

# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

We spent most of August in Ecuador this year, visiting three regions of the country, Amazonia, The Galápagos Islands, and the Andes mountain range. From Seattle it was a long flight to Atlanta then another to Quito. Quito was our base for the other travel within Ecuador. This was with a tour group of eleven other travelers with a driver and one or two guides at any given time. It was a great trip to places we had been (Amazonia albeit Peruvian) and places we have wanted to see. In particular The Galápagos Islands.

This edition of *Flying Pig Adventures* will be about the Amazonia portion of the trip.

We spent a couple days in Quito after the flights from Seattle and Atlanta touring Quito and insuring all travelers arrived as well as any wayward luggage.

We had to rearrange and repack what we needed for Amazonia due to luggage and space limitations on the flight over to El Coca as well as the canoe style boat that would take us down the Napo River to the lodge. Excess luggage was left at the hotel. My luggage to Amazonia consisted mostly of camera gear and an extra set of underwear for the three or four days we would be there.

I had misunderstood and thought only a small carry on bag would be allowed. As it turns out my understanding was not 100% accurate as we could have checked a bag. No big deal, I stayed with our original one carry on plan... but I was shamed into either buying another set of clothes from the Amazonia lodge gift shop or be expelled from the group. Wendy preferred I not travel along at this point so I am well logod with an entire The Napo Cultural Center uniform.

As you can see from the maps, we did a lot of moving about in Ecuador. We were certainly tired when we got home. A bit more than we anticipated and/or have experienced before. However, we are already eager to be on the road again and on our way to the SW for the winter. We plan to have this issue out before we leave the first part of October and finish with two more issues covering our other travels in Ecuador while on our way down to Tucson over the next month or so. As we like to do, we plan on making many stops on our way down to Tucson. We plan to have some fun adventures to report on from those stops as well.





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After the recovery, sightseeing and repacking days in Quito, we headed back to the Quito airport for a short flight over the Andes to a town called El Coca (at the confluence of the Coca and Napo rivers).

You can click on the image below for a short video of what I saw out the airplane window. It is probably best to view the video via a WiFi connection and avoid using up your cellular data.

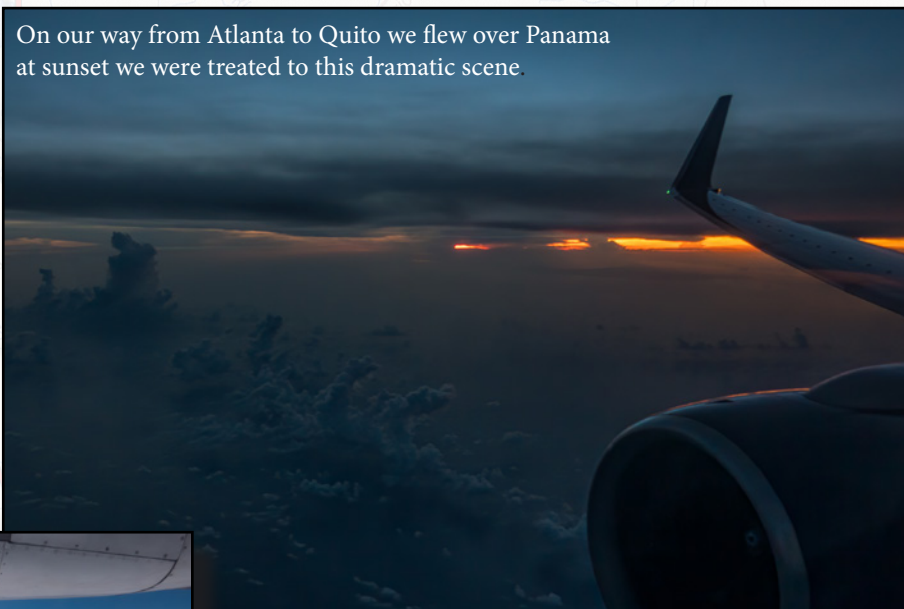
The first part of the flight out of Quito video shows that although Quito is in a valley between high andes mountains all around it, the land is still very rugged with very steep gorges and ravines all over the valley. you will see that even though the tops of the ridges are flat and plateau-like, there really isn't any large areas where it is flat.



Below, Wendy is happy in her 'jungle boots' and looking forward to our attitude adjustment hour.



On our way from Atlanta to Quito we flew over Panama at sunset we were treated to this dramatic scene.



