

Colombia

Western, Central, and Eastern Andes, Santa Marta,
and Magdalena Valley



Independent Budget Birding

9 Dec 2016 – 22 Jan 2017

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www.budgetbirders.com

Summary:

My recent trip to Colombia was a huge success. During the trip I was able to visit a vast majority of the major birding areas in the country and record 790 species including 75 out of 76 possible endemics on the itinerary. With an extensive public transportation system and small towns near almost all of the main birding areas, Colombia is a very easy country to bird independently. Colombians were also very helpful throughout the trip and I very rarely felt unsafe. Daily living costs in the country were also very cheap compared to Ecuador and Peru. I could almost always find a place to sleep for 25,000-30,000 pesos and most meals cost between 8,000-15,000 pesos. In total I spent \$3,291 in the country over a 42 day period. I highly recommend Colombia as a birding destination for an independent birder and hope that you find this report helpful in planning your own trip. If you're interested in more pictures of the locations and of the birds seen, check out my blog posts on the trip in the [Colombia section](#) of budgetbirders. Also, feel free to reach out if you have any questions regarding costs, logistics or birds.

I want to thank Josh Beck and Sebastian Ballesteros for all the help along the way. Josh's website, Birds of Passage is extremely helpful and he also provided plenty of advice along the way. Sebastian is a fantastic bird guide based out of Santa Marta who coordinated the trek for the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest as well as put me in contact with some other drivers throughout the trip. I also want to thank Alex Harper for joining the trip for two weeks (Dec 30 – Jan 11) and Stephan Lorenz and Claudia Cavazos for birding with us on a few occasions (and giving us a few rides).

Resources:

Websites:

As usual, xeno-canto, cloudbirders, and eBird were extremely valuable resources in researching and preparing for the trip. A few trip reports that were referenced (to varying degrees of usefulness) are included below. Also, there is a link to our website, which has blog entries written on my six week trip, though overall, for someone looking for information, this report will be more helpful than the blog (but still check out the blog!). EBird is rapidly becoming an extremely useful tool on seeing recent sightings before leaving on a trip, but sadly, most people remain extremely vague in their checklists. All of my eBird checklists include GPS coordinates or detailed information for target birds and I encourage others visiting these areas to do the same. Even quick notes about where on a trail or a km mark can be extremely helpful for those not familiar with the area.

www.eBird.org: all checklists from the trip including numerous pictures and audio recordings can be searched for on eBird

www.xeno-canto.org: Recordings for the trip were downloaded from here, I've also added [my recordings](#) from the trip

<http://www.cloudbirders.com/>: Access to hundreds of trip reports. Below are a few I took with me.

Books/Reports:

Birdwatching in Colombia: Jurgen Beckers & Pablo Florez, It'd be unfair to say this book is a complete waste, but I'm still not a huge fan of it. The birding information is fairly good, but I was continually disappointed by the maps and directions. There's also a ton of blurry subpar photos that are included instead of adding additional info or making the book smaller (who cares about a blurry pic of a Louisiana Waterthrush??). I still recommend buying the book and using it as a reference, but if you try to bird Colombia ONLY using this book, you'll struggle. Do not take the maps to be accurate (no I'm not talking about scale,) I'm just talking about being completely incorrect.

[Birds of Passage: Colombia](#): Josh Beck 2015; Covers everywhere, fantastic resource

[Mitu, Choco, Andes](#): Hans Matheve 2014

[Santa Marta and Andes](#): Hans Matheve 2013

[Colombia](#): Clayton Burton 2013; covers most of Colombia

[West and Central Andes](#): Rob Gordijn 2015

[Colombia](#): Pritam Baruah 2012; covers most of Colombia

www.budgetbirders.com: blog posts with photos and stories from this trip along with my prior travels can be found here

GPS:

For those who don't own a GPS, buy one. The Garmin Etrex 30 is extremely easy to use and I feel is essential to any independently traveling birder. Using a GPS and a set of coordinates helps to eliminate the guess work in directions and really makes it easier for others to find the same location. In this report I try to use GPS coordinates as much as possible and once again, encourage others to do the same. I'm always amazed to pick up a "bird site guide" and find detailed (though usually confusing or inaccurate directions) when all someone needs to do is write a few quick notes and provide a list of GPS way points. It is also very easy to download free open source maps online for use in both car GPSs and handhelds (such as the Garmin Etrex30). I've used these open source maps throughout the world and have found them extremely accurate in most circumstances and they are free!

OSM Map: http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/OSM_Map_On_Garmin/Download: Download maps from around the world for Garmin

Logistics:

Buses/Vans:

Getting around by bus is very easy. Most major cities have a few bus terminals (South, North, etc.) so if you're traveling through Bogota or Medellin, it's important to make sure you're going to the correct terminal for your destination. Long bus rides (3-5 hours) averaged around 30,000 pesos, but trips traveling to smaller towns will usually be in vans (colectivos) instead of buses. Also, for very remote areas (Puerto Pinzon, etc.) the common mode of transportation is a modified jeep known as Chiva. Be aware that if you're doing a long trip on a large "direct" bus, it WILL NOT STOP at a midway point. I got burned on this going from Valledupar to Santa Marta (I wanted to get off at a small town midway), but instead I had to go the whole way to Santa Marta. Another quick tip is that there is almost ALWAYS a solution to getting to somewhere. Make sure you ask 3-4 people if you don't like the first answer you get. I cannot count the number of times I was told disappointing info (when a bus leaves, etc.) to find out that there was another way that suited my needs. Also, if a bus is full and they say there are no tickets, ask if you can stand. We were never turned away from standing and eventually someone will get off and you'll have a seat.

Taxi/4wd:

Taxis are fairly cheap in Colombia. In smaller cities/towns there will be a fixed rate to get around (5,000-6,000 pesos), but in larger cities they will have meters. I had mixed results with hiring taxi drivers for extended periods with the cheapest being about 20,000 per hour around Riohacha and 50,000 per hour in Jardin (there's only 5 taxis in town!). I also hired 4wd vehicles on a few occasions with the average being about 250,000ish for an entire day (specifics in each sections).

Rental Car:

I didn't rent any vehicles during this trip, but I did spend a few days with a couple who rented a small economy car from Medellin for about 3 weeks. They had found a great deal and if you're also able to find a good price I wouldn't hesitate at all to rent a car. There are very few birding locations that can't be reached by a small rental vehicle, especially in the Bogota area. If I was to repeat my circuit of Sumapaz, Monterredondo, Mana Dulca, Soata, I definitely would have rented my own car. All of the roads were in good shape and I spent way more time and money for transportation (Soata) than I would have had I just used my own rental.

Motorcycles:

Motorcycles are a much cheaper alternative to hiring 4wd vehicles and I tried to utilize them as much as possible. If you're traveling solo, this is a great and effective way to get around. Specific prices for each area are covered in its respective section below.

Currency Exchange:

I used ATMs the entire time. The exchange rate was around 2,990 pesos/ 1 USD. ATMs are available in almost every town (except Minca). At the Bank of Colombia ATMs the limit is 600,000, but there's another where the limit is 720,000 (Servibanca?)

Accommodation:

In most small towns, the going rate for a room was 25,000 pesos although the condition of those rooms differed greatly by location (El Carmen was terrible, but Soata was very nice, both for 25,000). In large cities, hostel dormitories were usually 25,000-30,000 pesos and cheap hotels were around 50,000. There are only a few occasions where you'll need to spend more (Rio Claro, Montezuma).

Cell Phone/SIM Card:

SIM cards and data are very cheap in Colombia and it's highly recommended you pick one up. I used my phone often to make/confirm reservations at birding locations as well as have drivers pick me back up once I was done birding an area. I bought a Claro SIM, but Movistar is good as well. The SIM was 5,000 pesos and data is 20,000 for 500 mb. Well worth it to be able to check eBird, make calls, etc. Just make sure you unlock your phone before leaving home!



Itinerary:

Although my itinerary is fairly standard compared to other independent trips and typical bird tour itineraries, you'll notice that from 26 Dec-29 Dec, I did a loop covering El Paujil, Victoria, Ibagué, and Pereira before going up to Manizales. Typically it wouldn't be very efficient to do that loop in the middle of your trip, but I had plans to meet up with my friend Alex on the 29th and I was running a few days ahead of schedule so I did Victoria, Ibagué, and Santa Rosa, before meeting him instead of at the end of the trip which was the original plan. Also, I was very fortunate and did very well at almost every site I visited. If planning an independent trip, make sure to plan adequate time at each location, my original itinerary looked quite a bit different, but I kept it flexible so that I could move forward quickly when possible. This flexibility allowed me to add the last few days around Bogotá into the trip.

