

**BIRDER'S GUIDE TO BOLIVIA:**  
**PART I: THE BOLIVIAN HIGHLANDS**

**By**

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authors.

Bolivia is a huge country the size of France and Spain combined. Compared to other countries in South America, the birdlife is relatively under-studied. Seasonal and altitudinal movements of many species are still poorly understood. Many promising sites are somewhat inaccessible to all but the "expedition-ready" birder. And more than a few birds are likely to be added to the Bolivia list in the coming years. As a result, this guide is an attempt to capture the richness of just a small part this fascinating country. We hope to add a second guide focusing on lowland sites in the future.

We are grateful to those that have generously provided advice on birding sites, proofread part of this guide, or accompanied us in the field. Our sincere thanks to our friends, colleagues, and fellow birders that have provided so much valuable assistance to this project: Victor Bullen, Isabel Gomez, Sebastian Herzog, Jon Hornbuckle, Alvaro Jaramillo, Michael Kessler, Tim Miller, Douglas Mason, Preston Motes, Manual Olivera, Carmen Quiroga, David Recalde, Jim Turner, Bret Whitney, and Brian Woods. Last but not least, this guide is dedicated to Sjoerd Mayer, the dedicated chronicler of Bolivia's bird sounds.

It is our fervent hope that the birdfinding advice presented here will help spark a growth in birding-related eco-tourism in Bolivia. For many vulnerable areas, the emergence of sustainable eco-tourism is the main hope for conserving Bolivian biodiversity. The more that eco-tourism dollars flow into local economies, the more Bolivians will come to value their unique natural areas. Despite the explosion in birdfinding guides, South America has generally lagged behind. Only Venezuela and Ecuador have country-specific birdfinding guides published in English. Yet birding-centered eco-tourism is highly dependent upon good, accurate information on birding sites.

The first section of this guide contains basic information on planning a birding trip to Bolivia. Section 2 reveals some of the special "hints" for getting around in Bolivia that we have learned over the past few years. Section 3 provides detailed information on over 30 highland birding sites.

## **SECTION 1: PLANNING A BIRDING TRIP TO BOLIVIA**

### **Why Choose Bolivia?**

More and more birders are headed to South America, attracted by over 3,000 species and the greatest avian diversity in the world. Why choose Bolivia? Several reasons combine to make Bolivia a prime destination:

1. **Low crime:** Unlike Columbia and Peru, Bolivia has low crime rates. While political unrest (in the form of strikes and roadblocks) has grown over the past decade, tourists that avoid periods around elections are rarely inconvenienced. Check the latest U.S. State Department bulletins at <http://travel.state.gov/>. The military coups of the 60s and 70s are a thing of the past. And Bolivians must be some of the friendliest people in the world.
2. **Reasonable prices:** Unlike some countries, prices for meals, hotels and public transportation are very reasonable. Only imported consumer goods and rental cars are relatively expensive.
3. **An incredible range of habitats:** Like Ecuador and Columbia, Bolivia has everything from dense Amazonian rainforests to Andean puna grasslands, and everything in between. The only thing Bolivia is missing is a seacoast that would offer coastal and pelagic species. In fact, if Bolivia *did* have a seacoast, Bolivia would probably surpass Columbia as the country with the highest count.
4. **Lots of birds:** Bolivia's official list stands at nearly 1,400. But many prime areas remain unexplored. With more fieldwork, Bolivia's bird list will undoubtedly pass 1,400, placing just behind such birding meccas as Ecuador and Brazil.

### **Independent birding in Bolivia**

Commercial birding tours are big business. Plunk down \$5,000 per person (plus another \$1,000 or so for airfare) and you can enjoy nearly three weeks birding in Bolivia with a tour group and expert field guides. But many people do not have that kind of money --- and many people don't like to have birds handed to them on a silver platter by professional guides.

This summary is written for the independent birder who wants to tackle Bolivia on their own. It is written at two levels: 1) for the "backpacker birder" who plans to use public transportation and camp or sleep cheap in basic hotels; and 2) the independent "budget birder" willing to spend a little extra for a rental car and modest hotel room.

For two independent "budget birders," a 17 day birding trip to Bolivia, taking in many of the

major sites, can be made for less than \$1,500 each (excluding airfare). That is less than a one-third of the cost for two birders on an organized package tour. For a couple of "backpacker birders," the cost is even lower--perhaps only \$500-600 each (excluding airfare).

The drawbacks? You have to do a little planning on your own. That is where this guidebook is designed to help you. But even after all the planning, expect some surprises.

### **Do I need to speak Spanish?**

A birding trip through Bolivia with no Spanish knowledge at all is certainly possible. Major hotels and rental car companies have English-speaking employees. Improvised sign language and pointing to sentences in phrase books goes along way. Fortunately, unlike Cubans or Mexicans, most highland Bolivians tend to speak quite slowly and the use of slang is somewhat limited.

But you will certainly enjoy your trip more and feel more secure if you have someone in the group who has some knowledge of the language. Even if it is just rusty Spanish from high school or college, a little goes along way. If not, try an introductory course at your local community college or borrow some language tapes from a local library.

### **What about vaccinations and all those tropical diseases?**

Hollywood has used the backdrop of exotic South American diseases to create countless dramatic scenes of illness and death. To be sure, Bolivia has its fair share of tropical diseases, but with proper precautions, the risks faced by a traveling birder are low.

First, check with the U.S. Center for Disease Control website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) or a local travel clinic for up-to-date information. The typical protection includes a yellow fever shot (good for 10 years), typhoid vaccine, and the new hepatitis A vaccine. Although cholera is endemic in some parts of South America and Bolivia gets a few cases a year, the vaccine is not very effective and you are better off just watching what you eat. Make sure your tetanus vaccine and childhood vaccinations are up to date as well. A rather new rabies vaccine exists and given the number of motley-looking village dogs, such a vaccine might not be a bad idea.

If your itinerary includes lowland areas, you will likely need anti-malaria tablets. The typical malaria course starts a week before you leave and continues for four to six weeks after you return. As always, the best protection against malaria is keeping as much of your body covered as possible between dusk and dawn and using a repellent. Bringing a mosquito net is a good idea. Lodges often have them, with the number of holes inversely related to the price of the lodge. However, in general malaria is not as much of a problem in Bolivia as in, say, West Africa. The probability of contracting malaria, even if you do not choose to take a malarial prophylactic, is apparently low, especially in the dry season. A general practitioner in La Paz, where malaria is not transmitted due to the high elevation, recounted that he had not seen a case

of malaria in over four years.

Leishmaniasis, spread by the bite of an infected sand fly, is a threat in some areas. There is no vaccine, so again the best defense is to keep covered up and wear repellent. The sand fly bites at dawn, dusk and after dark, so adequate precautions can be taken.

As far as exotic diseases, there is a very remote chance of contracting Chagas disease, but only if you sleep in thatched-roof huts without a mosquito net where the vinchuca beetle makes its home. Chagas leads to heart failure over a period of years. Sleeping under a mosquito net can provide good protection against Chagas.

For the typical birding traveler, the major health issues are more mundane. Sooner or later you are bound to come down with some form of traveler's diarrhea. Powdered Gatorade is great to have along to rehydrate yourself. An anti-diarrhoeal (such as Imodium AD) can plug you up and allow you to spend a long day in the field chasing endemics, but it won't speed your recovery. Your body simply needs to get rid of the offending parasites.

La Paz is the highest capital in the world. The altitude ranges from 3250 meters (10,650 feet) to over 3650 meters (12,000 feet) depending exactly where you are in the city. This is over twice as high as Denver, Colorado and you will definitely notice the lack of oxygen. Altitude sickness (locally referred to as soroche) characterized by headaches, insomnia, tiredness and vomiting is a real possibility. Be sure to take it very easy the first few days and, most importantly, drink lots of liquids (avoid alcohol). There is a preventative called Diamox available by prescription that can help, but for some it makes food and especially carbonated drinks taste strange. Beware too of the much more serious Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) which, without descent to lower altitude, can cause death. Know the symptoms and remember people react very differently to high altitudes. If it fits your itinerary, adjust to the altitude gradually by ascending a couple thousand feet each day. Most professionally-led birding tours start in Santa Cruz, spend a couple nights in Cochabamba, slowly working their way to the lofty heights of La Paz.

At high altitudes there is much greater UV radiation, so severe sunburn can occur in a fraction of the time it would take at sea level. Bring good sunglasses and sun block with a high SPF and don't plan on getting a tan. A good hat is essential.

### **What birding gear should I bring?**

Binoculars, of course. But if you happen to be in the fortunate position of purchasing a new pair of **binoculars** before your South America trip, what would be the ideal binoculars for neo-tropic birding? Several requirements come to mind. First, you might want to think about getting a pair that is waterproof. At the least, you will want binoculars that have a reputation for being rugged and able to withstand the high humidity and rainfall of the tropical lowlands. Second, in the dim recesses of the rainforest, the light gathering ability of binoculars becomes especially important. Lastly, a binocular with an appropriate balance (for you!) between magnification, a wide field

of view and close focus. Trade-offs are inevitable: magnification of course enables you to see more detail, but the smaller the field of view, the harder it is to get your binoculars on that Tody-Flycatcher flitting around in the canopy. Close focus capability is a real advantage in tight forest situations and there is the added bonus of improved butterfly watching.

Many neo-tropical birders consider a **tape or mini-disc recorder and uni-directional microphone** standard gear for highland *Yungas* and lowland Amazonian forests. Indeed, tape playback can attract many antbirds, antpittas, and other skulkers that can be difficult to observe. Yet there are growing concerns about repeated tape playback in heavily birded areas. Case in point, at the popular Cotapata site, reports suggest that the recently discovered Bolivian-diademed Tapaculo has grown accustomed to playback and is less likely to show itself. If you bring a tape recorder, use discretion.

If you are the type of person who has a **spotting scope** permanently resting on your shoulder, Bolivia will not be an exception. However, if you are wavering as to whether to bring a spotting scope or leave it home, there are two schools of thought (represented by the two authors!). One view is that a scope is very useful, occasionally clinching a distant identification, and nearly indispensable in the *pampas* and aquatic habitats. The other school of thought is that in many habitats (especially the *yungas*, rainforests, arid *valles*) a scope is unnecessary and often not worth the trouble of lugging around.

Although you probably do not usually use one in North America or Europe, an **altimeter** is almost essential in Bolivia. Bird distribution is highly dependent upon altitude. Knowing "where you are" often means knowing your altitude. A combination watch and altimeter (there are several brands) runs about \$150. Unfortunately, altimeter wristwatches depend upon barometric readings and changes in barometric pressure throw off readings. It is best to recalibrate your altimeter whenever possible. The following are official altitudes for the major airports in Bolivia:

La Paz (El Alto airport)	4,058 meters (13,313 feet)
Cochabamba airport:	2,548 meters (8,360 feet)
Santa Cruz (Viru-Viru)	373 meters (1,224 feet)
Sucre airport	2,903 meters (9,527 feet)

A **GPS receiver** (Global Positioning System) can come in quite handy if you plan to leave the beaten track. Since Bolivia has very poor road signs and few good maps, GPS coordinates are used throughout the site descriptions in this book. For finding some sites, a GPS is very useful in order to avoid wasting considerable time in aimless wandering. Prices on lower-end GPS receivers have fallen to below \$100, making them quite affordable.

A notebook for field notes is always a good idea, but a **microcassette recorder** can also really help. In cloud forests and Amazonian forests, it is often "feast or famine." One minute it is quiet and the next you are surrounded by a foraging flock with over 20 species. With a

microcassette recorder clutched in your left palm and steady grip on your binoculars, you can whisper notes and not miss a bird. Well worth the \$30 investment.

If you wear **eyeglasses**, bring an extra pair. You likely will not have time to find a replacement in Bolivia. If you wear contacts, be aware the extreme dryness of high altitude areas can be difficult on the eyes and bring plenty of eye drops.

Narrow jungle trails, high Andean scree slopes and urban cobblestones make walking in Bolivia a challenge, especially if your eyes are focused elsewhere. **Hiking boots**, preferably with water protection and good ankle support, are good for highland areas. In the lowlands, heavy hiking boots can become a bother and, by contrast, lightweight running shoes are very foot friendly. Ted Parker regularly wore Converse Hightops in the field! And don't forget **rain gear**. Even in the dry season, rain showers are regular in the *yungas* forests. During the rainy season, a pair of **rubber boots** is also an excellent idea. For trips to the highlands, nothing beats a **warm fleece jacket** for cool mornings.

It is difficult to pack for Bolivia, as temperatures vary greatly. In the lowlands, **long sleeve nylon shirts and nylon pants** will give you protection from both the sun and assorted biting insects. They also dry in record time. **Cotton shirts** are also very comfortable option. Short pants are only appropriate for lounging around the hotel pool or relaxing after a hard day's birding. Finally, don't forget a hat for sun protection. For highlands, a **wool cap, gloves and long underwear** are good insurance. At high-altitude, UV rays are intense and painful sunburns can occur with limited exposure. A baseball hat does not protect the ears and back of the neck and most people need something more substantial. A favorite for the neo-tropics is the wide-brimmed **Tilley hat**. Such hats (there are other brands) offer excellent sun protection. The heavy canvas keeps you dry during a brief tropical rain shower and has a cord that keeps you from losing your hat in a sudden breeze. Finally, a good first aid kit is essential. You will likely be traveling in areas where immediate medical assistance is very limited.

It is always a good idea to bring a stash of **snacks**. Many birding areas are far from lodging and restaurants and early departures are the norm. Granola bars and crackers can pass for breakfast, bringing up blood sugar levels, and staving off hunger pangs. As an alternative, you can stock up on snacks (and more substantial fare for camp meals) at grocery stores in the larger cities.

As a general rule, if you cannot live without it, bring it with you. Many common consumer goods are hard to find outside of the large cities and quality is often poor. Medicines, batteries, and film fall into this category.

### **What birding guidebooks are recommended?**

Unfortunately, there is no single guidebook that covers all of the nearly 1,400 species found in Bolivia. One is reputed to be in the works, but it will likely be several years until it is finished. The visiting birder must make do with a combination of field guides.

For the highland areas (including *Yungas* habitats) covered in this guide, Birds of the High Andes (1990) by Jon Fjeldsa and Niels Krabbe is essential. With a few notable exceptions, virtually every bird you are likely to encounter over 2600 meters is illustrated. The introductory sections on Andean natural history and vegetation zones are also excellent and should not be ignored. A bit pricey, a bit heavy, but worth every penny. The Field Guide to the Birds of Peru by James F. Clements and Noam Sahny, published in 2001, is less preferred by birders in Bolivia due to the limitations of the textual descriptions.

A copy of the 2003 version of the annotated list of the birds of Bolivia published by Asociación Armonía in Bolivia is also essential. It is available at: Asociación Armonía/BirdLife International, Ave. Lomas de Arena 400, Casilla 3566, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Phone/Fax: +591-(0)3-3568808; E-mail: [armonia@scbbs-bo.com](mailto:armonia@scbbs-bo.com)

For the Northern lowlands, the best strategy is to carry A Guide to the Birds of Columbia (1986) by Steven Hilty and William Brown. This book is superb but naturally a number of birds with more southerly distributions found in Bolivia are not included. One strategy is to use it in conjunction with South American Birds: Photographic Aid to Identification (1989) by John S. Dunning. Dunning has practically the entire universe of South American birds. The major limitations with Dunning are the reliance on photos, the lack of photos for the majority of species and very limited species summaries. Yet, using the two books together, one can often pin down an identification.

For pampas and chaco habitats (i.e. most of Beni Department and a good chunk of Santa Cruz department), the best option is a Collins guide Birds of Southern South American and Antarctica (1998) by Martin R. de la Pena and Maurice Rumboll. The descriptions are short, but the small size will be a relief.

Serious birders will definitely also want Volume 1 and Volume 2 of The Birds of South America by Robert S. Ridgely and Guy Tudor. Unlike most multi-volume tomes, the authors started this series from the end of the taxonomic order. Thus Volume 1 covers the oscine passerines (wrens, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, etc.), while Volume 2 tackles the suboscine passerines (ovenbirds, woodcreepers, antbirds, manakins, etc.). Although not every bird illustrated, this is a landmark series. For those interested in in-flight parrot identification, check out "Flight Behavior and of the Genera of Neo-tropical Parrots" by Bret Whitney in the journal *Cotinga* (number 5).

Although much depends on the planned itinerary, for a trip that covers both highlands and lowlands, the three field guides mentioned above (Fjeldsa and Krabbe, Hilty and Brown, and de la Pena and Rumboll) should be sufficient. If weight is not an issue or you can bring yourself to tear out the plates, the two Ridgely volumes are a great luxury, especially in the lowlands.



Although not a field guide, Steven Hilty's Birds of Tropical America is highly recommended. This collection of essays on neotropical birds provides some great insights and makes excellent reading at the end of a long birding day. More generally, the Neotropical Companion offers a primer on how rainforests function and describes the many common creatures of the neo-tropics. For birders that want a broader understanding, this book is just the ticket. It has a good section on birds that focuses on the major neotropical families, a welcome introduction for the first time visitor. Eloquent, precise, and perhaps even more entertaining, Tropical Nature by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata provides 17 fascinating essays that provide a glimpse of the incredible tapestry of life in the Amazonian rainforest.