Once we landed and the others that had understood checked bags were okay (and had done so) collected their checked luggage and we were bused to a nearby dock where we boarded canoes similar to the one below. It was about a three hour ride down river to the lodge we were staying at, The Napo Cultural Center. The Napo Cultural Center has a web site where you can see the rooms, facilities, and read about all the activities they offer. <https://www.napoculturalcenter.com/>



The image to the right is from our boat. The pilot and navigator weaved us down river, from side to side, avoiding (mostly) sandbars, shallow water and debris (submerged and otherwise).

If you click the image there is another short video of scenes from the boat. Again, it is probably best to view the video via a WiFi connection and avoid using up your cellular data.





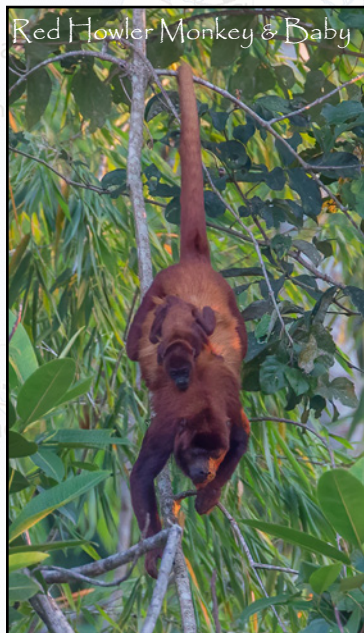
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The next pages are the wildlife images I was able to make in Ecuador's Amazonia.

Since we were very limited in how much luggage we could take to Amazonia it was impractical for me to take my big DSLR fixed focal length lenses, extenders and supporting gear (which would have given me 400mm / 560mm / 600mm / 840mm / 1200mm fixed focal lengths). Instead, I only took two zoom lenses on this trip, a 100-400mm and a 24-70mm. I also felt that since it is very easy to get close to wildlife on the Galápagos Islands, even if with my maximum focal length of 400mm on this trip, I'd probably still get some good photo opportunities, in particular while in the Galápagos Islands.

Of course I still had a small PnS (Point and Shoot) camera that many of the images in my travelogues are made with. As well, had the iPhone and iPad which also have cameras. And of course all the supporting electronica!

So... in retrospect... as far as the Amazonian photography goes, I missed my BIG lenses and gear very much. There are images here that are satisfactory in terms of resolution and quality necessary for the travelogues, but most, if not all, are not sufficient in the qualities necessary for printing. Most of the Amazonia images are cropped and/or processed too much to leave enough of those magic pixels necessary for printing (or at least for very big ones). I've yet to process the Galápagos Island photographs, but suspect I'll have more success with those.



Red Howler Monkey & Baby



Squirrel Monkey



Squirrel Monkey



Squirrel Monkey



Black Agouti



Typically, the wildlife stayed under the cover of the jungle (like the image to the right of the Red Howler Monkeys) and we would only get momentary views in the open.



Leaping Red Howler Monkey



# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019



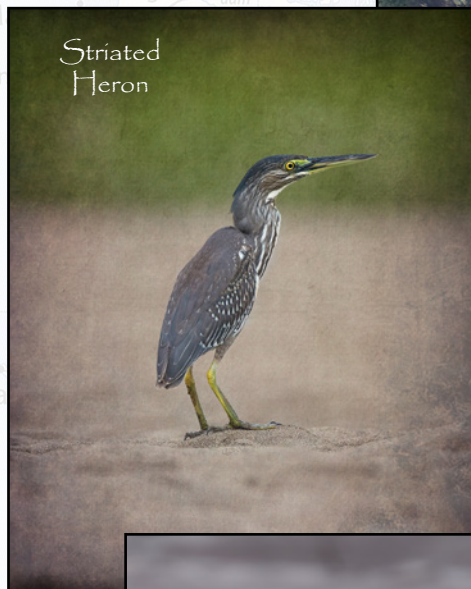
Great Egret



Mealy Amazon Parrots



Greater Ani



Striated Heron



Black Vulture



White-Winged Swallows



Ladder-Tailed Nightjar



# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

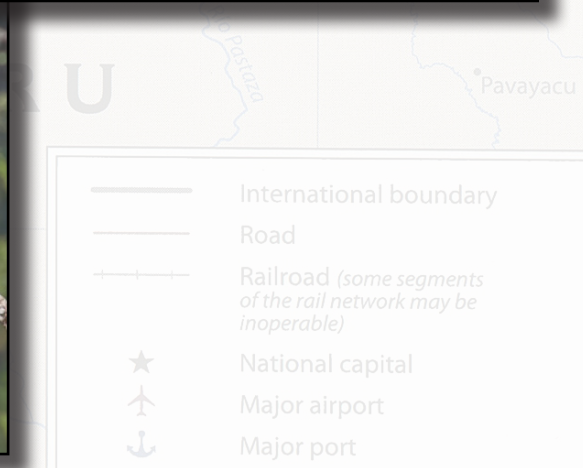
One morning we scaled a viewing tower nearby to do a little bird watching. The tower was 220 steps up and poked us out up and above the jungle canopies. So high that we looked down on most of the birds.



