

Sunrise Birding LLC  
**AMAZON CRUISE**  
 March 17 – 24, 2018  
**TRIP REPORT**  
 Report & Photos by John Kricher



Photos: Hoatzin, White-eared Jacamar, Saddle-back Tamarin, Happy Sunrisers





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Local Guide: Juan Tejada  
Expedition Leader: Guillermo Knell  
Sunrise Birding Leader: John Kricher



**OUR MOST MEMORABLE SIGHTINGS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GROUP:**

- Hoatzins galore
- Pygmy Marmosets
- Two different groups of Night (Owl) Monkeys
- Ten monkey species for the trip
- Capped Herons
- Chestnut, Cream-colored, Yellow-tufted, and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, each at nest holes
- Squirrel Cuckoo in the open
- Great and Common Potoos seen at night
- Long-billed Woodcreeper
- Huge flocks of White-winged Parakeets coming to roost
- Having breakfast while watching both dolphin species
- Flock of Paradise Tanagers along with a pair of White-eared Jacamars
- Roosting flock of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds at sunset, “lighting up” the marsh
- Sunset on roosting Great Egrets
- Victoria lilies
- Lots of parrots including good looks at Blue-and-Yellow Macaws

**OVERVIEW:** This birding tour was done almost entirely by boat, cruising along the Amazon River and the Ucayali River, exploring multiple channels, backwaters, and riverside habitat. We did some birding from the “mother ship,” the *Zafiro*, but mostly from the skiff that took us along the river banks and into the lagoons and channels. Our typical day was to be out for an early excursion at 06:30 and return for breakfast aboard the *Zafiro*. Then we would go out again for birding and natural history, returning for lunch. That would be followed by an afternoon siesta and later a brief lecture from one of the naturalist guides, and then, usually around 15:30, we would be out again, returning in time to shower and relax in the lounge before dinner. Our talented guides and staff provided vibrant live music at happy hour

most nights. Following our multi-course dinner, usually at around 21:30, we did our list session in the lounge. Each day at meals, Guillermo Knell, the expedition leader, would brief all passengers as to the plans. Weather was generally favorable. It was rarely a blue-sky day, usually overcast but bright, with virtually no rain for the entire trip. The rivers were high, the forest along the river edge flooded. The rivers are white water rivers, high in sediment load carried from the Andes. There were lots in the way of flotsam, tree branches, leaves, other forms of detritus. The river was sufficiently high that there were no exposed sediment islands so birds had few places on which to perch, at least along the main rivers. Forests were flooded, and that enabled us to move easily up various channels but it also meant that some species of birds could tuck into the forests rather than be more conspicuous along the river edge. We were able to explore some black water lakes and channels but were mostly on the mocha-colored white waters.

The skiff, with twin outboards, was very comfortable, good seats for everyone, easy to see birds and monkeys and sloths from the boat. We had a boat assigned us that accommodated all of our group as well as a dedicated and talented local guide, Juan Tejada, who was with us for the entire week. How often we heard, "It was not good..... It was great!!!!" To say nothing of: "LET'S GO GET 'EM!"



## DAILY LOG:

**17 March 2018, Saturday:** This was the official beginning of our Amazon Cruise. The full group met for the first time at 06:00 breakfast at the Swisshotel in Lima, Peru. We assembled in the hotel lobby at 07:30. Our Expedition Leader, Guillermo Knell, from International Expeditions, was there to greet us. He stewarded us to the airport for our Latam Airline flight to Iquitos. We were airborne by 10:45 and descending into Iquitos by noon. Those with window seats had outstanding views of the Amazon River and its oxbows and twists. Once off the aircraft we immediately felt the heat and humidity of tropical Iquitos. Let the games begin!

Soon we were on a comfortable bus, our luggage already heading for the *Zafiro*. We were taken to the Manatee Center, a rehabilitation facility for Amazon Manatees as well as various turtles and other local animals. We began our bird list with common species such as Short-tailed Swift, Smooth-billed Ani, Great Kiskadee, and Silver-beaked and Palm Tanagers. We enjoyed the turtles, locally called Taricaya, cute green turtles with yellow spots on the head. The manatees were a bit reluctant to socialize but we saw several, including a juvenile, quite well.