Dec 9: Flight IAD-BOG (0600-1800), Flight BOG-BAQ (2000-2130). Night: BAQ airport

Dec 10: Palermo (0500-0720), Isla de Salamanca (0800-1030), Bus to Riohacha (1030-1500), Camarones (1530-1730). Night: Riohacha

Dec 11: Camarones (0500-1100), Bus to Minca (1100-1400), Motorcycle to Minca, birding below Minca (1500-1730). Night: Minca

Dec 12: Palo Alto area (0500-1100), Meet Sebastian 1200, drive to Ciénaga, Rufous-headed Chachalaca spot (1430-1530), Bus to Valledupar (1700-2100), Ride to Manaure (2200-2300). Night: Fabio's House

Dec 13: Drive to paramo from Manaure (0200-0600, delay due to truck breaking down), Paramo (0600-0900), walk to El Cinco (0900-1130), birding El Cinco to San Antonio (1330-1700). Night: El Cinco (Pancho's house)

Dec 14: Paramo (0430-0900), birding ProAves to El Cinco (0930-1200), birding El Cinco up to ProAves and back (1300-1700). Night: El Cinco (Pancho's house)

Dec 15: San Antonio area (0500-0900), coffee plantations (0930-1030), Bus from Valledupar to Santa Marta (1200-1600), meet Sebastian (1600), drive to San Pedro Town (1630-2100). Night: San Pedro Town

Dec 16: Start hike at 1750m (0500) and bird all day to Abandon Farm house at 2400m (1630). 13 km. Owling (1800-1900) Night: Farm house

Dec 17: Start hiking (0430). Arrive good forest at 2500m (0530). Birding up to Lagunas 3700m (0530-1400). 11 km. Area around third lake (1430-1700). Night: Camping

Dec 18: Explore third and fourth lakes (0600-1600). Night: Camping

Dec 19: Helmetcrest stakeout at third lake (0630—0900). Birding to abandon farmhouse (1000-1600). Owling (1800-1900) Night: Farm house

Dec 20: Birding abandon farm house to San Pedro Town (0400-1300). Drive to Minca (1400-1700). Night: Minca

Dec 21: Motorcycle to San Lorenzo Ridge (0400-0530), Birding down to Palo Alto (0530-0900), Palo Alto/La Tienda waiting for Blossomcrown (0900-1600). Night: Minca

Dec 22: Birding just above Minca (0530-0830), Palo Alto/La Tienda waiting for Blossomcrown (0900-1400), Minca to Santa Marta (1600-1630), Bus to Ocana (2100-0400). Night: Overnight bus

Dec 23: Mule trail opposite Bushbird Reserve (0530-1100), Van to Bucaramanga (1200-1750), Bus to San Vicente (1800-2030). Night: San Vicente

Dec 24: Drive up to Cerulean Reserve & Hike to Forest (0430-0600), Cerulean Reserve (0600-1500), Walk through plantations (1530-1700). Night: San Vicente

Dec 25: Drive to Cerulean Reserve entrance (0515-0550), Road from reserve down to second gully/plantation hummer feeders (0550-1000), Cerulean Reserve Forest (1000-1500), quick walk down to lower planation around 1000m (1700-1730). Bus to Bucaramanga 1900-2030. Bus to Honda (2100-0400) Night: Overnight bus

Dec 26: Honda to Victoria (0430-0600). Victoria (0600-1100). Victoria to Puerto Boyaca (1100-1350). Chiva to Puerto Pinzon (1400-1645), birding near El Paujil (1700-1745). Night: Puerto Pinzon

Dec 27: EL Paujil (0500-1030), Chiva to Puerto Boyaca (1500-1730), Bus to Ibague (1800-2100). Night: Ibague

Dec 28: Juntas (0530-1130), Bus to Pereira (1300-1800), Pereira to Santa Rosa (1800-1900). Night: Santa Rosa de Cabal

Dec 29: Fuerte's Parrot spot (0500-1130), Bus to Manizales (1300-1400). Afternoon off. Alex joins trip. Night: Manizales

Dec 30: Rio Blanco (0600-1800). Night: Manizales

Dec 31: Drive to Nevado de Ruiz (0500-0630). Nevada de Ruiz (0630-1200), Bus to Medellin 1500-2000). Night: Medellin

Jan 1: Bus to Rio Claro (0550-0930), Rio Claro, Mulata Trail (1000-1230), lunch, Mulata Trail (1400-1700), oilbird cave (1730-1830). Night: Rio Claro

Jan 2: Mulata Trail (0500-1200), lunch, Mulata Trail (1400-1800). Night: Rio Claro

Jan 3: Rio Claro entrance road (0530-0700). Bus to Medellin (0730-1100). Bus to Anori (1430-1800). Night: Village before Anori

Jan 4: Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve (0300-1800). Night: Village before Anori

Jan 5: Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve (0500-1130), Bus to Medellin (1300-1700). Metro to Itague (1730-1800). Night: Itague

Jan 6: La Romera (0600-0830), Bus to Jardin (1030-1400), Yellow-eared Parrot area above Jardin (1430-1730). Night: Jardin

Jan 7: Bus to Bolombolo (0500-0700), birding km3 (0730-0930), Bus to Urrao (1030-1430), Hike to ProAves Lodge (1530-1650). Night: ProAves Lodge

Jan 8: Urrao Antpitta feeder (0600-0630), hike up to paramo (0630-0830), birding higher elevation (0830-1600). Night: ProAves Lodge

Jan 9: Horseback ride up trail (0500-0600). Hike to Parrot Lick (0600-0630). Waiting at lick (0630-0845), walk back to lodge (0845-1000). Walk back to Urrao (1100-1200), Bus to Bolombolo (1300-1700), Chiva to Bolivar (1700-1745), tax to El Carmen (1800-1900). Night El Carmen

Jan 10: Drive to Tangaras (0400-500). Tangaras (0500-1700). Night: El Carmen

Jan 11: Tangaras (0615-1000). Bus to Bolivar (1030-1130). Travel to Pereira (1200-1900). Car to Otun (1930-2030). Night: Otun

Jan 12: Walk to El Cedal/Owling (0300-0530), birding El Cedal back to Lodge (0530-1200), "B" trail (1500-1730). Night: Otun

Jan 13: Birding "B" Trail (0600-1100), birding to El Cedal and back (1300-1800). Night: Otun

Jan 14: Birding "B" Trail (0600-0830). Chiva to Pereira (1000-1100), Bus to Pueblo Rico (1200-1430), birding around Santa Cecilia (1530-1630), car to Montezuma (1800-1900). Night: Montezuma

Jan 15: Drive to top of road and walk down all day, Montezuma (0500-1700). Night: Montezuma

Jan 16: Walk up to 1750m and bird back down, Montezuma (0430-1330). Travel to Santa Cecilia (1400-1630). Night: Santa Cecilia

Jan 17: 20 min downhill from Santa Cecilia, Gitco (0600-0930), Alto Amurrupe Reserve (1000-1230), drive to Pereira (1330-1600), Bus to Bogota (1700-0300). Night: Overnight Bus

Jan 18: Taxi to Usme (0430-0500), Bus to Sumapaz (0530-0700), birding Sumapaz (0700-0930), travel to Observatorio de Colibris (0930-1400), Observatorio de Colibris (1430-1600), travel to North Bus Portal (1600-1700), Bus to Soata (1930-0130). Night: Soata

Jan 19: Drive to birding location about Soata (0500-0600), birding upper areas (0600-1000), birding around Soata (1100-1200), drive back up to upper area (1600-1645), birding upper area (1645-1730), Bus to Bogota (2030-0220). Night: Overnight Bus

Jan 20: Bus to Guayabetal (0230-0430), motorcycle to Monterredondo (0530-0630), birding upper areas (0630-1000), walk back down to main road (1000-1230), Bus to Bogota (1300-1500), travel to Agua de Dios (1530-1930). Night: Agua de Dios

Jan 21: Man Dulce (0530-1000), bus to Bogota/Hostel (1100-1700). Night: Bogota

Jan 22: La Florida (0600-0830), Flight BOG-IAD (1400-2300)



Marsh along the dirt road in Palermo

Birding Hotspots

This section will hopefully be the most informative part of the report. For each birding location there is a quick summary followed by important logistics for visiting, target birds, and other “good” birds that probably won’t be encountered easily at other locations visited during a trip to Colombia. Of course both the “target bird” and “good” bird sections are based on my opinion, but should give you a good idea of what to focus on. Although the “target bird” section should keep you focused on the birds you need to find there, the “good” bird section is quite arbitrary and I’d definitely check other reports to get a thorough understanding of all birds available as this report is meant to focus on logistics and target birds (there are plenty of trip reports out there to get an idea of all birds present). The order of sites described below are in order of when I visited them.