If you have an interest in bird songs, the CD-ROM Bird Sounds of Bolivia Version 2 by Sjoerd Mayer is an incredible tour de force. Many of the species on this CD-ROM are not found on commercially available cassettes and recordings of species never recorded before, such as Huayco Tinamou, Inquisivi Spinetail and Masked Antpitta, are included. The second edition has sounds of over 900 of the nearly 1400 species in Bolivia with many photos as well. The CD-ROM format is an excellent way to learn calls and songs of the more common species prior to a trip. The CD-ROM can be ordered from Bird Songs International B.V. (a Dutch company dedicated to producing and marketing CD-ROMs with nature sounds). The address is:

Bird Songs International B.V.  
Wierengastraat 42  
NL-9969 PD Westernieland  
Netherlands  
Tel: (31) 595 528679  
Fax: (31) 595 528629  
www.birdsongs.com

### **What key habitats occur in Bolivia?**

Bolivia has an incredible assortment of habitats, only lacking a sea coast. There are many possible classifications, but for the birder, seven habitats are of major importance. The more of these habitats that are visited, the more variety of birds likely to be seen in Bolivia. The first four habitats are found in the highlands and are covered by this guide, while the last three are lowland habitats. The habitat categories are somewhat simplified and it is likely that no botanist or ecologist would chose such simplified categories. But they should serve the purposes of the birder. The seven are:

1. Dry Andean valleys (*valles*)
2. *Yungas* (humid montane forest)
3. Puna grasslands and heaths (including high-Andean wetlands, lakes and ponds)
4. *Polylepis* forests
5. *Pampas* (savanna, forest islands and dry forests)

6. *Chaco* (dry thorn scrub)
7. Lowland Amazonian forest

For the birder intent on either a big list or seeing localized species, these habitats differ sharply in terms of diversity, abundance and number of endemics. For example, in the Bolivian pampas, it is possible to see (not just hear) 130 species in a day. But on your second day in the same habitat you will probably see around 85 percent of the same species. Abundance is high, but diversity is low. By contrast, in the lowland Amazonian forest, you may see (not just hear) 30 species in a day. The next day you will also likely see 30 species, but 50 to 70 percent will be species you did not see on the first day. Diversity is high, but relative abundance is low.

As a rule, more complex ecosystems create more diversity of birds. So for the birder (who is looking for species numbers, not specific species) with a limited time span, the strategy would be to spend more time in areas of high diversity and low abundance. The following table summarizes the trade-offs:

<u>Habitat type</u>	<u>Diversity</u>	<u>Abundance</u>	<u>Endemics</u>
Dry <i>valles</i>	Medium	Low	High
<i>Yungas</i>	Medium	Low	High
Puna	Low	Medium	Low
<i>Polylepis</i> forests	Low	Low	High
<i>Pampas</i>	Medium	High	Low
<i>Chaco</i>	Low	High	Low
Amazonian forest	High	Low	Low

As seen from the table above, in general, the highlands of Bolivia are characterized by relatively high rates of endemism while abundance (actual number of birds) is relatively low. Indeed, most of the Bolivian endemic and range restricted species (range restricted species refer to those that are not endemic but are found outside Bolivia in a very limited area) sought after by birders are highland species.

### **I only have limited time so what are the best birding sites to visit?**

The typical visitor, with only two or three weeks, has to make some key decisions. The first step is decide what type of trip best suits you. Do you want to build as big a list as possible in a short time? Do you want to focus on finding most of the endemics and range-restricted species? Or do you want to combine birding with some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes and natural areas on the continent?

If building a big list is a priority, you will want to devote a good chunk of your time to the lowlands. Diversity is much higher in the lowlands and a few days in Santa Cruz followed by a

quick circuit of the highlands and a longer excursion to the pampas and Amazonian forest in the Northern lowlands can easily push you past 500 species in just over a couple weeks. However, most of the species that will be seen are widely distributed across South America. So if you have done some birding in forests and pampas in other South America countries, many species will already be familiar.

If you want to focus on finding most of the endemics and range-restricted species, the lowlands will be less of a priority. Since many of your target birds will be in middle and upper *Yungas* forests, dry *valles*, and *Polylepis* forests, plan an itinerary around the highlands Cochabamba and La Paz (the focus of this volume of the guide). A favorite strategy is to spend a day or so in Santa Cruz recuperating from your overseas flight, and then make your way west to Cochabamba. After a few days at 2600 meters birding around Cochabamba, you will be better acclimated when you eventually move on to the lofty heights of La Paz. A side trip to Trinidad in the Northern lowlands for the beautiful endemic Blue-throated Macaw is a perfect finale.

If finding birding areas with cultural or scenic interest is important (or if you simply are not obsessed with searching out endemics), you may want to include a visit to some of the lesser known areas in Southwestern Bolivia. Sajama National Park, with snow-capped volcanoes, simmering hot springs, and stark grasslands, offers an experience of a lifetime. Although diversity is lower still, the bird life of the *altiplano* and *lagunas* is unique. And who could deny the pure enjoyment of flamingos shimmering pink in a highland lake?

Finally, those interested in getting off the beaten track should consider exploring areas such Pando department in the north, the Pantanal (South America's answer to the Everglades), and Gran Chaco National Park in the southeastern part of the country. These areas, again not described in this volume, offer some incredible birding experiences for adventuresome types.

### **When is the best time of year to visit?**

If your itinerary includes more of the lowlands than just Santa Cruz, avoiding the January to April rainy season is often a good strategy. In the Northern lowlands, roads in *pampas* areas often turn to mud during the rainy season. And if your lowland Amazonian adventure is of limited duration, a couple days of rain can be most unwelcome. The January to April rainy season is, however, a good time to visit the *altiplano* of southwestern Bolivia. The *altiplano* is so arid that there is little danger of being rained out. Temperatures are more moderate in the rainy season and hillsides are green.

Austral winter months (May to August) have clear blue skies in most of the country and little risk of rain (except in the *Yungas* where it can rain any time of year). Travel is pleasant, although temperatures are cold in the highlands. In August and September, the seasonal *chaqueo*, burning of grasslands, casts a smoky pall throughout nearly the entire country. Nevertheless, the latter half of the dry season (August through early November) are prime birding months in forested areas as song and breeding activity are high.

## **SECTION 2: GETTING AROUND IN BOLIVIA**

Although Bolivia is blessed by low crime and civil strife is rare, it is still a third world country. For those accustomed to precise first world schedules, getting around in Bolivia can be both challenging and frustrating. This section is meant to offer some tips that may help make a birding trip a bit smoother.

### **Using local transportation**

Except where noted, most sites in this guide can be reached by cheap public transportation. Bolivia has a huge number of private companies that operate mini-buses, large long distance coaches and everything in between. However, any discussion of schedules and services would quickly become out of date. Your best bet is to consult a general Bolivia travel book, such as the *Lonely Planet* and *Bolivia Handbook* guides, for an overview. If you are on a tight schedule or visiting a more remote location, it often pays to make a phone call or visit to the bus terminal office to confirm departure times. Even then, departure times are often flexible. If a bus is full, it may depart early. If there are still seats available, the driver may stick around awhile hoping that more passengers will show up.

Taxi service in Bolivia is quite economical. In La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, a taxi can be hired for \$4 or \$5 per hour. Thus, for day-trips outside of these major cities, a taxi is often cheaper than renting a car (and you lessen the chances of getting lost!). Be sure to agree on the price before hand and withhold payment until the end of the day to ensure that the driver sticks around.

With long driving distances, internal flights can be a good way of maximizing birding time. Fares are reasonable and many flights leave at mid-day or at night, meaning you are less likely to lose a morning waiting in an airport. Special tickets allowing you to stop off at various cities on a pre-determined circuit can be economical, but are only available outside the country. Also, be aware that during the rainy season, flights to Rurrenabaque and San Borja can be delayed when lowland airstrips become waterlogged.

### **Driving safely in Bolivia**

Bolivia's unique topography and poor road infrastructure make driving a challenge, yet renting a car also provides a lot of flexibility and can help ensure that you are at key birding areas at peak hours. There are several car rental companies in Bolivia, but no international companies as of yet. Given the state of Bolivia's roads and the short life of most vehicles, prices are rather high. Rates run about \$60 a day for a four-wheel drive Suzuki and \$100 for a Toyota Land Cruiser, with 100 free kilometers per day (which may be negotiated up with persistence). Be sure to pay attention to the additional "per kilometer" charges, as these can add up fast. Four-wheel drive is not necessary except for a few locations, but the higher ground clearance can be very important

as rental car companies will charge for underbody damage. Getting an "International Drivers License" before leaving home (available at automobile association offices in North America and Europe) is also good idea if you plan to rent a car. In tropical lowland towns such as San Borja, Rurrenabaque and Trinidad, a good option is to rent a motorcycle by the hour or day.

Very few roads are signposted and safety features (median markings, guardrails and street lights) taken for granted in North America are almost nonexistent. For those inexperienced with South American road culture, it is best to avoid driving at night. Animals and children are special hazards at all hours. If you want to be predictable to other drivers, some general "rules" apply: There is no need to slow down or swerve for chickens. On the dirt roads, there are too many. If you happen to kill one, it will simply be eaten. Roadside dogs are quite common and often aggressive. They are often found at dangerous mountain passes awaiting handouts from superstitious drivers. These dogs seem to have been genetically selected for car chasing and know exactly what they are doing. Just keep driving and don't swerve---you won't hit one. Pigs tend to wallow at the side of the road and rarely move very fast. Cows are another matter as they are completely unpredictable. Cows have a habit of wandering *into* the flow of traffic. Llamas and alpacas are a bit tricky. Generally, if they are off to one side of the road, there is no problem. But be careful if the herd is split, with some animals on each side of the road. In such cases, it is possible that an animal will suddenly cross at the last second to join the others. Finally, even on a wide two-lane road, if children are playing on the side of the road, slow down, honk your horn as a warning, and move to the far lane.

### **Asking directions**

Great care has been taken in describing how to reach each birding site. GPS coordinates are provided for most sites to aid in finding them. Yet Bolivian road signs are notoriously bad. Rarely updated, Bolivian road maps should be read with skepticism. Planned roads are often included though they do not yet exist, while older, impassable roads are frequently shown as if new. A small town may go by two or even three names. The bottom line: you will undoubtedly get lost at some point in your travels. When you do, here are some tips on asking directions. First, remember that kilometer-based distances are a difficult measurement for many rural people. Someone who has lived in a particular town all their life may not have any idea how many kilometers (Bolivia uses the metric system) it is to the next town. Better to ask how many minutes or hours away it is. Even then, be aware the travel time is often expressed as how long it would take in a slow bus or truck. Second, avoid phrasing questions in a way that leads to a "yes" or "no" answer. Instead of saying "is this San Miguel?" ask "what is the name of this town?" Lastly, seek a second and third opinion. If three separate townspeople agree on which road will take you to Sorata, you are probably on the right track.

### **Dealing with police checkpoints**

Upon entering and exiting all major cities and some smaller towns, the traveler encounters police checkpoints. The dual purpose of these checkpoints is to collect modest tolls and to

record information about the vehicle and driver. The birder/tourist should have no problem at these checkpoints and will pass through in a matter of minutes. Simply present your driver's license (and passport if requested) and be prepared to tell them your destination, license plate, and number of passengers. For a rental car, you may be asked to produce the rental agreement. Also, be sure to save any receipts you are given for payment of tolls: you will probably be requested to present them at future checkpoints. UMOPAR, the national drug police, operates several checkpoints to restrict the flow of coca, cocaine paste and precursors (materials used in the processing of cocaine). Again, presenting your driver's license and passport should quickly produce a wave of the hand, motioning you to continue on your way. In some instances, you will be asked to open the trunk or a suitcase or two. All this is quite normal and should not be any cause for worry. It is extremely rare that tourists are solicited for bribes or given trouble. Naturally, it would be extremely foolhardy to buy or transport any prohibited drug in Bolivia.

### **Bridging the cultural gap between *campesino* and birder**

Unlike in much of North America, birding is little understood. The idea that someone would spend hundreds or thousands of dollars to travel to a foreign land to see birds is often incomprehensible. As a result, local people will naturally be curious. Also, binoculars are often mistaken for cameras by camera-shy rural residents. If there are questions or curious stares, your best bet is to politely explain that you are "*mirando aves*" (looking at birds) or "*me gusta aves*" (I like birds). Pulling out a guidebook and pointing out the various plates does wonders. People will often take a keen interest and even show you what other birds are found in the area! To many, a spotting scope set up on the roadside may look similar to a surveyor's tripod. Again, a simple offer for them to look through the scope can ease suspicions that you are surveying the land for a future purchase by a profit-hungry multinational corporation...

Rural Bolivians are some of the friendliest people in the world. Except for some of the well-traveled treks on former Inca trails, rural crime is virtually non-existent. Just remember that, in their view, you are exhibiting strange behavior in your search for birds. Even if your Spanish is limited, a smile and giving them a glance at the plates in your bird guide is often all it takes to bridge the cultural gap. Your efforts will determine the reception that future birders receive.

### **Fences and private property**

Fences are quite common in much of the lowlands of Santa Cruz and the Beni. The main reason is not a preoccupation with private property, but rather the presence of cattle and the desire to control their wandering. The site descriptions attempt to describe instances when crossing fences is acceptable. Of course, if you open a gate, always be sure to close it behind you. In the highlands, much land is communally owned and access seldom questioned. But, as a general rule, it is always best to ask permission if someone is present.

Wherever you are, be very careful about walking in active farm fields. Rural farmers are very

poor and their livelihood depends on their meager harvests. A group of birders that thoughtlessly trample a path through a potato field may cause real human suffering in the form of reduced household food supplies. Respect their fields.

### **Staying in smaller hotels**

Bolivia has a complete range of hotels, from five-star luxury hotels in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz to \$2 a night hostels in rural areas. Unfortunately, most hotels are far from birding sites mentioned in this guide, often necessitating before dawn departures. Where there are specific hotels that are particularly convenient to birding sites, they are mentioned in the text. The Bolivia Lonely Planet guide has the most comprehensive listing of reasonably priced hotels. In general, it is possible to stay at a basic but clean hotel for \$15 to \$30 per double.

For birders, some important points to keep in mind: Smaller hotels often lock up their doors at night. To avoid the frustration of being trapped in a hotel lobby at 5AM, explain to the desk clerk the day before if you are planning an early departure. Also, many hotels in rural areas have discos that primarily attract a local clientele. Ask if there is a disco before registering, and, at the very least, request a room far from the action to assure yourself a good night's sleep. Finally, the outskirts of many cities have "motels." These are not hotels for the motoring tourist, but rather discrete rendezvous spots for amorous encounters with rooms for rent by the hour.

### **Camping in the *campo***

Bolivia has few organized campsites with toilets, showers, picnic tables and fire pits. But if you are willing to forgo these luxuries, wonderful camping spots exist throughout the country. Given the distances between hotel and birding sites, camping also enables you to get a good night's sleep and still be in prime birding areas at dawn. In the highlands (*puna* and *valle* habitats), potential campsites far from human settlements are easy to find. In the lowlands, cleared plots of land are often occupied. One strategy is to ask farmers or ranchers for permission to camp on their land. *Camba* hospitality being what it is, many will even invite you in for a cold drink. Finding secluded campsites in the *Yungas* forests of La Paz and Cochabamba is the most difficult as nearly every piece of relatively flat land already has a house on it or is being cultivated. Again, asking permission to camp in someone's "front yard," fallow field, or on the edge of a community soccer field is an option. The site descriptions mention several potential camping sites in the *Yungas*.

### **Coping with fiestas**

If you are on a tight schedule, it pays to be prepared for Bolivian holidays. Public transportation usually runs on holidays and smaller grocery stores are open. But hotels can be quite full, especially when there is a three-day weekend. The major Bolivian holidays are:

January 1:                      New Year's Day

Mid-February:	Carnival (falls on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday)
March/April:	Good Friday (the Friday before Easter Sunday)
May 1:	Bolivian Labor Day
June:	Corpus Christi Day (always on a Thursday)
August 6:	Bolivian Independence Day
Early November:	All Saints Day (usually November 2)
Dec 25:	Christmas

Avoid the city of Oruro during Carnival (mid-February). The Government also usually closes a few days before Christmas and does not re-open until the first Monday of the new year. Most middle and upper-class Bolivians also take off from work during this period and hotels are often full.

In addition, each department has its own Departmental holiday once a year:

April 15:	Tarija department
May 25:	Chuquisaca department
July 16:	La Paz department
September 14:	Cochabamba department
September 24:	Santa Cruz and Pando departments
November 10:	Potosi department
November 18	Beni department





## SECTION 3: BIRDING SITES IN THE HIGHLANDS OF BOLIVIA

This section presents a selection of some of the more interesting and accessible birding sites in the Bolivian Andes. We have not attempted to list every site of potential interest. Thus, there are undoubtedly globally important sites that have been excluded, such as Eduardo Avaroa Faunal Reserve in Potosi and Lago Uru-Uru and Lago Poopo in Oruro. Rather, our intent was to describe a cross-section of sites that might help a visiting birder assemble an itinerary that provides maximum access to Bolivia's avian diversity with minimum travelling time. All sites described have been visited by authors, with many sites receiving multiple visits. We have also included GPS coordinates for most sites. However, due to the tendency toward weak GPS signals in mountainous areas, all GPS readings should be assumed to have a margin of error. Every attempt was made to ensure the accuracy of the kilometer distances cited, but be aware that vehicle odometers can vary by as much as 10 percent.

### CLOSE TO THE CITY OF LA PAZ

Bolivia's largest city is not itself a particularly exciting birding destination. But it does offer "daytrip" access to some truly spectacular sites, including the *Yungas* cloud forests, puna grasslands, Lake Titicaca and even dry *valles*. La Paz has a wealth of hotels, something to fit every price range. Reservations are always advisable at the more popular hotels.

Leaving the city of La Paz can often be a challenge. There are three principal roads out of the city: the Coroico road through the Miraflores and Villa Fatima neighborhoods to Coroico town; the road through El Alto, past the military airport, and northwest to Lake Titicaca; and the Oruro road through El Alto and south to the city of Oruro. As you exit the city of La Paz on one of these roads, near the outskirts you will encounter a combination toll booth (*peaje*) and police checkpoint (*tranca*). Most of the mileage readings to birding sites discussed in the text begin at these checkpoints. To aid drivers in reaching these toll booth/checkpoints and getting out of the city, the GPS coordinates for each are listed below:

Miraflores <i>tranca</i> for Coroico Road:	S 16.27.177 W 68.05.750
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El Alto <i>tranca</i> for road to Lake Titicaca:	S 16 28.517 W 68 16.502
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El Alto <i>tranca</i> for road to city of Oruro:	S 16 43.435 W 68 11.104
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Since many international flights arrive in La Paz, it is worth suggesting a few birding sites within or very close to the city where one can spend a pleasant morning or afternoon while

waiting to head on to more exciting destinations. A variety of typical Andean species can be seen very close to the city. A couple days relaxing in La Paz can also give one time to acclimate to the lofty altitude of the High Andes. The altitude ranges from 4060 meters (13,100 feet) at the El Alto airport outside of La Paz to 3300 meters (10,800 feet) in some of the wealthy southern suburbs (Zona Sur).

