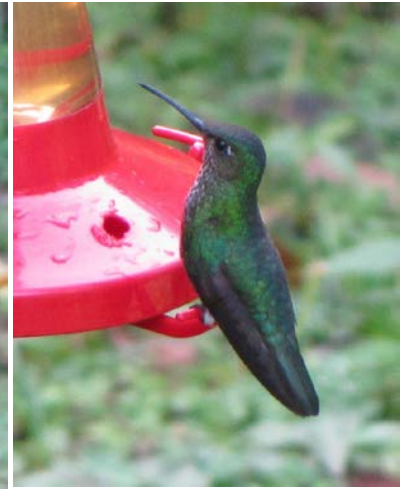


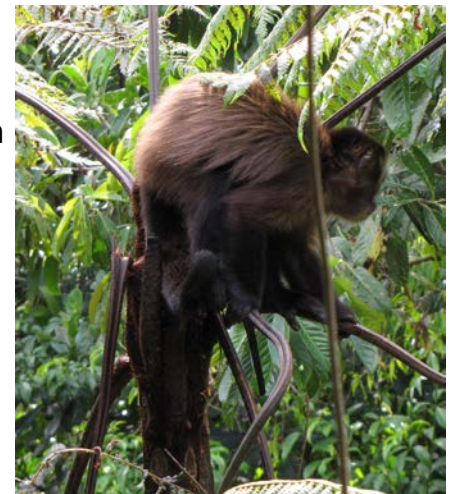
Sunday, September 15 – Birding at Cock-of-the-Rock Lodge

We are up and out at 6 am for birding. There are lots and lots of new birds to see in the Amazon, and you don't have to go far. Most of our birding here is done from the road or right in the clearings around the lodge.



There are feeders, blooming plants, orchids and bromeliads that have been planted around the lodge grounds. And a stream runs just behind the cabins so there is plenty of water nearby. The result is birds (and a tiny squirrel) all around us. And even a monkey or two.

Amazingly, Vergilio has repaired the van's rear bumper (although it is now so wet and humid that we don't encounter any more dust) and has it cleaned out and detailed. When does he sleep? We won't be using it until this evening, but it will be ready for tomorrow. Then we will part company with Vergilio and the van. All further travel will be by boat (there are NO roads).

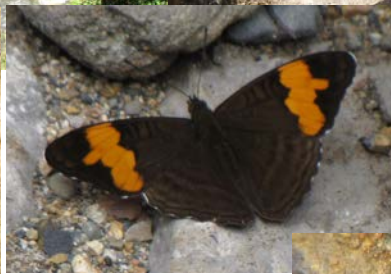
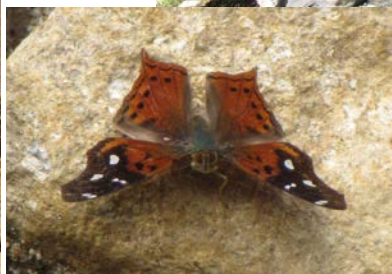
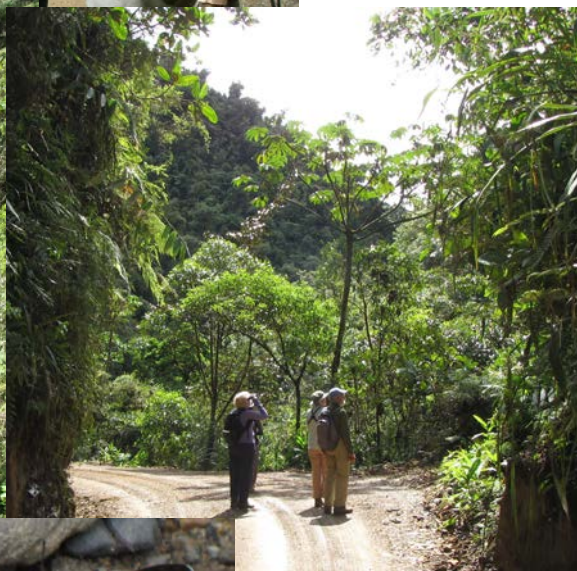