Lunch was at the local Doubletree, near the main square that is surrounded by historic buildings, some from the rubber era. After lunch we walked to the riverfront, looking out on the Amazon River. Birding was lively. We saw many species and highlights included Orange-headed Tanager, Black-billed Thrush, Purple Gallinule, Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, and our first looks at Black-capped Donacobius.

At 17:00 we were on a skiff transferring us to the *Zafiro*. We were assigned our various cabins and that was followed by a complete orientation and safety drill. Our first multicourse dinner began at 19:00 and, as would become our custom, we did a list session and group orientation after dinner, up in the spacious lounge. Then it was off to bed.





**18 March 2018, Sunday:** All of our group save two were up on the main deck of the *Zafiro* at 06:00 for early morning birding. John K and Martha were slower to get there because they had all of 3-hours sleep the previous night, having arrived at the Swissotel at about 02:00. But our naturalist guides were on the job and lots of birds had already been seen by 06:30, when John K arrived on the scene. Flocks of Fork-tailed Flycatchers were flying overhead along with flocks of Barn Swallows. Riverside species

such as Oriole Blackbird, Ringed Kingfisher, and Yellow-tufted Woodpecker were easy to see. A Green Ibis flew past, the first of several of these solitary ibises that we would encounter during our week on the river. The boat was at the confluence of the Marañon and Ucayali Rivers, where these two great tributaries meet to form the Amazon River.

Breakfast was at 08:00 and we were off with our guide Juan Tejada, at 09:00 for birding on the Yarapa River. Our skiff passed among floating mats of vegetation as we sought birds along the riverside. We were introduced to **Horned Screamers**, one of the more unique Amazonian bird species. We had fine looks at a pair of Red-and-White Spinetails, a pair of Barred Antshrikes, a small flock of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, some Wattled Jacanas, and White-winged Swallows.

We were back on the *Zafiro* for lunch followed by relaxation time during the heat of the day. We were again in our skiff on the Yarapa at 15:00, exploring more of the winding river. This trip was highlighted by good looks at **Woolly Monkeys** as well as two saki monkey species, the Equatorial Saki Monkey and the Monk Saki Monkey. As for birds, we saw our first Masked Crimson Tanagers, Yellow-rumped Caciques, many Southern Rough-winged Swallows, and a nest of Dusky-headed Parakeets. We explored both white



and black water tributaries. The trip was highlighted with a spectacular rainbow late in the afternoon as well as big flocks of noisy White-winged Parakeets.

Once back aboard the *Zafiro* we were told of a “surprise” awaiting us in the lounge at 19:00. That took the form of vibrant live music, our own Juan on percussion. The group called itself “The Woolly Monkeys,” and we soon learned that each night that name would change. One night they were “The Village People.” As the music ramped up some of us were drafted into doing our impressions of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

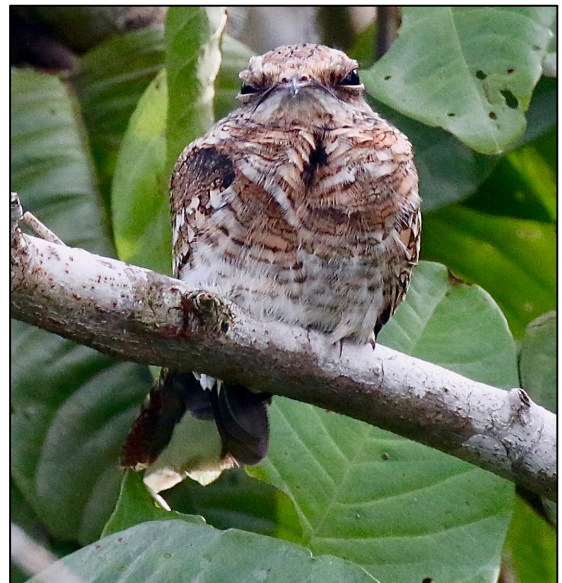
After exercising on the dance floor, dinner and checklist followed, then bed.