Palermo

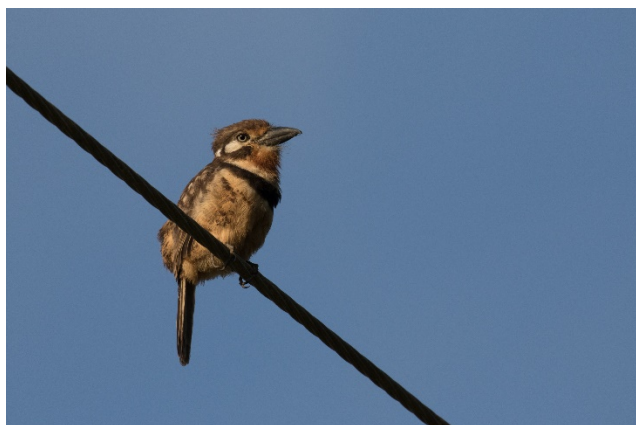
Summary: Located just east of Barranquilla, this site provides quick access to quality marshland and is a reliable location of Northern Screamer, Pale-legged Hornero, and “Brown-backed” Bronzed Cowbird. I birded this location on a single morning from 0530-0720.

Logistics: Taxis from Barranquilla will only be able to take you to the start of Palermo as there’s a toll gate. From here I walked through town and then took the dirt road on your right just after the large pedestrian walkway (N 10.96633 W 074.73719). From here you cross a bridge and then can continue along the dirt road which leads into good marshland. The first part of the road is drivable, but you’ll eventually have to stop as the road turns into more of a trail around 2.5 km. I walked 2.9 km and turned around after finding the screamers. Please note that leaving here can be difficult. I waited for an hour for a bus (the main road is a toll road so most traffic is moving fast and won’t stop). Your best bet is to talk to a local in town and coordinate a ride with them either back to Barranquilla or onwards to Isla de Salamanca (as I did).

Birding: I spent a single morning here from 0530-0720. After getting dropped off by taxi, I walked through the small town and started down the dirt road. As you head further down the road, you get better views of the marshland. I stopped often to scan for the screamer, but didn’t find any until I reached 2.9 km. I had a single horneo near the beginning of the road and despite a lot of searching I was unable to find any cowbirds (although there were plenty of Carib Grackles around). Tons of other marsh birds were present making for a very enjoyable morning.

Target Birds: Northern Screamer (10.961516, -74.712147), Pale-legged Horneo (Caribbean ssp), and Bronzed Cowbird (sometimes split as Brown-backed Cowbird).

Good Birds: For most birders this will probably be the only time that you’ll bird marshland in Colombia. Plenty of open country species can be found here. Russet-throated Puffbird, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant.



Russet-throated Puffbird

Isla de Salamanca:

Summary: Isla de Salamanca is part of the National Park system and provides easy access to mangroves. This spot is easily accessed from Barranquilla and is the only reliable location for the endemic Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird. There are a few other mangrove specialties that can also easily be seen here

Logistics: The entrance to the park (11.005892, -74.683766) is located on the right side of the road 9.6 km after crossing the bridge leaving Barranquilla. Being a National Park, the entrance fee is very steep. As of Dec 2016 the price was 42,000 pesos (if you have a car, it would be more). After paying the entrance fee, you can cross under the highway via a tunnel. On the other side (north side) there are a few more administration buildings as well as a boardwalk that heads out into the mangroves. It also is possible to rent kayaks or go on a boat ride if interested. Most staff are knowledgeable about the hummingbirds.



Green areas represent best areas to search for the hummingbirds

Birding: I birded here from 0800-1000. The two hummingbirds are commonly seen around the admin buildings on both sides of the road. During my visit I saw a single Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird in a tree just behind the building on the south side of the road and two more hummingbirds (at least one was a Sapphire-throated) along the edge of the mangroves on the north side, again near the buildings. I took a walk along the boardwalk, but by then it was 0900 and quite hot. Other interesting birds found were Panama Flycatcher, Chestnut Piculet, Bicolored Conebill, Black-crested Antshrike, Russet-throated Puffbird, and Great Black Hawk.

Target Birds: Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Chestnut Piculet, Bicolored Conebill, Panama Flycatcher

Good Birds: Russet-throated Puffbird, Black-crested Antshrike, Great Black Hawk.

Chestnut-winged Chachalaca Spot:

Summary/Logistics: Located 60 km east of Isla de Salamanca is a reliable spot of Chestnut-winged Chachalaca. Although these birds can be seen anywhere along the drive from Barranquilla to Santa Marta, I found this spot in eBird and it seems to be a nice spot to stop either early in the morning or late in the evening for the chachalacas. Because the highway is split here, if approaching from the west, you'll have to pass the spot and do a u-turn at the next available location before eventually making a right turn onto the road (11.03165, -74,20463). As you head down this road to your left you'll see a fairly open area with large brush piles. The chachalacas enjoy perching atop these piles in the early morning and late evening. Please note that there was a very sketchy guy hanging around while we (Sebastian and I) were there so be careful.

Birding: I visited this spot on the 12th with Sebastian once we found out the helmetcrest trip was delayed. We arrived at 1430 and of course no birds were to be found. A single bird appeared atop a brush pile at 1530 in the large open area on the south side of the road along the first few hundred meters.

Target Birds: Chestnut-winged Chachalaca

Camarones (Los Flamencos Sanctuary):

Summary: The Camarones area located at the base of the Guajira Peninsula is a very well-known hotspot for a number of near-endemics that are shared only with Venezuela. Typically this desert landscape is very dry and most birds can be found by concentrating on a few water holes and bridges that attract birds. This wasn't the case during my visit as the area had recently experienced large amounts of rainfall making the vegetation very lush with standing water everywhere. This made birding difficult, but I was still able to find most of my targets. Most of the birding is done along the "old" road to Camarones as well as past the town towards the end of the road near the ocean.



Logistics: After catching a micro bus at Isla de Salamanca, it took 4 hours and 15 minutes to reach Riohacha. I elected to stay in Riohacha as I didn't have reliable information as to whether there was a hotel in Camarones. For those interested, there is a hotel in Camarones, but to be honest, Riohacha is only another 20 minutes down the road and you'll have better access to nicer lodging, food, and wifi. I stayed at Bona Vida (30,000, free breakfast, spoke English). From here I was easily able to hire a taxi to be my birding vehicle for Camarones. I paid 50,000 for (1515-1730) and 80,000 for (0500-0900). Both times starting and ending in Riohacha (although I actually ended in Camarones after the morning). If one has the time and wants to save money, you could easily just stay in Camarones and walk to the birding spots. Although I saw a few reports mentioning that this area could potentially be unsafe, I had no problems and everyone I met was very friendly, but still probably wise to use some caution.

Birding: I spent an afternoon and a morning birding the area and was able to find all of my targets except Buffy Hummingbird. On most visits, the best game plan would be to concentrate around the bridges on the "old" road where there is usually water along with a few watering holes closer towards the beach that often have good birds. Since there was so much rain, my strategy differed a little bit and I spent a lot of time walking the old road and birding another spot on the east side of the highway from Camarones. The three locations are detailed below:

Old Camarones Road: This road starts along the main highway at (11.40072, -73.06708) and eventually connects to the western edge of Camarones. The road is paved, but in bad shape. It is drivable by a small rental car or taxi, but be very cautious of the potholes (some are way deeper than you'd expect). There are a few bridges along this road that have been reliable for most of the targets. At the first bridge at (11.405064, -73.065814) I found a family group of Vermillion Cardinals and near the largest bridge at (11.412167, -73.06733) I found my only Orinoco Saltator. Also along this road I encountered numerous White-whiskered Spinetails, both Inezias, Glaucous Tanager, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Crested Bobwhite, and Rufous-vented Chachalaca.

Tocuyo Sparrow Road: Usually, most people get Tocuyo Sparrow a few kilometers south of Camarones near an area called Perico, but I had noticed a few recent eBird sightings along a road just east of Camarones and decided to check it out. The entrance to this dirt road is near the main entrance to Camarones at (11.42159, -73.05911). If approaching from the south, turn right (east) and after 75 meters, veer left at (11.42122, -73.05866). At this point, the road became very muddy, so I had the taxi park and I started to walk the road. After about 150 meters, at (11.420925, -73.054647) there is a trail on the left. I birded the first 200 meters of this trail and found numerous Tocuyo Sparrows (4) along it. Other birds in the area included both Inezias, Chestnut Piculet, Russet-throated Puffbird, Bare-eyed Pigeon, and Pileated Finch.

End of Road/Mudflats: If you continue along the old road past Camarones, you'll eventually dead end near the ocean. Although many reports reference this area as being productive, I didn't spend much time around here. There are a few water holes nearby, but like I said, during my visit, everywhere was a water hole. The end of the road is usually good for flamingos and flocks of shorebirds during the right time of year.

