

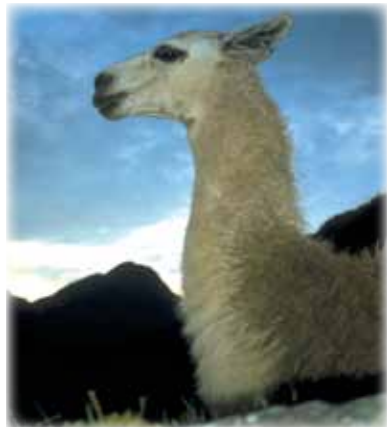
2.4 Andean wildlife



Vicuña, a wild camelid with exquisite wool

Peru has four camelid animals. Two are domesticated: the llama and alpaca, and you will see plenty of them; llamas are widely used as beasts of burden. Llama manure also had an important agricultural role, allowing the Incas to cultivate cereals at high altitude. The animal below was photographed at Machu Picchu.

The country's two wild camelids are more exotic: guanaco and vicuña. The rare vicuña is highly prized for its exquisite wool, the softest and finest in the world. With a yield of only 250 grams per shearing, and only four or five shearings per lifetime, it is very expensive. The species is endangered, and protected by law. Vicuña wool was used exclusively for making the finest clothes for the Inca himself. It features in the national flag of Peru: see page 21.



Llama near the guardhouse at dawn

Another interesting mammal is the shy Spectacled bear (*Tremarchus ornatus*). Each animal has a unique set of face markings. Machu Picchu Sanctuary is one of only two conservation areas for the habitat of this endearing animal, sadly threatened with extinction from loss of habitat. They live only in cloud forest at altitudes between 1900 and 2400 m. They are rare and very wary of humans, so you are unlikely to see one.

While hiking, especially near dawn or dusk, watch out for the agile viscacha, which looks like a long-tailed rabbit but is actually a cousin of the chinchilla: see the photograph below.

They feed on vegetation among the rocks, and you could see one on the Trail at any altitude. Despite their Latin name *Lagidium peruanum*, they are found in other Andean countries – in Chile, Bolivia and Argentina.

A new rodent was discovered in 2000 by Louise Emmons, an American biologist who was climbing in the mountains near Machu Picchu. It was a pale grey tree rat as large as a domestic cat, and she named it *Cuscomys ashaninka*. It was not only a new species, but also a new genus. Later she observed that it was related to the tomb rats whose remains were found in 1916 in the tombs at Machu Picchu. Previously these had been thought to be extinct.



Spectacled bear (male)



Mountain viscacha resting on a rock



The Andean condor

Bird life is extremely varied: over 370 species live within the Sanctuary. The largest is the condor, which feeds on carrion and weighs about 10 kg. Its body is black except for a white neck ruff, and it soars majestically on a 3-metre wing span. However, you are more likely to see condor at the Colca Canyon, near Arequipa, than on the Trail.

You will glimpse many kinds of hummingbird as they flash across the Trail, especially during the approach to Machu Picchu where flowers proliferate. They scull their wings in a figure-of-eight at up to 80 beats per second while hovering to sip nectar or catch insects. For a close view, or a good photograph, you need patience and skill: and see page 43.

Other birds you may see include the mountain caracara, a scavenging kind of falcon; it occupies the niche filled by crows in temperate latitudes. On the higher ground you might see American falcon and buzzard eagle. Lower down, look out for the green streak of a passing parrot.

Peru's national bird is the extraordinary Cock-of-the-rock (*Rupicola peruviana saturara*). Males have dazzling bright orange heads and chests, and they gather twice daily in leks (groups) to make mating displays. This involves a great deal of screeching and prancing, designed to impress the shy, russet-coloured females. Their altitude range is about 1000-2400 m (3300-7900 ft). You may glimpse them from the ruins at Machu Picchu in the afternoons, but mainly they occur in cloud forest lower down. There is a site for watching the lek display near a tourist camp on the road from Cusco down to Manu.