Some of these sites can be easily combined to make good all-day trips. For example, after a dawn stop at the UMSA Botanical Gardens (Site 2), one can continue up the road and visit Huni Pass (Site 3) and still return in time for a late lunch.

### ***Site 1: Ravine below Zenon Iturralde Park***

If one has very limited time, this ravine offers a birding spot right near downtown of La Paz. The area is not particularly beautiful and still very urban, but if one has only an hour or two, it is one of the few options. The steep slopes have discouraged urban development and some indigenous vegetation is sprinkled throughout the overgrown grass and eucalyptus.

Two hours of birding can provide 15 or so common highland garden birds including Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch, Golden-billed Saltator, Giant Hummingbird, White-tipped Plantcutter, Sparkling Violetear and possibly even the endemic Grey-bellied Flowerpiercer. None of the areas with vegetation are private property but there are small garden plots that need to be respected.

**Logistics:** The park which leads into the ravine is located on Avenida Arce just below the Plaza Isabela Catolica. If taking a taxi, ask to be dropped off the plaza. A taxi from a downtown hotel should be less than \$2. Alternatively, there are mini-buses which run from the Prado (La Paz's "main street") down to Isabela Catolica. From the Plaza Isabela Catolica walk down (south) Avenida Arce. On the left, pass Jalapeños, a medicore Mexican restaurant. A block or so later, arrive at a small grassy area on the left hand side called Zenon Iturralde Park, right near a Nissan dealer. (The far corner of this park is home to the Centro Boliviano Americano which has an English library, including magazines). Enter the park and walk to the end. Just to the right are a small set of steps that lead down into a dry ravine with various paths that can be explored. Upon leaving, either return the same way as entered, or take the paved road that bisects the ravine uphill to the center of the city.

GPS reading at steps at Zenon Iturralde Park: S 16 30.624 W 68 07.347

### ***Site 2: UMSA Botanical Gardens***

Located in the southern suburb of Cotacota, the Botanical Gardens are a "work in progress" by

the Ecological Institute located on the campus of the Universidad Mayor de San Andres (UMSA). The garden is divided into five (poorly marked) sections: a small ornamental garden, a greenhouse and office, a study area for plants with special "economic interest," and two sections with semi-wild examples of the dry valles *habitat*. The small ornamental garden is often alive with feeding Black and Yellow-bellied Siskins and a Giant Hummingbird or two watching over the flowering plants. White-tipped Plantcutter, Band-tailed Seedeater, Andean Flicker and Tufted Tit-Tyrant are common. A pair of Alpomado Falcons occasionally may be found perched high in the eucalyptus trees that border the garden. Recently, a rather large flock of Chopi Blackbirds have become established in the area. Since Chopi Blackbirds are a lowland *pampas* species usually found at below 1,000 meters, their origins have been subject to much debate.

**Logistics:** From downtown La Paz, head towards the Zona Sur (southern suburbs of La Paz). From the Prado, Avenida Arce winds down to Obrajés where it becomes Avenida Hernando Siles. After crossing a small bridge that marks the beginning of the Zona Sur and the trendy neighborhood of Calacoto (complete with invading exotics such as Burger King and McDonalds), watch the numbered cross streets that begin with Calle 8. Follow the main drag (now named Avenida Ballivian) into Cotacota, where the street changes names yet again, becoming Avenida Muñoz Reyes. At Calle 27 in the neighborhood of Cotacota, turn left and proceed one block to a small gate that marks the entrance to the university. Enter the gate and follow the path a few dozen meters towards the Chemistry Department (*Ciencias Químicas*). The most interesting part of the garden are to the left. The semi-wild examples of dry *valle* habitat are to the north of the ornamental garden. A taxi from downtown La Paz to "*Calle 27 en Cotacota*" should not be more than \$4.

The garden staff are around only from 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday to Friday, but early morning and weekend entry is not usually a problem as there is usually a guard around to open the gate if it is closed. You may need to explain that you are a bird-watching tourist. Telephone numbers are 792582 and 792416.

GPS reading at gate to UMSA Botanical Gardens: S 16° 32.399 W 68° 04.034

### **Site 3:      *Huni Pass (on the Palca Road)***

Huni Pass, on the road to Palca, offers a taste of the dry *valles* of La Paz. Although rather degraded and suffering from a disheartening litter problem, the area offers some interesting birding less than 45 minutes from the city center of La Paz. Because it offers incredible views of both Mt. Illimani to the east and the city of La Paz to the west, it is quite popular with locals. Dusk is particularly beautiful as the setting sun brings out the orange, red and blue hues in Mt. Illimani, which at 6,439 meters is the second tallest mountain in Bolivia.

The small pond at Huni Pass often has little more than a Common Moorhen or two. But the reeds at the edge of the pond often attract Andean Hillstar which feed quite conspicuously with tail feathers flashing. The hillsides surrounding the lake are more promising. Among the ubiquitous Bar-winged Cinclodes, Peruvian and Ash-breasted Sierra-Finches, you are likely to turn up an Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, Black-hooded Sierra-Finch, or Puna Yellow-Finch. Be careful in identifying any Puna Yellow-Finches as Greenish Yellow-Finch is common. Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch, Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant, Rufous-naped Ground Tyrant, and Rock Earthcreeper are also found in the eroded canyons. Watch the sky for Andean Swift, Mountain Caracara, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle and even Andean Condor. During the rainy season, the area has numerous flowering plants, attracting Gray-bellied Flowerpiercer.

Some of the nearby canyons, reminiscent of the American southwest, are worth exploring as much for their scenic value as the Rusty-vented Canasteros that call throughout the day. Locals know the area as *Cañon de la Animas* and the stunning rock formations attract non-birding hikers. A December 1995 municipal resolution supposedly declared the area a "natural park," with the intent to limit new construction and spur conservation of the area. However, enforcement and follow-up actions have been non-existent.

Nearby is a well-known day hike to a extinct volcano plug: La Muela del Diablo (the Devil's Molar). The Lonely Planet guide has good directions. La Muela del Diablo offers similar species to the Huni Pass site and possibly better chances at Andean Condor, but can be a strenuous hike for those not accustomed to the altitude.

**Logistics:** Coming from the city center, head south towards the residential Zona Sur. At the small bridge that marks the start of the Calacota suburb (Plaza Humbolt will be on the right) re-set odometer to zero (0.0). Follow the main drag (Avenida Ballivian) into Cotacota, passing McDonalds (1.0 km) and continuing south where the street name changes, becoming Avenida Muñoz Reyes. Pass the turn for Site 2 above (UMSA Botanical Gardens), continue travelling east on Avenida Muñoz Reyes through the neighborhood of Cotacota. The road makes several sharp turns as it climbs uphill. The pavement gives way to cobblestone. At 6.3 km, turn right and continue to climb up a winding dirt road (the road to the town of Palca). At 10.8 km, reach Huni Pass with a small pond on the right side of the road. Park on the right immediately after the pond. Minibuses headed to Ovejuyo or Palca can drop you off at Huni pass and you can either hitch back or walk back five kilometers (all downhill!) to a minibus stand.

GPS reading at Huni Pass parking area: S 16 32.862 W 68 00.689

#### **Site 4:      *Mecapaca***

The surrounding areas of La Paz are justly famous for limited but unusual birdlife of the puna

grasslands, the waterbirds of Lake Titicaca and, not least, the diversity of species in the sub-tropical *Yungas* along the Coroico and Chulumani Roads. Yet La Paz also has an example of the dry *valle* habitat (or arid, inter-Andean valley) more reminiscent of the Cochabamba area than La Paz. Mecapaca is a prime example of this habitat that also includes farmlands and wetlands. About 28 kilometers from the center of the city of La Paz, the altitude at Mecapaca ranges from 2800 to 2950 meters. For the birder looking for a morning escape or an easy day trip within reach of La Paz, Mecapaca is an ideal destination. Over 60 species have been seen near Mecapaca. By Amazonian lowlands standards this is a small list. But since there are only 130 species or so regular on the Bolivian *Altiplano*, it is rich for such a small area. Several species reach the limit of their altitudinal range at Mecapaca and other species that are somewhat harder to see elsewhere are easily seen here (i.e. Brown-backed Mockingbird, Red-tailed Comet, and White-tipped Plantcutter). Mecapaca also boasts three endemics: Bolivian Warbling-Finch, Bolivian Earthcreeper, and Bolivian Spinetail (rare). One warning: due to its proximity to La Paz, it is becoming increasingly developed. Good habitat is likely to be lost in the coming years as suburban sprawl and thirst for cheap land take their toll.

Mecapaca is best birded in the morning, especially on sunny, summer days when bird activity seems to slow down by late morning. Yet late afternoons can also be productive. Assuming an early morning arrival at the small plaza in the village of Mecapaca, a good strategy is to head down hill towards the cultivated and fallow fields and the river. There are several dirt roads and smaller trails. Any taller trees and bushes that border the fields are worth scanning for Cinerous Conebill, Blue-and-yellow Tanager, White-bellied Tyrannulet, and Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail. Listen for Grey-hooded Parrots that often roost in tree borders in large numbers. Aplomado Falcon is even possible in the introduced eucalyptus. Slowly work your way downriver through the cultivated areas. In the open areas a few hundred meters from the river, is a small wetland and reedbed that is worth checking for Plumbeous Rail and possibly Puna Snipe.

As the river plain narrows and becomes more arid, turn left and head up the conspicuous arid canyon that comes down from the mountains. Join a small dirt road where a left turn will bring you back to town (completing the loop). A more interesting variation can be had by making a right-turn at the small dirt road and following the road a kilometer or so to a dry valley with cactus and thorn bushes (see GPS coordinates). Here, if the sun has not gotten to high, the western slopes should be in shade and bird activity will still be high. Bolivian Warbling-Finch may be spotted feeding in the thorn bushes. Rufous-sided Warbling Finch is also fairly common, so check any Warbling-Finches carefully. Red-tailed Comet is relatively easy to spot near flowering plants. Giant Hummingbird and D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant can be anywhere. White-winged Black-Tyrant (austral migrant), Brown-backed Mockingbird and White-tipped Plantcutter all perch conspicuously and are hard to miss. This circuit can be done in two to four hours depending on how many times you stop to raise your binoculars.

Be sure not to trespass on any fields that have crops. It is usually fairly easy to avoid trampling on crops by walking along the mounds built up along the edges of the fields. These mounds have usually seen a fair amount of foot traffic.

**Logistics:** One of the great attractions of Mecapaca is that it is only 45 minutes from La Paz city center and even closer to the Zona Sur (the southern suburbs of La Paz). Moreover, it is easily reached by taxi or one of the regular minibuses. Minibuses (number 253--look for the "Mecapaca" sign on the dashboard) leave for Mecapaca regularly from Plaza Humbolt, a small plaza on the right as you cross into the Zona Sur. Mecapaca is the "end of the line" so transportation back is not a problem. If you have your vehicle, re-set odometer to 0.0 at Plaza Humbolt. From Plaza Humbolt, follow Calle 8 to the stoplight and turn right onto the Costanera highway (heading back toward downtown). Within 100 meters, enter a small traffic circle and bear to the left (0.5 kms). The Rio La Paz will now be on your right. (If you have trouble, ask anyone for the road to Mallasa or to the zoo). At 2.4 km, cross a small bridge over the Rio La Paz, and begin a steep ascent. At 4.2 km, pass the *Valle de la Luna* (Valley of the Moon), a popular tourist destination with strange eroded sandstone formations. However, any birds found here will also be found at Mecapaca. At 10.1 km, a long bridge re-crosses the Rio Paz and the road begins to ascend again. Enter the town of Valencia (18.2 km) and finally, at 20 km, the town of Mecapaca (see GPS coordinates). Either park in the small main plaza in Mecapaca or down by the river. From the plaza, the road continues south another couple kilometers or so until it dead-ends at a dilapidated pig farm in a dry valley (see GPS coordinates). This dry valley can be excellent early in the morning.

A couple spots on the way might be worth a quick stop. Parque Bartolina Sisa Aranjuez, a small urban amusement park, fronts the Choqueyapu River and offers a chance at seeing Red-tailed Comet if there are blooming flowers. Only worth a stop (and a very short one at that) if it is early morning. Also before arriving at Mecapaca (10 km from Plaza Humbolt), a large bridge crosses over the Rio La Paz before climbing uphill on the paved road. This area, called "Ananta," has some indigenous vegetation (disappearing fast!) and is worth exploring.

GPS reading at Mecapaca plaza: S 16 40.101 W 68 00.998

GPS reading at dry valley near Mecapaca: S 16 39.919 W 68 00.172

## **COROICO ROAD**

The famous (or infamous to many nail-biting passengers) Coroico Road is one of the most spectacular roads in South America. Carved into the cliff face, it is the main road linking La Paz and Coroico. For birders, it offers a stunning transect from the high altitude puna grassland to the subtropical "Yungas" forests.

### ***Site 5: La Cumbre***

At about 4650, La Cumbre (the summit) is the highest point on the Coroico Road before the twisting descent into the sub-tropical yungas. The climate is harsh and species diversity limited,

but some spectacular birds await those hardy souls willing to devote a half day or more, braving the cold, wind and surprisingly brutal sun.

A Christ statue high above the roadside on the left-hand side of the road marks La Cumbre at 16 km pass the Miraflores *tranca*. The large lake ("Repressa Estellani") on the left just before the Christ statue is rather barren, but a few Silvery Grebes and various waterfowl are usual. Bright-rumped Yellow-Finches are often spotted on the shoreline. The best strategy is to take one of the dirt roads branching off from the paved road. Amid the rocky moonscape are cushion bogs and small lakes. The cushion bogs are often better in wet season, as they can dry out in dry season. Cushion bogs also attract locals that gather the rich topsoil. Unfortunately this practice is slowly destroying the bogs. Crossing the bogs will yield typical highland Andean species associated with water including Puna Ibis, Andean Gull, Andean Goose, Andean Lapwing, Crested Duck, Speckled Teal, and possibly Andean Snipe or even Diademed Sandpiper Plover. During the colder months or during heavy snows, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipes often descend from the scree slopes near the snowline to feed in the bogs. During the austral winter, the barren ground around the lakes and bogs is a mecca for ground tyrants such as Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrant. Over 200 Ochre-naped ground-tyrants were counted one July day. Slender-billed Miner is a specialty of the area, while Puna Ground-Tyrant is a year-round resident. Puna Tinamou can be heard calling from the hillsides. Also, keep a lookout above as Variable Hawk is common and a Black-faced Ibis fly-over is even possible.

**Logistics:** Leave La Paz via the neighborhood of Miraflores, taking the road to Coroico. At the Miraflores police *tranca* reset your odometer (0.0 km). At 8.2 km pass a large, nearly lifeless, reservoir on your right. Continue climbing on the paved highway, and at 13.4 km, turn right at a dirt track for the largest expanse of cushion bogs (not visible from the road). The turn is just after the overhead power lines cross the road and is marked by a small sign that points to "Turbera." In less than a kilometer, the dirt track divides. The left fork goes to the large cushion bog (another 1 kilometer further) and the right fork goes to a series of very small lakes (about a half kilometer after the fork). The right and left forks are actually part of the same circular road, but there is a stretch of 200 meters that is difficult to negotiate in a vehicle.

Returning to the paved road and continuing on, La Cumbre (the Summit) is marked by a large Christ statue high above the roadside on the left-hand side of the road 2.6 km further on (16 km from the Miraflores *tranca*). The large, mostly barren, lake on the left is hard to miss. At La Cumbre there is a small dirt parking area on the left just before the long descent. From this parking area, a small, rutted dirt track winds up to the start of the Choro trail and several interesting high-altitude lakes and bogs.

GPS reading at La Cumbre parking area: S 16 20.273' W 68 02.434'

### ***Site 6: Upper Coroico Road (between La Cumbre and Pongo)***



If the siren call of the cloud forest (Sites 8 and 9 below) is not too great or you have couple days for the Coroico Road area, the Upper Coroico Road between La Cumbre (almost 4,600 meters) and the small village of Pongo (3,800 meters) offer interesting birding, with the emphasis on several high altitude specialties. One can stop anywhere along the road and enjoy the dramatic scenery, but three stops, coming in fairly fast succession, are particularly worthwhile. Even if you only spend 30 minutes at each site, you have a good chance of spotting some interesting birds.

Four km from the Cumbre, the road makes a sweeping turn to the right. On the left side of the road, there is an interesting boulder field, a steep mountain face, and a small stream (Stop #1). White-winged Diuca-Finch are quite common, but check closely for a Short-tailed Finch lurking in the boulders. Any flowering plants are worth staking out as Oliveaceous Thornbill may be seen. Across the road is a small bog that can have finches foraging on the ground.

At 9.0 km from the Cumbre, a road-side bog with scattered boulders is attractively situated on the left-side of the road (Stop #2). With an altitude of nearly 4,200 meters, this is an excellent site for Streak-throated-Canastero especially if you spend time walking among the bogs and boulders. Watch also for Blue-mantled Thornbill. Short-tailed Finch is difficult to see, but the superficially similar Plumbeous Sierra-Finch is common. To check out a small pond that sometimes has waterfowl, walk east uphill a hundred meters or so. By parking on the left-hand shoulder of the road, you should be able to scan the entire area and decide which sections need further exploration on foot.

As you continue to descend the serpentine Coroico road, roadside vegetation increases. At 12.9 km, there is an unmarked track that joins the road on the left-hand side. Turn left and enter a large gravel clearing (Stop #3). The hillsides have quite a bit of indigenous vegetation and a small stream flows by, crossing under the paved road. This area is very reliable for Tawny Tit-Spinetail and Scribble-tailed Canastero. Stripe-headed Antpitta has also been seen on the boulders further up the ravine. The altitude at this stop is about 3,800 meters.

**Logistics:** Leave La Paz via the neighborhood of Miraflores, taking the road to Coroico. Pass through the Miraflores police *tranca* and continue for 16 km to the Cumbre (see Site 5: La Cumbre). At the Cumbre, re-set your odometer to zero (0.0) and begin the descent. The three stops described above are at 4.0, 9.0 and 15.9 km respectively.

