

Birding Colombia's Central Andes and coffee region

The hills of the Central Andes in Colombia are rich with coffee and birds. Enjoy both while helping the surrounding communities conserve the incredible local natural heritage.



Many-striped Canastero. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo

Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, with a huge number of species that dwarfs not just the temperate regions, but even other tropical countries. With more than 1,900 species of birds in Colombia, it is the richest country for bird species on Earth. Colombia has 79 endemic species of birds, and sadly right now more than half of them are considered species of conservation concern. This enormous biodiversity stems from the fact that Colombia is tropical, yet it also has immense elevation change due to the Andes. The Andes in Colombia split into three ranges, which increase habitat diversity, as well as rain shadow valleys between the mountains. The country also has coasts on both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. With all of these different habitats, it is not a surprise that Colombia is the 'birdiest' country in the world.

On this trip we will venture into two spurs of the Andes and the

Magdalena Valley Endemic Bird Area. In particular, in the western Andes we will visit the Chocó ecoregion with its fantastic and unique avifauna. The elevation changes between tropical valleys and mountain peaks mean a wealth of different species. We will head up above the tree line and into the páramo—a high-altitude ecosystem— and experience one of the most unique and endangered habitats on the planet, full of range-restricted endemics and area specialists. This is a land of hummingbirds and tanagers, antpittas and gorgeous parrots.

The Central Andes and coffee region (Eje Cafetero) has an important cultural, historical and economic role in Colombia. Tourists already consider this a must-see region in Colombia, and tourism and infrastructure are improving every day as more areas are becoming accessible. Birders are the vanguard, going where others have yet to discover. Some of these areas were, up until recently, not

accessible due to political and social conflict. This conflict has receded, and gorgeous areas are now open and primed for discovery.

While this itinerary is designed for the avid birder, it is also part of a process where birding becomes an active driver in economic development and ecotourism. You will visit project sites from a venture funded by the Colombian government, USFWS and MUGF and implemented by the National Audubon Society to give economic value to birds and the habitats that sustain them. As part of this program, we have trained 60 birding guides in the areas we are visiting, in birding and guiding, and in English language skills. As these people become part of the birding economy, they are becoming ambassadors for their local environment, and key people who will convince their communities to conserve habitat rather than degrade it. This is conservation of birds and habitats, through bird-focused tourism.



Rufous-fronted Parakeet. Photo: Mauricio Ossa

The birding sites we visit

VICTORIA AND THE BELLAVISTA RESERVE

The Victoria area is special. This is not only because the town of Victoria is welcoming, charming, and friendly, but also because the easily accessible forest reserve just above town is superb. The forest here is on the dry side, not considered true tropical dry forest, but a transition to it. The reason for this relative dryness is that we are in the famed Río Magdalena Valley. This is not only the valley that divided the Central from the Eastern Andes, but it is an endemic bird region of its own. Yes, there are species not found anywhere else, and they are actually accessible at the Bellavista reserve. Perhaps the two premier specialties are the White-mantled Barbet and Sooty Ant Tanager. However, let's also put the Beautiful Woodpecker on that list—it really is beautiful, and it is endemic as well. Colombian Chachalaca and Velvet-fronted Euphonia are seen here as are Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant and Apical Flycatcher. Non-endemic species include the Rufous Motmot.

Not too far away from Victoria is the oxbow lake of Guarinocito. Oxbows are “C” shaped lakes that form when the bend of a river becomes cut off, as the meander of the river intensifies over time. They are common feature of rivers that run through flat floodplains with light sediment. Guarinocito is a nice trip to do in the morning or afternoon, and a great visit for a little photography. We visit using large canoes that fit 3-6 people each.

The star of the site is the Northern Screamer, a large and heavy bird that perhaps resembles a huge chicken,



although it is in fact more closely related to the waterfowl. It has a loud call, not really a scream, but noticeable enough that it is clear why this bird family is named for its voice.

Interestingly all three of the world's Ani species can be found here, being black and lacking bright colors they are not species that people tend to think of that much. However, they are extremely interesting in their communal life style, where several males and females mate willy-nilly and all help in the care of the eggs and young - a hippie commune of the bird world. Here you can test your identification skills telling the three apart.



From top to bottom:
Beautiful Woodpecker. Photo: Armando Aguirre;
Cinnamon Woodpecker. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo.