Cock-of-the-rock (male)

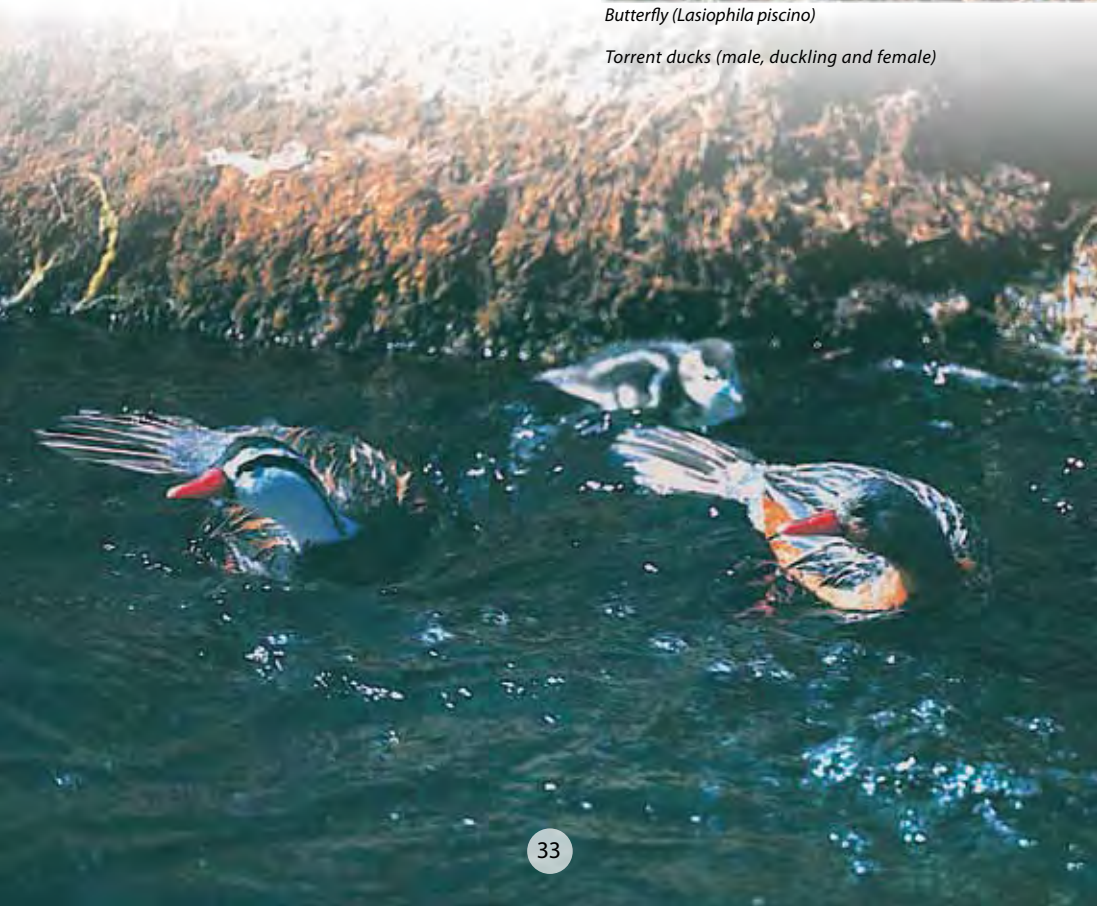
In wooded areas and near water, look out especially for butterflies. Because of its enormous diversity of habitats and wide range of climatic conditions, Peru has a vast number of ecological niches. These support more kinds of butterflies than any other country – over 3700 species, or one in five of the world's total. (Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil are also rich in species with about 3200 each.) Peru's butterflies are under-recorded so you could see and photograph a new species! Visit our Inca Trail website for links to butterfly identification sites.

Near rivers, notably the Urubamba, look out for the amazing torrent duck (*Merganetta armata*). It has a huge muscular tail which it uses as a paddle to swim upstream in white-water rapids: see the photograph below.



Butterfly (*Lasiophila piscino*)

Torrent ducks (male, duckling and female)



Damp mossy vegetation thrives in the cloud forest, with a range of colours from deep reds and oranges through to green. If you grasp it, water squeezes out as if from a sponge.

Cloud forest is home to a wide range of orchids: the Paradise orchid on the right is fairly common, but *Telipogon papilio* (below) is a rare orchid in danger of extinction.



Above: *Sobralia dichotoma* (Paradise orchid)

Below: *Telipogon papilio*



Before Llulluchapampa, the Trail runs through polylepsis woodland, home to many rare birds

Inset at top: Bomarea sanguinea grows on other plants (at over 3000 m)

Inset at left: Bromelia at Machu Picchu