GPS reading at Upper Coroico Road Stop #1: S 16 19.084' W 68 02.201'  
GPS reading at Upper Coroico Road Stop #2: S 16 19.078' W 68 01.390'  
GPS reading at Upper Coroico Road Stop #3: S 16 19.741' W 67 57.981'

### ***Site 7: Choquetanga Valley near Pongo***

The Choquetanga Valley provides a glimpse at the diversity of the High Andes before intensive human habitation. The valley holds a remnant *Polylepis* forest, one of the closest to La Paz. The species, *Polylepis racemosa*, is suited to semi-humid area and somewhat rarer than the *Polylepis* species in Sajama National Park and San Miguel in Cochabamba. While the *Polylepis* forest above Pongo is somewhat disturbed and, as is often the case, more scrub than forest, it still attracts a variety of *Polylepis* specialties. Starting at an altitude of just under 3700 meters, the 225 meter climb to the *Polylepis* forest can be strenuous. Make sure you are reasonably well acclimated to the altitude before attempting it. The path is quite good, if a bit steep. Even if La Paz temperatures are warm, be prepared for cold, foggy weather. Bring adequate clothing and rain gear.

The key attraction in the forest is the Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant. An endangered and rare *Polylepis* specialty known from a handful of sites in Peru, for years the only Bolivian record was a 1935 specimen. Yet in 1993, Sjoerd Meyer, a Dutch ornithologist, discovered and sound recorded a small flock of Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrants in the Choquetanga Valley. They appear to be resident and, based on about a half-dozen visits, they are likely to be seen on over two-thirds of all visits. With their white tail feathers and tendency to travel in small family groups, they are fairly conspicuous.

Other species found in the valley, some of which are at least partially *Polylepis*-dependent, include: Olivaceous Thornbill, Blue-mantled Thornbill, Tawny Tit-Spinetail, Line-fronted Canastero, Stripe-headed Antpitta, Puna (Andean) Tapaculo, Brown-bellied Swallow and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Plain-colored Seedeater. Andean Hillstar and Great Sapphirewing can be found feeding when flowers are in bloom, especially near the stunted *Gynoxys* trees. A walk through the bunch grass at the perimeter of the forest will likely flush a Scribble-tailed Canastero. Cinereous Ground-Tyrant is likely on the way up or down. Finally, even Andean Condor has been seen soaring overhead on rare occasions.

Unfortunately, the *Polylepis* forest in the Choquetanga valley is under severe threat. Evidence of cattle grazing is everywhere. However, cattle do not seem to penetrate the boulder fields where *Polylepis* have established as stronghold. Burning of the hillside grasslands also threaten the small patch of forest. Conservation proposals exist for the area, but are still under funded.

Located in the valley just below the food stalls on the paved highway, Pongo town itself can have some interesting species in the exotic plantations and flowering bushes. White-browed Conebill and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant are notable.

**Logistics:** Pongo is a small town just off the Coroico road. Townspeople operate a number of food stalls which line the Coroico road and provide a convenient place to park. At the La Cumbre (see Site 5 above) re-set your odometer to zero (0.0 km). Continue down the Coroico road until you see the Pongo food stalls on your right (14.5 km from the Cumbre). Park your car (or get off the bus) at the food stalls. From the parking area in front of food stalls, orient

yourself to the north. Head back up the road 50 meters or so, cross the paved road and begin a steep climb (north) into the Choquetanga valley on the small path that parallels the left-side of the waterfall. After 10 minutes or so, reach the "first level" with a small pond and beautiful views of a second, larger waterfall to the north. Your goal is to cross the stream, work your way around to the right-side of the waterfall, and reach a "second level" area that is just above this second waterfall. However, the sheer cliff face of the second waterfall makes a direct assault impractical. Instead work your way to the west and then south to a switchback (see map) before turning again to the north on a well-defined path. As you surmount the "second level," the second waterfall will be on your left. You may find the path blocked with rocks; the rocks are to prevent animals grazing in grasslands further up the path from wandering too far. Once you arrive above the waterfall (you will pass it on your left as you climb the trail), walk due north for a couple hundred meters until you reach the *Polylepis* forest at the base of a large boulder field. Smaller remnant *Polylepis* is also found further up on a "third level." The total climb from food stalls to the forest is about an hour without birding or rest stops.

GPS reading at Pongo food stalls (roadside parking area): S 16 19.443 W 67 57.216

GPS reading at the *Polylepis* forest: S 16 19.501 W 67 57.247

### ***Site 8: Cotapata trail***

After centuries of settlement, very few pristine examples of accessible upper Yungas forest remain in the department of La Paz or Cochabamba. Fortunately, the Cotapata National Park and Integrated Management Area provide at least some nominal protection for upper Yungas cloud habitats. The Coroico Road skirts the southern edge of the park and on the left-hand side of the road a narrow trail (the "Cotapata trail") provides hikers with access to the park.

Although most of the area is far from pristine, the number of range-restricted species that have been recorded on the higher parts of the Cotapata trail is impressive. A full list appears in the Appendix. The endemic Bolivian-diademed Tapaculo was first discovered here by Bret Whitney in 1992 and still appears to be quite common. You will undoubtedly hear it sing, although getting a good look is difficult. Rufous-faced Antpitta, another endemic is also often heard with a characteristic three-note song. The endemic Black-throated Thistletail is also readily found skulking in the understory. Sickle-winged Guan is only known in Bolivia from this site and the neighboring Zongo valley. Yungas Pygmy-Owl is also often heard. Other restricted range species of importance recorded in Cotapata include: Stripe-faced Wood-Quail, Black-eared Parrot, Scaled Metaltail, Hooded Mountain-Toucan, Light-crowned Spinetail, Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant, Golden-collared Tanager, and Orange-browed Hemispingus. But don't expect to see all, or even most of these, in one trip; like many higher altitude sites, diversity and abundance are low and birding at Cotapata can be highly variable. On cloudy, misty days, one can encounter one foraging flock after another, while on hot, sunny days, an hour can pass between birds and the only sounds are those of insects.

From the "parking area" at 3,200 meters, the trail winds down over 300 meters into the Chairu river valley. Fortunately, the upper part of the trail is usually the best. Black-throated Thistletail and Rufous Antpitta are likely right near the parking area clearing. Listen also for the distinctive call of the Hooded Mountain-Toucan here. The first hundred meters of the trail are marred by sounds from the sawmill and the forest is heavily disturbed. But the next few hundred meters, with second growth, epiphytes and hanging tangles, can be excellent. Watch for foraging flocks. Three-striped Hemispingus can be seen travelling with Drab Hemispingus, Blue-backed Conebill, and Plushcap. Other flocks may include Citrine Warbler, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Streak-necked Flycatcher and a variety of mountain tanagers. Light-crowned Spinetail is a common member of foraging flocks and often can be seen foraging at the edge of the trail.

After the first few hundred meters, the trail begins a series of steep switchbacks down into the valley. For a stretch, the vegetation is not nearly as attractive and the trail is somewhat more overgrown. But take advantage of the frequent overlooks to listen for the distant call of a Masked Trogon. After nine or so switchbacks, the trail reaches a T junction. A right turn leads to a river bed and, further on, a dilapidated gold mining camp. A left turn is probably the preferred option. Winding around a steep ravine, the path is cut into sheer vertical rock. Underneath the thick foundation of soil and vegetation on the path lies some interesting stonework. Some say the path dates back to the Inca period. White-crowned Tapaculo and Rufous-faced Antpitta can be found here. More interesting forest is soon encountered. Theoretically (that is if it is not too overgrown), one could follow the path into the Chairu valley and hook up with the famous Choro trail before the town of Chairu. The trail is wide enough at some parts and gets so little foot traffic, that it is possible to camp right on the trail, preferably at one of the wide hairpin turns.

The new Cotapata-Santa Barbara road, running on a ridge line northeast of the Cotapata trail, will probably not have a great impact on the bird life of the area. However, increased noise from road will undoubtedly lead to a deterioration of the aesthetic enjoyment of birding this rich area.

**Logistics:** Continuing on the road to Coroico, pass through a tunnel (35.4 km), a police checkpoint at 36.2 km, then pass the South Yungas turnoff (36.9 km). At 44.6 km, where the pavement ends, arrive at Cotapata. A proverbial "blink and you miss it" place, Cotapata is nothing more than a sawmill, construction site and gas station on the left-hand side of the road. Just to the left of the gas station, a narrow trail provides access into the southern edge of the park. Cotapata National Park is somewhat neglected and few signs exist denoting the park boundaries. Economic activities such as mining and logging continue within the borders of the park.

GPS reading at start of Cotapata trail: S 16 17.118' W 67 51.072'

### ***Site 9: Chuspipata***

Although possessing many of the same species as the nearby Cotapata trail, Chuspipata has some marked differences. First, with its slightly lower elevation, it is a few degrees warmer than the Cotapata trail. Second, the trails at Chuspipata lead into the Unduavi river valley towards the south rather than into Cotapata national park to the north. Unfortunately, it is also somewhat more disturbed than Cotapata. The consolation is that, on a clear day, there are beautiful views of snow-capped Mt. Mururata. The two trails at Chuspipata are also very flat, unusual for the Yungas.

Like the Cotapata trail, Chuspipata boasts a number of range-restricted species. In fact, while the bird list is very similar to Cotapata (see Cotapata list in the Appendix), it is probably a better place to see goodies such as Stripe-faced Wood-Quail, Orange-browed Hemispingus, Plush-capped Finch, Grass-green Tanager, Paramo Seed eater, Hooded Mountain-Toucan, and Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant. A pair of Hooded Mountain-Toucan inhabit the Unduavi river valley and can occasionally be seen from above. Listen for their distinctive calls.

**Logistics:** Leaving Cotapata (see previous site), pass the turn-off to the left (47.0 km) where the new road to Coroico was still under construction in 2000. Completion may be sometime in 2002. At 47.6 km, arrive at Chuspipata, a tiny town with shops selling cold drinks lining both sides of the road. For the Mining Coop Trail, park in the grassy area on the right between the shops. From there, a small trail travels a little over a kilometer to a mining camp. A yellow sign may still exist pointing the way to the mining cooperative. Too overgrown for vehicle traffic, the path offers excellent views of the canopy and foraging flocks.

For the Railway Trail, take the branch to the right and follow the road downhill about a kilometer to a construction camp, a fenced in set of office and bunkhouses. The old train station has been converted into the headquarters for a construction firm. Stop at the gate and let the person in the guardhouse on the left know that you want to hike along the old railroad bed (*Via de Ferrocarril* in Spanish). You will probably have to leave your car at the guardhouse. Walk past the old train station (on your left) and after 100 meters or so, turn left to follow a dirt road uphill. The road has a couple switchbacks before leveling off at the start of the old railroad bed (no iron rails or ties are visible). On a clear day, the entire Unduavi valley is visible with snow-clad mountains in the distance. The railroad bed can be followed for about an hour, past waterfall and a railroad tunnel, although it is more over-grown the farther from the construction camp you get.

GPS reading at Chuspipata: S 16 17.965' W 67 49.152'

### ***Site 10: Hotel La Finca, Coroico***

Perched on a hillside at 1750 meters, Coroico is a popular tourist destination and a favorite weekend getaway for *Paceños* (La Paz residents). Unfortunately, the area surrounding the town is very disturbed, but remnant forest patches remain. Hotel La Finca, outside of Coroico, on the road to Coripata, fronts one such forest patch. Although the trail network is under-developed, foraging flocks in the forest behind the hotel can be very interesting. The hotel makes a great place to unwind and make morning forays into the forest patches. Birding along the roadside can also be good for Upland Antshike and even Lyre-tailed Nightjar.

On the drive in, the town of Yolosa just before Coroico is also worth a stop. Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper has been seen from the bridge.

**Logistics:** Coroico is 93 kilometers from the city of La Paz. The Coroico (or North Yungas) Road has been called the "most dangerous road in the world" by the *Lonely Planet* guide and it certainly serves up a nerve-wracking experience. In a number of places, it is a narrow dirt track, barely wide enough for a single vehicle, with steep drop-offs and even a couple places where the road passes under a waterfall. With heavy, overloaded trucks from the lowlands coming uphill (uphill traffic has the right-of-way), drivers are forced to back up and seek out narrow pull-outs to allow the oncoming traffic to pass. Municipal authorities have experimented with various schemes to try and reduce fatalities on the road (usually due to unsafe speeds and alcohol). For a time, the Coroico Road between Chuspipata and Yolosa was one-way downhill from 8AM to 3 PM and one-way uphill from 5 PM to 5 AM. There are frequent buses to Coroico from the suburb of Villa Fatima in La Paz.

For Hotel La Finca, from Coroico Plaza, take road toward the hospital (anyone can point you in the right direction). At 0.8 km, pass the hospital and continue on the road for 7.2 km. Hotel La Finca will be on the left and there is a small sign. Reservations for Hotel la Finca can be made in La Paz at their office at: Avenida 16 de Julio 1615 (El Prado). Tel: 373965 and fax: 311570.

GPS reading at Coroico main plaza: S 16 11.306 W 67 43.640  
GPS reading at La Finca Hotel: S 16 14.663 W 67 42.576

## **SOUTH YUNGAS ROAD (ROAD TO CHULUMANI)**

The South Yungas road, which effectively ends in the Yungas town of Chulumani, has less traffic than the more famous North Yungas (Coroico) Road and is statistically safer. The directions for each site assume you re-set to zero at start of junction for the South Yungas road

### ***Site 11: Upper South Yungas Road***

This site offers a good selection of roadside birding. Many a birder has spent a pleasant morning stopping at various spots along the upper portion of South Yungas Road before heading to the lower elevations near Chulumani. The forest is still in good condition, with some excellent patches on the steep hillsides (for example at about 2500 meters). The road itself was constructed by Paraguayan prisoners of war during Chaco war.

Given the proximity to the Cotapata trail, the Cotapata list (see Appendix) is a good proxy for likely species, although the altitude is a bit lower.

**Logistics:** To reach the South Yungas Road (also called the Chulumani Road), leave La Paz, pass through the Miraflores *tranca*, and head north on the Coroico. Sites 5 through 9 described in the previous sections can be visited along the way. At 36.9 km from the Miraflores tranca, turn right onto the unpaved South Yungas Road. Re-set odometer to zero at the start of the South Yungas Road (0.0 km). Each of the stops highlighted above are on the first 23 or so km of the South Yungas Road:

former Acero Marka Resort:	5.3 km
Nice roadside forest:	13.7 km
Road uphill to Chuspipata:	16.7 km
El Castillo hotel:	22.7 km

A possible place to stay is El Castillo Hotel, strangely modeled on a French chateau. The hotel was constructed by Tejada Sorzano, a former Bolivian president. He died before moving in and it was boarded up until the 1970s. It is "delightfully shabby" or "unnecessarily rustic" depending on who you talk to. Some say it is haunted. But it has nice gardens that attract hummingbirds and parrots.

GPS reading at start of South Yungas Road: S 16 18.588' W 67 54.146'

### ***Site 12: Chojlla aqueduct trail***

Chojlla is an old mining town, the terminus of the Takesi trail, which has fallen on hard times. Mining cooperatives still try to eke out a living and dilapidated buildings speak to a better past. Hydropower arrived to Chojlla near the town of the century to provide electricity for the mines. For birders, the ground-level aqueduct that carries water to the small power plant doubles as an excellent birding trail through the surrounding *yungas* forest. More like a sidewalk, only the faint thundering sound will remind you of rushing water below. Although Chojlla is a bit difficult to reach (most people visit in their own vehicle or end up there after hiking the Takesi Trail), once there the birding is easy. In fact, the concrete covered aqueduct means that it is one of the few trails that use of a wheelchair or baby stroller is possible. The altitude is about 1900 meters.

From the starting point, the trail parallels the riverbank to 2 or 3 kilometers. The best strategy is to stroll along, trying to pick up foraging flocks. The light is actually quite poor in the morning, as the views of the canopy sloping down to river are to the east. Chojlla is only two drainages over from Cotapata, but at a lower altitude. Versicolored Barbet, a spectacular bird, is actually fairly easy to see here. White-eared Solitaire calls frequently.

The watershed near Chojlla is also the site of a recent hydroelectric project. *Hidroeléctrica Boliviana*, has constructed two power plants with 85 megawatt capacity. While the project has helped ensure that the road to Chojlla is well-maintained, the road to the power plant (not accessible to the public) and new aqueducts have caused some environmental degradation in the watershed.

**Logistics:** With your own vehicle: Assuming you have re-set your odometer at zero at the start of the South Yungas road, the turn for Chojlla is at 31.7 km on the South Yungas road. The turn is easy to miss: Look for a narrow road forking uphill to the right. Re-set odometer to zero (0.0) at the turn. Pass through the small town of Yanachachi, bearing right at the T junction. At 10.3 km, just before the mining town of Chojlla, turn left and follow the narrow track downhill to the river. (If you reach the mining town of Chojlla you have missed the turn and need to back-track. The narrow track down to the river can be difficult to find, but you can always ask a local person ("*Donde esta el camino al rio?*"). At 11.4 km, still descending, pass a small gold mine. At 12.4 km, cross a small stream and arrive at the trail head. The road pretty much dead-ends here for vehicle traffic.

Using public transportation: a bus leaves Chojlla twice a day at 5:30 AM and 1:00 PM and passes through Yanacachi at 6:00 AM and 1:30 PM, stopping in front of the Hotel San Carlos. Tickets can be purchased in advance in Chojlla though there is generally space available. A minibus leaves from Yanachachi on Fridays and Sundays at 2:30 PM and Mondays at 5:00 AM. Check with Doña Yolla on the plaza for space and tickets. If you are unable to get a space on the departing busses there is a trail (not following the road) that brings you to the Chulumani road in 30 minutes. From here it is easy to get a ride to La Paz or Chulumani from a passing bus or truck.

Don't bother trying to spend the night in Chojlla. Instead, the nearby town of Yanacachi has a hotel and a number of *alojamientos* located along the main road into town and around the plaza. Recommended are Alojamiento Don Tomas (\$3 per person) with a pool and gardens and Hotel San Carlos (\$6 per person). Both of these hotels serve food, as do other small restaurants near plaza.

GPS reading at right turn for Chojlla on the South Yungas Road: S 16 21.701' W 67 45.140'  
GPS reading at left turn for narrow track down to river: S 16 24.064' W 67 46.107'  
GPS reading at start of aqueduct trail: S 16 24.571' W 67 46.596'



### ***Site 13: Apa Apa reserve, Chulumani***

Apa-Apa Forest, located just north of the town of Chulumani, is one of the best sites in Bolivia for middle-montane *Yungas* species. Although access is a bit difficult, this is a premier site that offers a host of interesting species. This is the only site in Bolivia where the Scimitar-winged Piha has been recently seen. Other key species for this site include Hooded Tinamou, Rufous-faced Antpitta, Short-tailed Antthrush, Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater, Straw-backed Tanager, Versicolored Barbet, Yungas Manakin, and Slaty Finch.