LOS NEVADOS NATIONAL PARK

This will be our chance to visit the páramo, a high elevation habitat of grass, cushion plants, and unique vegetation found only in the high mountains. Los Nevados National Park is a high elevation park, largely above the tree line. It is an extensive park; we will visit the most easily accessible part of it. This region is also adjacent to montane forests at slightly lower elevation, such as the road that goes through the Bosques CHEC preserve on the way down to Manizales. The park is wild, and even the Spectacled Bear lives here, although one would have to be very lucky to see one. The local birds are high elevation-specialties, including the endemic and extremely charismatic Buffy Helmetcrest. This long-tailed hummingbird with a peaked crest is not only a rare and range-restricted bird, but also a habitat specialist. It is found in páramo rich “Frailejón” plants of the genus *Espeletia*. These are odd, large, hairy-leaved plants in the sunflower family that are only found in well-preserved páramo habitats. Up at these high elevations we may also find the Stout-billed Cinclodes, Many-striped Canastero, Andean Tit-Spintail, Veridian Metaltail, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Plain-capped Ground-Tyrant, Andean Teal, Páramo Tapaculo and one of the easiest antpittas to find, the Tawny Antpitta. If you are lucky, the Andean Condor may sail by.



One of the highlights of this region is the hummingbird feeders at Termales del Ruiz hotel. These are chock full of activity. The star is the Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, while the rare Black-thighed Puffleg is a frequent visitor to the feeders here. The supporting cast is also beautiful: Tourmaline Sunangel, Buff-winged

From top to bottom:
Buffy Helmetcrest and Frailejones. Photo: Alvaro Jaramillo



Starfrontlet, Collared Inca, Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, and Shining Sunbeam. Perhaps not as vivid in color as its relatives, one hummingbird stands out for its bill. The Sword-billed Hummingbird has the longest bill length relative to its body of any living bird! The high elevation forests here also may provide Dusky Piha, the gorgeous Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Golden-plumed Parakeet, and maybe mixed forest flocks with Black-capped Tyrannulet, White-banded Tyrannulet, Black-crested Warbler, Lacrimose and Scarlet-bellied mountain-tanagers, Golden-crowned Tanager, Blue-backed Conebill and maybe the uncommon prize of a Black-backed Bush-Tanager.



From top to bottom:
Stout-billed Cincloides. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo;
Nevados National Park. Photo: Catalina Casas/Audubon Colombia



RÍO BLANCO

Very near to the city of Manizales is a reserve operated by the local water company. Ostensibly, the forest here was originally preserved to maintain water flow for the company. In time, it became clear that this habitat was also wonderful for naturalists and birders. They have been coming here in numbers, along with local groups being educated on the value of nature and wildlife. Río Blanco is high enough that it holds montane forests, moist and luxurious, with a mix of species entirely different from the lower elevations. If you had to describe what makes Río Blanco unique, the answer is decisive and clear: Antpittas. Nine species have been recorded here. These birds are of course very difficult to see, skulkers that walk on the forest floor and which are generally heard, but not seen. What makes Río Blanco



special is the fact that here you can actually see them! They come to worms brought in by the local guide who is known as the Antpitta Whisperer. The various antpittas

vary in how difficult they are to see, and four species come in regularly including the endemic Brown-banded Antpitta, Chestnut-crowned as well as the Bicolored and Slate-crowned antpittas. The ability to see this many Antpitta species in one morning is unrivaled.

Río Blanco's montane forests also have many other wonderful species. The White-crowned Tanager, an odd, large tanager may be seen here, along with some stunning or hard-to-find birds. These include the Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Rusty-faced Parrot, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Streak-headed Antbird, Ocellated Tapaculo, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Dusky Piha, Black-collared Jay and Masked Saltator. During the slow hours in the middle of the day, pay attention to the hummingbird feeders to see Collared Inca, Long-tailed Sylph, among many others.



From top to bottom:
Brown-banded Antpitta. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo; Ocellated Tapaculo. Photo: Arnulfo Sánchez/Mistrató Neblina Birds

TINAMÚ RESERVE AND LODGE

This former *finca* is still owned and operated by the same family that has owned it for over 40 years. What they have done here is amazing. They have restored the habitat to forest, and the birds have returned! The forest is second growth, at 1,200m (3,930 foot) elevation, and has a wealth of neat birds to be seen. It is also an incredibly comfortable birding lodge that accommodates to the schedules and needs of the birding traveler. But what is truly outstanding here is the abundance of hummingbirds and tanagers that come to the nectar and fruit feeders. You can sit back, have something to drink and enjoy a never ending drama unfolding in front of you.

Birding the forest can be great as well, and one may even run into the difficult to see namesake of the lodge, the Little Tinamou. The isolated Colombian population of Grey-headed Dove can be found here, as can several specialties like the Colombian Chachalaca, Grayish Piculet, and some nice antbirds. These include the Parker's Antbird, which is difficult to find, but also the much easier to find Jet Antbird and Blue-lored Antbird. The Moustached Puffbird is a charismatic bird that may be found in the forest, and if you like a challenge the White-crowned Tapaculo has been seen here.

Not far from the Tinamú Reserve is the Cameduadua Reservoir. Used for fishing by the locals, particularly on weekends, there is an area upstream where birders may visit that is quieter. A variety of waterfowl may be found here, from Bare-faced Ibis, to wintering ducks including flocks of Blue-winged Teal at the right time of year. This reservoir is a nice spot to stop at and scan through, on the way south from Manizales.



