



BIRDWATCHING & PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Abra Málaga & Polylepis Forest

One of the great birding roads of the Andes — Polylepis endemics, cloud-forest bamboo specialists and a 4,316 m pass, in a single day from the Sacred Valley.

Photo © Jean Paul Perret

DURATION

Full day (~13 hours)

DEPARTURE

Pre-dawn from
Ollantaytambo (Cusco)

ELEVATION

~2,700–4,316 m

GROUP SIZE

1–6

FROM

\$295 per person

1 pax \$620 · 2 pax \$360 · 3+ pax \$295

The road climbing out of Ollantaytambo over the Abra Málaga pass is one of the most celebrated birding transects in Peru. In a single day it crosses humid cloud forest, wind-stunted Polylepis woodland, high puna grassland and a drier western slope — four ecosystems, each with its own set of specialities, several found almost nowhere else on Earth.

The pass's treasure is the Polylepis: gnarled, red-barked woodland clinging to the high slopes and among the most threatened forest types anywhere. It shelters the critically endangered Royal Cinclodes, the endemic White-browed Tit-Spinetail, Tawny Tit-Spinetail, Line-fronted Canastero and the dazzling Giant Conebill. On the humid east slope, bamboo and elfin forest hold the endemic Inca Wren, Marcapata Spinetail, Cuzco Brushfinch, Unstreaked Tit-Tyrant and Grass-green Tanager, while the drier descent adds Creamy-crested Spinetail, Rusty-fronted Canastero and White-tufted Sunbeam.

TARGET SPECIES

- Royal Cinclodes
- Marcapata Spinetail
- Cuzco Brushfinch
- Creamy-crested Spinetail
- Rusty-fronted Canastero
- Tawny Tit-Spinetail
- Line-fronted Canastero
- Puna Tapaculo
- Shining Sunbeam
- Blue-mantled Thornbill
- Andean Hillstar
- Red-crested Cotinga
- Bearded Mountaineer

· endemic to Peru

- White-browed Tit-Spinetail
- Inca Wren
- Unstreaked Tit-Tyrant
- White-tufted Sunbeam
- Giant Conebill
- Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant
- Stripe-headed Antpitta
- Grass-green Tanager
- Tyrian Metaltail
- Purple-backed Thornbill
- D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant
- Andean Parakeet
- Andean Condor

DAY BY DAY

Pre-dawn — depart Ollantaytambo

We leave Ollantaytambo around 4:30 AM (a Cusco pickup can be arranged) and climb the switchbacks toward the Abra Málaga pass in the dark. Timing it this way puts us on the upper east slope just as the cloud forest wakes and the first mixed flocks begin to move.

East slope — cloud forest & bamboo

We work the humid elfin forest and Chusquea bamboo of the San Luis area for the endemic Inca Wren, Marcapata Spinetail, Cuzco Brushfinch and Unstreaked Tit-Tyrant. Grass-green Tanager, Stripe-headed Antpitta and roving mixed flocks of tanagers and furnariids keep the pace fast through the morning.

The pass & Polylepis woodland

At the 4,316 m pass we trek gently into the gnarled Polylepis stands — the heart of the day — searching for the critically endangered Royal Cinclodes, White-browed and Tawny Tit-Spinetails, Line-fronted Canastero and the striking Giant Conebill. We take a boxed lunch in the woodland while we wait for the specialists to show.

Puna & summit

Around the pass we scan the open puna and cushion bogs for Puna Tapaculo, Blue-mantled and Purple-backed Thornbills, Andean Hillstar, D'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant and Andean Parakeet. Andean Condors patrol the ridgelines, and the high-altitude scenery is spectacular in every direction.

Western slope & return

On the drier western descent we pick up a different set — Creamy-crested Spinetail, Rusty-fronted Canastero, White-tufted Sunbeam and Red-crested Cotinga — as the habitat shifts back to inter-Andean scrub. We reach Ollantaytambo or Cusco in the evening after one of the richest single days of birding in the Andes.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

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- Private transportation from Ollantaytambo (Cusco pickup available)
- Expert bilingual birding guide
- Boxed breakfast and lunch
- Conservation-area access fees

NOT INCLUDED

- Accommodation in Ollantaytambo or Cusco
- Personal expenses and tips

Ready to book, or want it tailored?

wildandestours.com/abra-malaga-birding-tour/ · sales@wildandestours.com

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