White-Throated Toucan



White-Throated Toucans



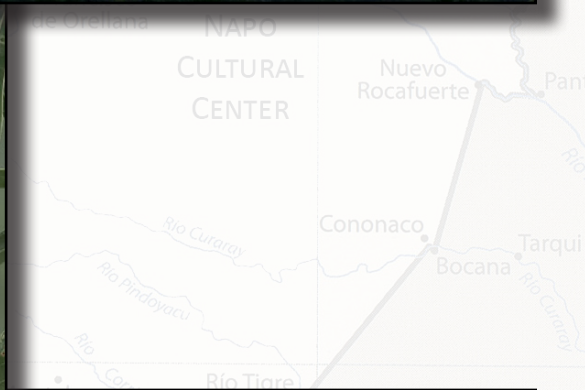
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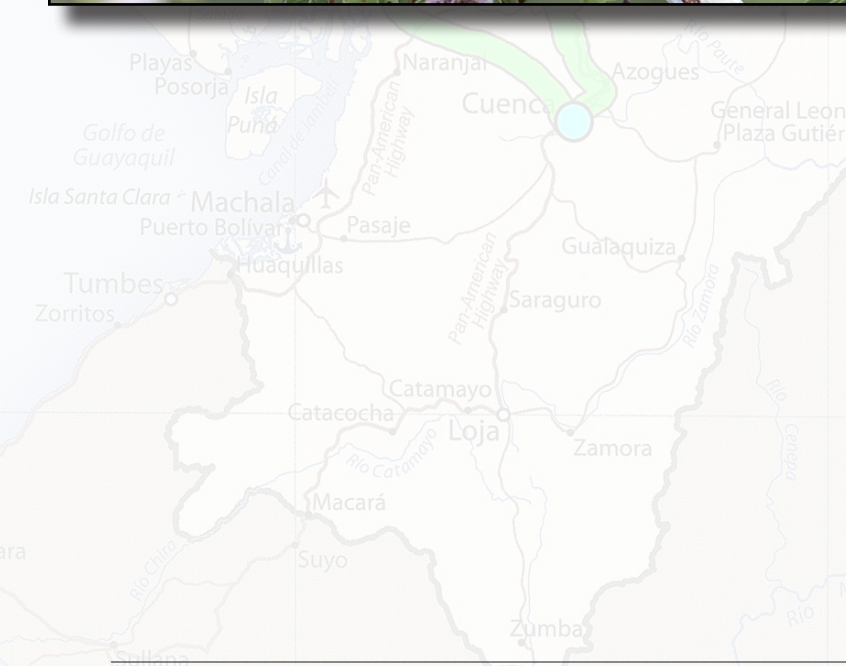
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House Wren

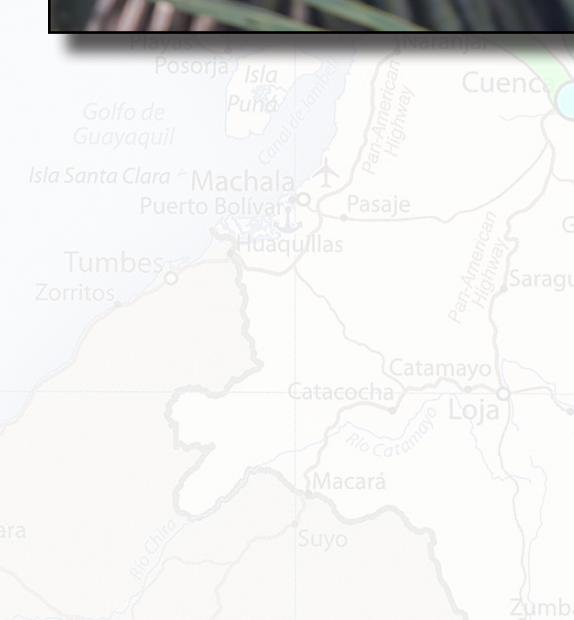
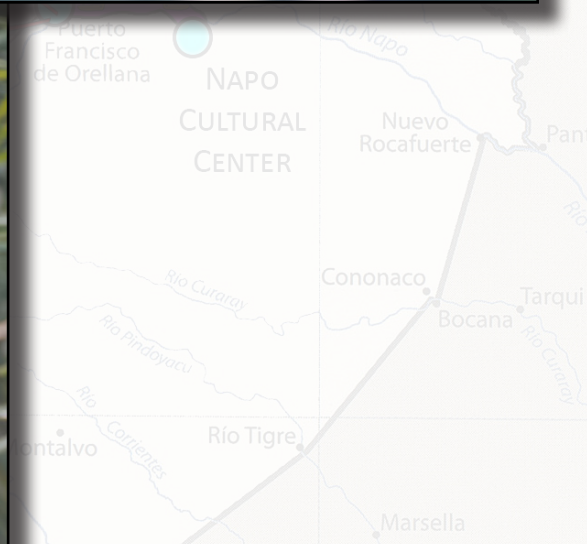


