

The Northern Peru Birding Route: Pedro Ruiz to Cajamarca

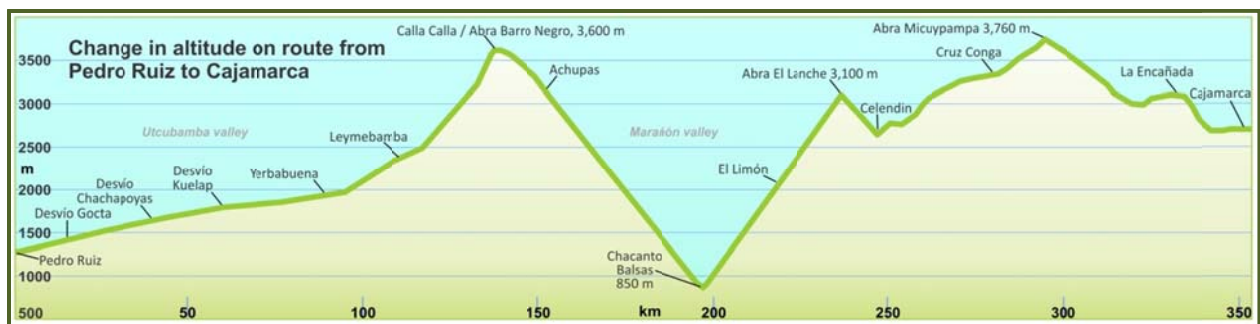




Pedro Ruiz to Cajamarca

The second main route of the Northern Peru Birding Route covers from Pedro Ruiz to Cajamarca; with some of the most spectacular scenery of north Peru. The area is also rich in archaeological sites from the Chachapoyan culture along the Utcubamba valley and this is often combined with some tours. Recent road improvements now mean this section is more comfortable, quicker and gives the birdwatcher more opportunity to appreciate the landscape and birds.

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Gocta Lodge and Gocta Falls

From the crossroad town of Pedro Ruiz the journey south up the Utcubamba valley is one of the most pleasant journeys in the north. Good birding can be had along the river and road on the journey up, keeping an eye for Torrent Duck, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Peruvian Pigeon, Koepcke's Screech-Owl, Mitred Parakeet, Torrent Tyrannulet, and Marañon Thrush.



Depending on the tour itinerary, the first stop along the valley may well be a side trip to Gocta Falls and a night there. The falls have been ranked as the fifth highest in the world and the walk to them provides for some good birding. The fall is set in an impressive natural amphitheatre of limestone rock. From the road there is 6 km of track to the village of Cocachimba, where the community is well organized to receive tourists. The village itself is very pleasant and the locals very friendly, making Cocachimba an attraction in itself.

Accommodation: For tours Gocta Lodge is the norm; all rooms have views of the falls. The village has 2 or 3 small hostels, which are good for independent travellers. An alternative for accommodation is the Casa Andina hotel, near the Chachapoyas-Leymebamba junction, at km 39.



Access: From Pedro Ruiz drive 14 km to the junction for Cocachimba and Gocta, then 6 km of track climbing slightly to Cocachimba village. The falls can be seen from the village, although it is a 6.5 km or 2 hour walk to the base of the falls, but horses can be hired in the village.

Facilities: Gocta Lodge has a swimming pool and the usual facilities one would expect. The hostels and restaurants in the village are more than adequate and the local food is very good. There are moderate fees to walk to the falls, guide or horses.

Local guides: The community has a tourism association, with guides rotating to attend visitors, who will accompany visitors to the falls. Horses can be hired which might be advisable for those not so accustomed to hiking in the Andes. Ruben Santillan is a local guide with a good knowledge of the birds and some entertaining stories of the local history. Other guides with an interest in birds are brothers Wilson and Ilton Yalta.

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Birds: Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Mitred Parakeet, Scaly-naped Parrot, Band-winged Nightjar, Marvellous Spatuletail, Speckled Hummingbird, White-bellied Hummingbird, White-bellied Woodstar, Little Woodstar, Green-backed Trogon, Andean Toucanet, Speckle-chested Piculet, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Variable Antshrike, Variegated Bristle-Tyrant, Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, Golden-winged Tody-Flycatcher, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Blackish Tapaculo, Chestnut-crested Cotinga, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, Marañon Thrush, Great Thrush, Andean Solitaire, White-eared Solitaire, Black-faced Tanager, Rufous-crested Tanager, Buff-bellied Tanager, Silver-backed Tanager, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Saffron-crowned Tanager, Flame-faced Tanager.