**19 March 2018, Monday:** We boarded our skiff at 06:30 on an overcast but otherwise pleasant day on the Ucayali. We set off to explore the river as well as Yanallpa Creek. Birding was lively. We saw three species of macaws as well as other parrots including good looks at Short-tailed Parrot and White-eyed Parakeets. Short-tailed Swifts

flew overhead and we encountered our first Green Iguana.

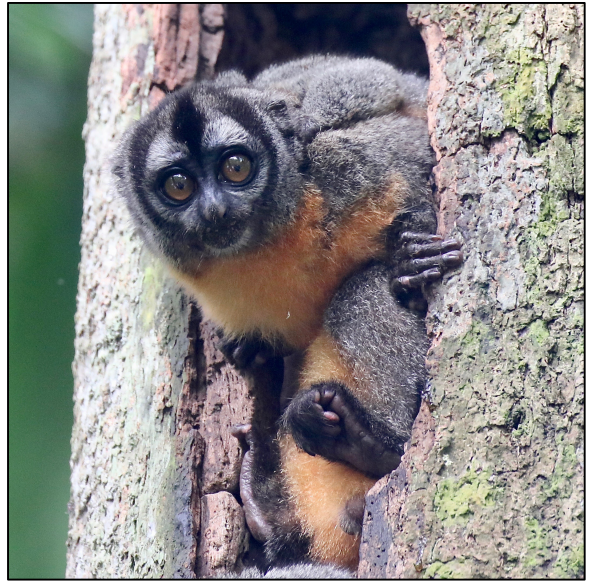
Birds kept coming: a treetop Black-crowned Tityra, a perched Peregrine, great looks at **Capped Heron** and Crimson-crested Woodpecker, and a perched **Ladder-tailed Nightjar**, outstanding looks. We had a brief and frustrating encounter with a Sungrebe that just did not want to be seen. But we had just the opposite with a pair of White-eared Jacamars. In close proximity to the jacamars was a flock of Paradise Tanagers. Add to that some Chestnut-eared Aracaris and some Red-capped Cardinals.



Mammals did not disappoint. We found a small group of squirrel monkeys as well as a group of Monk Saki Monkeys.



But our “primate of the morning” was a tree inhabited by **Night (Owl) Monkeys**. Amazing little big-eyed critters. We were back on the *Zafiro* for breakfast by 09:00.



It was hot and sunny at 10:00 when we set off to visit 11 del Agosto, a local village. We found plenty of birds around the village including a Streaked Flycatcher, more looks at Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers (at a nest hole), and lots of Yellow-rumped Caciques. A few Greater Anis perched in the open, wonderful looks. We watched a demonstration of how yucca is harvested and watched a woman preparing yucca beer using, well, her own saliva. We visited the local school and had fun with the children, including more dancing. We left the Village at around noon and, on the way back to the boat, enjoyed lots of Large-billed and some Yellow-billed Terns on the river. Lunch was at 13:00 followed by a well-earned siesta. At 15:00 most of us attended a brief lecture on the source of the Amazon, said now to be high in the Andes near Arequipa, Peru. Actually, the Amazon forms from multiple sources in the Andes but the source near Arequipa, said to be only 100 miles from the Pacific Ocean, may be the most distant.

Rain clouds threatened when we were again aboard or skiff at 16:00, but the rain went elsewhere. We were off to explore El Dorado, a black water area of calm, still water with bordering marshes. Exquisite. For perhaps all of us, the “bird of the trip” was found on this excursion, the remarkable Amazonian specialty, **Hoatzin**. We initially saw several perambulating in rather well shaded foliage but soon they began showing very well. The photographers among the group (most were) began filling up their camera’s memory card. After a lengthy visit with Hoatzins we cruised the calm water, seeing huge Victoria lilies. Great Egrets were coming to roost and the



sinking late afternoon sun really lit them up. Wattled Jacanas and their young walked along the floating water hyacinths. Hundreds of Fork-tailed Flycatchers were in the air as were thousands of White-winged Parakeets, looking like distant clouds over the marsh. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were coming to roost in the marsh grasses and the males really stood out, their yellow heads glowing like beacons in the late afternoon light. As the sun set we watched both dolphin species feeding near our skiff. Amazing.