Target Birds: Crested Bobwhite, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Bare-eyed Pigeon, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Buffy Hummingbird (missed), Chestnut Piculet, White-whiskered Spinetail, Slender-billed Inezia, Pale-tipped Inezia, Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Orinoco Saltator, Vermillion Cardinal, Glaucous Tanager, Tocuayo Sparrow, Bronzed Cowbird (missed)

Good Birds: Double-striped Thick-knee, Blue-crowned Parakeet, Grey-capped Cuckoo, American Flamingo, Scarlet Ibis, Pileated Finch, Trinidad Euphonia



White-whiskered Spinetail

Minca/Santa Marta (San Lorenzo):

Summary: The touristy town of Minca is the entrance to the fabled Santa Marta Mountains, an area home to nearly 30 endemic species! Since this birding spot has been covered in-depth in trip reports, I don't plan on saying a lot. I'll just give a few GPS coordinates and updated logistics. For the most part, birders will need to spend some time at the lower elevations (just uphill from Minca) as well as higher up to see all of the specialties. It is also necessary to make at least a quick visit downhill from Minca to find the range restricted Black-backed Antshrike.

Logistics: I took a bus from Camarones to Santa Marta for 18,000 pesos (1045-1330). At the drop off point at the edge of the city (11.22416, -74.16196), I took a motorcycle for 40,000 (overpaid) the 30 minutes uphill to Minca. There are vans that make the trip up to Minca from the market in Santa Marta (8,000), but from my drop off point, taking the moto made sense (though I totally overpaid, 25,000 would be reasonable). In Minca there are plenty of places to stay. I stayed at Hotel Brisas de Minca (30,000) right before the bridge. There are plenty of motorcycles willing to ride you further uphill. Road conditions depend on how much rain there has been, but during my first visit the road was very, very bad (tons of mud), but later in the trip most of the mud had dried and the road was just very bad. The motorcycles have a fixed pricing schedule (see picture), but I often had to pay a premium for early starts (which makes sense). It is possible to stay further uphill at Palo Alto (40,000 including meals), El Dorado (you better have won the lottery), or San Lorenzo Research Station (fairly cheap I think, but needs to be arranged prior to arriving). If you were in a pinch, the lady at "La Tienda" would probably let you stay at her place too. Below are some costs/drive times for the motorcycles, but as you can see, drive times will vary greatly depending on the specific bike and road conditions.

Minca-El Campano: 10,000 (20,000 at 0400), 60 minutes when road was very very bad, only 40 minutes the other times

Minca-La Tienda: 25,000, 70 minutes

Minca-Parakeet Spot near top: 90,000 (0315 start), it took 150 minutes, but the motorcycle ended up having some serious issues, I'd recommend at least 2 hours

Birding: I did not spend much time in this area since I did the helmetcrest hike and saw the majority of the endemics during that hike. In total I spent an afternoon below Minca, a morning around Palo Alto, a full day from the top to Palo Alto, and a morning just above Minca up to Palo Alto. Most of my time was spent looking for Santa Marta Blossomcrown which ended up being my only endemic dip of the trip. Below are a few notes on specific spots.

Below Minca: In the afternoon I walked 1.9 km down the steep paved road until I found my first Black-backed Antshrike (11.153136, -74.126171, 510m). From here I started birding my way back up seeing Scaled Piculet, Golden-winged Sparrow, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-chested Jay, Rufous-breasted Wren, and Rufous-and-white Wren.

Minca: Just above Minca there is a Black-and-White Owl roost at 11.144265, -74.112533, 810m. The birds roost on the left side of the road. Literally everyone in town knows about these birds, so if you can't find them, just ask any of the motorcycle drivers. They aren't always at this roost site, but when they are, they are very apparent. I heard a Common Potoo (11.137076, -74.108459, 820m). Coppery Emerald is also usually found in the coffee plantations just above Minca.

La Tienda: This is one of the reliable stakeouts for Santa Marta Blossomcrown and Santa Marta Woodstar. During my visit I spent hours 16 hours sitting between here and Palo Alto and still dipped on the Blossomcrown. The feeders attract a number of hummingbirds and banana feeders are usually loaded with Blue-naped Chlorophonia. This is also a very reliable spot for Groove-billed Toucanet which pass through occasionally in small groups. Just uphill from here I had both Santa Marta Tapaculo and Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner. It is 10,000 pesos to enjoy the feeders.

Palo Alto: I was disappointed in this place. Apparently it sometimes has feeders out which usually attract both White-tailed Starfrontlet and Coppery Emerald, but during my visit no feeders were up. The flowers in the garden were visited by a single Santa Marta Woodstar, but other than that, the place was very disappointing. 10,000 pesos to visit the feeders. Just below Palo Alto and just after the School (blue building), the steep hillside on your left is a very good spot for Santa Marta Tapaculo.

Santa Marta Parakeet Spot: Sadly, due to fires this past March, the Santa Marta Parakeets have been very unreliable in the area. Your best chance is to see them at first light at this lookout. 11.110459, -74.042348, 2600m

Below are the target birds although I don't have GPS coordinates for some of the better endemics, as I didn't look for them on this side since I had seen them all on the other side. Also, for those species mentioned above with GPS, I didn't include them again.

Target Birds: Black-fronted Wood-Quail, Band-tailed Guan, Lined Quail-Dove, Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Screech-Owl, White-tipped Quetzal (11.108265, -74.063232), Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Black-chested Jay, Santa Marta Blossomcrown, Santa Marta Woodstar, White-tailed Starfrontlet, Black-backed Thornbill, Coppery Emerald (just above Minca around 900m), Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant (11.106902, -74.049891), Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager, Santa Marta Toucanet, Rusty-headed Spinetail, Streak-capped Spinetail, Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner (11.094736-74.079947, most active just after dawn), Black-backed Antshrike, Brown-rumped Tapaculo, Santa Marta Tapaculo, Bang's Wood-Wren (lower elevations), Santa Marta Wood-Wren (higher up), Santa Marta Antbird (11.099361,-74.081634, 1480m), Santa Marta Antpitta, Yellow-crowned Whitestart, White-lored Warbler, Santa Marta Brushfinch, Sierra Nevada Brushfinch (11.110741, -74.056292, also common near El Dorado Lodge)

Good Birds: Rosy Thrush-Tanager (missed, but usually just above Minca), Black-and-White Owl, Common Potoo, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Plushcap, Paltry Tyrannulet, Grey-throated Leaf-tosser (missed), Groove-billed Toucanet, Lazuline Saberwing (feeder at La Tienda).



Flowers across the road from La Tienda

Las Lagunas de Santa Marta (Blue-bearded Helmetcrest):

Summary:

Rediscovered only two years ago, the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest hangs on by a thread in the high elevation paramo of the Santa Marta Mountains. Most birders visit Santa Marta from Minca (see above), but that ridge tops out around 2700m far below the elevational requirements of the helmetcrest and Santa Marta Wren. Instead it is necessary to complete a two day trek, starting in San Pedro Town to reach the paramo and the lagunas where the two high elevation endemics can be found. Sebastian Ballesteros



The hike starts just above San Pedro Town at 1670m and ends 24 km later at 3700m

(fotonatural@live.com) a Colombian birding guide from Santa Marta is very familiar with the area and the people, and therefore was contacted to be my guide for this trek. Typically I try to avoid guides, but in this case it was necessary as there was no information (GPS coordinates, etc.) as to where the trail started. More importantly, the trek involves hiking through Kogi Tribal lands and without permission, issues could arise. With that being said, I enjoyed my trip with Sebastian and would HIGHLY recommend him as a birding guide for this trek or for any Colombian birding in general. We completed the entire trek over 5 days (6 if you include sleeping in San Pedro Town the night before starting), but it could easily be done in 4 and maybe even 3 if you're in very good shape and don't care about any of the other endemics. Although I am providing detailed information on how to do this hike, PLEASE contact Sebastian before trying to attempt this hike on your own. You will need to coordinate mules, as well as permission from the tribal people so doing so independently would be difficult and will probably ruin it for others.