Many-Banded Aracari





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# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

This next image is for you to have fun with. There are several Dusky-Headed Parrots in these trees, see how many you can find. On the next page you will find the same image with red circles showing them and a couple of yellow circles I 'think' are Dusky-Headed Parrots but I am not 100% sure.





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# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

More hard to find wildlife is in the image to the right, a Red Tailed Boa Constrictor. The image is a blown up area of the image below. See if you can find the Red Tailed Boa Constrictor in the image below.

Our 'hunter' guides, attuned to whatever reveals the wildlife to them, would invariably find things that even when they did point it out we could not see. Keep in mind, images like the one below and one of all the parrots were photographed with a 400mm lens. Imagine what it was like with the naked eye!



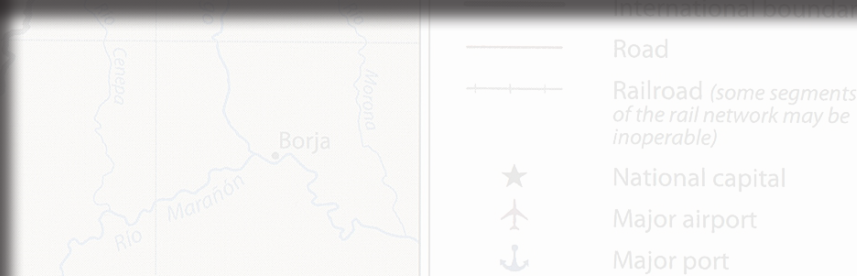


# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

On a couple trips we stopped at unique clay cliffs and/or licks that parrots and the-like birds go to. They go here to get an antidote to the poisons they ingest with the fruit and other foods they normally eat. There is some substance in these spots the rid their bodies of these otherwise fatal poisons. They have to do this every few days or they will die.

These areas are well known and other tourists in boats will hang out at them (on the Napo River in boats) waiting for the masses of parrots to come. This is a very vulnerable time for the birds as when they land they are easy prey to things that will eat them. So... one will usually see and/or hear the birds mass in the tress above the cliff, which is at waters edge, and wait for some brave, adventurous or desperate bird to land... and survive. Only then will the rest come in to feed on the antitoxins necessary for their survival. Any sign of a predator (or any potential danger) and they will not land and try another day. Even the tourists are asked to be quiet and still as not to spook the birds away.

At this particular spot, the birds were massing in the trees above but would not come in. After some time and just about giving up for the day, our guides saw what was keeping the birds from coming in. In the photograph below, again a photograph using a 400mm lense, one can just make out the predator keeping them from landing, and then probably only if you know what you are looking for (a snake, a big Red Tailed Boa Constrictor). Yet another example of just how keen our guides were at seeing 'stuff'.





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In the end, all the parrots just flew away. We came back later for a second look and still no mass of birds. There was only a lone Yellow-Crowned Amazon that we saw land at the cliff. In the end, even the brave Yellow-Crowned Amazon feeding was not enough for the rest of the birds to feel comfortable enough to land and feed for themselves.



Tourists Waiting For Parrots To Land At A Clay Lick



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At another 'clay-lick' Colbalt-Winged Parakeets did land. Here they there are getting their life-saving antidote from the water. We arrived at this location when the birds were all in the jungle canopy above. In a mass descent they began landing and competing for space to acquire the antidote. Almost all were Colbalt-Winged Parakeets, where at the Napo River 'clay-lick' there was a variety of parrots, parakeets and like-birds. I don't remember seeing Colbalt-Winged Parakeets there.



As quickly as they had descended from the jungle canopy, they also exited in mass... flying directly at, around and over us. And with that they were gone, leaving me almost breathless from the incredible experience. I 'almost' got on video. My lack of experience with the video features of my DSLR found me floundering and having not pushed the right buttons to make it happen! The best I could do was the still photograph below of the tail end of the exodus, a most inadequate capture of the real experience.





# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

## Insects and Small Stuff

Walking-Stick



Leaf Bug



Crested Forest Toad



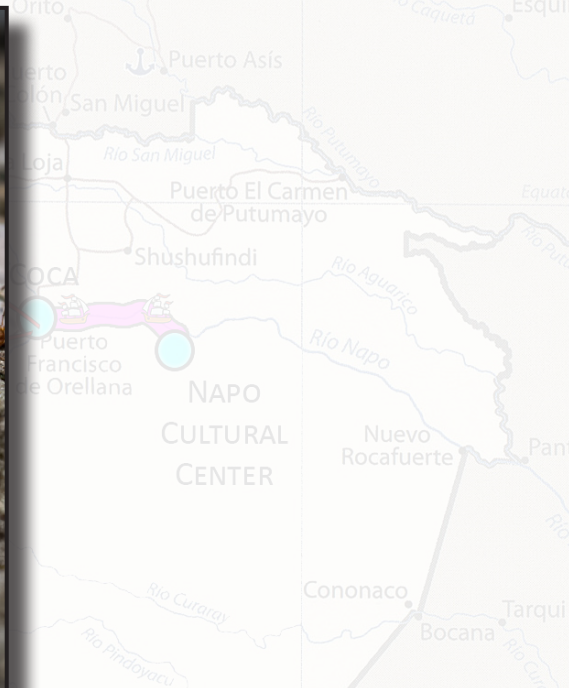
Suri: a large, plump grub that is food eaten in the jungle regions along the Amazon Basin. Eaten alive, raw, BBQ'd and/or Kabob'd. I declined live and raw but did put a BBQ'd one in my mouth, chewed a bit, but DID NOT swallow!





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There were lots of different kinds of ants that we saw. The ones below are just one of the 47 species of Leafcutter ants and one where the size varies enough to easily see the size difference between some of the castes. A single species is divided into castes based mostly upon size. Each of the castes perform different functions. I think the small ones (below / left) are 'minors', the large one managing the portion of leaf a 'mediae' and the large one (below / right) is a 'major'. These were all part of the same colony. The smallest of the castes is the 'minims', which are usually working underground. Minors easily seen on the portion of leaf and around the column, the larger 'mediae' is carrying the leaf and generally they do the cutting and foraging. The one on the right is a 'major', the largest and the soldiers of the colony. I sensed this major was not happy with me getting so up close and personal with the colony.