Unlike much of the La Paz Yungas, where accessible forests are dominated by second-growth and logging has wiped out many of the larger trees, Apa-Apa is virgin forest. Huge trees, with attendant epiphytes and orchids, are right next to the road. Apa-Apa is a glimpse of what much of the Yungas must have been like hundreds of years ago. That it survives to this day is largely a tribute to the Portugal family and strict community prohibitions on logging and land clearing in the forest. The forest was once part of a large coca estate that was broken up in the land reforms following the 1952 revolution. The Portugal's, whose ownership of the estate dates to the 1600s, still live in the valley below the forest and are working to promote sustainable eco-tourism in the forest.

Apa-Apa does not offer much in the way of trails through the forest. Most birding is done from either the road that runs from San Cristobal, through the forest, to the village of San Isidro on the other side of the *serrania* or from the Portugal Hacienda winding up into the forest. Fortunately, the San Isidro road sees little traffic (one or two vehicles per day), while the Hacienda road eventually becomes a narrow track suitable only for foot traffic. From either San Cristobal or Portugal Hacienda, the real forest begins at about 2,150 meters after passing through second-growth forest and recently burned areas. Foraging flocks can be encountered anywhere from here. From 2150 meters, both roads climb to intersect the summit at about 2450 meters. Listen for Rufous-banded Owl here at night. The other side of the summit is significantly drier and the road descends into the village of San Isidro. On the descent, possibility of Black-and-chestnut is merits frequent scanning of the skies.

Nearly 140 species have been recorded in Apa Apa and this number is likely to grow as more research is conducted. A complete list appears in the Appendix.

***Logistics:*** Chulumani, a pleasant village in the Yungas, is on the South Yungas Road, less than four hours from La Paz. (Chulumani is only 115 kilometers from La Paz, but such distances are deceptive given the quality of the road). The best way to visit Apa-Apa forest is to contact Ramiro or Tilde Portugal in Chulumani at 0811-6106. Tilde Portugal speaks English. The Portugal Hacienda is nestled in a valley below Apa-Apa Forest and offers hiking trails into the forest. Accommodation is available at the Portugal Hacienda (limited number of rooms plus

camping). A variety of hotels are also available in the nearby town of Chulumani, but an excellent option is to back-track to 21.2 km to Puente Villa. Turn right, cross the narrow bridge over the Unduavi River and follow the very narrow dirt track a kilometer or so to the lovely Hotel Tamampaya. The grounds offer good birding and a double room is less than \$30. Reservations for Hotel Tamampaya (essential for holiday weekends) can be made at their office in La Paz: The "Centro de Moda" shopping center on Calle 21 in Calacoto. The office is hidden away in the basement and the telephone number is: 796099.

For those intent on visiting with your own vehicle, re-set your odometer at zero at the start of the South Yungas road. At 69.5 km on the South Yungas road arrive at the village of San Cristobal. The road actually enters the main plaza of San Cristobal (1900 meters elevation). At the plaza re-set odometer again to zero (0.0). Instead of bearing right and continuing to Chulumani, bear left around the plaza, and make a sharp right turn at the street corner dominated by the pink church. Following the street uphill (can be rough going!), the road forks in three directions after 100 meters or so. Take the central fork, keeping the houses on your immediate right. Continue climbing, passing modest farmers' houses and cross a soccer field. At 5.8 km on this access road, the forest begins. A wider part of the road can be found at about 7 km where it is possible to park or even camp. The summit (2450 meters) is reached at 8.7 km from San Cristobal Plaza. If you plan on using public transportation and hike in, get the bus to Chulumani and ask to be let off the bus at San Cristobal.

GPS reading at point on access road where forest begins: S 16 20.971' W 67 30.569'

### ***Site 14: Takesi trek***

At least a half dozen Pre-Hispanic or "Inca trails" link the *altiplano* with the sub-tropical Yungas. Constructed over 500 years ago as a vital transport and communication link, many are still in use today by local people. In the last few years, these "Inca trails" have also emerged as a major tourist draw. For the trekker, the Takesi trail has some of best preserved Hispanic stone paving, steps, and retaining walls in South America and offers great views of the flat-topped Nevado Mururata (5868m). For the birder, the 40 kilometer trail descends from 4600m to 2220m passing through a variety of interesting habitats, from puna grassland and high-altitude bogs to second-growth Yungas forests. As the trail descends into the Yungas the vegetation changes, subtly at first, with the introduction of tall grasses and shrubs, gradually growing more dense before finishing in the second growth cloud forest below the mining town of Chojlla. Try and do this hike during the week as weekends (especially holiday weekends) can be very crowded with Bolivian hikers. On average over 5,000 people trek the trail each year. Also, during the peak season, quite a bit of litter accumulates along the trail (follow the candy wrappers if you think you are lost!). Please pack out your all your garbage.

With a lift to the trailhead at Mina San Francisco, one can skip the long uphill slog through

farmland from Ventilla, and the journey becomes a nice two day trek with plenty of birding time. If you decide to start walking at Ventilla, you may end up camping at or near the trailhead the first night (where it can be quite cold). The times below are for an acclimated but out-of-shape hiker carrying a pack without including rest stops.

*From Ventilla town to the trailhead:* Four hours. Due to limited transportation, trekkers often have to make the trip from the town of Ventilla to the trailhead through the dry Choquecota valley. If possible, try and arrange a lift from La Paz directly to the trailhead as the Choquecota valley is mostly shrubs and farm fields. Birds that may be seen include: Puna Hawk, Spot-winged Pigeon, Giant Hummingbird, Sparkling Violetear, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, White-winged Diuca-Finch and Black Siskin.

*From the trailhead to cumbre:* One hour. This section is only one of two significant uphill segments on the trail and passes some beautiful examples of stone paving. A signpost showing the route is found at the trailhead. From the trailhead, follow the branch to the right. Near the summit, the path becomes broader with excellent Inca stone paving. Reach the summit (cumbre) at 4600 meters and start downhill through more beautiful stone paved areas. Interesting high altitude birds here include Andean Hillstar, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Streak-throated Canastero, Plain-breasted Earthcreeper, and Puna Canastero. The keen birder may choose to take three hours for this one hour climb! Just before the cumbre, encounter several small bogs that are worth a rest stop. Watch for Cinerous Ground-Tyrant, Andean Flicker, and Andean Swallow. Andean Condor can occasionally be seen soaring above.

*From the cumbre to Takesi:* Three hours. This section is relatively barren but a half hour or so below the cumbre lies a large lake which makes a nice stop for lunch. The boulders around this lake are good for Short-tailed Finch. However, be careful in identification, Short-tailed Finch can easily be confused with the abundant Plumbeous Sierra Finch. Andean Goose also likely in this area. Birdlife picks up considerably near the village Takesi as vegetation increases. The area just below Takesi village is good place to camp (3700m) with streams providing a water source (be sure to treat all water). The low shrubbery below Takesi village is also good for the endemic Black-hooded Sunbeam and the rare Stripe-headed Antpitta. Other birds of interest include Andean Tapaculo, Light-crowned Spinetail, Brown-bellied Swallow, White-browed Conebill, Red-crested Cotinga, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant. As the area below Takesi is one of the best birding sites on the trail, it is worth getting here in time to do some birding before dusk. Another option is to camp here and plan on spending a couple hours birding at first light before continuing down the trail.

*From Takesi to Kacapi:* Three hours. Just beyond the village of Takesi, the trail crosses the Takesi River and, with the river on the left, begins a gradual descent on smooth stone paving (which can be treacherous when wet). The trail then levels out and making a long sweep right turn around the Loma Palli Palli with the river far below. With the descent into Kacapi, the vegetation increases, although the area is fairly dry and, unless a rare foraging flock is encountered, this section of the trail has limited birdlife.

*From Kacapi to Chojila:* One hour. From Kacapi, where locals operate several modest restaurants, it is a brief yet steep descent to the Quimsa Chata river (2600m). Full of boulders, the stream-side is a wonderful place to soak your feet in the icy water and have a snack. Then there is a long uphill segment to the tiny, seemingly unpopulated village of Chojila. As this area is somewhat drier than the area near the Takesi area and somewhat more disturbed, birds along this section are rather scarce.

*From Chojila to Chojlla:* Two hours. From Chojila, the trail descends and re-crosses the Takesi River. After crossing the river, the trail parallels the left bank and enters quite good habitat. Birds likely to be encountered include: Andean Guan, Speckled Hummingbird, Scaled and Tyrian Metaltails, Blue-banded Toucanet, Highland Eleania, White-eared Solitaire, Rust-and-yellow Tanager, Collared Jay, and Dusky-green Oropendola. White-capped Dipper and even Torrent Duck can be found on the boulders in the river. As you approach the mining town of Chojlla (note the minor difference in spelling between the neighboring village of Chojila and mining town of Chojlla), a cement covered aqueduct begins. This aqueduct offers excellent birding and is dealt with under Site 12. From the aqueduct it is a short, but steep, uphill climb to the town of Chojlla, a filthy and unpleasant mining town. Best options are to camp near the aqueduct or continue down the dirt road from Chojlla to Yanachachi where there are a couple modest hotels (*alojamientos*).

**Logistics:** The Takesi trailhead is located near the San Francisco mine, though the poor condition of the road means most drivers stop well before reaching the trailhead. Public transportation goes daily to the nearby town of Ventilla, leaving from the market area above Calle Sagarnaga on the corner of Calles Rodriguez and Luis Lara in La Paz. It is about a three hour journey. Another option for larger groups (6 to 10 people) is to charter a minivan to the trailhead outside of the village of Choquekhota. Many of the tour agencies along Calle Sagarnaga can arrange transport or contact the Fundación Pueblo office in La Paz (tel: 413031). Fundación Pueblo, a Bolivian NGO, supports rural development projects in the Yanachachi/South Yungas region aimed at increasing economic opportunities for the local people through, among other things, developing tourism infrastructure along the trail. To return to La Paz after the trek, early morning buses leave from Chojlla (Site #12) and Yanachachi.

GPS reading at trail head of Takesi Trail (near Mina San Francisco): S 16 29.743'  
W 67 54.124'

## LAKE TITICACA AREA

Few visitors to Bolivia, even the most hard-core birders, will want to leave Bolivia without a quick visit to Lake Titicaca. At 3810 meters (12,500 feet), Lake Titicaca is often called the highest, navigable lake in the world, although there seem to be several other more likely

candidates. Nevertheless, Lake Titicaca is a very pleasant birding destination, especially towards the tail end of a long birding trip when early mornings and long days in the field have begun to take their toll. As might be expected, waterbirds are the key attraction. Diversity is not that high (an average day might reach 50 species), but many of the target birds are high-altitude specialties. One of the most sought-after birds is the flightless Short-winged Grebe, relatively common in its stronghold on Lake Titicaca.

### ***Site 15: Huatajata lakeshore***

On the shore of Lake Huyñaymarka, a southern extension of Lake Titicaca, the small town of Huatajata makes a pleasant base for exploration of the Lake Titicaca area. Since most of the attractions are waterbirds, an early start is not necessary. Less than two hours from La Paz, the Huatajata lakeshore makes a good day trip.

Although the area can be birded using public transportation or as part of Lake Titicaca package tour, the best strategy is to have your own vehicle. This gives you the freedom to stop at various places that look interesting. Bird concentrations and best locations depend greatly on the water levels in the lake. The following plan of stops is usually good: Leave El Alto for the paved road to Lake Titicaca and Copacabana (re-set odometer to zero at the *tranca*--see GPS reading at introduction).

After leaving La Paz, the fields near the turn-off to Batallas can offer good birding if they are flooded. Continuing on, look for an area where the lake is very close to the road, just before the village of Huarina (see GPS waypoint below). Walk through the fields to the west (left) to the shore of the lake for a variety of waterbirds. Continuing on, a third stop is on the causeway at marshy area just before the Hotel Titicaca (see GPS waypoint). A last stop, (before a *trucha* lunch at one of the many restaurants in the area) is the five-star Hotel Inca Utama. The pier of the hotel is a good spot to scan for Short-winged Grebe. The *trucha* (salmon) at Hotel Inca Utama is excellent, if a bit more expensive than neighboring restaurants. From here one can also negotiate with one of the local boat captains for a tour of the lake and some of the nearby islands.

**Logistics:** The birding strategy outlined above should make reaching Huatajata relatively straight-forward. The road is paved all the way from La Paz to Huatajata and gets a good amount of traffic, especially on weekends. Public transportation is easy to find, particularly since Copacabana, a major destination, is further along the same road. Huatajata is a hub in the steady tourist industry of the area. Several hotels at varying price ranges dot the shoreline.

GPS reading at good roadside spot before Huarina: S 16 14.870' W 68 34.184'

GPS reading at causeway before Hotel Titicaca: S 16 11.484' W 68 37.270'

GPS reading at Hotel Inca Utama, Huatajata: S 16 11.934' W 68 37.832'

### ***Site 16: Copacabana and the Yampupata peninsula***

Copacabana, nestled between two hills, on the shores of Lake Titicaca and only a few kilometers from the Peruvian border, is not an especially exciting birding destination. Although it does have many of the species typical of the High Andes (the altitude is just over 3800 meters) and a variety of waterbirds, it is included here because it happens to be a major tourist destination on the "gringo trail." Many young backpackers working their way through Peru and Bolivia stop for a couple days because of the fantastic scenery and incredible collection of Inca ruins on nearby Isla de Sol.

With an hour or two to spare for birding, walk from the center of town back along the road toward La Paz. Pass a gas station on the left, then a cemetery on the right where the birding begins. Soon after there is a police checkpoint for vehicles entering the town. Some of the fields to the right are worth exploring, but stick to the paths and avoid trampling on crops. This walk is likely to turn up a number of common Andean species found near rural settlements, including: Rufous-collared Sparrow, Peruvian Sierra-Finch, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, Mourning Sierra-Finch, Andean Flicker, Andean Lapwing, Chinguanco Thrush, Black Siskin, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Eared Dove, Bar-winged Cinclodes, and Sparkling Violetear.

The best reason for heading to Copacabana, besides the cultural attractions, is a very good chance at seeing the flightless Short-winged Grebe. From Copacabana, drive out along the Yampupata peninsula, a finger of land jutting into the lake. At various points where the road makes a close approach to the lake and there appear to be sufficient reedbeds, scan for the Short-winged Grebe.

**Logistics:** Copacabana is 156 kilometers from the city of La Paz. It is a popular local tourist attraction and is easy to get to via public transportation. Avoid the first week of February, Easter weekend and Independence Day (August 6) as it can be hard to get hotel reservations during holidays. The ferry crossing at Tiquina is a unique experience.

### ***Site 17: Sorata***

About three and a half hours northeast of La Paz, Sorata, with its steep streets and a sleepy atmosphere, is a typical *Yungas* town. The town, perched on the hillside at 2700 meters at the base of snowcapped Mt. Illampu in the Cordillera Real, is quite charming. But many of the surrounding areas are heavily distributed. Indigenous vegetation only survives high up on steep hillsides and in steep ravines. Birds like Golden-billed Saltator, Azara's Spinetail, Rust-and-yellow Tanager, Black-backed Grosbeak are suggestive of the disturbed, scrub and hedgerow habitat that dominate. But Sorata is a convenient base for hiking and trekking and is a lovely

getaway from La Paz.

The main attraction is the endemic Berlepsch's Canastero which is easy to find in the patches of introduced eucalyptus trees seen on the main road just a few kilometers before entering the town (see GPS waypoint below). Areas near this patch of eucalyptus are also very good for the endemic Black-hooded Sunbeam when roadside flowers are blooming. Green-tailed Trainbearer (rare further south) is also common around the town in the exotic flowering plants.

The drive from La Paz to Sorata is also excellent for waterbirds. The best spots are a few kilometers after the Ayacucho military battalion headquarters. Watch the roadside ponds here for Andean Avocet, Puna Ibis, and Chilean Flamingo. On the road ascending to the summit, there are some typical puna habitats that can be good for miners and pipits, especially Rufous-banded Miner. A good spot is 17 km from the turn at the Ayacucho military battalion where there is a large lake on the left side of the road that holds Giant Coot, Andean Goose, and even, on occasion, Black-faced Ibis.

**Logistics:** Sorata is 148 kilometers from the city of La Paz. Leave La Paz through El Alto and take the road to Lake Titicaca. Pass through the *tranca* for road to Lake Titicaca and continue 47.5 km to the small lake-side village of Huarina (re-set to 0.0 km). At Huarina (see GPS waypoint below), take the right fork to Achacachi. After 18 km, arrive at the market town of Achacachi, make your way through the town plaza, continuing straight, cross over a rather long bridge and arrive at the Ayacucho military battalion (20.8 km from Huarina--see GPS waypoint). Turn right just in front of the battalion building (a soldier may stop you to record your license plate). From here the asphalt ends (but the birding picks up). The unpaved 51.5 km stretch between Ayacucho military battalion and Sorata is a bit rough, especially in the wet season. Plan on a two-hour drive for this stretch in case the road is in poor condition.

In Sorata, Hotel Prefectura is a pleasant hotel with an entrance driveway just off to the right before entering the town of Sorata (\$25 a double for a spartan room). With creaky floors and badly in need of renovation, it may appear a good set for a horror movie. But the staff is very helpful and the atmosphere is restful. Rooms on the top floor are the nicest. Residential Sorata, in the main plaza, is also highly recommended, with better food. (\$48 per person per night). Try the meals at Cafe Altai on the main plaza.

