

The first thing you notice at 6:30 am is how noisy the forest is. Mostly this din is caused by birds but monkeys too are loud when they awaken, declaring their territories. In the relatively small skiffs we are able to explore small river tributaries of the Marañon and even navigate among the trees. We see a Speckled Chachalaca, a Cocoi Heron, a Capped Heron, a Great Egret, a Snowy Egret, a Green Ibis (easily mistaken for a Puna Ibis), a Turkey Vulture, a Black Vulture and a Lesser Yellow-Headed Vulture. The Capped Heron was especially stunning with its bright, long, light blue bill, the lower mandible of which was tinged with purple, a black cap, and a bright yellow chest and neck. Trailing from the cap were several white tassels. All the other herons and egrets, or birds very much like them, I have seen in Florida but not this one.



After breakfast we went for a walk on *terra firme* in a place called Casual. *Terra firme* is land that remains above the high water mark all year. It isn't dry because of the rain and can be quite muddy, as well as slippery since it is rather clayey. We wore mid-calf galoshes provided by the boat staff. They kept the mud off our tucked in pants and the insects and spiders out of our pants as well. As we

hiked, native wildlife spotters paralleled us through the forest. They would appear at times holding poison dart frogs, snakes and bats.



The poison dart frogs are very small and quite beautiful in their bright colors. I spotted a brilliantly red-backed one in the genus *Ranitomeya*. These frogs can be found in tiny pools of water in the bromeliads that festoon the trees everywhere in sight or on the ground among the copious leaf litter. Indeed, it was by stirring the leaves with my walking stick that I flushed out the *Ranitomeya*. Their toxins are particular alkaloids, often sequestered in their skin from sources in prey species such as ants. I was told some years ago when Lynn and I were on expedition in Costa Rica, where these frogs are also found, that contact between their skin and ours could be deadly. Our spotters in Peru showed us several different species of these frogs by holding down a foot with a thumb and forefinger and they did not perish at the end of the walk as far as I know.







At another moment our naturalist guide spotted a Vine Snake which we observed for several minutes. In the picture the head is facing down.



During this 2-3 hour trip and during the late afternoon 3 hour skiff ride we saw the species of animals (mostly birds) discussed below. The Black-collared Hawk caused lots of excitement because of its beautiful colors on the wings and body, not so much because of the black collar. As it would turn out we would see many everyday.





The Yellow-headed Caracara is a scavenger and nest robber. The Striated Heron, that we would see daily, can be confused with the Green Heron. The Wattled Jacana is striking for its very long toes, not so much for its red wattle, and walks on water plants, sometimes appearing to walk on water. Hence its other name: the Jesus Bird. In the picture below look for the big toes on the left leg.



The Canary-winged Parakeet appears squawking loudly in small flocks. When in flight its secondaries showed canary yellow. The short tailed parrot appeared in pairs, also squawking. The Common Pauraque, rarely seen in daylight, posed on a branch.





The Ringed Kingfisher is the largest Kingfisher in Peru and many were seen daily. So were the smaller but similar looking Green Kingfishers, shown below front and back.





A Swallow-winged Puffbird was seen flying about its perch. Our naturalist put a stick down a small mound of dirt beside a tree and stirred gently. Out marched Bull Ants (aka Bullet Ant, Isula Ant, Izula Ant), each over an inch long. Some say their sting is the most painful of the animal kingdom but not deadly. It has the highest score on the Schmidt Sting Pain Index at 4.0+.

We also saw many Oropendula nests as well as Cacique nests, often together. These birds are very beautiful in their ebony bodies highlighted by brilliant yellow patches. A Yellow-rumped Cacique is shown below.



Their nests are long woven baskets or pouches that hang in clusters from tree branches, usually near large wasp nests. The wasps swarm around the nests and protect them from predators. Why the birds are safe in this arrangement isn't clear.

Along with the nests were many sightings of the birds themselves. A Yellow-hooded Blackbird was seen. Its yellow head is also striking.



A green iguana was seen sunning itself to warm up its muscles. Another was high in a tree eating leaves.







So far no sloth sightings and no hoatzins either. I consider a trip here unsatisfactory if these two species go unseen, much like a trip to Africa without seeing leopards, or a trip to Denali without seeing grizzlies. We have seen many pink dolphins and a few gray ones in the waterways. The gray dolphin is the second smallest *cetacean* in the world and rarer than the pink dolphin. The Marañon is the place to see them. Part of a pink dolphin is shown below. The head is on the left and a hump, rather than a fin as on the gray dolphin, is seen on the right.