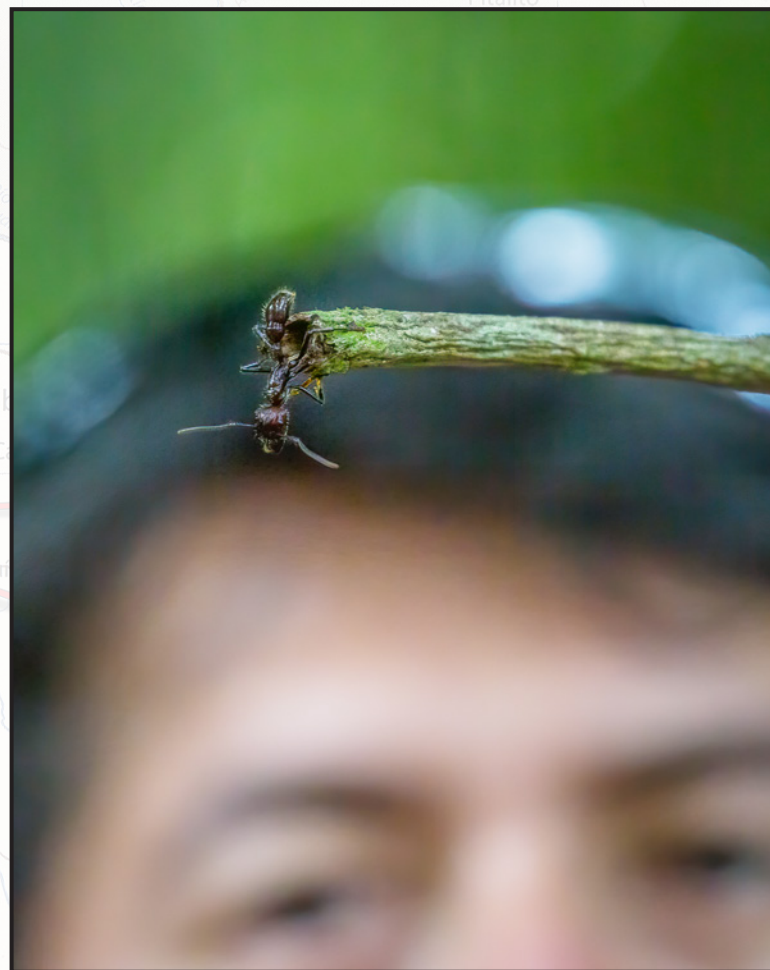


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The dreaded Bullet ant. They are not named because they are gun-metal gray or because they're shaped like a bullet, but rather because the pain from their sting is apparently like getting shot. They are also known as the 24 hour ant as the pain supposedly takes 24 hours to go away. Putting these two things together means these are the animals jungle guides most fear in the Amazon. Bullet ants often sting as people brush by vegetation the ants are standing on. If you have your wits about you, you will spot these large ants standing on leaves as you walk through the rainforest. Although painful, there are generally no long term effects and Amazon Indians use these ants in initiation rituals to mark the occasion when boys become men.

I think the most memorable statistic I learned while there was that in just one hectare (2.47 acres) of Ecuador Amazonia there is more biodiversity than in the entirety of North America.

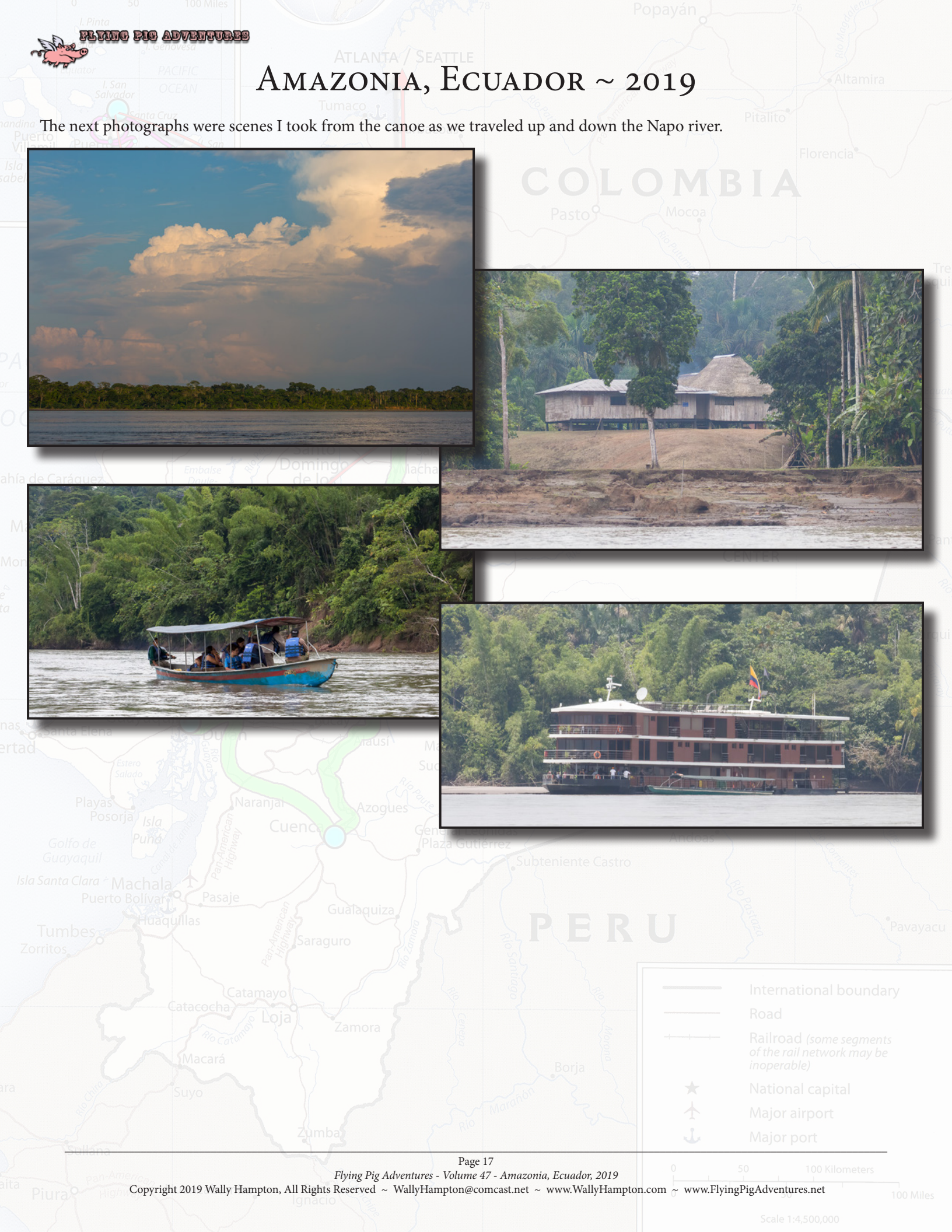
And of course there are lots of spider too. I kept these images small as a curtesy to some of my more timid readers.





# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

The next photographs were scenes I took from the canoe as we traveled up and down the Napo river.





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Barges like these (as well as their cargo of refined petroleum products bound for places where even more crude oil was being produced) were very common.



There were lots of fast boats powered by multiple outboard motors. I even saw one huge old cargo barge powered by outboard engines (themselves looking old and tired). And a few slower ones like the manually powered one below.





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The cargo in the canoe below is very curious. A Pink Dolphin, a Tapir and a pile of brooms? I am convinced that these fellows (one is asleep with a red towel over his head) are wildlife smugglers.



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on River Turtles

## Yellow-Spotted Amazon River Turtles



## Ringed Kingfisher



## Ringed Kingfisher





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There are lots of bat species in Ecuador, in particular the food rich areas of Amazonia. While we saw a few at night, these Proboscis (Long Nosed) Bats were the only ones I got a photograph of. Another find that even though I was looking directly at them, only a few yards away, I could not find them. The guides had to point them out with a laser pointer before I found them. These are small bats, around 2.4 inches long and 0.14 ounces in weight. The species is characterized by its long, fleshy, and pointed nose. Its fur is soft and dense and is brownish-grey in color, with two white stripes down the back. Whether these stripes serve a purpose, such as camouflage or attraction of mates, is unknown. This bat also has gray tufts of fur on the forearms. No matter what time of day these features may make the bat difficult to see.

Proboscis bats live in colonies (groups). The colonies are usually between five and ten individuals, and very rarely exceed forty. The bats are nocturnal, sleeping during the day in an unusual formation: they line up, one after another, on a branch or wooden beam, nose to tail, in a straight row. The location is usually just a bit above the water where predators are less likely.

This small species of bat has been found to occasionally fall prey to the large spider. I did not see any spiders THAT big!



Our group split into two smaller canoes and were paddled up a small Napo River tributary one afternoon. While we did not go that far, the tributary leads to an exclusive (expensive) resort on a lake. All transportation and supplies to and from that lodge is done in non-powered canoes like we were in. On this small river one got a really good feel for how dense and enclosing the jungle can be. While there was not much in the way of wildlife photography opportunities this time (outside of another group of leaping Red Howler Monkeys) the scenery was wonderful.



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Common Piping-Guan



Southern Lapwing

The Hoatzin below is also known as the reptile bird, skunk bird, or stinkbird. It is an herbivore, eating leaves and fruit, and has an unusual digestive system used for fermentation of vegetable matter. The alternative name of "stinkbird" is due to the bird's foul odor, which is caused by the fermentation of food in its digestive system. Our guide called it the 'Stinky Chicken', the name I prefer. It is also notable for having chicks that have claws on tier wing digits so they can claw their way back into the trees and their nest after falling from the nest, (evidently a common occurrence).



The young man's coiffure fascinated me and reminded me of the Hoatzin (Stinky Chicken). I am coining his hair style as the 'Stinky Chicken' and assume he is one of the coolest and most admired kids in Amazonia. When you see me next time I may have the 'Stinky Chicken' coiffure myself... I sometimes do when I wake up anyway!



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This is another young man I envied. He had just seen a Jaguar. One my most wanted animals to see and photograph in the wild. Unfortunately the Jaguars have recently been targeting dogs and have become very brave in their pursuit. This fellow had seen one in daylight hours come to his porch and try to take his pet dog. All involved survived the encounter, but it has become such a problem that people are trying to live trap the jaguars and relocate them. Below is one of the traps they are using, baiting them using live chickens (which the jaguar can not actually reach they say).



We spent some time at the local school playing games with the students. Here Wendy and her dancing partner (the lucky jaguar fellow above) hold the ball between them while dancing to music. The object being not to let the ball fall while dancing AND not touch the ball... or at least not before all the other couples dancing drop theirs. Wendy and her partner won too! Clearly the young jaguar fellow is charmed with all sorts of good fortune! We later went to his home for lunch and where I chewed a bit on that grub. No jaguar this time, but I was keeping an eye on his dog just in case.