GPS reading at Huarina, right fork for Sorata: S 16 11.916' W 68 35.939'

GPS reading at turn at the Ayacucho military battalion: S 16 02.148' W 68 41.282'

GPS reading at roadside spot good for Berlepsch's Canastero: S 15 49.415' W 68 8.603'

## **CLOSE TO THE CITY OF COCHABAMBA**

The Department of Cochabamba (with the department capital of the same name) lies in the

geographical center of Bolivia. The city of Cochabamba itself lies in a fertile valley that centuries ago was the breadbasket of Bolivia, supplying the mining towns of Potosí. Much of the original vegetation in the valley has given way to farmland and industrial parks, but both Lake Alalay in the center of town and the outstanding Polylepis forest in San Miguel near Quillacollo offer interesting birding sites easily reached by taxi. It is also a center of endemism, with most of the key Bolivian endemics found within the department. At an altitude of 2600m, the city of Cochabamba is firmly in the highlands, but the abundance of city parks and small-town atmosphere make it a pleasant base for birding explorations. The surrounding areas offer high habitat diversity, from high altitude Polylepis forests, to dry *valles*, to an interesting transect through Yungas montane forest down into the tropical lowlands. The city of Cochabamba offers hotel accommodation in every price range and an excellent selection of restaurants. A local saying is "in La Paz, people eat to live, in Cochabamba, they live to eat." For the one of the best steaks in Bolivia, try the restaurant "La Estancia," near the Hotel Portales.

### ***Site 18: Lake Alalay***

On the southeastern edge of the city, Lake Alalay has emerged again as key site for visiting birders. For a time in the late 1990s, it appeared that the area was destined to choke slowly to death from neglect, pollution and litter. Effort by the municipality have brought new life to this park-like area only a 20 minute walk from the central plaza. Many hotels have a brochure available that highlights Laguna Alalay, with photos of some of the over 135 species recorded at this significant site. When water levels are high, the laguna can cover over 200 hectares. The altitude is 2560 meters.

For birders, the eastern shore is especially good with plenty of native vegetation. Towards the northeastern edge, there are plenty of reedbeds that harbor Many-colored Rush-Tyrant and Wren-like Rushbird. Great Pampa-Finch is also a good find. A few hours in the morning (avoid weekends when the area is a magnet for all types of recreation) can yield over 60 species. Common species include: Silvery Grebe, Puna Teal, Speckled Teal, Andean (Ruddy) Duck, Slate-colored Coot, Black-necked Stilt, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Rufous Hornero, Bay-winged Cowbird and Creamy-breasted Thrush.

Fences around private property (soccer clubs and other sports clubs) make access a bit tricky on the east side, but a few trails exist to the lake edge across the street from the "Country Club Cochabamba" (also known as the golf course) main entrance. Rules are fairly loose so if there is a security guard or other authority, explain that you want to watch birds on the lake shore. ("*Queremos ver las aves que estan allá*"). Watch for White-tufted Grebe, Red Shoveler, White-cheeked Pintail, Puna Ibis, and Grassland Yellow-Finch on the southern shore. On migration, when water levels are right, a variety of shorebirds can be found including Collared Plover and Black-bellied Plover. Plumbeous Rail is sometimes seen.



The hillsides to the east of the laguna, just behind the Country Club, have quite a bit of indigenous vegetation and can also be worth exploring. A good strategy is to take the first road to the left after the Country Club as you head south from town. As the road starts to wind uphill, watch for small trails branching off from the road. This area is best explored in the early morning, as it can get quite hot by mid-morning. Species to look for include Giant Hummingbird, White-tipped Plantcutter, Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, and Gray-crested Finch.

The less crowded part of the laguna, on the road south of the golf course can be very good. One strategy is to take a taxi to the southeast corner of the golf course and down the road, along the shore, then cut across the soccer (football) fields and to loop around the lake. This course will keep the sun behind you in the early morning. Typical birds seen include Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle and White-tipped Plantcutter.

**Logistics:** Laguna Alalay is in the southeastern part of the city. Any taxi can take you there from anywhere in the city for less than \$2. For the budget conscious, the number 27 bus will also get to the laguna for about 25 cents. The Christ statue, a Cochabamba landmark, a rising 33 feet plus, is nearby. In fact, Christ's left arm seems to point directly to the best birding area, the north-east side of the laguna. For the north-east side, the light is best in the morning.

### ***Site 19: San Miguel polylepis forest***

The San Miguel polylepis forest, lying in the shadow of the Tunari cordillera that dominates the city of Cochabamba to the north, is one of the premier birding sites in Cochabamba. The attractions are an abundance of endemic species, as well as easy access from Cochabamba. At an altitude of about 3200 meters, San Miguel (often known as the community of Jankho Khala) is 58 kilometers by road from Cochabamba and 43 kilometers from Quillacollo (a lower-income neighbor of Cochabamba). A complete species list appears in the Appendix.

While trees of the genus *Polylepis* are in general decline and often found only in areas with difficult access, the San Miguel forest is a pleasant exception. Due to strong traditions and community restrictions on cutting, the forest (*Polylepis besseri*) remains in relatively good shape. Studies have shown high densities of *Polylepis* (160 *Polylepis* trees per hectare). And, over the past couple years, conservation projects have aided the community in construction of a nursery for *Polylepis* seedlings and helped the community improve their management and conservation of the forested areas. The area is rather arid, with between 600 and 1000 millimeters of rain each year, and characterized by steep ravines and several streams. In addition to *Polylepis besseri*, key tree species include *Citharexylum punctatum* and *Escallonia resinosa*.

Unlike many other areas, it is not essential to arrive at first light. Unless it is quite hot, birds are

often active all day long. Temperatures are usually pleasant, although the occasional birder falls victim to windy conditions. Ideally, San Miguel should be visited on two separate occasions to compensate for the fact that some of the key species have large wandering ranges.

The birding begins soon after leaving Quillacollo on the stone paved road. As the road begins climbing, look for flowering plants that may hold a variety of hummingbirds including Giant Hummingbird, Red-tailed Comet, and the endemic Wedge-tailed Hillstar. On the way up, a stop at the turn for Liriuni is also worthwhile as a few Bolivian Blackbirds often seem to be around where the road forks or close to the Liriuni hot springs. A group of Bolivian Blackbirds live, and likely breed, in the valley formed by the bare cliff. They are often seen foraging as a group on the ground.

Continuing straight on the road to Morochata, travelling up a serpentine road. As the road makes a turn to the right and crosses a small stream, look for evidence of an old washed out concrete bridge. This area is the best spot for a number of *Polylepis* specialists including Giant Conebill, Cochabamba Mountain-Finch, and Rufous-bellied Saltator. The left hillside has an excellent *Polylepis* grove, though it is interspersed with potato plots. The forest is open enough that one can wander through out the area with little problem, though the steep slopes and somewhat high altitude might necessitate a slower pace. Other birds of interest are Bolivian Warbling-Finch, Gray-bellied Flowerpiercer, Maquis Canastero, and Tawny-Tit Spinetail. Rufous-bellied Saltators respond well to persistent pishing. The Giant Conebills are noted for their nuthatch-like behavior, so it is worthwhile to carefully scan the trunks of the *Polylepis* trees.

The *Polylepis* trees are close enough to the road that by scrambling up the hillside, one can easily reach the edge of the forest. A slightly more strenuous, but rewarding option, is to seek out the trail that runs along the small irrigation aqueduct 50 or 60 meters up the hillside. To reach the aqueduct, carefully follow the rock-filled stream bed up-river until you reach a small stone dam. The aqueduct carries water off to the left and provides a level trail for birding the forest. More *Polylepis* lies further up the Morochata road, especially in the deep ravines and on steep inaccessible slopes. At 27 kilometers, the road makes a sharp hairpin turn to the right. To the left, there is a good view of the ravine and a small trail that leads to the edge of the main ravine. Torrent Duck, White-capped Dipper, Streak-fronted Thornbird, D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail are all rather common here. Travelling further up the road will eventually take you to a large area of high altitude puna and over a dozen small *lagunas*. At 42 km along this road (about 400 meters) there are interesting wet bogs that are best explored by foot. Many of the more common high Andean species can be found here including: Andean Gull, White-winged Diuca-Finch, Yellow-billed Pintail, Crested Duck, Bar-winged Cinclodes and Bright-rumped yellow-Finch. Although Short-billed Finch and Diademed Sandpiper-Plover have been recorded from this area, they are probably easier to see elsewhere.

The nearby Liriuni hot springs area is not as interesting as San Miguel, but does have a few species not yet recorded further up in the *Polylepis* forest, in particular Olive-crowned

Crescentchest. The Liriuni balinero (or bathhouse) at the hot springs is quite run-down and the "hotel" is quite seedy. But the area can be rewarding, especially in the afternoon, for dry valley species such as Giant Hummingbird, Red-tailed Comet, Andean Flicker, Maquis Canastero, Tawny Tit-Spinetail, and Grey-hooded Parakeet.

**Logistics:** From the central plaza in Cochabamba travel west two blocks to Avenida Heroínas. Follow Avenida Heriones as it changes name to General Blancos still travelling west (this is also the main road leading to La Paz). Continue travelling west passing several footbridges across the road. This is a fairly built up area and there are several gas stations along the way. Watch for a large green statue of a man with a small boy. Turn right at the second street after this statue, a poorly signposted turn for the town of Morachata. Set your odometer to zero at this point and continue straight, passing through a small outdoor market. This road, known as the "old road" to Morochata, changes from asphalt, to one paved with stone, and eventually to dirt. You may note a small sign that says Morochata 62 km, Buena Vista 8 km.

Pass through Buena Vista and then at 12 km arrive at a fork in the road. The left fork travels to an excellent Polylepis forest and eventually to the Morachata puna zone. The right fork travels to the Liriuni dry valley. Taking the left fork, follow the road up and around many curves. The river will be on your right. At around 21 km (3500 meters) the road makes a tight turn to the right to cross the river. Before the river crossing, one can see the remnants of an old washed out concrete bridge. Park here on the side of the road. Facing uphill, most of the hillsides to the left are covered with Polylepis.

GPS reading at the "washed out bridge," just below San Miguel Polylepis forest: S 17 16.588'  
W 68 19.776'

## CHAPARE ROAD

Since its construction in the early 1980's, the road linking Cochabamba and the Chapare, a subtropical region that is Bolivia's prime illegal coca growing area, has been a favorite of birders. Most Bolivian records of such spectacular species such as Scimitar-winged Piha and Hooded Mountain-Toucan come from this road. However in the last decade, settlement along the road has increased and deforestation for small-scale agriculture has taken its toll.

The Chapare road travels through Cochabamba Yungas, a humid forest area along the eastern slope of the Andes, to the main Chapare town of Villa Tunari. Starting at an altitude of 3800m outside of Cochabamba, the road drops quickly over a 100 kilometer stretch to 500m at Villa Tunari. As a result, the road travels through a variety of habitat types: Upper Montane (2600 m and above), Middle Montane (1600-2600 m), Upper Tropical (900 - 1600 m), Hill Tropical (500-900 m) and Lower Tropical (500 m and below). However, whether due to habitat loss or geographic position, the Hill Tropical and Lower Tropical habitats around Villa Tunari are not

that rich in terms of bird life. If your trip also includes visiting lowland habitats in another area of Bolivia, spend most of your time above 1000 meters.

A good strategy for maximizing the number of species seen is to make stops at 2900 meters (Site 20: Tablas Monte), 1900 meters (Site 21: Miguelito) and somewhere on the roadside at about 1000 meters. Birding can be good in the upper elevations even in the midday sun, even in one of the frequent mist showers. And do not be fooled, birding in the rain is often fantastic above 2000 meters. Villa Tunari offers several nice hotel options and makes a good base for exploring the region.

Unlike most roads in Bolivia, the Chapare road has occasional kilometer markers that make providing directions somewhat easier. Coming from Cochabamba, the kilometers posts start at zero at the toll booth in the city of Cochabamba. The Chapare Road, after passing through Villa Tunari, continues on to Santa Cruz. As it is the main highway linking Santa Cruz to the highlands, it is also known as the "new road" to Santa Cruz. Some road signs also mention "Sacaba," a small town just outside of Cochabamba. Thus, the "Chapare Road," the "new road to Santa Cruz" and "road to Sacaba" are all really one and the same.

GPS reading at tollbooth leaving Cochabamba for the Chapare Rd: S 17 23.895' W 66 03.223'

***Precautionary Note:*** The Chapare is Bolivia's major coca producing region. A chemical process is used to transform coca into cocaine. Although coca consumption is legal in Bolivia, coca production in the Chapare is considered illegal by the Bolivian government. With emphasis on eradication of coca plants, civil strife and resistance by coca farmers has grown as well. Coca farmers and policemen have died in confrontations in the region. However, do not let this dissuade you from visiting the region. As birders and tourists, you are very unlikely to encounter problems. Tourists are not being targeted and no tourist has been killed in coca-related violence. Using common sense is the best strategy: do not take photos of drug activity; do not wear green military-type fatigues; call your Embassy or Consulate upon arrival in Bolivia and ask about any travel advisories to the area. In general, the Carrasco National Park road (Site #23) is the only site where you are likely to see evidence of the drug economy.

### ***Site 20: Tablas Monte Road***

The Tablas Monte road, a dirt road branching off from the main Chapare Road at kilometer post 72, passes through an upper montane forest. The Tablas Monte road begins at 2900 meters and descends 27 kilometers to the village of Tablas Monte. Unfortunately, clearing for agriculture has increased markedly in the past decade. The roadside disturbed forest has a number of trails (used by local farmers), that pass through secondary growth as well as cleared fields and cow pastures. It is also possible to bird along the road, although recently improved, it still gets little traffic. While some well-forested slopes remain, access is more difficult. Note: the barbed wire fences are to stop cattle from leaving, they do not typically mark private property.

Many of the birds found at Tablas Monte are found on the Cotapata list in the Appendix. Some of the high cloud forest birds seen here include: Andean Guan, Hooded Mountain-Toucan, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Chestnut-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Black-winged Parrot, Red-crested Cotinga, Band-tailed and Barred Fruiteaters, Bar-bellied Woodpecker, Stripe-faced Wood-Quail, Violet-throated Starfrontlet, Collared Inca, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzals, White-throated Screech-Owl, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, Light-crowned Spinetail, and Black-throated Thistletail. The endemic Rufous-faced Antpitta can usually be heard calling. One of the better trails is 0.4 km down from the turn, a wide path leading off to the right.

Just before Tablas Monte, is another interesting site. After passing the (bird poor) reservoirs of Corani, but before arriving at the turn-off for Tablas Monte, the road passes through a deep gorge (about 3300 meters). Emerging from the gorge, there are several cleared road side areas (with lots of trash). It is possible to pull over and bird these bushy roadside areas. This stop can be quite good for the higher elevation species including: Moustached Flowerpiercer, Great Sapphirewing, Black-hooded Sunbeam and Black-throated Thistletail.

**Logistics:** From Cochabamba, the left turn for the Tablas Monte road is at kilometer post 72. Actually, the kilometer post has disappeared, but a large "72" is painted on a wrecked green car on the left-hand side of the road next to several buildings. The turn is also about a kilometer past a small cluster of buildings with signs for "Bar/Restaurant San Isidro." The good-quality dirt road winds down 27 kilometers to the village of Tablas Monte, although the first few kilometers of the road are usually the best. Camping at Tablas Monte can be great for the early morning chorus, though it is often mixed with the muffled sounds of trucks and cars passing.

GPS reading at turn for Tablas Monte road: S 17 10.286' W 65 53.549'

### ***Site 21: Miguelito***

Probably one of the most interesting spots on the Chapare road, Miguelito is a small roadside village with several good birding areas nearby. It qualifies as "mid-montane" yungas forest with an altitude of between 1600 and 2000 meters, an elevation range that can be difficult to access in other parts of Bolivia. Unfortunately, there are few signs for Miguelito, but the kilometer posts are quite helpful. Miguelito itself is centered around kilometer post 96. The area has three interesting birding spots that are accessed between kilometer 96 and 97:

**Stony Trail (at kilometer 96.5):** About 200 m past the small settlement of Miguelito, a stony trail begins on the left-hand side of the road (see GPS waypoint). If there is still intact forest along the trail, specialties worth searching for include Versicolored Barbet, Red-billed Parrot, Yungas Manakin, Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, Scaled Fruiteater, Slaty Tanager, and Straw-backed

Tanager. Watch overhead for Solitary Eagle. White-eared Solitaire is often heard giving its distinctive call.

Marcelino's place: The first driveway on the right after Miguelito leads to a large cleared area with a house on the top of the hill. The land belongs to Marcelino, a kind man who grows flowers. Ask permission to bird his land. The edges of the cleared areas can be very productive, especially the right corner near the main road. Further up, where there are a few short trails into nice forest habitat.

Lagunita (Little Lake): Travelling towards Villa Tunari, less than 100 meters past the Stony Trail, there is a small footpath leading through the forest to a little lake (see GPS waypoint below). Look for a dirt footpath leading up the slope, beside an exposed concrete drainpipe, about 60 meters from the Stony Trail. If you can not find it, drive up to the first house on the left, there may be some children who will be very keen to show you the trail (*Por favor, donde esta la laguna*). This laguna was completely dry in July and offered a large edge area to bird away from the road noise. Interesting species in this area are: White-crowned Tapaculo, Upland Antshrike, Stripe-chested Antwren, Scaled and White-throated Antpittas, Yungas Manakin, White-eared Solitaire, Crested Quetzal, and Olive-backed Woodcreeper.

Further along the road at kilometer 99, is the Substation Trail (see GPS waypoint). Starting at the San Jose Electricity Substation at 2000 meters, the trail descends into nice forest that has become accessible due to construction of power lines. The road goes through good forest for 5 kilometers or so. Specialties, birds best seen in the Cochabamba Yungas, include Deep-blue Flowerpiercer and Yungas Tody-Tyrant. Solitary Eagle is sometimes spotted soaring in the wooded valleys and Swallow-tailed Kites are often seen. Also of note are Upland Antshrike, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Montane Foliage-Gleaner, Golden-headed Quetzal, Short-tailed Antthrush, Scaled Antpitta, Buff-banded Tyrannulet, Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, and Bolivian Tyrannulet. Watch the tanager flocks for specials such as: Beryl-spangled Tanager, Straw-backed Tanager, Golden-naped Tanager, Orange-eared Tanager plus some of the higher elevation tanagers reaching their lower limit.

**Logistics:** Travelling towards Villa Tunari on the new road one encounters the village of Miguelito at kilometer post 96. It is about 1900 meters elevation. The "town" is really no more than a few food stalls and shops in a bare area on the roadside. Look for the few Miguelito signs.