Logistics: The hike starts from San Pedro Town which is about a 90 minute drive along a steep rough road accessed from San Pablo along the main highway. The actual start of the trail is another 10 minute drive uphill from town at 10.895677, -74.03747, 1670m. From here the hike passes through coffee plantations and eventually runs along a ridge where the habitat is a mixture of decent forest and open farmland. At around 11km the trail hits the first "peak" at 10.90505, -73.977215, 2600m before descending steeply to a river crossing at 2430m and then back up to the first camp site at the abandoned farm house at 10.896819, -73.968206, 2575m. Total walking for Day 1 was 13km. We started at 0530 and got to the farmhouse at 1600, keep in mind the day was spent walking slowly and birding the entire time. From the farmhouse, it's about a 45 minute hike through more farmland until you finally reach a very nice section of forest that starts at 10.897173, -73.957103, 2770m. This section of trail is steep, but winds through a very nice section of forest that holds a lot of the Santa Marta endemics. At around 3100m you finally reach the paramo and from here it's another 600m of elevation gain until you finally reach the Second Laguna at 10.899259, -73.906282, 3680m. We started the morning at the beginning of the good forest at 0530, reached the paramo at 1015, and the campsite at the second laguna at 1400. The first part of the morning was spent birding slowly through the good forest, but once we reached the paramo, we hiked fairly quickly to the campsite. Total distance for the second day was 11km. We set up camp at the second laguna and from here we were able to climb slightly higher to explore both the third and fourth lagunas. The hike back down went much quicker. On day 4 we left around noon, reached the good forest by 1400, and slowly birded back down to the farm house by 1700. On day 5 we slowly birded the first section of forest below the farm house before walking quickly back to San Pedro Town, arriving around 1145.

Birding: The birding along the entire trek was absolutely fantastic. Most of the Santa Marta endemics can be seen along this hike, but it's highly improbable that you'd be able to see everything (i.e. you still need to go to the San Lorenzo side). Below I've broken the birding into three areas. Although most of the endemics were found in very high numbers, surprisingly Sierra Nevada Brushfinch and White-tipped Quetzal were absent along this side of the mountain.

Lower Section: San Pedro Town (1670m) to Farm House (2575m):

This section was birded from 0530-1600 on day 1 and again from 0500-1100 on day 5. After you climb through the coffee plantations, the trail flattens out through some nice sections of forest where Santa Marta Antbird (10.902914, -73.981891, 1930m) was very common. Plain-breasted Hawk was also seen in the area and Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner was heard on the hike up. Near the school, Barred Forest-Flacon was seen well. A few Lined-Quail Doves were flushed early in the morning on day 1. During the entirety of the hike, numerous Santa Marta Antpittas were heard calling (at least 12) and a few seen. Golden-breasted Fruiteaters were also ridiculously common with upwards of 30 heard and 10 seen. On the hike back down Santa Marta Warbler (10.901257, -73.985476, 2506m) and Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant (10.902874, -73.981857, 2580m) were both encountered. After reaching the farm house, a female White-tailed Starfrontlet was seen visiting the flowering bush at the house and Santa Marta Screech-Owls were heard calling with two birds responding downhill from the farm house along the forest edge (10.89927, -73.97016). During the hike back down, I spent the first part of the morning at the first peak at 10.90505, -73.977215, scanning for Santa Marta Parakeets and although I didn't see any, a flyby group of Barred Parakeets was a nice consolation prize.



Abandon Farmhouse

Upper Section: Farm House (2575m) to Second Laguna (3680m):

The birding along this section actually starts after a 45 minute walk uphill to the start of the good forest at 10.897173, -73.957103, 2770m. From here the trail steeply winds through the forest for a few km. At the very beginning of the trail, a Santa Marta Rufous Antpitta was seen at dawn as well as a pair of Santa Marta Warblers. Further up hill a pair of Santa Marta Bush-Tyrants were encountered at 10.897384, -73.955663, 2860m. Other good birds along this section included more Santa Marta Antpittas, Brown-rumped Tapaculo, and Santa Marta Wood-wren. Sebastian has seen Santa Marta Parakeet along this section of forest, but we didn't have any on this trip. The walk through the paramo was fairly lackluster except for a few Streak-backed Canasteros and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles. On the hike back down we saw a single Andean Condor.

Las Lagunas (3680m-3800m)

The second laguna provides a good spot to camp, but the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest has only ever been seen around the 3rd and 4th lagunas. From the second laguna, it's about a 20 minute steep hike until you can see the third laguna. Along the "trail" up to the third laguna, there was a male Black-backed Thornbill that was regularly seen every time we passed by. Most of the time, the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest has been seen along the steep vegetated hillside along the north side of the lake. The first afternoon we climbed up onto this hillside and after about an hour of scanning, found our first female Blue-bearded Helmetcrest! Santa Marta Wrens are fairly common throughout the area and we also found a few other species unique to the area including Andean Tit-Spinetail, Black Flowerpiecer, Rufous-chested Chat-Tyrant, and Rufous-



The campsite is next to laguna 2, while the helmetcrest is typically found around laguna 3

browed Conebill. On day 3 we spent the entire day between the third and fourth lagunas. We found a flowering tree (small pink flowers) growing next to the stream entering the third laguna which was regularly visited by 2 immature males and at least 1 female helmetcrest. We were unable to find any helmetcrests around the fourth laguna and spent the majority of the afternoon photographing the helmetcrests visiting the pink flowering tree. On the morning of day 4, we spent a few hours again at the flowering tree and then started the hike back down around noon. I did want to make a quick note about birding around the lagunas. The elevation (+3700m) makes it very difficult to get around. Also, the northern hillside is extremely hard to navigate as it is very steep, thickly vegetated in parts, and has tons of large boulders. Getting around is very difficult and takes a lot of time. If you just want to get to the far side of the laguna, I preferred taking the southern slope (although Sebastian disagrees). The southern slope isn't vegetated and although it's a bit long and has some steep sections, if you study your route, it is WAY easier. I was able to get back from the far side in only 35 minutes. Something I never would have been able to do along the north slope.

Target Birds: Same as above, Blue-bearded Helmetcrest, Santa Marta Wren

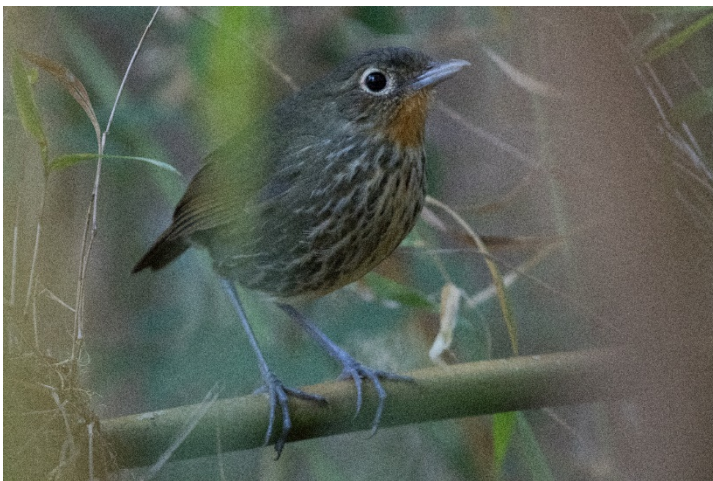
Good Birds: Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Andean Condor, Rufous-browed Conebill, Andean Tit-Spinetial, Black Flowerpiercer, Rufous-chested Chat-Tyrant



Laguna Three; Home of the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest



Santa Marta Screech-Owl



Santa Marta Antpitta



Santa Marta Wren

Perija Mountains:



Summary: Located along the Colombian Venezuelan border, the Serrania de Perija Mountain range is home to a number of endemic and near-endemics only shared with nearby Venezuela. The spot is fairly inaccessible with no stand accommodation available and the road is in pretty rough shape (high clearance necessary). Most birding tours have just begun to start visiting the area because ProAves recently constructed a lodge just below the paramo.

Logistics: Getting here can be a little tricky, but it still very doable. If you've rented your own high clearance vehicle (4wd wasn't necessary, but that could change) you could easily drive up and either camp or talk to either Pancho in El Cinco or another local in San Antonio into letting you stay at their place. Make sure you bring food to cook. From the main town of Valledupar, you first need to drive to Manaure. From here, find the plaza and take Carrera 6A east (mislabelled on most maps at 6B) to "La Danta." At 10.388141, -73.0201 you start heading uphill towards San Antonio. The total drive from Manaure to the ProAves lodge is 2 ½ hours. San Antonio is at 10.362205, -72.994482, 1905m, El Cinco is at 10.36728, -72.954914, 2392m, ProAves is at 10.36275, -72.949579, 2604m, and you hit the paramo at 2850m. Sebastian helped me coordinate a vehicle, driver, and lodging through Fabio. Fabio lives in Manaure (house at 10.391947, -73.029009, white with red on bottom, red door) and can be contacted at 3145046656. He doesn't speak English. Also, you can try contacting him via email through his daughter Dayana, dayiechavez@hotmail.com. Fabio provided a driver, vehicle, food, and coordinated a place for me to stay at Pancho's house (10.369157, -72.955661) in El Cinco. Cost for 2 ½ days was 700,000 pesos. This included being picked up and dropped off in Valledupar at the bus station. Fabio is very flexible (I changed my dates last minute and arrived at 2200 wanting to leave at 0200), but he also changes his own plan without telling you. When I arrived at the bus station he was nowhere to be found and it took a while to eventually get picked up. Overall, though you should have no major issues going through him.