From top to bottom:
Greyish Piculet. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo
Turquoise Dacnis. Photo: Diana del S. Arias Alzate

LA SOLEDAD, RÍO CLARO

In this coffee growing area of Villamaría, a community group exists which is devoted to the promotion of birding as an alternative fun activity for kids and youth, as well as an alternative economic activity for the rest of the community. In particular they are interested in the conservation of the endemic Turquoise Dacnis. The leaders of the tourism committee here have found 171 species, including Colombian Chachalaca, Torrent Duck, Grayish Piculet, Parker's Antbird, Blue-lored Antbird, Red-headed Barbet, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Tropical Gnatcatcher. This site is also quite important for migratory species, such as Cerulean Warbler, Canada Warbler



and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which arrive each year to feed and seek shelter in the "Guamo" (Inga) trees that are the shade providers for their shade coffee plantations.

FINCA LA ROMELIA

Finca La Romelia is considered a top rate spot by birders who also are looking for different cultural experiences. It is a relaxing place, where the owners make you feel like one of the family. The house, furniture, and gardens are set up to give visitors a fantastic experience. The various orchids that adorn the entire house are a treat –this includes at the dinner table and at breakfast! You will be able to visit various trails in the orange groves and forest edge while a spectacular breakfast awaits you in the middle of your trip through the grove! Birding guides, also knowledgeable in orchids, are ready to show you the various spots on the trail best for viewing. They have found 188 species of birds here, in the hummingbirds you can see gems such as White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Western Emerald, Steely-vented and Rufous-tailed hummingbird, while in the orange trees you may find the Ultramarine Grosbeak and the Orange-bellied Euphonia. In the Guadua (bamboo) thickets it is possible to locate the Speckle-breasted Wren and the Jet Antbird.



Clockwise from top right:
Orange-bellied Euphonia and Red-headed Barbet.
Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo



ECOPARQUE LOS ALCÁZARES

Ecoparque Los Alcázares offers an opportunity to have a natural experience, in the middle of the City of Manizales that allows for conservation of bird and other wildlife habitats. In the Ecoparque, 187 species of birds have been reported and you will have an option to visit four comfortable trails, where one could come upon species such as the Spectacled Owl, or colorful Red-headed Barbet, Masked Trogon and hummingbirds such as the Buff-tailed Coronet, Purple-throated Woodstar, White-bellied Woodstar, Bronzy Inca, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Collared Inca, Sparkling Violetear, Sword-billed Hummingbird and Tourmaline Sunangel. In areas with thicker vegetation, the Parker's Antbird makes itself heard, and the Grayish Piculet can be easy to see foraging in the branches of the trees bordering the forest. A 16 m tall observation tower allows one to see the canopy of the trees, and to get some nice photos of birds that usually are too high to see well from the forest floor. From the tower, you can also take in the migration of various raptors that move in from the north between September and October.

JARDÍN BOTÁNICO DEL QUINDÍO

Very close to the city of Armenia, this island of wonderful habitat is essentially within earshot of the highway, but when you are at the Jardín Botánico, you might as well be in the middle of the jungle. The park itself is large enough that several hours of walking and observing can be spent here seeing interesting birds, and when one is finished observing the birds, visiting the Mariposario (butterfly farm) is an amazing experience and well worth doing.

More than 160 species of birds have been found in the Jardín Botánico, including some rare or difficult species to see. The Jardín Botánico has also set up bird feeding stations that teem with hummingbirds and tanagers, as well as an observation blind/hide that allows for close up views of some of the species which visit. Hummingbirds found here include White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Western Emerald, Steely-vented and Rufous-tailed hummingbird. At the fruit feeders, you may find the Blue-gray and Palm tanagers, Green Honeycreeper, Scrub Tanager and the colorful Blue-necked and Bay-headed tanagers. It cannot be overstated that the photographic opportunities here are top rate.

In the forest are various birds of interest. In the canopy, the range-restricted and endemic Turquoise Dacnis can be found here. The male is a beautiful sky-blue bird with a black mask and bright yellow eyes. Blue-headed Parrots can be seen flying overhead and on the forest floor, the Black-billed Thrush is common, and it may share the area with the seldom seen but commonly heard Scaled Antpitta.

