

>> BIRDING SITES ORANGE-THROATED TANAGER

Orange-throated Tanager

the easy way—the Cordillera del Cónдор in south-east Ecuador

**David Capper and
Penny Pereira**

The striking and globally threatened Orange-throated Tanager used to be a regular target of birders' trips to remote areas of northern Peru: now it can be seen easily in southern Ecuador.

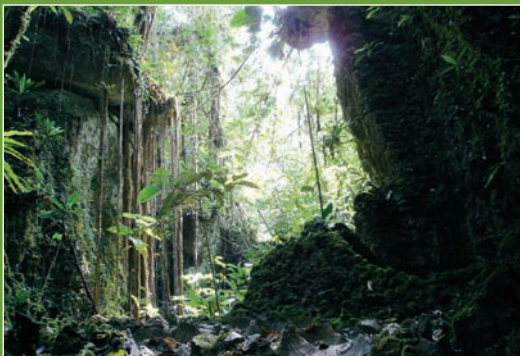


Orange-throated Tanager *Wetmorethraupis sterrhopteron* at Shaima, the star bird at this site (Murray Cooper)



Above: White-browed Antbird *Myroborus leucophrys*, a common bird of the eastern Andean slope, can be seen at the bottom of the garden at Cabañas Yankuam (Murray Cooper)

Right: Band-bellied Owl *Pulsatrix melanota* can be heard or seen from the cabañas, often perching in the garden trees close to the river (Murray Cooper)



Top: Forest at Shaime (Murray Cooper)

Bottom: Forest at Shaime (Michael Norman)



An added attraction of Shaime is the Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* cave (Murray Cooper)

>> BIRDING SITES ORANGE-THROATED Tanager

Many birders visit the Bombuscaro sector of Podocarpus National Park, southern Ecuador, but very few venture into the nearby Cordillera del Cónдор. Now there is a great reason for birders to see the Cordillera's spectacular scenery—the equally spectacular Orange-throated Tanager *Wetmorethraupis sterrhopteron* is being seen there regularly.

The Orange-throated Tanager is considered globally Vulnerable¹. This striking black, orange, blue and yellow tanager is a poorly-known inhabitant of Zamora-Chinchipe province, Ecuador, and north Amazonas, Peru¹. It primarily occupies mature, humid terra firme forest and foothill-forest in the upper tropical zone, at 600–1,000 m¹. Birders have traditionally looked for the species in Peru at either Nuevo Salem or Peña Blanca. However, access has been difficult—Peña Blanca is out of bounds because of disputes between two Awaranu villages, whilst the land of the indigenous Aguarani/Awajun people at Nuevo Salem can only be accessed through one of the Peruvian bird tour operators² (and the birds have been absent of late). Now birders have the opportunity to see this widely-desired bird with a lot less hassle.

Like many others, we had been staying at the excellent Copalinga lodge (see www.copalinga.com) on the dirt road between Zamora and Bombuscaro. From there, a visit to the Cordillera del Cónдор is straightforward.

In the Cordillera, we stayed at Cabañas Yankuam, near Orquideas, for four days/three nights. This is a spectacular place, with stunning tepui-style mountains and the fast flowing río Nangaritzta at the bottom of the garden. It is possible to reach the Cabañas by bus, but far easier to arrange for a pick-up from the owners in either Zamora or Loja (see box).

The Cabañas have been run by a Swedish-Ecuadorian couple, Fredrik and Frances Ahlman, since September 2005. In February 2006, Fredrik found a regular site for Orange-throated Tanager,

~
 “Birders now have the opportunity to see the widely-desired Orange-throated Tanager with little hassle”
 ~

GETTING TO AND STAYING AT CABAÑAS YANKUAM

The logistics of reaching the Cabañas are easy. Fredrik can drive you from Loja (USD\$20 pp) or Zamora (USD\$10 pp). The journey takes about 3 hours in a 4WD.

You can reach Orquideas by bus, from where it is a 3 km walk to the Cabañas. There are direct buses from Zamora or you can take one of the more regular buses to Zumbi and change there. By bus it takes perhaps 5 or 6 hours, but it didn't look a very comfortable option. So, unless you are on a very tight budget, it is best to arrange transport with Fredrik.

The Cabañas themselves are a bit (but not too) rustic. The water was a little intermittent whilst we were there, but Fredrik always managed to fix it. The food was good and wholesome.