Once back at the *Zafiro* we enjoyed more live music, the intrepid Juan on drums.

Our after-dinner list session was lively and why not? What a day.

**20 March 2018, Tuesday:** During the night, the *Zafiro* moved further along the Ucayali to the Zapote River, our exploration destination for the morning. We were on the skiff with Juan and Rafael (who coordinated very well with animated hand signaling by Juan) at 07:30 and would be out until about 11:00. Weather was cloudy and mild, not at all unpleasant.



Birds were numerous, many easy to observe. We had a fine look at a Green Kingfisher and a long look at a Chestnut-fronted Macaw atop at leafy tree. We saw Cream-colored and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers very nicely. Fork-tailed Flycatchers seemed to fill the sky in some places. We added Pied Puffbird, Muscovy, and Black-throated Mango to our growing bird list. A distant Crane Hawk was preening atop a tree and we had good looks at Great Black Hawk and Slate-colored Hawk. We enjoyed another great sighting of **Night (Owl) Monkeys**, incredibly lucky to have two separate sightings on the trip. We also had nice views of Saddleback Tamarin, yet another “cute monkey.” Two Scarlet Macaws flew along the river and landed in a cecropia but decided to fly off before we could enjoy them. We did see them well in flight. We met a pair of Bare-necked Fruitcrows and a few of us had a brief view of a Pygmy Kingfisher. Alas, with the forest so flooded, species such as Sungrebe and Pygmy Kingfisher have many places to hide that are unreachable by our skiff.



After lunch and the usual siesta time we heard a lecture by Juan about the Pacaya-Samiria Reserve, a huge area now protected that lies between the Marañon and Ucayali rivers. This conserved area was our focus for most of the trip and its biodiversity is quite remarkable.



We were out again at 16:00 and our plan was to remain out past dark and see what we might find. We found a troop of Squirrel Monkeys with “children” and saw a solitary sloth rather well. We had wonderful looks at **Black-fronted Nunbird** and encountered our first Long-billed Woodcreeper, a specialty species of riverine forest edge. More dolphins entertained us.

Happy Hour was spent docked at the Ranger Station as the sun was setting. We noted a Laughing Falcon and an Anhinga perched high in different trees. As we began our post-sunset cruise we saw some Sand-colored Nighthawks flying in the lights that Juan was using to scan the waters. One quest was Spectacled Caiman and Juan succeeded in grabbing a small specimen and showing off its impressive dental work. Once the caiman was released we searched for potoos, with great success. Juan found a perched Great Potoo, spectacular in his light. We would find others as well, including one in flight. Juan also found a perched Common Potoo and we had fine looks at it. Finally, Juan and Ed heard a Tropical Screech-Owl and after some searching, it showed well in Juan’s light. On the ride back to the *Zafiro* we passed many flying Long-nosed Bats as well as Fishing Bats, illuminated in the lights. Our evening on the river had been quite the success.

We returned to dinner and our usual post-dinner list session.

**21 March 2018, Wednesday:**

We were back aboard our skiff with Juan at 06:30 under the usual cloudy skies, the temperature and humidity distinctly tropical. We were back on the Pacaya searching for more birds and other animals. The plan was to do some birding and enjoy breakfast on the river, docked at the Ranger Station. We had more fine looks at a sloth,



this one a male with chestnut markings on its back. It was well exposed in a fairly bare cecropia tree and was even slightly animated. Just a short distance from the sloth was a sleeping Tamandua and, as we watched it, well, it kept on sleeping. More active were Red Howler Monkeys and Brown Capuchins, though they kept their distance in the trees. As for birds, we got nice looks at a singing male Black-crested Antshrike, a species that thrives along river edges. We found some Tui and Cobalt-winged Parakeets tucked in and feeding on some fruits in a dense leafy plant, demonstrating how cryptic parrots can be. We soon added a new species, Bluish-fronted Jacamar, seen well. This was followed by fine looks at Spot-breasted Woodpecker. Then along came two very close **Horned Screamers** in fine light, great looks. We had seen several Great Black Hawks but we came upon an immature and its russet brown streaked plumage made it look quite distinct from the adults we had previously seen. A pair of **Festive Parrots** seemed to be “dancing,” feathers spread, swaying from side to side, likely courtship behavior. We



were back aboard the *Zafiro* by 11:45 for the usual ample lunch buffet and welcomed siesta time.