RANCHO CALIFORNIA

This is a private reserve, to the south of Armenia. For many years this was a park where one could do ziplines, and various other adventure games. Recently, activities in the park have shifted toward nature observation and it is a great place to see birds of open areas. We will look at the grounds which includes some large and productive fresh-water ponds, adjacent to old grasslands, and scrub. The waterbodies may hold flocks of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Common Gallinules, Striated Herons, Wattled Jacana, and perhaps some migratory shorebirds like yellowlegs, or Solitary Sandpiper. One rare and unusual waterfowl that can be found here is the odd Comb Duck, a species found spottily in South America, as well as Africa! Various long legged waders may be found here, Bare-faced Ibis, Buff-necked Ibis, Cocoli Heron, among others. Spectacled Parrotlets fly overhead, and perhaps an Aplomado Falcon may show up, while Fork-tailed Flycatcher and Yellow Orioles are in the shrubbery nearby. In the grasslands, the Red-breasted Meadowlark does flight displays, while the Ruddy-breasted Seedeater sings from the fields. Pale-breasted Spinetails call throughout the day, while the shy and rather uncommon Wedge-tailed Seed-Finch may pop out of the grass.



From top to bottom:
Blue-headed Parrot and Wattled Jacana. Photo:
Wladimir Giraldo.







Highlight Species

Northern Screamer
Cauca Guan
Colombian Chachalaca
Chestnut Wood-Quail
Buffy Helmetcrest
Dusky Starfrontlet
Spot-crowned Barbet
White-mantled Barbet
Toucan Barbet
Black-billed Mountain-Toucan
Grayish Piculet
Beautiful Woodpecker
Rufous-fronted Parakeet
Rusty-faced Parrot
Indigo-winged Parrot
Yellow-eared Parrot
Parker's Antbird
Moustached Antpitta
Bicolored Antpitta
Brown-banded Antpitta
Hooded Antpitta
Crescent-faced Antpitta
Alto Pisones Tapaculo
Stiles's Tapaculo
Paramillo Tapaculo
Buffy Tuftedcheek
Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant
Apical Flycatcher
Orange-breasted Fruiteater
Yellow-headed Manakin
Club-winged Manakin
Munchique Wood-Wren
Black-and-gold Tanager
Gold-ringed Tanager
Multicolored Tanager
Turquoise Dacnis
Scarlet-and-white Tanager
Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer
Black-backed Bush Tanager
Tanager Finch
Yellow-headed Brushfinch
Sooty Ant-Tanager
Crested Ant-Tanager
Baudo Oropendola
Red-bellied Grackle
Velvet-fronted Euphonia

THE SALENTO AREA

Salento is an extremely popular destination with tourists. The charm of this town is irresistible, colorful and historical, and it is not difficult to understand why so many come here to see a bit of Old Colombia. Part of the appeal of Salento to many people is that it is nestled in the mountains, alongside the gorgeous Cocora Valley. There are many opportunities here for hiking, horseback riding, and enjoying nature. For the birder, the mix of agricultural land, rushing streams, montane forest and the rare Wax Palm Forests are the appeal. Over 245 species have been detected in the area. They range from large Sickle-winged Guans to tiny hummingbirds, such as Tourmaline Sunangel and White-bellied Woodstar, to Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Golden-breasted Puffleg to showy little things like Booted Racket-tail and the impressive Long-tailed Sylph. All of them are gems on wings. In the Wax Palm forests of the highlands, Golden-plumed Parakeet can be found, and at times the rare Yellow-eared Parrot, as well as other more common parrot and parakeet species. The mixed species flocks here can include sightings of Montane Foliage-Gleaner, Pearled Treerunner, Blackburnian Warbler, Grass-green Tanager and up to five species of Mountain-Tanagers, and up to ten species of brightly colored *Tangara* tanagers – that is a lot of color in the forest! The gorgeous, unique and sought-after Torrent Duck can commonly be found here in the rushing streams.



From top to bottom:
Rainbow-bearded Thornbill. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo; Wax Palm forest in Salento area. Photo: Alvaro Jaramillo





From top to bottom:
La Patasola Reserve. Photo: Alvaro Jaramillo; Pearled Treerunner. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo

There are three areas we can go birding in the Salento Area. Continuing on the road above Salento is the “Camino Nacional.” Here one has access to large forest patches with great birding, as well as in the higher elevations the Wax Palm forest, the national tree of Colombia. In the highlands, a stop at a local *finca* will allow us to see some of the birds coming to their various hummingbird feeders while we enjoy a local cup of coffee or *aguapanela* (sugar cane drink). Across the valley from Salento is the reserve of Patasola, where great forest can be visited and sometimes nice mixed foraging flocks of birds are found. The Cocora valley itself is another great birding area that includes the rushing river that has created this scenic valley. The Reserva El Cairo includes a very comfortable and well-reviewed hotel. The nature reserve of El Cairo has a checklist of over 140 species and can be used as a base for visiting the area.





PIJAO, QUINDÍO

Pijao is the first Cittaslow town in South America, a movement that aims at slowing down life to reclaim the time and tranquility to make meaningful connections with people, culture and nature. Pijao is a quiet place with beautiful architecture, good coffee and friendly people. A 30-minute drive from the town, we will be visiting the area of “La Palmera”, which still has montane forest fragments and Wax Palm forests, where about 110 species of birds have been recorded. The Sickle-winged and Andean guans can be found here, as well as several specialties like Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Bicoloured Antpitta, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Ocellated Tapaculo, Striped Treehunter, Pearled Treerunner and 16 species of brightly colored tanagers including Grass-green Tanager and Black-chested Mountain-Tanager, and if you like a challenge, you can look for the charismatic Yellow-eared Parrot!