Birding: I spent 2 ½ days in the area, although 1 ½ days should be plenty as long as weather isn't a huge issue. The first morning I started just below the paramo where I had Perija Antpitta. I then spent the rest of the morning walking through the paramo at 2850m and along the road that heads up higher (eventually making it to 2970m). It was very windy when I visited and I saw little birds. Highlight was Black-fronted Wood-Quail and a single Perija Metaltail. That afternoon I birded below San Antonio where I was able to find a single Perija Brushfinch and a Klages's Antbird at 10.360298, -73.001071, 1930m. The forest patch just above San Antonio is also good birding and is where I saw my only Rufous-shafted Woodstar. Further uphill from San Antonio is Finca Esperanza at 10.363773, -72.978329, 2267m. The house has very oddly cut juniper trees, but it also had a number of flowering bushes. The owner says he sees the woodstar here fairly regularly. The next morning I once again birded the paramo. It wasn't nearly as windy and I finally found a Perija Thistletail at 10.363886, -72.941432, 2833m. There were a lot of flowers at 10.362008, -72.939951, 2930m which is where I found my only "Perija" Golden-bellied Starfrontlet. I found another Perija Metaltail at 10.361986, -72.938508, 2944m. Surprisingly I only saw two Perija Metaltails the entire trip. I did however see well over 30 Tyrian Metaltails! That afternoon I birded the road from the paramo down to El Cinco. This section holds most of the target birds including Perija Tapaculo (common), Rufous Spinetail, Common Bushtanager, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Perija Yellow-breasted Brushfinch, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, Streak-capped Treehunter, and Fulvous-headed Tanager (slight above typically elevation at 2472m). The last morning I birded below San Antonio, the best spot was a wet gully at 10.364357, -73.004453, 1740m which had multiple Perija Brushfinches and a Lazuline Saberwing lek.

Target Birds: Black-fronted Wood-Quail, Lazuline Saberwing, Perija Thistle-tail, Perija Metal-tail, Perija Golden-bellied Starfrontlet, Rufous-shafted Woodstar, Perija Rufous Antpitta, Perija Tapaculo, Rufous Spinetail (ssp), Klages's Antbird, Grey-throated Warbler, Common Bush-Tanager (ssp), White-throated Toucanet (ssp), Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager (ssp), Perija Yellow-breasted Brushfinch, Perija Brushfinch, Fulvous-headed Tanager

Good Birds: Streak-capped Treehunter, Brown-billed Scythebill (missed), Barred Fruiteater, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Many-striped Canastero, Striped Owl (just below San Antonio), White-throated Screech-Owl (just below paramo), Band-winged Nightjar



Pancho's House in El Cinco



Fabio's Truck used for the trip

Ocana:

Summary: This small town located between Valledupar and Bucaramanga, is home to the range restricted Recurve-billed Bushbird. ProAves has set up a reserve for this rare bamboo specialist, but you don't actually have to visit the reserve to get the bird.

Logistics: I took an overnight bus from Santa Marta to Ocana (2100-0400, 80,000 peso). Make sure you pay attention to your stop as the bus driver won't wake you if you're sleeping. The bus doesn't stop at the terminal in Ocana (a really small crappy terminal). I accidentally missed my stop and had to go to Abrego before catching a taxi back to Ocana. Oops. Anyways, once in Ocana, take a taxi from the plaza towards "Santuario del Virgen" or they might even know the name of the reserve "Reserva Natural de las Aves

Hormiguero de Torcoroma". The start of the road is at 8.23461, -73.36237 and it's a total of 7 km from town. Cost of taxi was 15,000. The reserve sign is at 8.203426, -73.381269, 1576m. To access the actual reserve, you would take the sandy road on the left that heads steeply uphill. There are three access points into the reserve, the first two are barbed wired gates/locked, but the third is just a wooden gate. Back at the entrance sign, on the right side of the road (opposite the reserve), there is a mule trail that winds steeply downhill and then flattens out (but still heading downhill). It was along this trail that I found all of my target birds.

Birding: There are small patches of bamboo along the mule trail. I had a very responsive pair of Klages's Antbirds at 8.202524, -73.38364. This is also the area I finally found a male Recurve-billed Bushbird although it wasn't until after 0900 that I finally found it. The weather was foggy all morning so bird activity was slow. Walking back and forth along the trail I was also able to find Speckled Tanager, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Black Hawk-Eagle, Red-billed Scythebill, and Short-tailed Woodstar (yellow flowers along the first very steep portion of trail). After seeing the bushbird I walked back up to the main road and birded the sandy road next to the reserve up to the third entrance. Didn't see much except Moustached Brushfinch right near the sign.

Target Birds: Recurve-billed Bushbird, Klages's Antbird, Grey-throated Warbler, Moustached Brushfinch, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Short-tailed Emerald

Good Birds: Red-billed Scythebill, Speckled Tanager



Recurve-billed Bushbird



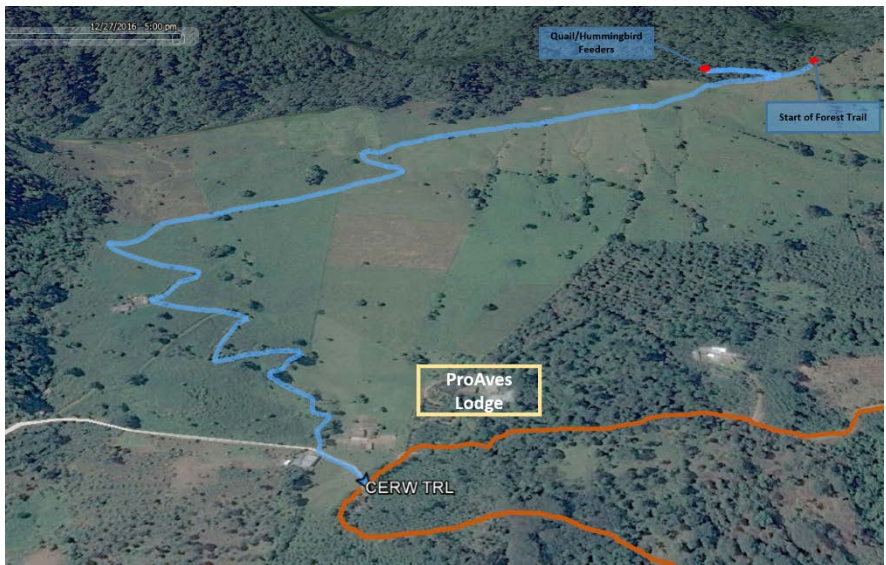
Entrance Sign and sandy road leading along edge of reserve

Cerulean Warbler Reserve:



Summary: Located 7km above San Vicente de Chucurí, the Cerulean Warbler Reserve is home to a number of endemics and difficult to find species. There are two main areas to bird at the reserve. The forest above the reserve that starts at 1660m continues to 2000m and the coffee plantations from the lodge at 1300m and goes downhill to the edge of town at 930m. Because of the large elevation differences and habitat types, it is very easy to amass a large species list for the area.

Logistics: I first took a van from Ocana to Bucaramanga (5 hours, 42,000 pesos) and then a bus from Bucaramanga to San Vicente (2 ½ hours, 20,000 pesos). There are plenty of hotel options in town. Typically you shouldn't have too much difficulty finding a motorcycle to drive you up to the lodge area in the morning, but I visited over Christmas, so finding rides were tricky. It takes about 45 minutes to get from town up to the lodge on a motorcycle and cost me 20,000 pesos. On the second day I had to take a taxi for 50,000 (it was Christmas, also most taxi drivers won't make the trip). I wouldn't recommend walking as the first part of the road is insanely steep. The start of the road is at 6.87329, -73.40029. There are a few turns along the road up to the lodge and it isn't always the most obvious, but your driver should have no problem knowing how to get there (just ask around if you're driving yourself, or look at all of my GPS coordinates for birds along the correct road).



Once you reach the lodge area, you still need to hike another 30-45 minutes (2.6 km) up through a pasture to reach the edge of the forest and start of the trail. Just before the lodge, take a left at 6.86294, -73.3847 and then a right across from the farmhouse at 6.86310, -73.38422 to start the trail. The hike takes you up through a series of fields and you'll have to go through a few gates. At one point you'll need to continue straight through a gate (instead of going left)

and then there will be a Y (6.86009, -73.37965) where you'll want to keep right. The small side trail to the wood-quail/hummingbird feeders is at 6.85328, -73.38100 and the start of the main trail is at 6.85263, -73.38107. The main trail (the Lengerke Trail) is a cobblestone (very slippery, you're going to fall) that continues uphill until 2000m and then degrades quickly afterwards. There are 5 benches along the trail that are often referenced in trip reports with the 5th being at 2000m. I don't have the exact distance, but it's ~5km from the start of the forest to the 5th bench.