We were out again at 16:00 on the Atun Roza and Yanayacu Lake, a black water area. There we found another group of very showy Hoatzins, more great looks, more





full frame photos. We also saw another signature species of the Amazon, **Blue-and-Yellow Macaws**. They were flying near us and we also saw them perched in riverside trees. We added Plum-throated Cotinga to our list, doing the usual cotinga behavior of perching high in an exposed tree. We also came upon an active nest cavity attended by Crimson-crested Woodpeckers. Another highlight of this trip was that several of us opted to try to catch a piranha. This task proved rather easy. A simple stick, a line, a hook, some bait: stir the water with the stick, and wait for five seconds. Pull up piranha. We snagged at least two species of the reputed terror fish of the Amazon and, of course, released them after a fine look at beautiful fish.

We crossed signals at dinner and not all of us made it to list session afterward but those who missed quickly got caught up.

**22 March 2018, Thursday:** Today was a departure at 06:30, “up the creek,” this time the Supay Creek. We had a smaller than usual group as some of us opted for kayaking. As usual we had overcast conditions, a “white sky,” for which the tropics is famous. Our excursion provided more good looks at Paradise Tanagers, Swallow-winged Puffbirds, a showy Squirrel Cuckoo, and Slate-colored Hawk. We also enjoyed seeing Grayish Saltator perched in the open, a Gray-headed Kite, and another Plum-throated Cotinga. The most remarkable sighting of the trip was that





Juan spotted some **Pygmy Marmosets**, tiny monkeys, little gnomes, staring at us with curiosity until they began mutual grooming. What a great find! We returned for breakfast and were out again at 11:00.

We took the skiff along the river and came upon a nest cavity of a pair of Short-tailed Parrots. Then it got downright dramatic. Juan spotted a recently fledged Yellow-rumped Cacique. Not unusual, but what was unusual was that it was floating down the river perched precariously on some flotsam. Not good. Juan did a rescue. He skillfully got the bird on a stick, we moved to shore, and Juan carefully placed it on a branch along the river bank, wet but out of harm's way. Once that drama concluded we were back to birding as usual and came upon a very well-named bird, the Drab Water-Tyrant, great close looks. We also had very close looks at a perched Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture that did not seem to care in the least that we were very near it. Some of us got a quick look at a Spotted Tody Flycatcher. We entered an oxbow lake, Clavera, and Juan saw some men fishing. He obtained a fish from them, a silver dollar fish as it is called, and soon offered the fish to a waiting Black-collared Hawk. We had seen quite a few of this distinctive Amazonian species over the past days but this one knew the drill and was calling as we approached. Juan tossed the fish overboard and with just a bit of coaxing the raptor was soon airborne and gaffed up the fish, carrying it off for brunch. And that concluded our morning on the river.





We were out again (yes, after lunch and siesta time) at 15:30, for a visit to the village of San Jose. The weather was decidedly tropical, hot and humid on this day of the spring equinox on the equator. We were moving kind of slow and so was the birding. We saw more Tropical Kingbirds and Great Kiskadees and lots of **Yellow-rumped Caciques**. We hoped for a trogon but someone apparently forgot to tell the trogon. We walked a muddy trail to a small pond laden with gorgeous Victoria lilies, a real high point.

We then took a boat ride that concluded in dramatic fashion. At about 18:00 we were just beyond the confluence of the Marañon and Ucayali rivers. The weather had become very pleasant. Conditions were good. And then we saw a few White-winged Parakeets. A few thousand that is! This is a huge roosting area for this abundant species and they seemed to know it. Wow! Dense flocks, virtual galaxies of the highly vocal parakeets were everywhere, plunging into the dense riverside vegetation. This was the Amazonian version of the famous European Starling murmurations that are so commonly available on YouTube. What a way to end the day!