Kuelap

Kuelap is an impressive fortress perched on a mountain ridge at 3,000 m over the Utcubamba valley. Built by the Chachapoyan culture, it is a huge elevated platform some 600 m in length and 100 m wide. The site is worth the visit just for the extreme architecture and fantastic panoramic views. There are also a few birds of interest in and around the site.

Accommodation: Generally visited en route up the valley or as a day trip from Gocta. On the road up to Kuelap there is Choctomal lodge on the edge of the village of the same name. This is also the entrance point for Huiquilla private conservation area, a cloud forest site on the slopes behind the village, which is for the more adventurous.



Access: Access road is near the village of El Tingo in the valley, at km 474 (note km post distances count down towards Cajamarca). From El Tingo it is 37 km, about an hour, to Kuelap. Choctomal is 18 km along the track.

Facilities: Arriving at Kuelap there is a grassy area for parking, the fortress is a further 2.5 km along a well maintained all-weather path. There are toilets, shop and resting areas along the way. Entrance fee.

Birds: Mountain Caracara, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Green-tailed Trainbearer, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Andean Emerald, Blackish Tapaculo, Streaked Tuftedcheek, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, White-banded Tyrannulet, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Rufous-naped Brush-Finch, Buff-browed Foliage-Gleaner.

Leymebamba

After Kuelap the road continues climbing for 50 km to Leymebamba town. The town is situated on a mountain above the headwaters of the Utcubamba river, at 2,200 m. The central square is attractive and generally peaceful. The main reason for most visitors to the town is the museum on the southern outskirts, about 5 km from the centre.

Accommodation: In town there are several reasonable hostels for larger groups; Hostal La Petaca, Hostal Laguna de los Cóndores, Hostal La Casona de Leymebamba. For smaller discerning groups Kentitambo, near the museum, is highly recommended.

Access: Either from the direction of Chachapoyas or from Cajamarca. Road improvements have made Leymebamba more accessible.

Kentitambo Lodge and Leymebamba Museum

The Leymebamba Museum was inaugurated in 2000 and houses some 200 Chachapoyan mummies recovered from the Laguna de los Condores several years earlier. The architecture, gardens and exhibitions easily make this one of the best small museums in Peru and well worth a visit. The gardens are good for birding.

In front of the museum main gate is Kentitambo Lodge owned by the co-director of the museum. Kentitambo caters for small groups with a boutique lodge and excellent food and service. Most meals are made from organic and/or local produce. The land around the lodge has been reforested and there are also hummingbird feeders with 18 different species, including the Marvellous Spatuletail. For those needing a break, Kenticafe below the lodge offers freshly baked cakes and good coffee, while enjoying the local birdlife.



Access: Museum and Kentitambo are located south of Leymebamba, about 5 km from the centre and 2,400 m.

Contacts:

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Birds: Koepcke's Screech-Owl, Purple-throated Sunangel, Speckled Hummingbird, Green-tailed Trainbearer, Marvellous Spatuletail, Bronzy Inca, Rainbow Starfrontlet, Sword-billed Hummingbird, White-bellied Woodstar, Little Woodstar, Spot-throated Hummingbird, White-bellied Hummingbird, Mitred Parakeet, Scaly-naped Parrot, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Russet-mantled Softtail, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Cinereous Conebill, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Rusty Flowerpiercer.



Rio Atuen

The valley of Rio Atuen is located south of the Museum and if time allows it is highly recommended to walk from the Museum up into the valley. The trail head is about 300 m from the Museum, the trail then passes through some pastures with stone walls, before entering the narrow valley and forest of the river. Some 5 km up the valley the owner of Kentitambo has a private reserve of 100 ha and a forest cabin with some hummingbird feeders. The walk to the cabin is very pleasant, with good birding all the way. High above the cabin, on near vertical rock faces, are a pair of Andean Condors that normally take flight early in the morning. For those not so keen on walking or short on time the forested area is easily accessed by vehicle.

Birds: Andean Guan, Andean Condor, Rufous-banded Owl, Rufous-bellied Nighthawk, Oilbird, Purple-throated Sunangel, Speckled Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail, Shining Sunbeam, Rainbow Starfrontlet, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Golden-headed Quetzal, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Powerful Woodpecker, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, Blackish Tapaculo, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, White-chinned Thistletail, Russet-mantled Softtail, Line-cheeked Spinetail, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Barred Becard, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Andean Solitaire, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Beryl-spangled Tanager.



Calla Calla – Abra Barro Negro

After Leymebamba begins one of the most exciting parts of the route with a spectacular crossing of the Marañón valley. From Leymebamba the road rises gently for 26 km to a pass at 3,600 m called Calla Calla, although it is known to birders as Abra Barro Negro or black mud pass. Leaving Leymebamba there are good views of the town from above before entering a canyon with forest, about 5 km from the Museum. Coming out the other side of the canyon the climb ahead to the pass is more visible. Vegetation is mainly open grassland with denser vegetation along creeks. Good spot on the way up it at km 408, with space for parking, good scrub and a trail. Further along stops can be made where the road crosses vegetation. On a clear day the pass will give fantastic views, especially over the huge Marañón valley.