GPS reading at start of Stony trail: S 17 10.761' W 65 46.013'

GPS reading at Lagunita: S 17 10.797' W 65 45.902'

GPS reading at start of Substation road: S 17 10.984' W 65 44.955'

## ***Site 22: Lower Chapare Road***

The lower section of the Chapare road, between 1800 and 800 meters has the most pristine forest on the Chapare Road. An unpaved stretch of 27 kilometers offers fabulous vistas of steep, heavily forested slopes. Access, however, is difficult; there are few trails leading into the forest. Most birders end up birding the roadside as many sections of the road have "good" forest right up to the road edge. The biggest frustration with roadside birding is the large volume of traffic and resultant dust. Since this is the main road between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, traffic can be heavy (by Bolivian standards this means a vehicle every minute or two).

At kilometer post 100 driving from Cochabamba, just after Miguelito, UMOPAR (the equivalent of Bolivian DEA) has established a checkpoint to ensure that no chemicals are brought into the Chapare for cocaine manufacture and no coca leaves or cocaine base are brought out. From this checkpoint, the road is unpaved for the next 27 kilometers, largely because the area is geologically unstable. These 27 kilometers offer a wonderful transect birding from 2000 meters (at the UMOPAR checkpoint) to 800 meters at the second bridge over the Rio Espiritu Santo where the pavement begins again. Kilometer 114 at about 1200 meters has some attractive forest and makes a nice stop. Bolivian Recurvebill has been seen and heard close to the west side of the road at kilometer 120, just before the Rio Chuyumuyu. There are also a couple Andean Cock-of-the-Rock leks somewhat close to the road and you may be lucky enough to spot one flying across the road.

From the second bridge over the Rio Espiritu Santo to Villa Tunari, it is a quick 29 kilometers to Villa Tunari on a good paved road. Unfortunately, this last stretch is rather poor for birds.

### ***Site 23: Carrasco National Park Road***

The Carrasco National Park road, which was historically the old road between Cochabamba and Villa Tunari, is now rarely as parts of the road are impassible. The lower part of the road covered in this site description is kept open and in good condition by an Italian magnesium mining company that runs a low impact mine at 2300 meters. It provides access to the same habitat as along the new road, but almost no traffic noise. There is also the option of camping just off the disused portions of the road.

The park headquarters is found near the start of the Carrasco National Park road. From here, the Oilbird caves, or "Cavernas del Repechon Guacharos" in Spanish, make a wonderful 2 to 3 hour excursion from Villa Tunari. Access to the caves is tightly controlled and requires a park guard escort. Visitation rules and times have changed several times in recent years. In the past, access was restricted to a maximum of 10 persons and departure times were 7:30 AM and 2:00PM. Some tourists have been told that the caves can only be visited on Saturday and Sunday, unless an appointment is made 24 hours in advance. With the uncertainty, the best strategy is to visit the park office upon arrival in Villa Tunari and make arrangements with the guards to see the oilbirds on a following day. Access to the caves used to mean crossing the river on a pulley in

the lap of a park guard, check at park headquarters for the latest information. Oilbirds are nocturnal so, if possible, the caves can be visited during heat of the day when other bird activity has lulled. The guards also know a good Cock-of-the-Rock lek that is usually active during the late afternoon.

Continuing up the road from the park headquarters, just after the river crossing, the road passes through interesting Hill Tropical forest. This area can be easily birded from the road. This area would make a good early morning walk. Amazonian Umbrellabird and Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks have been seen here. The road does pass a community, with its associated agriculture and firewood collecting. As a consequence the habitat between 700 m to 900 m is highly disturbed, and as such offers many of the common birds of disturbed habitat such as Squirrel Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Oropendola, Crested Oropendola, Piciu Ground-Dove, and Silver-beaked Tanager. Just after the small settlement, there is a small pond/marsh that is worth a quick scan.

After around 900m, once human disturbance has declined, anywhere along the road can be good birding. There are two good water sources, one at 1900 meters and a beautiful waterfall at around 2200 meters. Much of the montane forest on the upper Carrasco road (for example, around 2500 meters) saw some disturbance in the past when the road was more heavily used. But large sections of forest have come back nicely, and birding on the upper portions of the road can be more pleasant than similar elevations on the Chapare Road because of the absence of road noises and passing traffic. Yungas Antwren is worth searching for here above 1800 meters.

It is also possible to access the upper end of the Carrasco National Park road from Cochabamba, leaving the main road at Aguirre, a small town about 42 kilometers from Cochabamba. This area is a good place for Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant.

***Precautionary Note:*** The Carrasco Park road is used as a cocaine paste transit route. Local people are paid \$7-10 per day to carry a large bag of cocaine paste 2000m up the mountain toward Cochabamba. Most of these "mules" pass by late at night and will only be encountered by campers. Most want nothing with you and will simply to pass by with a simple wave of the hand. This site deserves special caution. If possible, camp away from the road. Do your owl watching elsewhere. If you plan on significant camping in the park or want the peace of mind, get permission to camp from the head office of Carrasco National Park in Cochabamba. You may be required to hire a park guard companion.

**Logistics:** Starting from the new tollbooth in Villa Tunari at the western edge of town, head west toward Cochabamba on the main road. Paractito is the first village encountered, about 4 km after leaving the Villa Tunari tollbooth. (If you are travelling *to* Villa Tunari, look for the signs saying "Paractito"). Turn south at Paractito (left if coming from Villa Tunari) and pass through farmed areas and early successional growth. At 6.1 km, reach a turn off to the left with a sign for "Parque National Carrasco." To the left is the park headquarters and the trail to the



Oilbird caves. For the Oilbird caves, turn left and continue for another kilometer, crossing a very narrow wooden bridge and arrive at the park headquarters and parking area. Otherwise, for the montane forest area, continue straight and begin climbing. Upon reaching a fork in the road, make a sharp turn to the left and, within 100 meters, cross a rather large (usually shallow) river. The road continues straight after this, slowly climbing to 2300 m.

GPS reading at Paractito, turn for Carasco National Park: S 17 00.847' W 65 27.361'

### ***Site 24: Hotel El Puente grounds(Villa Tunari)***

At an altitude of 400 meters, Hotel Puente does not really qualify as a “highland” site, but it has long been the favorite terminus for birders doing the Chapare Road transect and thus is included here. After a couple days scouring the preceding sites, it makes a great place to relax, have a plate of *surubi* (the local freshwater fish) and fried yuca. The advantage of Hotel El Puente is that it is a bit outside of Villa Tunari and does provide access to some pleasant trails and secondary forest.

For whatever reason, Villa Tunari never seems to match other lowland destinations. Walking back on the entrance road and taking one of the trails to the right can be somewhat productive. Watch for Undulated Tinamou on the road. Noteworthy birds found in the secondary forest near Hotel Puente worth searching for include Reddish Hermit, Glittering-throated Emerald, Dot-fronted Woodpecker, Black-spotted Barbet, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Black-throated Antbird, Black-faced Anthrush, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Round-tailed Manakin, and Nightingale Wren. Listen for Striped Owl at night.

**Logistics:** The entrance to the hotel is signposted on the right hand side just after the long bridge. The hotel is usually not crowded, but one can make reservations in Santa Cruz. If it is full, there are plenty of other options in Villa Tunari. There is also a nature park in Villa Tunari called Machia Ecological Park. This 36 hectare park has some nice trails and good interpretive maps and displays, although the birding is not that great.

GPS reading at Hotel Puente, Villa Tunari: S 16 59.028' W 65 24.497'

## **SOUTH OF COCHABAMBA TOWARD POTOSI**

A relatively under-explored area by birders, the vast collection of dry mesothermic valleys south of Cochabamba is home to the endangered Red-Fronted Macaw. The macaw is restricted to a small area of south-central Bolivia and is easier to see here than in the better known sites further east near Comarapa and Tambo. Few tourists venture this direction and the area has the added

bonus of the little known Torotoro National Park.

### ***Site 25: Rio Caine***

The Rio Caine area is one of the best sites for the highly endangered Red-Fronted Macaw. The area is best suited to an overnight trip as the macaws "commute" along the river valley and thus are best seen just after dawn and just before dusk. A new bridge was built over the Rio Caine in 1999, making access to the area much easier. The Red-Fronted Macaw, or *Papa Guayo* or *Cabeza Roja*, is the only regularly occurring macaw in the area and nests in cliff face crevices. It is a beautiful medium-sized macaw with red head, orange-red shoulder patches, blue flight feathers and olive-green back. The total wild population may be no more 1,000 birds.

The entire area is dominated by cactus and thorny scrub (altitude is 2100 meters). The macaw is also found frequently in cultivated areas. In fact, the Red-Fronted Macaw is regarded as a pest by many farmers. The macaws often attempt to feed on peanuts (*mani*) and corn in farm fields. As one farmer said to me as I commented how beautiful they were: "You can have them---take them away." When searching for the macaws, watch for them flying high following the riverbed. The 10 kilometers stretch of road after the Rio Caine bridge but before the road begins to turn away from the river and climb toward the town of Torotoro is the best area. After the breeding season, from March to June, larger flocks form.

Common birds likely to be encountered while looking for the Red-Fronted Macaw include Cliff Flycatcher, Blue-yellow Tanager, Andean Swift, Masked Gnatcatcher, Greater Wagtail-Tyrant and White-bellied Tyrannulet. Near the town of Anzaldo watch for Brown-backed Mockingbird.

**Logistics:** Heading east on the "old road" to Santa Cruz from Cochabamba (or approaching Cochabamba from Santa Cruz), pass the Represa (reservoir) Angostura (0.0 km). Then 13.4 km after the start of the *represa*, watch for a turn to the south for the good-sized town of Cliza (see GPS coordinates). Re-set odometer to zero at this turn. The road is paved for the 7 kilometers to Cliza. From Cliza, there are several routes to Toko, a tiny town a few kilometers south of Cliza, but few road signs. Ask locals for the best road to Toko (or use GPS coordinates). From the plaza of Toko, take the road south to the market town of Anzaldo (see GPS coordinates). Depending on the route chosen, Anzaldo is about 40 kilometers from the turn to Cliza). About 5 kilometers outside of Anzaldo, turn to the left at the sign for "Parque Nacional Torotoro." About 74 kilometers from the turn to Cliza, reach the large (nearly 100 meters long) bridge over the Rio Caine. The river marks the borders between the *departamentos* of Cochabamba and Potosí. The very small village of La Viña (but still on the Bolivia 1:1,000,000 map) is just before the bridge.

Using public transportation, there are regular buses to Cliza and then on to Anzaldo. There are also buses two or three times a week to Torotoro from Cochabamba. Enquire at the Cochabamba bus station. Instead of going all the way to Torotoro, for birders the best bet would

be to get out at the Rio Caine bridge crossing and begin searching for macaws.

Torotoro is a charming town of about 5000 persons well off the beaten track (perhaps destined to become a stop on the gringo trail?). Altitude is at about 2750 meters. Clean and reasonably priced *pensiones* are available. Torotoro has a limited restaurants, although as tourism grows, undoubtedly the selection of restaurants will too. For campers, the banks of the Rio Caine near the bridge is a great place to pitch a tent. There are secluded spots near the river and plenty of side tracks to the left (toward the river) that offer potential camping sites.

Torotoro National Park was created in 1989. It is relatively small (only 16,570 ha) but offers dinosaur footprints, many hidden caves and good hiking. The park receives few visitors and 80 percent of them are Bolivians. Guides can be hired at the Municipality of Torotoro offices. Admission for the park is about \$4.

GPS reading at Represa Angostura: S 17 31.692' W 66 05.088'  
GPS reading at Cliza (southern edge): S 17 35.977' W 65 55.963'  
GPS reading at Toko town plaza: S 17 37.622' W 65 55.631'  
GPS reading at Anzaldo town: S 17 46.785' W 65 56.188'  
GPS reading at Rio Caine bridge: S 17 58.283' W 65 51.947'  
GPS reading at Torotoro town plaza: S 18 07.867' W 65 45.698'

## **THE COCHABAMBA-LA PAZ HIGHWAY**

If you are travelling on the paved highway between Cochabamba and La Paz, there are a couple interesting sites just west of Cochabamba that deserve a stop and a hour or so of birding. Andean Condor can often be found soaring in late morning along the highway.

### ***Site 26: Arid valleys and remnant *Polylepis* west of Cochabamba***

The arid valleys outside Cochabamba on the main highway to La Paz offer surprisingly good birds. Although not a good as San Miguel (see site #19), there are at least a couple good stops when driving from Cochabamba to La Paz, worthwhile particularly if you have missed some of the key specialties at San Miguel.

Leaving the city of Cochabamba, pass through Quillacollo and then soon after cross a fairly long bridge over the Rio Tapacari. Form the bridge onwards, good vegetation begins (see GPS waypoint below). For the next 15 km or so, good indigenous vegetation for Bolivian Blackbird. The blackbird can often been seen from the road moving through the dry valleys in small groups. Scan the skies as this stretch is also a remarkably good site for Andean Condor.

Continue on the highway and continue climbing in altitude. About 36 kilometers after the Cochabamba *tranca*, pass the small settlement of Llavani (at 3200 meters). The next 10 kilometers between Llvani and the village of Bombeo can be very good birding. Notable species include Red-tailed Comet and Bolivian Blackbird. A good strategy is to simply park at one of the pullouts at promising looking sites on this winding mountain road. At about 3600 meters, just before the small settlement of Bombeo, one encounters a very nice patch of remnant *Polylepis* very close to the road (see GPS waypoint). Further on, west of Bombeo (that is, further toward La Paz) the roadside becomes more barren and roadside birding much less interesting.

Birds found in the *Polylepis* near Bombeo include Rufous-bellied Saltator, Giant Conebill, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail and Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail. Gray-hooded parakeet is also common in the stretch of road. Other common birds include Golden-billed Saltator, D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant and some of the more common species on the San Miguel in the Appendix.

GPS reading just past bridge over Rio Tapacari: S 17 35.059' W 66 21.257'

GPS reading at roadside *Polylepis* near Bombeo: S 17 40.324' W 66 26.097'

## VALLE TOWNS OF LA PAZ DEPARTMENT

Southeast of the city of La Paz, the stark, limitless expanses of the Altiplano give way to the spine of the Andes. The descent into these dry valleys from the Altiplano offer some of the most spectacular scenery in La Paz Department and some very special birds.

### *Site 27: Urmiri/Sapahaqui circuit*

A wonderful circuit to drive for great arid scenery and *valle* birding. It is close to La Paz, making it a perfect half day trip. However, public transportation is limited so you will need your own car. After turn toward Urmiri from the main road (0.0 km), the dirt road to Urmiri begins climbing to over 4300 meters before descending. This stretch of road is mostly barren Altiplano vegetation, but is not as overgrazed as in some areas. Look for Common Miner and Black-billed Shrike Tyrant. Once you begin descending, there are beautiful views of inter-Andean valleys and the snow-capped cordillera off in the distance. Sierra Finches (Plumbeous, Ash-throated and Band-tailed) are worth watching for. Below 3900 meters, the vegetation begins picking up. At 22.5 km from the La Paz-Oruro road, reach a large sign. For the detour to the Urmiri hot spring take the right fork. Descend on a very steep, winding, narrow road for 4 km. The slopes are full of reddish-purple aloes and cactus. Arrive (26 km) at the Urmiri Hot Springs (a dead end). Ornamental plantings around the resort are good for hummingbirds

(watch for Red-tailed Comet).

To continue on to Sapahaqui, re-trace your route 4 km. back to the large white sign and continue on the left fork. Descend into the river valley and reach Sapahaqui in about 12 km. Continue on from Sapahaqui to rejoin the La Paz-Oruro road near the El Alto *tranca*.

**Logistics:** Leave La Paz on the road to Oruro. Turn left (northeast) for Urmiri at the small town of Tholar, about 32.8 km past the El Alto tranca (at the 70 kilometer post when coming from La Paz). Signs advertising the Urmiri Hot Springs mark this turn. Urmiri (at an altitude of 3200m) is 102 kilometers from La Paz. Sapahaqui (at 2900m) is 110 kilometers from La Paz. For accommodation, Hotel Gloria Urmiri is located at the hot springs. It has 25 simple rooms and meals for about \$15 per person, including access to the hot spring and swimming pool. For reservations, contact the main office in the Hotel Gloria in La Paz, Calle Potosí, No. 909. tel: 370010, 370017 and 370018. E-mail: gloriatr@datacom-bo.net.

GPS reading at Urmiri hot springs: S 16 56.413' W 67 56.253'

### ***Site 28: Inquisivi***

Inquisivi is a wonderful little gem of a town in the Department of La Paz. It is also the haunt of the recently described Bolivian Spinetail, discovered in the 1990s by Sjoerd Mayer. This endemic spinetail is relatively easy to find as it rapidly comes into playback of its own song. Also around are Olive-crowned Crescentchest, White-vented Violetear, and Undulated Antpitta. Huayco Tinamou and Ochre-breasted (Bolivian) Antpitta can be heard from the ridge above town. Black-and-rufous Warbling-Finch and Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant and Darwin's Nothura can be found on the grass slopes above the village. In the dry forest leading down to the river look for Green-cheeked Conure and Sooty-fronted Spinetail. The dry forest patches lower down near the river is also the best place to look for Bolivian Spinetail.

The drive into Inquisivi also offers a couple good stops. About 70 km after leaving the main La Paz-Oruro highway, begin to check vegetated areas at about 4000 meters for Black-hooded Sunbeam and Tawny-Tit Spinetail. Just below Pongo town (about 80 km from the main highway), there are some good patches of vegetation. Rufous-bellied Saltator common around Quime where there is remnant Polylepis.

**Logistics:** Turn off the main La Paz-Oruro Paz highway at the town of Konani, the turn to Quime is signposted. From the turn-off, it is about 3 hours (106 km) to Inquisivi. For the best birding, from the town, follow the winding road down to river. From about 2500 meters down to the river over the bridge at 2150 meters, there is a 100 hectare patch of dry, low spiny "forest." It is possible to find pleasant campsites near the river. Alternatively, ask in town as there are families that rent rooms. Inquisivi can be reached by bus from La Paz from the central

bus terminal. Buses run every day, but depart fairly early in the morning. Buses arrive at 1 PM or 2 PM in Inquisivi. If returning by bus, buy tickets in advance.

