

# Peru

**Central: Rare Andean Endemics**

***24<sup>th</sup> September to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024 (16 days)***

## Trip Report



**Black-spectacled Brushfinch by Rob Williams**

**Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Rob Williams**

## Tour in Detail

This was the first scheduled Rockjumper Tour to the Central Andes. The aim was to try to find as many of the rare Andean endemic birds that can be found in central Peru, from the eastern cloud forests, through the high Andes to the arid west slope of the Andes and down to the coast.

We met in Lima for a welcome dinner and to discuss the strategy for the coming days. The next morning, we caught our flight to Húanuco where we met our driver, Fernando, and Carlos and our exploration of the Central Andes of Peru began. Húanuco sits in the Huallaga valley which has a rain shadow effect from the surrounding mountains. After checking in

to our hotel we headed up onto an arid hillside where remnants of native vegetation persist between agricultural areas and Eucalyptus plantations. We searched for the endemic Rufous-backed Inca Finch, but it was very hot and windy, and birds were keeping low. Despite Rob having a brief glimpse and hearing a few contact calls we could not get a bird into view. After lunch we headed south of the Huallaga and up into the hills near Panao in search of Panao Antpitta, one of the newly described species resulting from the Rufous Antpitta complex splits. The weather was cooling, and we soon found our target bird, initially a few calls and glimpses but then a pair that showed remarkably well. We also enjoyed great views of the flamboyant regalis subspecies of White-tufted Sunbeam amongst other.



**(Junin) Black Rail by Rob Williams**

We spent a full day exploring the high elevation elfin forest and grasslands at Unchog. It was hot and sunny and even the valley floor bogs were almost totally dry. It was clear the exceptional drought the region had been experiencing was having a severe impact on this normally cloud-shrouded, humid ecosystem. Birding was very hard work, very few species were calling after an initial few minutes of expectation-raising activity as the sun first hit the valley slopes. We worked hard and found a few species and heard occasional calls from others. The



**Junin Grebe by Rob Williams**

highlight of the day was a twice-flushed Imperial Snipe. We did pick up a reasonable selection of Andean species during the day. Back at the hotel a pair of Peruvian Pygmy-Owls showed well, much to the annoyance of the local, White-bellied Hummingbirds.

In a welcome change, given the previous day, we awoke to heavy skies and had a few drops as we drove to the Carpathian Tunnel. Just as we arrived it started to pour and rained hard for the next hour or so, as we breakfasted under a roadside roof and enjoyed the view from our dry spot. As it stopped, we were



rewarded with good activity and enjoyed a full day working this road. The increase in flower farming has resulted in more forest being cleared but some good patches remain along the road, and we worked through these during the day, also enjoying spectacular views of the eastern Andes when the mist lifted. Mixed flocks formed after the rain, and we soon enjoyed spectacular species such as Yellow-scarfed Tanager. Hummingbirds were a highlight with both Peruvian Piedtail and the Huanuco form of Violet-throated Starfrontlet being seen. Towards the end of the day, we had a great encounter with a cooperative Tschudi's Tapaculo.



**Junin Canastero by Rob Williams**

Heading south from Huanuco we stopped on an arid hillside and after putting in some effort, were rewarded with good looks at Rufous-backed Inca Finch. We continued towards Junin, lunching in an area of Polylepis woodland en route.

Arriving at Junin in the later afternoon, we met up with our local guide and headed into the Scirpus swamps on a hidden trail, here we succeeded in getting amazing views of the Junin endemic subspecies of Black Rail (which some authors have considered a separate species), as well as several rather dapper Andean Swamp Rats. We then stopped to see an adult and two chicks of Lesser Horned Owl and found the endemic Junin Canastero and several Puna Snipe as the light started to fade.



**Cerulean-capped Manakin by Rob Williams**

Several Ornate Tinamous were seen as we drove to take an early morning boat trip on Lake Junin. We headed out through amazing numbers of waterbirds in the shallows, mostly Slate-colored Coots but with a good selection of other species, especially enjoying several thousand Chilean Flamingos, hundreds of Wilson's Phalaropes. The open deeper water was covered with hundreds of Andean Gulls and Wilson's Phalaropes feeding on hatching midges. After a bit of searching, we enjoyed good looks at two of the critically threatened Junin Grebes, even allowing direct comparison with both Silvery and White-tufted Grebes. The reeds held the fantastic Many-coloured Rush-Tyrant and Wren-like Rushbird. We



then focused on the shoreline and adjacent agricultural areas finding both Common and Dark-winged Miners, Buff-breasted Earthcreeper and good numbers of finches.

A welcome return to lower elevation saw us arriving in Villa Rica. We spent a full day exploring the cloud forests of Bosque Sho'llet. Three Crimson-bellied Woodpeckers gave staggeringly good views, and we caught up with Trilling Tapaculo

In the evening, we spent some time looking for nightbirds, hearing Swallow-tailed Nightjar and Andean Potoo and seeing Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and brief views of Cloud-forest Screech-Owl. At the lodge good looks at a pair of Band-bellied Owls were a highlight.