From the Calla Calla pass at 3,600 m is a 60 km drive to the small town of Chacanto on the banks of the Marañón river, which at 850 m means a 2,750 descent to the tropical dry vegetation of the Marañón. Although Chacanto is the town where you cross the river, the area is generally referred to as Balsas, which is the next village along from Chacanto.

Facilities: No facilities along the road. Small village of Achupas, km 381, on the descent has a couple of shops.

Birds: Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Andean Lapwing, Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Tyrian Metaltail, Coppery Metaltail, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, Bar-bellied Woodpecker, Andean Flicker, Undulated Antpitta, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Rufous Antpitta, Ash-colored Tapaculo, Blackish Tapaculo, Many-striped Canastero, White-chinned Thistletail, Russet-mantled Softtail, Hooded Mountain-Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Yellow-scarfed Tanager, Moustached Flowerpiercer, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Masked Flowerpiercer, Plushcap, Gray-winged Inca-Finch, Mountain Cacique.

Balsas - El Limón - Celendín

Approaching Chacanto (and Balsas) you will notice a marked change in the climate and vegetation. The area has some lush orchards and other limited agriculture squeezed on to available level land. The sides of the valley are dominated by sparse dry scrub and cactus. Orchards and fields are the best spots for the Peruvian Pigeon and Marañón Thrush.

After Chacanto the climb up the other side begins, which is shorter in distance than the descent, and arrives at a lower pass near El Lanche at 3,100 m. A regular stop on the ascent is around the village of El Limón, sometimes called Hacienda El Limón. This is a productive area for



Chestnut-backed Thornbird, Gray-winged Inca-Finch and several more. The village is just off the main road and there is a good birding trail 600 m further along the main road on a hairpin bend. The road continues climbing to the pass at El Lanche, again with great views looking back over the Marañón valley.



From the pass the road drops down in to Celendin town at 2,630 m. There are a couple of stops on the way, where there is some scrub / forest habitat visible from the road with trails leading to the site. Celendin is a busy town and some tours will spend the night here, with a couple of reasonable hotels.

Facilities: Chacanto has a few shops and restaurants. Celendin is quite large with good facilities and a couple of reasonable hotels if tours break the journey here.

Birds: Balsas: Peruvian Pigeon, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Peruvian Pygmy-Owl, White-tipped Swift, Black-necked Woodpecker, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Chestnut-backed Thornbird, Marañon Thrush, Yellow-tailed Oriole.

El Limón: Peruvian Pigeon, Ecuadorian Ground-Dove, Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Andean Swift, Spot-throated Hummingbird, Black-necked Woodpecker, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Yellow-faced Parrotlet, Marañon Crescentchest, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Rufous Antpitta, Chestnut-backed Thornbird, Baron's Spinetail, White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant, Speckle-breasted Wren, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Marañon Thrush, Buff-bellied Tanager, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Peruvian Sierra-Finch, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, Band-tailed Sierra-Finch, Gray-winged Inca-Finch, Buff-bridled Inca-Finch, Yellow-tailed Oriole.

Celendin: Andean Parakeet, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Jelski's Chat-Tyrant, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Grey-winged Inca-Finch, Tricolored Brush-Finch, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Rufous-breasted Warbling-Finch.

Cruz Conga and La Encañada

Both sites are roadside stops on the journey to Cajamarca. Cruz Conga village, 3,325 m, is of interest for the *cajamarcae* form of the Rufous Antpitta, plus several other species. The best site is located a few kilometres from the village. The village is just before the highest point of the northern route, near the village of Micuypampa, at 3,760 m. From here it is downhill to Cajamarca. A side ravine before the town of La Encañada, 3,160 m, is worth a visit for Rufous-eared Brush-Finch.

Access: Both are stops along the road with a short walk. There are no facilities on site.

Birds: Cruz Conga: Puna Ibis, Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull, Band-winged Nightjar, Andean Swift, Tyrian Metaltail, Black Metaltail, Stripe-headed Antpitta, Rufous Antpitta, Slender-billed Miner, Striated Earthcreeper, Rusty-crowned Tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Streak-backed Canastero, Streak-throated Canastero, Line-cheeked Spinetail, White-throated Tyrannulet, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant, Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant, White-browed Ground-Tyrant, White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant, Rufous-webbed Bush-Tyrant, Jelski's Chat-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Sedge Wren, Paramo Pipit, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Plain-tailed Warbling-Finch, Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch, Yellow-bellied Seedeater, Band-tailed Seedeater, Rufous-eared Brush-Finch.