We bird until lunch, just walking up and down the road. Doris can spot birds anywhere. She also has calls recorded on her iPhone and when the birds don't want to show themselves she tries (usually with success) to call them out of cover so we can

can get a look at them. Some serious birders consider the use of recorded calls a moral issue and regard it as “cheating”, but none of us care. We’re not concerned with rules and protocols, only seeing the birds. Several days ago, when Doris first suggested this to us, she first asked if we were O.K. with it. Of course we were, and fortunately Donna and Doug agreed on this after they joined us. We all just want to see the birds, and the recorded calls certainly don’t hurt them.



Now, in the wet and humid areas, we start to see more butterflies. We didn't see any while we were on the dry western side of the mountains.

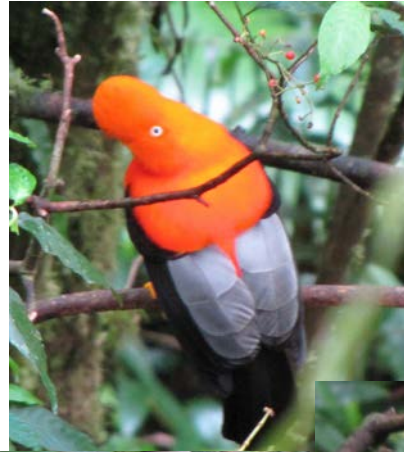


At one point Doris, who was standing behind Doug at the time, noticed him reaching up to brush something off his shirt collar. She immediately shouted “DON’T MOVE, DON’T TOUCH THAT!” She quickly picked up a stick from the roadside and flicked this critter off his shirt collar. It had been starting to crawl inside his shirt. She explained that this variety of caterpillar was highly poisonous, and assured him that had he had touched it, he would have been in excruciating pain for the next several days.



160 There is no known remedy for the pain, but it eventually goes away on its own.

After lunch at 3 pm, we leave for the “lek” - a place where male birds gather to display for the females. In this case it is the Cock of the Rock, the national bird of Peru. We situate ourselves in a hide just off the road. We are about 30 feet above 12 -15 birds, along with six other “bird tourists”. There is no need for recorded calls here, some of the birds come within 15-20 feet of our hide, and there are clear sight lines.



They are almost pigeon size and their color ranges from light orange to bright red. Beautiful!



Their display consists mainly of flapping their wings, preening and a subtle head-bobbing motion. No females in sight but the males just keep on displaying. Later in other places, we see females. They are a dark reddish mahogany color, attractive birds, but not nearly as spectacular as the males. The females take full responsibility for building the nest made of spittle and mud wedged into crevices in rock faces (hence the name), and they raise the young without male assistance.



This is a bird we especially hoped to see on this trip. We weren't disappointed. We saw all we could have wanted this afternoon. This alone was a wonderful experience for us.

Around dusk we go to another lek, this one far up the road from the Lodge. We hope to view lyre-tailed night jars. Here in the forest, with no ambient light from humans anywhere near, it is a DARK dark. We never really see the birds clearly. They are too far away, and the light is so dim the scope and binoculars don't help. There will obviously be no decent photo-ops but we don't care as long as we spot the birds. What we see are the outlines of largish birds (they are almost pigeon sized) flying against the dusky sky with amazing tail feathers in the shape of a lyre streaming behind them. Hope this terrible picture gives some idea; they are spectacular birds.



And we hear them call. If you've heard a Whippoorwill call, the lyre-tailed call is reminiscent, but not as distinct. They are both in the night-jar family. Ann's "piney" family will relate to this. And anyone who has grown up in the rural Midwest will recognize the call. We have several species of night-jars around Tucson and are especially fond of them, so seeing the Lyre-tailed is quite a thrill.

Then back to the Lodge for showers (cold, the heater still hasn't been repaired), dinner and packing. We leave the cloud forest tomorrow morning for the lowlands. . . and after a few hours of driving, there will be no more of "the road", and "the river" will become our road for the next several days . . . the Rio Madre de Dios (Mother of God River).