From top to bottom:
Bicolored Antpitta. Photo: Juan Antonio Ocampo
Pijao landscape. Photo: Diana del S. Arias Alzate



OTÚN QUIMBAYA

The Otún Quimbaya area is a Flora and Fauna Sanctuary and it is connected to Los Nevados National Park. It spans a good elevational range (1600–2200 meters) and the farther you go up the road or trail, the more there is to see. Less than an hour from Pereira, this is a superb destination. Also, worth mentioning is that a local organization, Yarumo Blanco Community Association, runs the hotel, the restaurant and train and hire local birding guides. This is a great spot for birding, and what you see depends on what elevation you decide to bird along the access road. There are 250 species of birds in the Otún Quimbaya Sanctuary. One of the most noticeable birds in the reserve at times is the Cauca Guan. This is an endemic species to west central Colombia, and Otún Quimbaya is the best spot in the world to see this guan. In fact, it is greatly endangered and although easy to find at the sanctuary, it is estimated that less than 1000 individuals exist in the wild! The Sickle-winged and Wattled guans can also be found on the road side. Otún Quimbaya appears to be the world headquarters for the Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. This species can be very common here, unlike in most other places it is found. The reserve is also a good place to find the skulking and rare Hooded Antpitta, a small Antpitta that has a neat little body swaying behavior, if you are lucky enough to see them. In the department of skulkers, one can find the Chestnut Wood-Quail, Stiles's Tapaculo, Moustached Antpitta here. Perhaps more visually stunning though, Torrent Duck is regularly found, as is the endemic Crested Ant-Tanager, and a nice mix of tanagers in the foraging flocks, like the sought after Multicolored Tanager along with



Black-capped, Scrub, Beryl-spangled, Metallic-green, Blue-necked, Bay-headed and Golden tanagers as the regularly encountered species in the colorful *Tangara* genus. There is a lot to see at Otún Quimbaya!

From top to bottom:
SFF Otún Quimbaya. Photo: Gloria Lentijo/Audubon Colombia
Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. Photo: Alvaro Jaramillo



MISTRATÓ AND APÍA AREA

The towns of Mistrató and Apía are the gateway to the Chocó forests. The Chocó ecoregion includes the Pacific slope and the Western Andes, from easternmost Panama to northernmost Ecuador. It is one of the 25 most biodiverse regions on Earth. Some parts of the Chocó are extremely wet, and some experts have claimed that it is the wettest region of the planet. This has created an incredibly abundant and diverse flora. The Mistrató and Apía areas are not in the wettest part of the Chocó, but they do have some amazing biodiversity and specialties.

Clockwise from top right:
Purplish-mantled Tanager and Purplish-mantled Tanager. Photo: Arnulfo Sánchez/Mistrató Neblina Birds



The rock stars of the Chocó region include various tanagers, in particular the little-known members of the genus *Bangsia*, named for the ornithologist Outram Bangs who had an influence in Colombian ornithology in the late 1800s. As accessibility has increased to many sites in Colombia, some new places have been found where *Bangsia* can be seen. In Mistrató and Apía, the Black-and-Gold Tanager is the common, local *Bangsia*. Up until recently this tanager was seen at a handful of sites; now we are learning it is more widespread. Another genus of highly sought-after tanagers, *Iridosornis*, translates to “rainbow birds.” One look at the Purplish-mantled Tanager, with its dark blue back and crisply set off vivid yellow throat will clarify why they have this name. Again, it is quite common at El Sutú in Mistrató and

Alto de la Línea in Apía. In total, there are 28 species here with tanager in their name!

But when you are not focusing on those smaller fruit eaters, what may attract your attention in Mistrató may be the big fruit eaters like Scaled Fruiteater, Golden-headed Quetzal and the fantastic Toucan Barbet. Note that on our way to Apía, we will stop at Santa Emilia. This site holds the possibility of seeing the Andean Cock-of-the Rock, as there is a known lek in the area. Other notables in Apía include the Golden-winged and Yellow-headed manakins, Multicolored Tanager and Turquoise Dacnis, Yellow-eared Parrot, and the neat Lanceolated Monklet. Given that the Mistrató and Apía areas are just being discovered, there may be some great surprises here.

PUEBLO RICO: MONTEZUMA, TATAMÁ NATIONAL PARK AND SANTA CECILIA

The Montezuma Ecolodge is located immediately adjacent to Tatamá National Park and much of the birding here is done on a road which heads up to a set of communication antennas and military installations which is in the park. This access to prime Chocó forest, and a wide elevational range, makes Montezuma one of the most important birding destinations in Colombia. With over 460 species found here, and a variety of rare and sought-after birds, Montezuma is a site that needs several days for good coverage. Furthermore, by heading downhill on the highway to Santa Cecilia, another Chocó site at only 300 m (984 foot), a further set of Chocó endemics can be found. Montezuma is truly a top-rate birding destination.