For our four days, including all transport (including the canoe), accommodation, food and Shaur guide, the total cost was USD\$240 for the two of us. Bed-and-breakfast is USD\$14, half board USD\$22 and full board USD\$30 pp. The guided boat tour on the Nangaritzta river cost us USD\$70 total (but may be more expensive now), including entrance fee to Shuar territory and packed lunch. You can contact Fredrik at fredrikahlman@hotmail.com or info@lindoecuadortours.com, or phone +593(0)72606147 (Fredrik and Frances speak both English and Spanish, and Fredrik speaks Swedish). Alternatively, look at their website www.lindoecuadortours.com.

some way upriver from the Cabañas. Since then, he has been seeing them regularly and is now organising trips for birders to see them.

Seeing Orange-throated Tanager

To reach the site, we took a motorised canoe upriver for about an hour to the Shaur village of Shaime. This costs USD\$70 regardless of the number of people. We then hired a Shaur guide (ours was called Bartolomé) for USD\$6 pp. Whilst this is not necessary to find the site, it is a non-negotiable cost. The Tanager is on Shaur land and it is only right they should benefit from the eco-tourism.

From Shaime, it is a 90–120 minute walk on a muddy “public trail” through degraded habitat to the tanager area. We didn't see them in the degraded habitat (which is where Fredrik first saw them), but did hear one calling distantly. A little further up, the trail enters better forest, where we saw and heard two birds silhouetted in the treetops. We then saw one well in the mid-storey. But the best was yet to come—a little way down the trail to the Oilbird cave, we had four birds

showing very well, with at least another two calling nearby.

The call is the same as the Shaur name for the bird—"In-CHUE-tooch". The first note is quite high pitched and we couldn't hear it at distance. The stress is on the second syllable and sometimes this was the only sound heard.

Oilbird cave and other nearby birding areas

The Oilbird cave (Cueva del los Tayos) is only 15 minutes walk from the Tanager area. There are an estimated 100 Oilbirds roosting in the cave. It was dark and noisy—take a torch and watch out for the big spiders.

From the cave, the trail becomes narrower and muddier but passes through much better forest. It takes another 2–3 hours to walk so leave time to bird this. When we returned to the río Nangaritz at Shaime, we had great views of a Neotropical River Otter feeding.

Apart from the Tanager, there are many other good birds to be found in the Cordillera del Cóndor. The Cabañas and Shaime are at about 1,000 m altitude so too low for some of the specialities. We understand that Aves y Conservación (BirdLife in Ecuador) have conducted some thorough surveys of the Cordillera and will publish their report shortly. In the meantime, Fredrik is compiling his own list of birds on the trails within striking distance of the Cabañas. This is very much still a work in progress, and we added 15 species to his list in our three days. Highlights included Black-mandibled Toucan *Ramphatos ambiguus*, Purplish Jacamar *Galbula chalcothorax*, Lanceolated Monklet *Micromonacha lanceolata*, White-plumed Antbird *Pithys albifrons*, and Foothill Antwren *Myrmotherula spodionota*.

In addition to the trail at Shaime, there are some trails behind the Cabañas and the access

~
 “An estimated 100 Oilbirds
 roosted – take a torch and
 watch out for the big spiders”
 ~

road provides quite good birding as well. Just beyond the Cabañas, the road peters out and crosses a stream. About 50 m beyond the stream, we saw Purplish Jacamar up in the forest on the right hand side of the track.

There are two other trails in the area. There is a trail at the Laberinto, further upriver from Shaime near the Peruvian border. This is not so good for birding primarily because walking off the trail risks an unpleasant encounter with a landmine. The other trail is the Maycu Miazí public trail, about 10 minutes drive back towards Orquideas from the Cabañas. It's a long trail, and you have to return the same way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Fredrik and Frances Ahlman for their hospitality, help and comments. We thank Rich Hopf for the tip-off about Cabañas Yankuam.

REFERENCES

1. BirdLife International (2006) Species factsheet: *Wetmorethraupis sterrhopteron*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 28/12/2006.
2. Valqui, T. (2004) *Where to watch birds in Peru*. Lima: Graña Press.

DAVID CAPPER AND PENNY PEREIRA

10A Kirkstall Rd, London, SW2 4HF, UK. E-mail: capper.david@gmail.com

WE WANT MORE MEMBERS!

Whilst NBC Council is committed to *Neotropical Birding*, producing a third publication each year is, inevitably, very costly, especially if our membership rate is not to increase. We therefore have a simple request: if you enjoy *Neotropical Birding* and *Cotinga*, please help NBC by telling your friends and colleagues about the Club. If every existing member recruited just one new member, the Club's size would double. This would enable us to improve and expand both magazines and support additional conservation projects. Please help us to help the Neotropics' birds.