GPS reading at Inquisivi town plaza: S 16 54.400 W 67 08.235

GPS reading at river-side campsite below Inquisivi: S 16 53.181 W 67 08.791

## **SAJAMA NATIONAL PARK**

Sajama National Park is one of the high-altitude jewels in the Bolivian national park system. Created in 1945, Sajama National Park protects a harsh, sometimes bitterly cold, high-altitude environment. With majestic Nevado Sajama, the tallest mountain in Bolivia at 6,542 meters, hot springs bubbling to the surface, snow-capped volcanoes, and abundant wildlife, Sajama has an intriguing mix. In addition to a bird list that surpasses 100 species, mammals such as vicuña and Andean fox can be seen.

Fortunately, for the visitor, access is relatively straight-forward. The entrance to the park is just off the main paved road between La Paz and the Chilean port city of Arica. It is straightforward to reach the village of Sajama, the gateway to the national park, by public transportation (taking a La Paz-Arica bus), but with long distances between sites, high altitude and infrequent traffic, a private car is the ideal way to sample the park's treasures. From La Paz, head south on the main highway to Oruro. At 65.5 km after the El Alto *tranca*, just before the town of Patacamaya, there is a well-marked turn to the right (west) for the paved highway to Arica and the Chilean coast. Re-set the odometer to zero at this turn (0.0).

Heading west, at 49 km, there is an interesting road-side archaeological site consisting of burial *chulpas*. The *chulpas* combined with some common Altiplano birds, make it a refreshing stop. At 142.5 km some remnant *Polylepis* can be found on the roadside. Finally, at 169 km, there is a right turn for the village of Sajama and Sajama National Park (the turn is just after the sign-posted 165 kilometer mark). The dirt access road to the park can be muddy in the rainy season and it can take almost a half-hour to arrive at the ranger station (12 km from the turn at the paved road).

The village of Sajama has very little in the way of amenities. Bring all your own food and cold weather camping gear as supplies are limited to a couple shops selling crackers and Cokes. Some families have opened their homes up to tourists and a guesthouse is supposedly under construction. If the cold dissuades you from camping, you may be able to ask around and find both accommodations as well as someone who will prepare simple meals for you.

### ***Site 29: Sajama Polylepis forest***

*Polylepis* forest (dominated by *Polylepis tarapacana*) covers a broad expanse of the lower

slopes of Mt. Sajama. One of the best patches is very close to the ranger station at an altitude of 4350 meters. Bird diversity and abundance are low, but some fascinating species can easily be located in the low forest and arid landscape including: Plain-mantled Tit Spinetail, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail and Rusty-vented Canastero. Olive-backed, Black-hooded, Plumbeous, and Mourning Sierra-Finch have all been recorded. Hummingbirds include Giant Hummingbird and Andean Hillstar. Giant Conebill, though not common, is also present.

**Logistics:** Leaving the Sajama ranger station, continue straight, in 1.6 km, a small sign on the right marks a right turn into a small dirt track for the *Polylepis* forest. Follow the dirt track, gradually ascending, for 2.2 km to the heart of the *Polylepis* forest.

GPS reading at *Polylepis* forest: S 18 07.891' W 68 56.866'

### ***Site 30: Laguna Huañakota area***

The arid climate at Sajama National Park (rainfall is only 10 to 20 inches a year) means that wildlife often concentrates near water sources. Laguna Huañakota is wonderful place to set up a spotting scope and patiently search and see what is in the vicinity. Typical waterfowl recorded in the park include: Speckled Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Crested Duck, Puna Teal, Ruddy Duck and occasionally Cinnamon Teal. If water levels are low, the flat can harbor migrant shorebirds. Watch for concentrations of shorebirds (Baird's Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalaropes) during migration.

The surrounding arid hillsides can be good for Least and Gray-breasted Seedsnipes. Higher up, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipes have been found. Scan the surrounding grasslands for some of Sajama has a nine species of Ground Tyrants, including Cinnamon-bellied, Rufous-naped, Puna, White-browed, Plain-capped, Cinerous, White-fronted, Ochre-naped and Black-fronted. Puna Rhea often come drink here as well.

**Logistics:** Laguna Huañakota is 10.8 km from the ranger station. At 4.8 km from the ranger station, there is a small sign and track to the left (west) for hot springs. The hot springs themselves are not that great for birds, but as the water flows into small streams, birds are often attracted to the relatively grassy areas on the stream banks.

GPS reading at Laguna Huañakota: S 18 02.891' W 68 56.142'

### ***Site 31: Lagunas area and border with Chile***

Heading west toward the border with Chile, Lagunas, a small village with a military post, is just

past the entrance to Sajama National Park. *Bofedals* (wetlands) lie alongside the paved road, on the north-side, and run for about a kilometer between the village of Lagunas and the bridge over the Rio Sajama. The shoulder of the paved road, built higher than the surrounding wetlands and grassland, provides a good vantage point for birding. The views of Mount Sajama are also spectacular on a clear day. The altitude is 4150 meters.

The advantage of the site is that the area is good for many species found in Sajama NP, valuable if you do not have the time or your own transportation to explore the park. Chilean Flamingos are also very reliable here. Unfortunately, the amount of trash in the wetlands seems to be growing. Likely species include Andean Avocet and Gray-breasted Seedsnipe. After scanning the wetlands, it is often worthwhile to wander through the bunchgrass, used as pastures, north of the wetlands. Sierra-finches and canasteros are likely to be flushed and Puna Tinamou is possible in this area. About 1.3 km further west from Lagunas, the paved road crosses the bridge over the Sajama River. This wet area is also worth exploring.

Close by and worth searching out (ask for directions from Sajama National Park staff) is the "Bofedal de los Geiseres," about 10 kilometers southeast of Sajama town. Bofedal de los Geiseres is a tiny patch of cushion bog interspersed with hot springs that also has proven to be a reliable site for Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, particularly in the winter months.

Finally, the border area with Chile, west of Lagunas, is an excellent area. But since the prime area lies in the "no man's land" between the Bolivian and Chilean border post, it is really only worthwhile to spend the time to visit if you are traveling on to Arica. In theory, one could pass through the Bolivian border post at Tambo Quemado, bird the wetland areas in the "no man's land" and return again through the Bolivian border post without ever reaching the Chilean border post. But the border hassles may not make it worth the trouble. The chief attraction of the border area is the diversity of waterbirds. Giant Coot is common and ducks include Specked Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Crested Duck, Puna Teal, Ruddy Duck and Cinnamon Teal. It is also a great spot for Puna Rhea as they come to drink at the water's edge.

**Logistics:** Lagunas is on the paved La Paz-Arica road, 2.1 km past the right turn for the village of Sajama and Sajama National Park and just after 170 kilometer post. The main birding area is north of the road. From the altiplano town of Patacamaya, Lagunas is 171 km.

For the border area with Chile, re-set odometer at zero at the turn for Sajama National Park (0.0). Passing Lagunas (2.1 km), the Bolivian border post at Tambo Quemado is at 11.7 km. At 19 km, "Welcome to Chile" signs appear. Finally, at 26 km reach the Chilean border post. The best birding area is from the causeway just a few hundred meters before arriving at the Chilean border post complex. From the Chilean border post at Chungara it is about 117 kilometers (downhill!) to the port town of Arica.

GPS reading at Las Lagunas: S 18 13.207' W 68 56.151'



## APPENDIX: BIRD LIST FROM KEY SITES

The following table provides species lists for six important sites described in the previous section. The six sites were selected because they represent a variety of habitats and altitudes. Special attention was given to ensuring as many of the restricted range species (including endemics) in Bolivia were included. Restricted range species appear in **bold**. The lists below are by no means exhaustive. Many sites have only begun to be explored (for example, only a few have been at birded after dusk for nocturnal species) and thus many species will undoubtedly be added to these site lists over time.

The six sites covered below are:

San Miguel (Site #19):	dry <i>valle</i> and semi-dry <i>Polylepis</i> , 2800-3700m (Cochabamba)
Mecapaca (Site #4):	dry <i>valle</i> and cultivated areas, 2900-3100m (La Paz)
Apa-Apa (Site #13):	middle-montane humid Yungas forest, 2100-2500m (La Paz)
Cotapata (Site #8):	upper-montane humid Yungas forest, 2800-3200m (La Paz)
Sajama (Site #29-31):	<i>altiplano</i> , with bogs and lagunas, 3800-4200m (Oruro)
Pongo (Site #7):	high altitude humid <i>Polylepis</i> , 3800-4000m (La Paz)

COMMON NAME	SAN MIG	MECA	APA	COTA	SAJAMA	PONGO
Lesser (Puna) Rhea						
Hooded Tinamou						
Brown Tinamou						
Ornate Tinamou						
Andean Tinamou						
Darwin's Nothura						
Puna Tinamou						
White-tufted Grebe						
Silvery Grebe						
Neotropic Cormorant						
Cattle Egret						
Black-crowned Night-Heron						
Chilean Flamingo						
Andean Flamingo						
Puna (James's) Flamingo						
Puna Ibis						
Black-faced Ibis						
Black Vulture						
Turkey Vulture						
Andean Condor						
Andean Goose						
Torrent Duck						
Speckled Teal						



White-faced Dove				
White-throated Quail-Dove				
Mitred Parakeet				
Green-cheeked Parakeet				
Gray-hooded Parakeet				
Mountain Parakeet				
Andean Parakeet				
Yellow-chevroned Parakeet				
<b>Black-winged Parrot</b>				
Red-billed Parrot				
Plum-crowned Parrot				
Scaly-naped Parrot				
Squirrel Cuckoo				
Barn Owl				
Tropical Screech-Owl				
Great Horned Owl				
Yungas Pygmy-Owl				
Burrowing Owl				
Rufous-banded Owl				
Band-winged Nightjar				
White-collared Swift				
Chestnut-collared Swift				
Andean Swift				
Green Violetear				
Sparkling Violetear				
Speckled Hummingbird				
Andean Hillstar				
<b>Wedge-tailed Hillstar</b>				
Giant Hummingbird				
Great Sapphirewing				
Collared Inca				
Violet-throated Starfrontlet				
Amethyst-throated Sunangel				
Booted Rackettail				
Green-tailed Trainbearer				
Red-tailed Comet				
<b>Scaled Metaltail</b>				
Tyrian Metaltail				
Rufous-capped Thornbill				
<b>Olivaceous Thornbill</b>				
Blue-mantled Thornbill				
Long-tailed Sylph				
White-bellied Woodstar				
Crested Quetzal				
Golden-headed Quetzal				
Masked Trogon				
Black-streaked Puffbird				
Versicolored Barbet				
Blue-banded Toucanet				
<b>Hooded Mountain-Toucan</b>				

White-barred Piculet					
Striped Woodpecker	█				
Bar-bellied Woodpecker	█		█		
Smoky-brown Woodpecker			█		
Golden-olive Woodpecker			█		
Crimson-mantled Woodpecker	█		█		
Green-barred Flicker					
Andean Flicker	█				█
Crimson-crested Woodpecker			█		
Olivaceous Woodcreeper			█		
Strong-billed Woodcreeper			█		
Buff-throated Woodcreeper			█		
Montane Woodcreeper			█		
Puna Miner					█
Common Miner					█
Slender-billed Miner					█
Plain-breasted Earthcreeper	█				
Rock Earthcreeper	█				
Straight-billed Earthcreeper					█
<b>Bolivian Earthcreeper</b>					█
Bar-winged Cinclodes	█			█	
White-winged Cinclodes	█			█	
Rufous Hornero	█				
Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail					█
Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail	█				█
Tawny Tit-Spinetail	█				█
Azara's Spinetail			█	█	
<b>Light-crowned Spinetail</b>					
<b>Bolivian Spinetail</b>			█		
<b>Black-throated Thistletail</b>				█	
Creamy-breasted Canastero	█				█
Cordilleran Canastero	█				█
<b>Iquico (Maquis) Canastero</b>	█				
Streak-throated Canastero					█
<b>Scribble-tailed Canastero</b>					█
<b>Line-fronted Canastero</b>					█
Streak-fronted Thornbird	█				
Pearled Treerunner			█	█	
Streaked Tuftedcheek			█	█	
Montane Foliage-gleaner			█		
Striped Treehunter			█		
Buff-throated Treehunter			█		
Variable Antshrike			█		
Rufous-capped Antshrike				█	
Long-tailed Antbird			█		
Short-tailed Antthrush			█		
Barred Antthrush			█		
Undulated Antpitta				█	
Stripe-headed Antpitta					█
Rufous Antpitta				█	

<b>Rufous-faced Antpitta</b>					
Olive-crowned Crescent-chest					
Trilling (Gray) Tapaculo					
Bolivian Tapaculo					
Puna (Andean) Tapaculo					
<b>Diademed Tapaculo</b>					
Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet					
<b>Bolivian Tyrannulet</b>					
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet					
White-crested Elaenia					
Highland Elaenia					
Sierran Elaenia					
White-throated Tyrannulet					
White-banded Tyrannulet					
White-bellied Tyrannulet					
<b>Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant</b>					
Tufted Tit-Tyrant					
Streak-necked Flycatcher					
Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant					
Black-throated Tody-Tyrant					
Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher					
Ochraceous-breasted Flycatcher					
Cinnamon Flycatcher					
Smoke-colored Pewee					
Crowned Chat-Tyrant					
Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant					
Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant					
D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant					
White-browed Chat-Tyrant					
Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant					
Rufous-webbed Bush-Tyrant					
<b>Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant</b>					
Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant					
Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant					
Cinnamon-bellied Grd-Tyrant					
Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant					
Puna Ground-Tyrant					
White-browed Ground-Tyrant					
Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant					
Cinereous Ground-Tyrant					
White-fronted Ground-Tyrant					
Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrant					
Black-fronted Ground-Tyrant					
Andean Negrito					
White-winged Black-Tyrant					
Yellow-browed Tyrant					
Cliff Flycatcher					
Dusky-capped Flycatcher					
Golden-crowned Flycatcher					
Variegated Flycatcher					

Tropical Kingbird				
Red-crested Cotinga				
Chestnut-crested Cotinga				
Band-tailed Fruiteater				
Barred Fruiteater				
Scarlet-breasted Fruiteater				
<b>Scimitar-winged Piha</b>				
White-tipped Plantcutter				
<b>Yungas Manakin</b>				
Brown-bellied Swallow				
Blue-and-white Swallow				
Pale-footed Swallow				
Barn Swallow				
Andean Swallow				
Moustached Wren				
House Wren				
Mountain Wren				
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren				
White-capped Dipper				
Andean Solitaire				
White-eared Solitaire				
Pale-eyed Thrush				
Chiguanco Thrush				
Great Thrush				
Glossy-black Thrush				
Creamy-bellied Thrush				
Brown-backed Mockingbird				
White-collared Jay				
Purplish Jay				
Green Jay				
Brown-capped Vireo				
Short-billed Pipit				
Correndera Pipit				
Paramo Pipit				
Rufous-collared Sparrow				
Peruvian Sierra-Finch				
Black-hooded Sierra-Finch				
Mourning Sierra-Finch				
Plumbeous Sierra-Finch				
Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch				
Band-tailed Sierra-Finch				
Slaty Finch				
White-winged Diuca-Finch				
<b>Short-tailed Finch</b>				
<b>Bolivian Warbling-Finch</b>				
Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch				
<b>Cochabamba Mountain-Finch</b>				
Ringed Warbling-Finch				
Puna Yellow-Finch				
Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch				

Greenish Yellow-Finch	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
Saffron Finch	██████████			██████████
Grassland Yellow-Finch				██████████
Great Pampa-Finch	██████████			
Double-collared Seedeater		██████████		
Band-tailed Seedeater	██████████	██████████	██████████	
Plain-colored Seedeater	██████████			██████████
Paramo Seedeater			██████████	
Dull-colored Grassquit			██████████	██████████
Rufous-naped Brush-Finch			██████████	██████████
Fulvous-headed Brush-Finch	██████████			
Black-backed Grosbeak			██████████	██████████
Golden-billed Saltator	██████████	██████████		
<b>Rufous-bellied Saltator</b>	██████████			
Plush-capped Finch			██████████	██████████
Grass-green Tanager			██████████	██████████
Common Bush-Tanager			██████████	██████████
<b>Orange-browed Hemispingus</b>			██████████	██████████
Superciliaried Hemispingus			██████████	██████████
Black-eared Hemispingus			██████████	██████████
Drab Hemispingus				██████████
Three-striped Hemispingus				██████████
Rust-and-yellow Tanager			██████████	██████████
<b>Slaty Tanager</b>			██████████	██████████
Sayaca Tanager	██████████	██████████		
Palm Tanager			██████████	██████████
Blue-capped Tanager				██████████
Blue-and-yellow Tanager	██████████	██████████		
Hooded Mountain-Tanager				██████████
Scarlet-bellied Mtn-Tanager				██████████
Blue-winged Mtn-Tanager			██████████	
<b>Golden-collared Tanager</b>				██████████
Chestnut-bellied Mtn-Tanager				██████████
Golden-rumped Euphonia			██████████	
Orange-bellied Euphonia			██████████	
Saffron-crowned Tanager			██████████	
Golden-naped Tanager			██████████	
Blue-browed Tanager			██████████	
Blue-and-black Tanager				██████████
<b>Straw-backed Tanager</b>			██████████	
Giant Conebill	██████████	██████████		██████████
Rusty Flowerpiercer	██████████	██████████	██████████	
Moustached Flowerpiercer				██████████
<b>Gray-bellied Flowerpiercer</b>	██████████			
Bluish Flowerpiercer				██████████
Masked Flowerpiercer			██████████	██████████
Swallow-Tanager			██████████	
Bananaquit			██████████	
Tropical Parula			██████████	
Slate-throated Whitestart			██████████	

Brown-capped Whitestart	██████████			
Spectacled Whitestart		██████████	██████████	
Citrine Warbler			██████████	
Pale-legged Warbler			██████████	
Three-striped Warbler		██████████		
Cinereous Conebill	██████████			
White-browed Conebill				██████████
Blue-backed Conebill			██████████	
Capped Conebill		██████████		
Crested Oropendola		██████████		
Dusky-green Oropendola		██████████		
Mountain Cacique			██████████	
Yellow-billed Cacique			██████████	
<b>Bolivian Blackbird</b>	██████████			
Bay-winged Cowbird	██████████			
Shiny Cowbird	██████████			
Thick-billed Siskin				██████████
Hooded Siskin	██████████			
Olivaceous Siskin			██████████	
Yellow-bellied Siskin		██████████		
Black Siskin	██████████	██████████		██████████
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	██████████			
House Sparrow		██████████		