**Creamy-bellied Antwren by Rob Williams**

Laguna Oconal gave us an entertaining morning of birding with a good variety of wetland species and a diverse range of species in the surrounding coffee plantations. Of note here were 4 Brazilian Teal and several Southern Lapwings, both recent colonists to Peru. Just outside town adult and juvenile Fasciated Tiger-Herons were a nice comparison. An area of secondary habitat near town gave us a variety of foothill species with the rarest perhaps being the local form of Foothill Elaenia.



**Rufescent Screech Owl by Rob Williams**

Near La Merced we spent an afternoon and a morning at Fundo Amorique, hosted by Martin and his family. It was hot and the cloud forest was strangely dry. Highlights included several displaying Cerulean-capped Manakins, Blue-banded Toucanet, Versicoloured Barbet and a nice mixed flock that included Creamy-bellied Antwrens. We spent an evening owling here and were rewarded with phenomenal views of a normal and the rare red phase of Rufescent Screech Owls.

The Satipo Road is one of the world's famous birding roads, extending from the Amazonian lowlands to the high Andes. We spent two and a half days exploring this area. The main targets were the suite of localised endemics at mid to high elevation and we were successful in getting good looks at both the recently described Junin and Jalca Tapaculos as well as Junin and Oxapampa Antpittas. Larry and Rob were fortunate to see Bay Antpitta which we heard calling. At dawn we were treated to exceptional views of a male Lyre-tailed Nightjar that flew around us and then perched in a small tree close by showing off its amazing tail.



The road into the Mantaro Valley was being rebuilt which made it a difficult drive but we got to the area we needed to and quickly found the endemic Black-spectacled Brushfinch. A bit further down we struggled with the three undescribed endemics in hot sun but with persistence eventually got views of both the Spinetail and the Wren, though the Thornbird remained elusive, and we heard a few calls. We added some other nice birds including Andean Ibis and Cream-crested Spinetail. At the Nevado Huaytapallana pass we birded below the glacier and enjoyed finding a series of high Andean species such as Glacier Finch, Puna and Cinereous Ground-Tyrants.



**Buff-breasted Earthcreeper by Rob Williams**

We travelled over the beautiful and spectacular mountain of the western Andes with some amazing geology and a series of high Andean lakes and high-altitude bogs. We focussed on the bog habitats, many of which were sadly suffering from a combination of the excessive dry conditions and a lot of illegal peat and plant extraction. The drought meant the birds were really concentrated at water and we found a nice range of species, though the very rare White-bellied Cinclodes eluded us. A couple of nice mammal sightings were both male and female Andean Huemel - a rare high-altitude deer also known as a Taruca, and Northern Mountain Viscacha.

Descending into the canyons on the west slope of the Andes we entered the spectacular Nor Yauyos Cocha landscape reserve, where crystal clear rivers cascaded through steep valleys with elfin forest tree species such as Polylepis lining the riverbanks. Just after lunch two adult Andean Condors soared over the mountain peaks



**Red-legged Cormorant by Rob Williams**

giving good views of one of the world's most impressive birds. The beautiful valleys of Nor Yauyos Cocha reserve provided a great backdrop for a nice afternoon's birding, finding several new species including Rusty-bellied Brushfinch.

The high Andean Polylepis woodlands are home to a variety of special birds, and we enjoyed a morning walk in one searching out the rare endemic White-cheeked Cotinga, eventually being rewarded with scope views of one. Descending towards the coast we found the endemic, Black-necked Woodpecker. In the lower valley we picked up Slender-billed Finch, and the recently split Rufescent Flycatcher.

Paracas and the Ballestas Islands were protected as one of the first marine protected areas in Peru. Despite historical and recent declines in seabird numbers it remains a great place to get to see the main seabirds of the Humboldt Current. We took a boat trip across Paracas Bay out to the Ballestas Islands and enjoyed good views of species including White-vented and Wilson's Storm Petrels, Humboldt Penguin, Red-legged Cormorant, Peruvian Booby, Peruvian Pelican. As well as the birds we saw several South American Sea Lions and a variety of other marine life. Along the coast a Blackish Oystercatcher was interacting with a couple of American Oystercatchers. The bay shore gave us good looks at a variety of migrant shorebirds and a few Grey Gulls in breeding plumage.



**Inca Tern by Rob Williams**

A lunch stop at Pucusana gave us great portrait studies of Inca Tern and a nice Surf Cinclodes - our last Peruvian endemic of the tour. A final stop at Pantanos de Villa gave us nice looks at a variety of wetland birds, shorebirds and seabirds. A pair of Great Grebe slept on the sea and a surprise was a Humpback Whale going north just offshore. On the pool we found an early Franklin's Gull, Western and Stilt Sandpipers and were entertained by Wilson's Phalaropes feeding around Cinnamon Teals that were stirring up the water as they fed. Two Harris's Hawks were a nice finale to a great trip.

We had enjoyed a spectacular trip through some of Peru's least visited areas, finding many of the rarest and least often seen endemic species and a suite of complimentary other birds as well as some nice mammals. The birding had been challenging, with the remote location being felt in both the road infrastructure and tourist facilities. The high altitudes and long days in the field had made us all tired, but in a good way and we had been rewarded with visits to some very special places and seeing some very special birds.

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## Annotated List of species recorded

We found 467 species of bird on the tour, the full species list can be found as an eBird trip report at:  
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/279718>

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