

Clay Licks

They have constructed blinds at two of the clay licks of the Napo Wildlife Center Reserve Area – the most accessible parrot and macaw clay licks in Ecuador (these are open to visitors from the Sani Lodge too) Visiting these clay licks helps to support an 82-square-mile private reserve and also supports Yasuní National Park, which is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Clay licks like these are scattered throughout western Amazonia. Although locals have always known about the clay licks and the ability to see parrots well at these sites, clay licks did not gain the attention of scientists until 1984.

It is now known that clay licks form an important part of the biology of parrots and macaws. Both parrots and macaws live by eating nuts from a variety of trees. Some of these trees have developed defences against having their nuts eaten: typically by having evolved a toxin that is in the nut to protect it. Any animal that eats the nut will then become sick.



Parrots and macaws have evolved with these trees, and have developed their own response to the toxins in the nuts. The answer lies in the clay. Certain minerals in the clay are able to neutralize the toxins in these nuts, and so parrots and macaws seek out deposits of this very special clay. Once a deposit is identified, parrots and macaws will come many miles to eat the clay. This allows them to eat more nuts, and in turn allows them to survive periods when the non-toxic nuts are not available.

We are fortunate to have this very special clay here within the Napo Wildlife Center Reserve Area, and have discovered almost a dozen exposed areas of this clay within the Reserve. Blinds have been built at two of these clay licks to welcome visitors.



Saladero de Loros

The blind nearest the Napo (Saladero de Loros) is typically visited by hundreds of individuals of Mealy Parrot, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Orange-winged Parrot, Blue-headed Parrot, Dusky-headed Parakeet, and occasional White-eyed and Cobalt-winged parakeets. The blind at this site is huge, with plenty of space for upwards of 30 guests at a time, and even includes a basic bathroom. Access is a simple 50m walk along an improved path.



Saladero de Pericos

The blind in the forest (Saladero de Pericos) is typically visited by a thousand or more Cobalt-winged Parakeets. The noise is incredible! From late October through early April, hundreds of Orange-cheeked Parrots are also found in the mix, as are rarities such as the Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet and occasional Scarlet and Red-and-Green macaws. It is almost certain that other small parakeets visit this clay lick, and new species for the region and Ecuador are just waiting to be discovered. [This is the site incorrectly listed as "La Selva" and "interior salado at La Selva" in *The Birds of Ecuador* (Ridgely and Greenfield, 2001)]. Access to this clay lick involves a 700m hike on an improved path with stairs and boardwalks where necessary. The blind itself will hold upwards of 20 guests and affords fantastic views. Birdwatchers will note that this is where one can find the famous "Manakin Trail" with 6 species of manakins.