Birding: The first morning I hiked up through the field and arrived at the edge of the forest at dawn. I quickly lucked into a group of Gorgeted Wood-Quail along the first part of the trail. My goal was to quickly make my way up to the 5th bench and focus on Mountain Grackle (difficult here). I stopped a few times, but arrived at 2000m around 0830. I tried to head further up, but the trail ends shortly afterwards. My 5 hour search for the grackle was unsuccessful. There were a ton of other birds around though, notably, White-bellied Antpitta seems to be easier higher up. I then birded my way back down. Upper Magdalena Tapaculo was seen near the 4th bench (6.850621, -73.37311, 1920m) as well as near the 1st bench. The area around the 2nd bench is known to be very good. Just before the 2nd bench (heading uphill), the trail will curve sharply left. On your right is a small side trail. The beginning of this trail is good for Yellow-throated Spadebill and Parker's Antbird. Searching through the mixed flocks I was able to easily tape out Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet. Other good flock birds included Rufous-rumped Antwren, Golden-winged and Cerulean Warblers, and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner. Although Long-tailed Tapaculo is supposed to be reliable here I spent a lot of effort looking and taping and only heard one call distantly. On the second day in the afternoon in the forest, I had White-mantled Barbet near the first clearing at 6.850336, -73.379174. I saw Black Inca a few times throughout the forest (none were at the feeders). On my second day I started near the lodge where Turquoise Dacnis is known to visit the largest trees behind the lodge at 0600. Just like clockwork a pair showed up in the tallest tree at 0600. The secondary growth around the lodge had Bar-crested Antshrike. Walking down hill in the first gully I found Niceforo's Wren (6.862342, -73.386492, 1290m) and at the second gully I found Black-headed Brushfinch (6.860768, -73.38783, 1258m). For the brushfinches I had to climb up stream about 20 meters to an opening where I was able to call them in. It might be tricky to see them here directly from the road. I then walked back uphill to some hummingbird feeders in the plantations. To reach these feeders take the same left turn towards the trail, but then continue walking along the road uphill. The feeders are at 6.869774, -73.382514. Indigo-capped Hummingbird was easy here and although Chestnut-bellied is sometimes seen here, I wasn't able to find any. At 1030 I walked back up to the forest and after spending the afternoon from the start of the trail to the 2nd bench, I headed back downhill at 1500. If you want to bird the lower areas (<1000m) I wouldn't leave so late. I was practically running downhill to make it to 1000m before it got dark. I arrived around 1000m at 1700 and quickly found a Double-banded Graytail in a large mixed flock (6.870409, -73.395209, 960m). Although I found this bird very quickly, I think I got very very lucky. After watching the Graytail I moved further downhill and taped in a Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo (6.871212 -73.396346, 927m). This bird was still very responsive late in the evening (it was 1730!). The second day I had 133 species without even trying!

Target Birds: Gorgeted Wood-Quail, White-mantled Barbet, Mountain Grackle (difficult here, missed), Indigo-capped Hummingbird, Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird (difficult here, missed), Blank Inca, Upper Magdalena Tapaculo, White-bellied Antpitta, Long-tailed Tapaculo, Niceforo's Wren, Black-headed Brushfinch, Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet, Yellow-throated Spadebill, Parker's Antbird, Double-banded Graytail, Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo, Turquoise Dacnis

Good Birds: Colombian Chachalaca, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Cerulean Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Rufous-rumped Antwren. Moustached Puffbird, Crested Bobwhite, Savanna Hawk, Bat Falcon

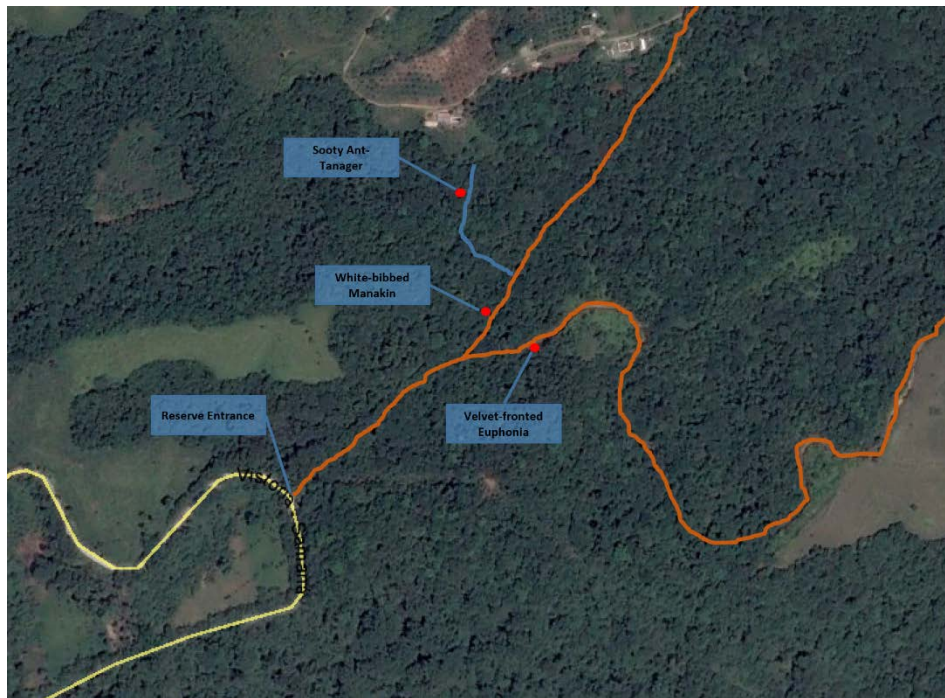


Double-banded Graytail!

Victoria:

Summary: This birding site isn't visited too often, but has a few key birds. Midway between Puerto Boyaca and Ibague, it makes for an easy morning stop between other major birding sites. The main attraction for this spot is White-bibbed Manakin—a species you aren't going to encounter anywhere else on your Colombian trip, found only in Colombia and Venezuela. A few endemics can also be found here. A single morning is more than enough time to bird this small area.

Logistics: After taking a bus at 1900 from San Vicente back to Bucaramanga, I then took an overnight bus from Bucaramanga towards Ibague. It departs at 2200 and I got off in Honda at 0330. From here I had to take a taxi back north to the intersection of the main highway with the road to Victoria (cruce de Victoria). You probably won't find a taxi willing to take you directly



from Honda to Victoria. Instead you'll have to get another taxi from the intersection to the main town of Victoria (40 minutes to town, another 10 to the reserve, 35,000 pesos). I arrived at the reserve by 0630 and told my taxi to return to pick me up at 1100. The entrance to the reserve is about 5km past Victoria at 5.326795, -74.923834. From here I walked the road which goes through a nice section of forest for about 700m. There is also a dirt road that veers off to the right about 250 meters along the road and a trail to the left about another 50 meters past where the road split is. This trail follows a small creek for about 300 meters before ending at a clearing.

Birding: I spent a single morning here (0630-1100) and it rained 80% of the time. Despite the rain I was still able to find my main targets, White-bibbed Manakin and Velvet-fronted Euphonia. The manakin is supposed to be commonly encountered from the start of the road to the start of the trail on the left, but it took about 2 ½ hours of walking back and forth playing tape before a female finally came in to investigate (5.328788, -74.922294). A male Velvet-fronted Euphonia was seen in a fruiting tree along the road to the right at 5.328446, -74.921662. Crested Ant-Tanager was seen along the main road just past the manakin spot as well as along the trail along the stream. The trail that runs along the stream starts about 50 meters past the manakin GPS coordinates. Supposedly Tody Motmot used to be reliable along this trail, but I don't think there have been any sightings for quite some time. Beautiful Woodpecker is often found in the area, but I didn't see any.

Target Birds: White-bibbed Manakin, Velvet-fronted Euphonia, Beautiful Woodpecker (missed), Crested Ant-Tanager, Tody Motmot (missed, no longer here?), White-mantled Barbet (didn't look for it)

El Paujil:

Summary: ProAves's Blue-billed Curassow reserve "El Paujil" is one of the few lowland spots most birders visit during their trip to Colombia. Therefore there are a ton of good trip birds to find at this reserve, but there's actually only a few main targets for those interested in endemics and near endemics. The reserve is difficult to get to and involves a long ride down a dirt road (which is in good shape except for the very last little bit). Luckily, there's a small town right outside the reserve which makes for a convenient base camp for visiting independent birders.

