

## Monday, September 16 – By van and boat to Amazonia Lodge

We're trying to get an early start in case of more road closings. They are doing a lot of improvements along this road, and Doris says there is no way to get information about closings in advance. We have an early breakfast and are on the road by 6:00 am. We apparently started early enough to avoid any road work; we pass several construction sites and see workers but no work started yet, so no hold-ups for us.



And in a nice, clean van . . . thanks Vergilio. We are heading for Atalaya, a small river village where Doris has arranged for a boat to pick us up for the trip to Amazonia Lodge. We stop along the road from time to time for some birding. We see an oropendula colony, crow-sized birds that build long, hanging nests like orioles in the U.S. We've seen these before, in Costa Rica and Panama - nests that are 6-8 feet long. How such a construction can support the weight of these big birds (sometimes both adults at once) and the young, who get as large as the adults before they leave the nests, is quite the engineering feat.



As we get lower and lower in elevation we are now out of cloud forest and into rain forest. It just looks green in the photos, but the character of the environment is

dramatically different. Termite nests are common in the trees. Almost every tree has one.



And here's Doris in action; the bird-spotter spotting! Check the body English.



At an open area along the road we stop for some photos overlooking the Rio Madre de Dios.



above (l to r) : Doris, Doug, Donna, Ann, Ed



above (l to r) : Doris and Vergilio

We are almost to Antayala now, about a ½ hour downhill to the river. As we near the river there are butterflies and some interesting flow





Well, Antalya is kind of a nasty-looking place (although later we see worse). It looks like a set for a B-movie about drug gangsters. But they have clean public restrooms, for which Ann is grateful. We get in and out of town as quickly as possible, but even in our scant few minutes there Doris finds a couple of new bird species for us. We say our good-byes to our faithful driver Vergilio. We think of him as “poor Vergilio” because he now has to drive all the back along “that road” taking the

van back to Cusco, with no company but himself. It seems to us a horrible fate, but he has done that drive so many times before, we doubt he even thinks twice about it.

In spite of the general “look” of Antalya, our boat is clean, and our boat crew consists of two decent-looking fellows. Now we have a pleasant, cool (it’s so nice out on the water) boat ride of about ½ hour to the Amazonia Lodge dock.



Then a 20-minute walk through the jungle to reach the lodge itself. Away from the river and hiking along the trail in the hot, humid jungle, we arrive sweaty and feeling “wilted”. Don’t know why we’re tired, we’ve only been riding not walking; but tired we are.

But Doris is running a real birding boot camp here. She shows us several new species as soon as we hit the clearing around the lodge and before we go up onto the verandah for a sit-down and a nice, cool drink.



We shed our packs and get our luggage into our cabins. Then we sit on the wonderful long veranda looking out into the clearing in front of the lodge. They immediately bring us some nice cool

lemonade and we gulp down several glassfuls. Ann pops some of her Bombay Sapphire into her lemonade. We sit and chill and watch the frenzy of bird activity all around us.



The people who run the lodge put out feeders to attract the birds: several hummingbird feeders, a platform with fruit slices on it for the tanagers, jays and icterids (orioles and their relatives) and a lower platform with rice

on it for gallinaceous birds and other ground-feeding species. Here are some speckled chachalacas (They are about the size of a large crow) at the feeder, enjoying some rice.

There is a row of flowering bushes right along the rail of the veranda. The hummingbirds are all over them as well as the feeders. We probably see 20-25 new species of birds (7-8 of them hummingbirds) within the couple of hours. We sit on the veranda and take brief walks into the clearing. As the sun falls the temperature moderates a little. But the humidity is still with us and not a breath of wind to stir the air.

Most of the birds we see here in the low jungle (actually a “flood-plain forest”) are different from what we saw at the higher elevations. Around 4:30 pm we’re serenaded by flocks of macaws, chachalacas and oropendulas . . . all VERY noisy birds, nothing the least bit “musical” about them. We just relax and enjoy the surrounding forest and the birds until it’s time to shower and go for dinner. Again, excellent food, just as we enjoyed at Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge. Ann has plenty of vegetarian selections and everything else is wonderful. It helps that we’re hungry).

Then to bed, candles and bug nets over the beds again, our regular nightly routine for the next week. We each brought nice, bright LED headlamps at the advice of Ann’s cousin Margaret and her husband Jack, experienced travelers. A wonderful recommendation. Candles are not adequate for reading (which we continue to do each evening), and the bathrooms are in a separate building. The lamps are invaluable for night-time bathroom runs as well as reading, Not sure what is on the ground here at night (we do see lots of toads). Likely nothing you’d want to step on bare-footed, or even wearing flip-flops; OR now that we think about it, even wearing our hiking boots.

And so to bed, since we will be up early in the morning for some birding around the Lodge before breakfast.

## Amazonia Lodge

The lodge, originally a tea plantation owned by the Cuscanean Yábar family, is located in the tropical lowland rainforest of Manu Biosphere Reserve. During 1983 a naturalist and his team were doing studies in Amazonia while staying at the Lodge. He suggested that the Yábar family consider working in tourism, specifically for birdwatchers. In 1984 the Yábars converted the property, creating one of the pioneer lodges in the Manu Biosphere Reserve.

The 360 hectare (about 1½ square miles) property is 65% primary forest, mostly in the higher elevations. The rest is mature secondary forest over 40 years old, much of which was reforested after the plantation closed. The elevation range of the property is between 1,600 feet to almost 5,000 feet with various habitats. This range in elevation creates a high diversity of birds and wildlife. Amazonia Lodge is now considered one of the best birding spots in Peru. Their bird list contains 628 species and keeps going up, one of the largest lists in the world. There are also many species of mammals including tapir, peccary, jaguar, puma, eight species of monkeys including the rare Night Monkey. Also many butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, orchids, and bromeliads.

The lowest elevations here are what is known as flood-plain forest. The lodge closes at the beginning of every rainy season, and stores all of the furniture and equipment up in high “attic” areas in some of the buildings. Then they leave for Cusco. When they return at the end of the rainy season, much of the lodge needs to be cleaned, repaired and refinished. It’s no wonder everything looked freshly painted, they do it every year. At times the water on the lodge grounds is over 10-12 feet. Even though the guest cabins are all raised about 5 feet off the ground they are inundated almost every year.

We have a nice room, high ceiling with twin beds. And of course the candles and bug nets. There is also a tiny electric bulb on the ceiling (probably at least 10 feet above us) that can be turned on until about 9:00 pm, but it gives less light than the candles. Thank goodness for those headlamps we brought. Thank you Marg and Jack!

