

# Helping conserve Black-breasted Puffleg through sustainable ecotourism

**James Lowen**

With funds from Global Birdfair 2023 among others, BirdLife International and its partners in Ecuador are seeking to support conservation of the Endangered Black-breasted Puffleg as part of a wider Ecuadorian Chocó–Andes landscape-scale conservation initiative.

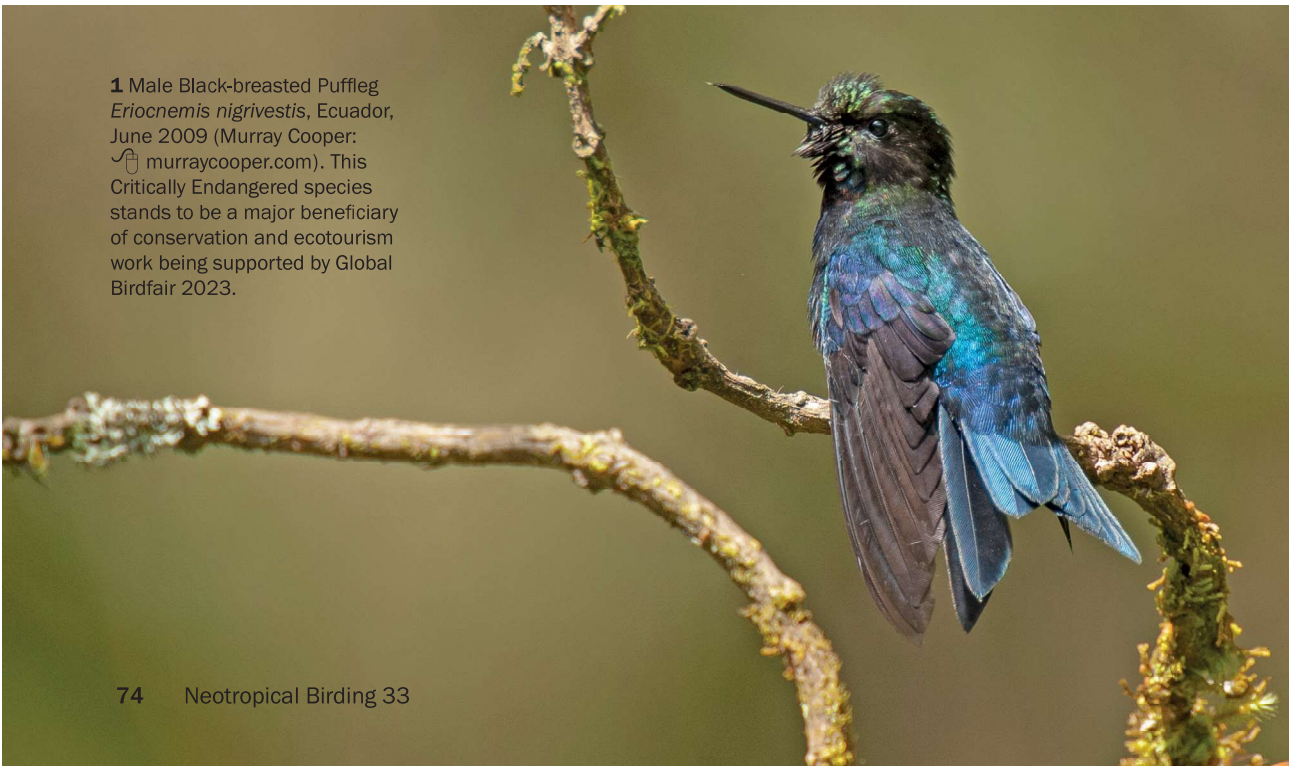
This issue of *Neotropical Birding* is formally published during Global Birdfair 2023, the successor event to the British Birdwatching Fair, held in Rutland, UK. This year Global Birdfair proudly bears a Neotropical dimension because the BirdLife International project for which it is raising funds is sited in our region.

The project seeks to generate sustainable ecotourism in Ecuador's northwest Chocó. The flagship species is Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, a globally Endangered Ecuadorian endemic recorded in the highlands of Pichincha, Esmeraldas and Imbabura provinces where it inhabits humid cloud forest, and

especially high-Andean montane forest, including elfin forest and forest borders at 1,700–3,500 m (Jahn 2008; Jahn & Santander 2008; Guevara *et al.* 2015, 2017; BirdLife International 2023).

Although mostly known from the northwestern ridge-crests of Pichincha volcano, west of Quito (BirdLife International 2023), a second subpopulation was rediscovered in 2006 in the Cordillera de Toisán above the Intag valley (Jahn 2008, BirdLife International 2023). During 2019, the species was found by Aves y Conservación fieldworkers at an additional site within Important Bird and Biodiversity Area EC-038 (Intag–Toisán).

1 Male Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, Ecuador, June 2009 (Murray Cooper: [murraycooper.com](http://murraycooper.com)). This Critically Endangered species stands to be a major beneficiary of conservation and ecotourism work being supported by Global Birdfair 2023.





**2** Male Black-breasted Puffleg, *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, Reserva Yanacocha, Pichincha, Ecuador, July 2022 (Patricio Mena).

This discovery inspired the purchase of 104 ha of nearby intact and degraded montane cloud forest in the buffer zone of the Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi–Cayapas ([tinyurl.com/cotacachi-cayapas](https://tinyurl.com/cotacachi-cayapas)). It is in this latter area that the BirdLife project will focus. Globally threatened species such as Black-and-chestnut Eagle *Spizaetus isidori* (Critically Endangered), Dark-backed Wood-Quail *Odontophorus melanonotus* (Vulnerable) and Andean Bear *Tremarctos ornatus* (Vulnerable) also stand to benefit.

The project forms part of a much wider initiative that, says BirdLife International's Michael Seager, "sits within the larger northwestern Ecuador landscape in which BirdLife and its Partners are committed to delivering conservation outcomes". BirdLife's two Partners in Ecuador, Aves y Conservación and Fundación Jocotoco, jointly led a process in coordination and consultation with over 40 state and non-state actors to develop a 'Conservation Investment Strategy for resident and migratory birds of the northwestern Ecuadorian Chocó'. Michael explains that this "is a results-based plan to maximize positive outcomes resulting from a desired investment of US\$15 million over ten years" that seeks to deliver concrete benefits for the communities and private landholders that care for the forests that these birds inhabit.



**3** Reserva Kinti Toisán, Imbabura, Ecuador (Juan Carlos Valarezo). Aves y Conservación have bought and are restoring a 104-ha plot here. Ecotourism offerings are part of the plan for the site.

While ecotourism and sustainable agriculture have increased incomes in many parts of rural Ecuador, BirdLife says, the Intag–Toisán region has not yet fully developed its ecotourism and avitourism industries, partly due to inadequate infrastructure, and lack of technical support. Other pressures include land invasion, poaching and deforestation. The particular project supported by Global Birdfair will contribute to four of the nine strategic priorities of the