As we mentioned above, *Bangsia* tanagers are high on the wish list for birders in the Chocó ecoregion. Montezuma has a particularly good looking one, the Gold-ringed

Tanager which is not difficult to find fortunately. The number of Chocó specialties is large at Montezuma. Starting in the higher elevation part we visit, the little-known Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer is a specialty. Known only from a few high elevation sites, this may be the most reliable place in the world to find this species. Similarly, the Munchique Wood-Wren is up here and often quite vocal.

Endemics in the park include the rare Olive Finch, Black Solitaire, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Beautiful Jay, Semicollared Hawk, Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl, Glistening-green Tanager, the “too sexy” Club-winged Manakin, Chocó Vireo, and some 400 more species. Some hummingbird feeders are placed in higher elevation sites, but the ecolodge also has a good variety of feeders, and even more hummingbirds. Among the more common species, there are some stunners like the White-tailed Hillstar,

Violet-tailed Sylph, Velvet-purple Coronet, Booted Racket-tail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, and the awesome Empress Brilliant.

Santa Cecilia, the lower elevation site approximately an hour from the ecolodge, is a superb birding site. The extremely range restricted Baudó Oropendola is regularly found here. Other goodies that may show up include the Spot-crowned Barbet, Esmeraldas Antbird, Chocó Toucan, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Baudó Guan, Band-tailed Barbthroat, among various other birds less likely to be seen farther east or higher up in elevation. Again, these lower-elevation Chocó sites are still being explored and discovered, and more will be seen and found here in the coming years.

From left to right:
Gold-ringed Tanager. Photo: Alvaro Jaramillo
Velvet-purple Coronet. Photo: Mauricio Ossa