La Encañada: Tyrian Metaltail, Black Metaltail, Shining Sunbeam, Rusty-crowned Tit-Spinetail, Streak-backed Canastero, Baron's Spinetail, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Yellow-breasted Brush-Finch, Rufous-eared Brush-Finch.

Chugur, San Marcos - San Nicolas and Sulluscocha

The main town of San Marcos is some 60 km southeast of Cajamarca. The site of interest is 9 km before the town in the village of Chugur at 2,650 m. A trail from the village enters a ravine with dry scrub and cactus and is the best spot for the Great Spinetail and others. After 2.5 km the trail comes out again on the main road, where the tour transport will be waiting.

On the main road out of Cajamarca to San Marcos, before the town of Namora there are two highland lakes which are worth visiting. San Nicolas lake is much larger, with more birds and has a track all the way around which allows for a pleasant side trip and birding. Sulluscocha is a smaller lake closer to the road.



Access: Easy to all sites. Chugur requires an easy downhill walk of 2.5 km.

Facilities: No facilities at sites.

Birds: Chugur: Andean Swift, Speckled Hummingbird, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Black Metaltail, Spot-throated Hummingbird, Andean Emerald, Black-necked Woodpecker, Slender-billed Miner, Great Spinetail, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, White-winged Black-Tyrant, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, Buff-bridled Inca-Finch, Grassland Yellow-Finch.

San Nicolas lake: Andean Tinamou, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Puna Teal, Yellow-billed Teal, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Silvery Grebe, Little Blue Heron, Striated Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Puna Ibis, Cinereous Harrier, Plumbeous Rail, Slate-colored Coot, Andean Lapwing, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Andean Gull, Andean Hillstar, Wren-like Rushbird.

Rio Chonta-Sangal, Cumbemayo, Abra Gavilán

These three sites are in the vicinity of Cajamarca, with Rio Chonta or Sangal being the most important for its species. All sites are half-day visits, returning to Cajamarca and involve limited walking.

Rio Chonta – Sangal: is a valley to the northeast of Cajamarca. If staying in Cajamarca the journey is about half an hour, first driving round the airport, passing through Ventanillas de Otuzco, which is also worth a stop and on to a bridge over the Rio Chonta. From this point uphill is the best place to see the very rare and threatened Gray-bellied Comet. If staying in Baños del Inca, there is a back road, avoiding Cajamarca, which eventually meets up with the bridge mentioned above. The best spots for the hummingbird are further up the valley, before a steep sided gorge. Parking here and birding from the road downhill is recommended. The valley has some small farm holdings and steep sides in places with xerophytic vegetation and until the sun gets up can be quite chilly.

Cumbemayo: this site is a well-known tourist attraction; one for the pre-Incan water channels cut into the rock, which still work, and two for the strange ‘forest’ of jagged rock formations which thrust up out of the ground. The site is about 50 minutes from Cajamarca, and has a parking area and toilets. From here there are good trails through the rock-forest which allow for birding this high altitude grassland at 3,600 m.

Abra Gavilan: is the pass at 3,200 m on the main road from Cajamarca to the coast, about 40 minutes to the pass. Birding is okay from the road on the descent on the coastal side.

Birds: Rio Chonta – Sangal: Bare-faced Ground-Dove, Black-winged Ground-Dove, Chestnut-collared Swift, Andean Swift, Gray-bellied Comet, Andean Hillstar, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Tyrian Metaltail, Black Metaltail, Giant Hummingbird, White-bellied Woodstar, Spot-throated Hummingbird, Mountain Parakeet, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Andean Parakeet, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Striated Earthcreeper, White-winged Cinclodes, Rusty-crowned Tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Line-cheeked Spinetail, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Torrent Tyrannulet, Jelski’s Chat-Tyrant, White-browed Chat-Tyrant, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Rufous-backed Inca-Finch, Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch, Greenish Yellow-Finch.

Cumbemayo: Andean Tinamou, Puna Ibis, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Andean Lapwing, Andean Hillstar, Shining Sunbeam, Giant Hummingbird, Andean Flicker, Mountain Caracara, Slender-billed Miner, Striated Earthcreeper, Many-striped Canastero, Streak-backed Canastero, Streak-throated Canastero, Line-cheeked Spinetail, White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant, Paramo Pipit, Peruvian Sierra-Finch, Mourning Sierra-Finch, Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch.

Abra Gavilan: Black Metaltail, Unicolored Tapaculo, Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch.

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