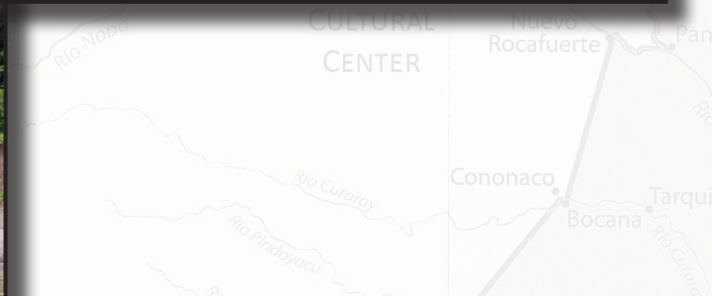
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One last day, with the first serious rain day, I enjoyed my 'Situation Room' as daylight came. Yes, we did have Internet access there. The world actually IS flat!

The weather soon cleared, we piled into the outboard powered canoe with our luggage and headed back up stream on the Napo River to El Coca.



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We arrived in El Coca with enough time to visit a local market area before heading to the airport.

El Coca also goes by the name Puerto Francisco de Orellana.

Francisco de Orellana Bejarano Pizarro y Torres de Altamirano (1511 - November 1546) was a Spanish explorer and conquistador. He completed the first known navigation of the entire length of the Amazon River, which initially was named "Rio de Orellana."

If you are curious about the word 'alcantarillado', it translates to 'sewer system' of course.



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We also took a walk thru the market food court and a last chance to try some BBQ'd grubs...



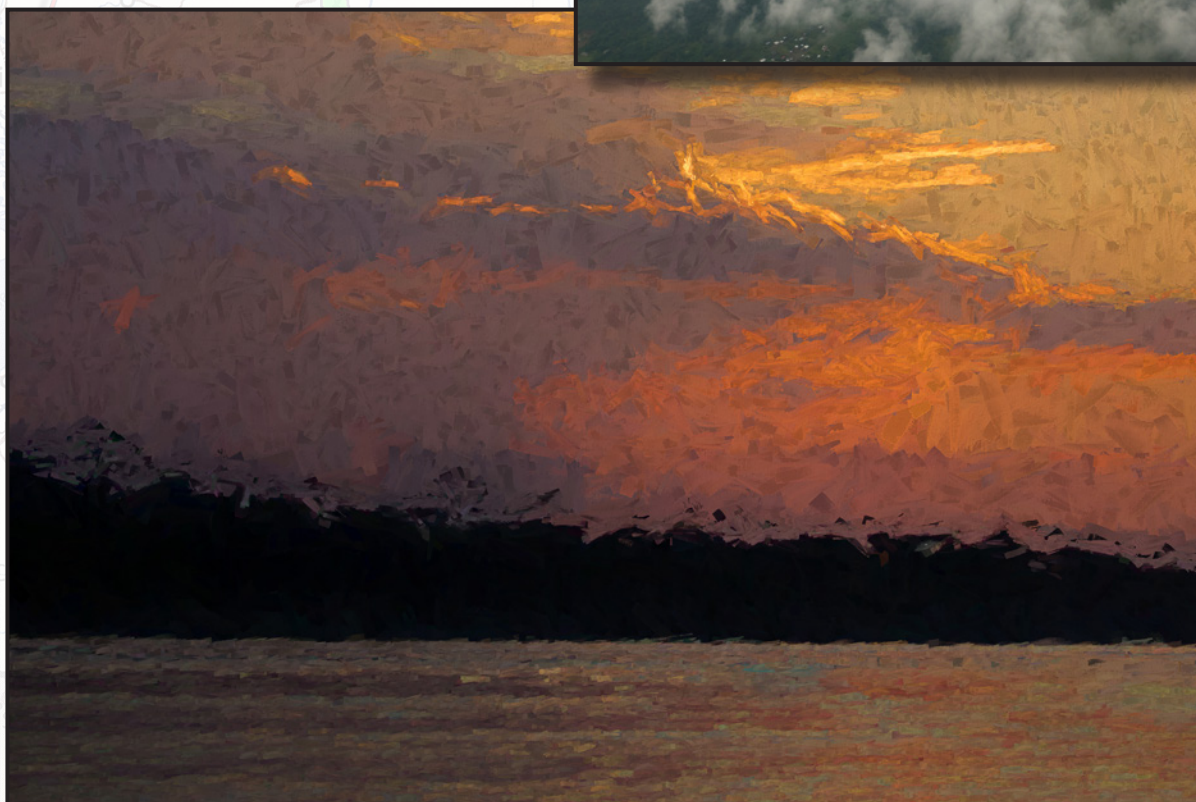


# AMAZONIA, ECUADOR ~ 2019

After the food court, we felt a stop at the market naturopathic pharmacy would be appropriate.



After our short visit to the market we were bused to the El Coca airport where we caught a flight back across the Andes to Quito. A short video of that can be seen by clicking the image to the right of the Napo River as we left Amazonia.



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