

**3<sup>rd</sup> Birding Rally Challenge ends in Machu Picchu with 619 species observed**  
US team Field Guides won with 457 species, while Sunbird and Surbound managed to tie for second place

**FINAL RESULTS (DAY 6)**

FIELD GUIDES (USA) –457

SUNBIRD (UK) – 455

SURBOUND (USA) – 455

BIRDING ECOTOURS (SOUTH AFRICA) – 389

AVIATUR (COLOMBIA) – 350

**TOTAL SPECIES = 619 (6% of the world's total species)**

As soon as Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica's entrance bell gave the start at 5 a.m., birders from all over the world pulled out their field glasses and were ready to hit their commissioned trails. Rainy weather was not an issue for them, nor the fact of waking up before sunrise for the six days that followed. Peru's mega biodiversity was to be confirmed during the Birding Rally Challenge, a unique competition that travels through an 800 km route, from the Tambopata Natural Reserve in the Amazon Rainforest, to the cloud forests of Machu Picchu.

The Birding Rally Challenge serves a scientific purpose, as it was created to upgrade bird inventories Inkaterra has worked on since 1979. Recollection of data creates awareness on the environment and encourages conservation. Listed the third country with the largest number of bird species (1836 registered, 1/5 of all species throughout the world), Peru can turn this potential into a source of sustainable development. Local communities can improve life quality via ecotourism, if their natural patrimony is preserved.

Participants were based at Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica (Madre de Dios) for the first three days, which allowed them to discover Amazonian ecosystems. The routes included Valencia Lake, three hours away from the lodge and near the Peru-Bolivia border; Inkaterra's Canopy Walkway, a system of two towers and eight bridges at 100 feet from the ground, which allows the observation of the canopy's flora and fauna; and the amazing Lake Sandoval, a water mirror surrounded by wetlands (*Mauritia flexuosa*) that hosts giant otters, caimans, howler monkeys and a great variety of birds. The area was so diverse that for Day 1, the aggregate was 303 bird species.

Teams headed to Machu Picchu on Day 4. They stopped at Piuray, a crystal-clear lagoon at the feet of the Pituiray and Sawasiray snowed peaks, near the town of Chinchero. Huaypo lagoon was the second stop, before catching a train in Ollantaytambo. Birders arrived to Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel at midnight, and before dawn they were ready to bird around the Lost City of the Incas. At 7200 feet above sea level, a whole new ecosystem was to be validated in teams' checklists.

By then, US team Field Guides was on the lead with an advantage of just one bird species. Team member Dan Lane –described by Judge Barry Walker as the “Lionel Messi of birdwatching”– contributed to these results with his exceptional sense of hearing, capable of identifying an enormous variety of bird calls.

After observing a total of 619 species, the third edition of the Birding Rally Challenge came to an end on December 9<sup>th</sup> at Machu Picchu's Café Inkaterra. With just an advantage of two bird species, US team Field Guides raised their glasses of champagne along the John O' Neill cup, named after the pioneer of birding in Peru. Competition has been so tight that Sunbird (UK) and Surbound (US) tied for second place with 455 species each.

Organized by Inkaterra Asociación and PromPeru, the rally allowed teams to watch 6% of the world's total number of species, with four endemics among them. A documentary on the Birding Rally Challenge, directed by Discovery Channel host James Currie, will be released in 2014.

### **NEW SPECIES FOR MACHU PICCHU**

On the last day of the competition, at 5:02 a.m., a new species was registered for Machu Picchu. UK team Sunbird was 3 km down river from Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, where they spent their last day of competition at the Birding Rally Challenge Peru 2013. Despite of the dark and adverse weather due to the rainy season, the group led by Stuart Elsom managed to register a Band-bellied Owl (*Pulsatrix melanota*) for the Machu Picchu area.

According to the book 'Birds of Peru', the Band-bellied owl is described as a species "Uncommon to fairly common in humid montane forest along east slope of Andes and on outlying ridges". It is similar to a larger Spectacled Owl, but has a brown iris and an extensively banded belly with rufous brown.

The historic picture of the Band-bellied Owl was taken by Inkaterra field guide José Luis Lavilla Holguín.