TERMALES SAN VICENTE - CORTADERAL - POTOSÍ

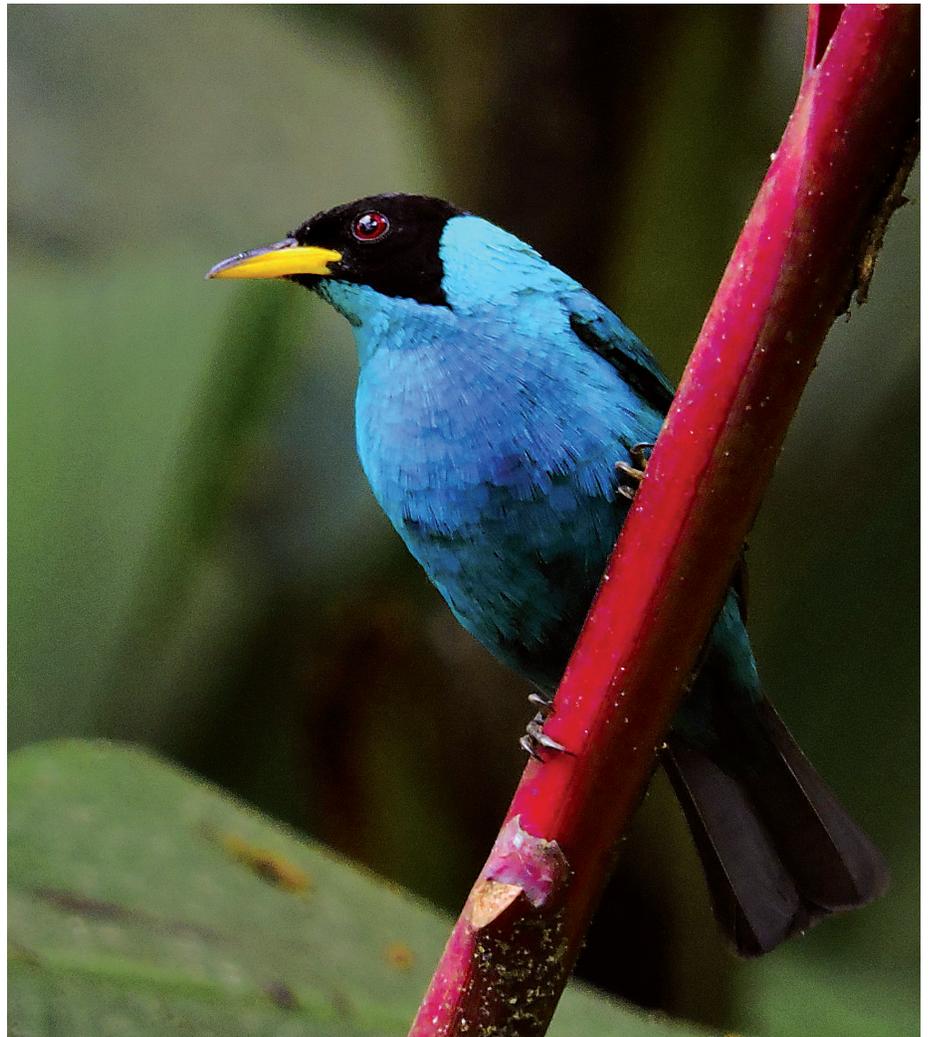


This is a birding site where one stands a good chance of finding the Critically Endangered Indigo-winged (Fuerte's) Parrot. This gorgeous parrot is estimated to number under 300 individuals in the very small range where it is found. It is a parrot of the cloud forest, being found in the elevational distribution between 2,600 and 3,600 m elevation (8500-11,800 foot). Here our main aim will be to arrive early in the morning and look for the Indigo-winged Parrot. But in addition, other notable species may be found here such as Purple-backed Thornbill, Grey-breasted and Black-billed mountain-toucans, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Bicolored and Chestnut-naped antpittas, Dusky Piha as well as a host of highland tanagers.

From top to bottom:
Indigo-winged (Fuerte's) Parrot and Green Honeycreeper. Photo: Luis E. Urueña/Manakin Nature Tours

BOTANICAL GARDEN OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF PEREIRA UTP

In the area influenced by the Consota River, there is a forest of vital importance for the flora and fauna of the city of Pereira. The Botanical Garden here has opened its doors to the visiting public, and has confirmed its importance as a center for research, conservation and environmental education as well as ecotourism. There are great spots for observing, bridges as well as a dock that allows easier access to the wetlands. Birds found in the botanical garden include the Greyish Piculet, Parker's Antbird, Turquoise Dacnis and the Spectacled Owl. The local birding guides have reported 170 bird species and they will help you find the best birding spots. You can end the day with a great coffee, while you check the hummingbird feeders, and if you want an extra adventure for the day, the canopy walk is a great option!



About the physical requirements & pace

The Central Andes and coffee region in Colombia has an incredible amount of diversity in a small space. Depending on the itinerary, we visit parts of the Western and Central Andes, as well as parts of the Magdalena Valley. Although the area of this birding trail is not huge on the map, some distances between sites are longer in travel time due to the nature of mountain roads and with elevation changes as you travel. Moving between sites, we will be on larger highways, or on good paved roads between towns. Note that to access some birding areas, we have to contend with some rather poor mountain roads. The road above Montezuma, for example, can become very muddy and can wash out after particularly rainy periods. There will be times when we will have to be traveling in 4 x 4 vehicles, such as in Montezuma. Thus, this tour is a little different from others you may have been on because we will be traveling in two or three comfortable 4 x 4 vehicles for parts of the trip. This will allow us access to all areas we want to go, comfort given the road needs, and space for luggage. The downside is that during drives you may not be sitting with a guide, but all vehicles will be in contact, and keep in mind that we make many birding stops where everyone will be birding as a group. At other times in the tour we will be together in a minibus, moving between sites or at sites that do not require 4 x 4 travel.

Accommodation varies throughout this tour. The Montezuma eco-lodge is simple, but caters specifically to birders. Here it may not be possible to have single rooms for larger groups. Food is excellent, and the rooms are clean and comfortable, but basic. Hot water is available at nearly all places. Río Blanco now offers comfortable accommodation for small groups within the reserve. Accommodation in small towns like Mistrató or Apía is in basic town hotels. The other extreme includes the very comfortable and very nicely appointed rooms at Hotel Tinamú and Reserva El Cairo. These hotels are great, in nice habitat, and are very appealing spots to stay. Other hotels are intermediate. It should be noted that depending on whether you stay in Victoria or Honda,

these small-town hotels may not have hot water. Hotels in rural areas of Colombia, particularly in the hot lowlands, as a rule do not have hot water. But these hotels are otherwise clean and comfortable, yet simple. Some of these small town hotels will not have a restaurant, and we will be eating elsewhere in town. We will have purified or bottled drinking water available throughout the trip.

One should be prepared for early morning birding, as it is important to be out before it becomes too hot, and the bird activity begins to subside. Whenever possible we shall have an early afternoon break, before continuing out in the late afternoon. Most of our meals will be sit-down meals, although field lunches are likely somewhere along the trip. If you have specific food allergies or diet needs, please communicate these to your tour leader upon signing up. There are no large hikes on this trip. However, some mountain birding, such as at Montezuma, may be best done by walking downhill on the main road, and getting picked up by the vehicle at certain intervals in order to cover an ample elevational distance. Muddy trails may occur in some sites, although much of the birding on this trip is done from roads with little to no traffic. The boat trip in Guarinocito requires a bit of balance to get in and out of the canoes, but help will be available to you.