We had a lively list session at 21:15, celebrating a good day.





**23 March 2018, Friday:** As is the custom of our people, we were aboard the skiff with Juan and Rafael at 06:30, this time headed for Pahuacahiro Creek. Birding was very lively. We were treated to more looks at Capped Heron, a favorite with everyone. Chestnut Woodpeckers, Masked Crimson Tanagers, Donocobius, more jacanas, more Swallow-winged Puffbirds, and more good looks at Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers got us off to a fine beginning. Along came more looks at Greater Anis and Lesser Kiskadees and then we found a nest

hole with a pair of Chestnut Woodpeckers in attendance. One of our best sightings was of a **Long-billed Woodcreeper**, our second sighting of this remarkable woodcreeper. As we listened to Horned Screamers “screaming,” we saw a small hummingbird exploring some colorful bromeliads. It was a Reddish Hermit, only our second hummingbird of the trip (hummingbirds are far more diverse in cloud forests and on up into the high Andes). We then had wonderful close looks at a foraging Spot-breasted Woodpecker and a Palm Tanager, as well as a colony of Russet-backed Oropendolas. We had “worked up an appetite” for breakfast, back on the boat at 09:30.

While birding had been basically from the skiff, today was our day in what is called a *terra firme* forest, above the flood plain. So off we went, wearing boots supplied by the crew, at 10:00 to explore “the jungle.” Upon arrival at Casual, where the trail began, Juan quickly located a roosting Great Potoo. He is a phenomenal spotter. We began an ascent up some well-cut stairs into the forest, which was classic rain forest. Soon Juan found some White-bearded Manakins and some of us got looks at a mature male. Later Juan found a Green-backed Trogon that was rather unreceptive to being watched but did return to its initial perch long enough for Ed to capture a photo of it. We also saw Owl Butterfly, Blue Morphos, a walking stick, and a sizeable cicada. Oh, and we saw a sizeable tree, an immense fig with massive buttressed roots, indeed a classic example of what I like to call at “typical tropical tree.” The tree was indeed wondrous to behold. Our jungle trek was fun but we all noticed how much we were sweating from just a short time trekking. We were glad to get back on our skiff and headed back to the “mother ship.”



After lunch we did a group photo and list session in the lounge. The *Zafiro* was steaming toward Iquitos and so we passed the afternoon watching the river, sailing with the current. After a relaxing afternoon, we assembled in the lounge at 19:00 for more music as well as crew introductions. That was followed by our final dinner aboard the *Zafiro* at 20:00. Our cruise was almost, but not quite, over.

**24 March 2018, Saturday:** We awoke back in Iquitos, the *Zafiro* “parked” along the riverbank. Guillermo had arranged for a final birding skiff ride for us Sunrise birders and off we went with Juan at 07:30, skies clear. Juan took us on the Rio Momon. We watched many colorful boats (including one named *Rambo III*) ply the waters and saw a man setting gill nets. We had a final look at many “old friends:” White-eyed Parakeets, Tui Parakeets, Southern Rough-winged and White-winged Swallows, a very cooperative Squirrel Cuckoo, more Chestnut-eared Aracaris, another pair of White-eared Jacamars, and the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped Caciques. We strained to find but found a Purple Gallinule in the riverside vegetation. And we added one new species to our list, White-banded Swallow, bringing our total bird species list to 143 for the trip.

We were back on the *Zafiro* at 10:15. Then it was off to the airport, a nice ride through Iquitos, and on to the Latam flight to Lima, wheels up at 12:55. Once back in Lima we bid fond farewells to our friends from the *Zafiro* and I.E and walked the short distance to the Wyndam Airport Hotel and got our day rooms. We met later for drinks and arranged for a dinner together. There was no mistaking it. We were all feeling migratory restlessness. We knew that tonight was the night, airborne, northward, time to migrate. And so, we did, fly away home.



Photos: Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Masked Crimson Tanager.