The suggested itinerary starts in Bogotá and ends in Pereira. But your tour company can suggest other options. Bogotá is a large, major airport and has many daily flights to and from North America. Pereira is served by Avianca (Star Alliance) and Latam (One World), as well as Copa through Panama City airport. Flights to Bogotá take less than an hour, and arrive in the main terminal (El Dorado) making connections to ongoing international flights quite easy. If your travel needs require overnighing in Bogotá, there are close hotels to the airport, and you may also choose to stay over and hire a local guide for birding here!

Suggested itinerary for Central Andes Birding Trail

This is an itinerary that tries to maximize birds and sites in 17 days. However, there are multiple possibilities and combinations according to your interests and time availability. Your tour operator – or even yourself can organize the trip with the information provided. You can also take day trips from the main cities in the Central Andes region: Manizales, Armenia and Pereira.

DAY 1 – ARRIVAL IN BOGOTÁ.

Today will be an arrival day, aim to arrive by or before dinner time in order to meet the group and get briefed for day 2 departure. You may choose to arrive a day early to recuperate and allow for any travel disruptions. Overnight near airport.

DAY 2 – BIRDING TRAVEL TO HONDA.

We will begin our day birding the marshes near the airport in Bogotá, hoping for the endemic Bogotá Rail, and perhaps the Silvery-throated Spinetail as well as various water birds. The afternoon will be spent traveling to Honda or the Victoria area. Overnight in Honda (or Victoria).

DAY 3 – BIRDING VICTORIA.

The morning will be devoted to visiting the Bellavista Reserve. Overnight in Honda (or Victoria).

DAY 4 – LAGUNA GUARINOCITO TRAVEL TO MANIZALES.

The morning will be spent at the Laguna Guarinocito. We will begin traveling mid-morning to Manizales. Overnight in Manizales.

DAY 5 – RÍO BLANCO.

Birding in the morning at Río Blanco. Overnight in Tinamú Lodge.

DAY 6 – TINAMÚ RESERVE, TRAVEL TO SALENTO.

Birding at the Tinamú Reserve and then travel to Salento, stopping at the Cameduadua Reservoir. Option 2 for this day starts early in Tinamú to drive to La Soledad, Río Claro to bird with the community and travel to Salento. Overnight in El Cairo Reserve.

DAY 7 – BIRDING SALENTO AND CAMINO NACIONAL.

We will get up early in order to drive up to the montane forests of the Camino Nacional. Option 2 for this day includes a visit to Pijao. Overnight in El Cairo Reserve.

DAY 8 – MORNING IN LA PATASOLA RESERVE, DRIVE TO OTÚN QUIMBAYA.

We will start our day visiting the forests of the Patasola Reserve. After lunch, we will continue to Pereira and then up hill to Otún Quimbaya and Overnight there.

DAY 9 – ALL DAY OTÚN QUIMBAYA.

All day in the Otún Quimbaya area, with a post lunch break. We will be looking for some of the harder to see species today. Overnight in Otún Quimbaya.

DAY 10 – MORNING IN OTÚN QUIMBAYA, DRIVE TO WESTERN ANDES.

We have one last morning in the Otún Quimbaya. We will spend the afternoon driving to the town of Mistrató. Overnight in Mistrató. Option 2 for this day starts birding in Otún Quimbaya and then driving to Apía.

DAY 11 – MORNING IN MISTRATÓ OR APÍA, AFTERNOON IN MONTEZUMA.

We have a morning to visit the wonderful Chocó forests of Mistrató or Apía, returning for lunch in town. We will then travel to Pueblo Rico, and onward to the Montezuma Ecological Reserve. Overnight in Montezuma.

DAY 12 – MONTEZUMA ALL DAY.

All day in Montezuma starting at the high elevation site and birding our way down. Overnight in Montezuma.

DAY 13 – MONTEZUMA ALL DAY.

Morning visit to Santa Cecilia, afternoon and overnight in Montezuma.

DAY 14 – MONTEZUMA IN THE MORNING, DRIVE TO SANTA ROSA DE CABAL.

We have one last morning to bird Montezuma. After lunch we drive to Pereira and onward to Santa Rosa de Cabal where we overnight.

DAY 15 – CORTADERAL IN THE MORNING, DRIVE TO LOS NEVADOS NATIONAL PARK.

We will start early to look for the Indigo-winged (Fuerte's) Parrot. In the afternoon we drive to Manizales and Los Nevados National Park. Overnight in Hotel Termas del Ruiz.

DAY 16 – LOS NEVADOS NATIONAL PARK.

Today we will have time to look for the Buffy Helmetcrest, as well as various other highland species. Overnight in Hotel Termas del Ruiz.

DAY 17 – TRANSFER TO AIRPORT IN PEREIRA. FLIGHTS BACK TO BOGOTÁ AND HOME.

We plan on arriving in Pereira around noon. Please book a flight back to Bogotá and onwards for the early afternoon. Safe travels!