Logistics: Getting to Puerto Pinzon (the small town near El Paujil) can be a little tricky. After taking a taxi from Victoria to La Dorada, I took a van to Puerto Boyaca. From the main plaza in Puerto Boyaca there are supposed to be two Chivas (trucks) that depart daily for Puerto Pinzon, one at 1100 and one at 1500. I arrived at 1400 and luckily made my way directly to the Chiva location in the plaza as the vehicle was already completely full and about to leave. Therefore I would highly recommend arriving a few hours early to make sure you get a



Entrance to El Paujil

space. If you miss the 1500 chiva, you're not going to make it to Puerto Pinzon (unless you spend a ton of money). Luckily the driver agreed to allow me to hang off the back of the truck so I still had a ride. It took 2 ½ hours to reach Puerto Pinzon and cost 13,000 pesos. When I arrived in Puerto Pinzon I was quickly pointed towards a nice little hotel 6.067351, -74.26944. The room was surprisingly nice for the location (although still pretty crappy), but the food was very good (and the cheapest I had). Overall I really enjoyed my short time in Puerto Pinzon and all the people were very friendly. To reach the reserve you can either take a motorcycle (10,000 pesos) or walk. Everyone knows where it is at. If you decide to walk, it takes about 35 minutes to reach the entrance gate. Walk through town and take the right at 6.066998, -74.265781. Then just continue along that road until you reach the gate at 6.053408, -74.267594. The entrance road goes steeply downhill. Around the lodge there are a few trails and they are where I spent the majority of my time. Ask in town when the Chivas are leaving to head back to Puerto Boyaca, but during my time there was one at 0700 and another at 1500.

Birding: I only spent a single morning at El Paujil because, although there are a lot of decent lowland birds, there are actually only a few good targets that you need to see here. I left the hotel at 0430 and walked to the entrance and down the steep entrance road. Just as it started getting light, Black-billed Flycatcher started calling at 6.050806, -74.261085 and I was able to get nice views. Along the same trail a little further away from the lodge I quickly found Black Antshrike at 6.051674, -74.262512. Having found two of my three targets before 0630, I then took the trail around the small lake which leads to the edge of the lodge ground. Right where the trail meets the buildings, two female Blue-billed Curassows were hanging around. Other birds along the pond trail included Purple-throated Fruit-crow, Slaty-headed Tody-Flycatcher, and Pale-billed Hermit. I spent the final part of the morning working my way back up the entrance road looking for Beautiful Woodpecker, but was unable to find any. Apparently the trail on the other side of the river is good for the woodpecker as well as a few other birds, but I didn't want to bother the ranger to take me across since I wasn't staying there.

Target Birds: Blue-billed Curassow (that is if you like your curassows as tame as chickens), Black-billed Flycatcher, Black Antshrike, and Beautiful Woodpecker

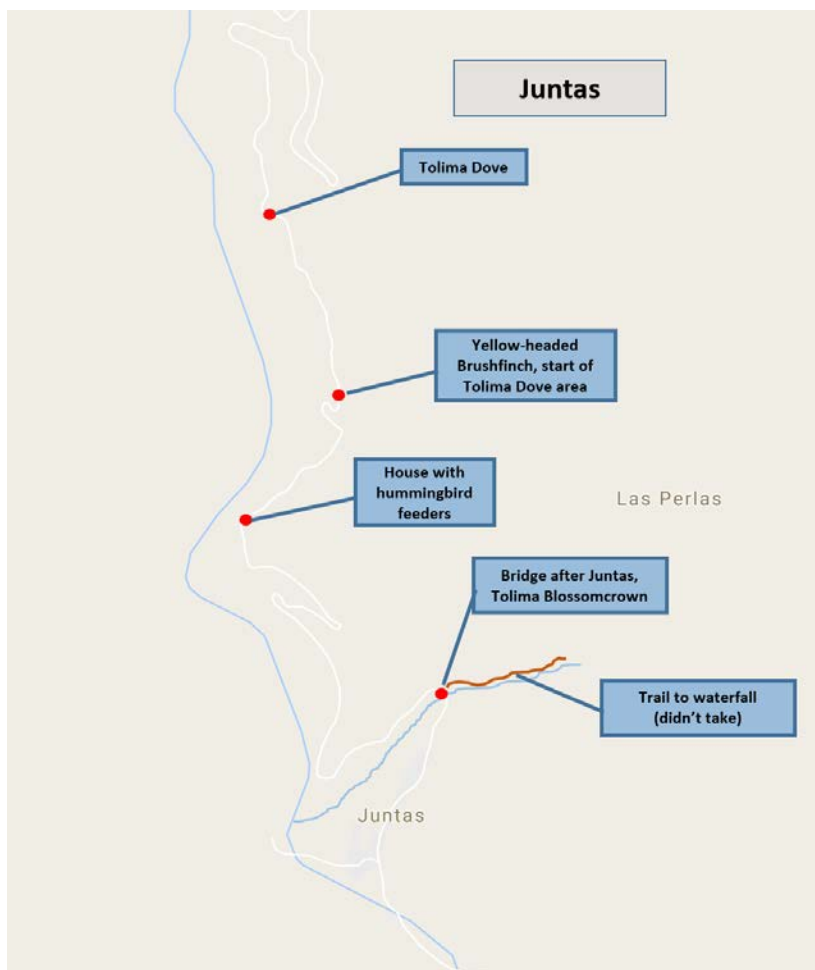
Good Birds: Slaty-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Colombian Chachalaca, Blue-and-Gold Macaw, Chestnut-fronted Macaw, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Rufous Piha (missed), Pale-bellied Hermit, Stripe-throated Hermit, lots of lowland stuff....

Juntas:

Summary: The road leading up through the Canon del Combeima is a great spot to catch up with three very range restricted endemics, Yellow-headed Brushfinch, Tolima Dove, and Tolima Blossomcrown. The only issue is that two of these birds can sometimes be quite tricky to see. The location can easily be reached from Tolima's capital, Ibague, and a single morning is plenty of time to bird the location as long as you get lucky. You might need a second day if the dove doesn't cooperate!

Logistics: From Puerto Boyaca I took a van to La Dorada (8,000) and then another van to Ibague (2 hr 45 min, 20,000). I spent the night in a hotel near the bus station and then at 0400 took a taxi to Juntas (40 minutes, 45,000 pesos). From Juntas I continued to walk uphill for 3 km to the birding area. I eventually caught a bus back to Ibague from Juntas around 12:00 (50 min, 2,500). There does seem to be a few places to stay in Juntas if interested, but I wouldn't try to show up in the middle of the night.

Birding: I originally stopped at a stand of Eucalyptus about 2 km up the road because the map in the Colombia site guide, is terrible. After spending the first hour at the spot in the book and realizing it had to be wrong, I continued uphill another km to 4.569314, -75.324307, 2130m where a nice section of forest started that was good for the brushfinch and dove. I spent the next hour walking from 2130m up to 4.575641, -75.326016, 2230m. I encountered numerous groups of Yellow-headed Brushfinches as well as a few White-naped Brushfinches. I heard a few Tolima Doves and was about to call one in close



near 2230m, but couldn't see it. Luckily another bird flew across the road at this spot. I then started walking back downhill and after another 75 meters, another Tolima Dove flew across the road and this time landed along the edge. I got a quick look before it disappeared in the brush. Be careful as there are a TON of Band-tailed Pigeons in the area. I then walked back downhill to the bridge at the edge of Juntas. During the beginning of my walk I passed a house around 2100 meters that had hummingbird feeders. They might not be filled but the owner (and his 4 dogs) are friendly and the guy will be more than happy to fill the feeders if you want. Indigo-capped Hummingbird visits these feeders. Back downhill at the bridge, I waited for the sun to hit some bushes that are supposed to be good for the Blossomcrown. The sun didn't hit the area until 1000, but at that time, a single male Tolima Blossomcrown came in and fed on the red tubular flowers (4.559262,-75.320375). There are two bushes before the bridge that are of interest, one with small yellow flowers and then a larger bush with has red tubular flowers. This has been a reliable area for the blossomcrown for some time now. Apparently when the blackberry bushes are flowering it enjoys them as well, but at the time of my visit there were no flowers on the blackberry bushes.

Target Birds: Yellow-headed Brushfinch, Tolima Dove, Tolima Blossomcrown, White-tipped Swift (best from mirador just above the bridge), Indigo-capped Hummingbird

Good Birds: White-naped Brushfinch, Flammulated Treehunter, Chest-crowned Antpitta



Tolima Blossomcrown Stakeout, the bush in the middle is the one with the red flowers



Tolima Dove area



Tolima Blossomcrown

Santa Rosa de Cabal (Fuerte's Parrot spot):

Summary: Located between Pereira and Manizales, the small town of Santa Rosa de Cabal, is the perfect launching spot for a morning trip to see one of the rarest parrots in the world. Thought to be extinct for nearly 90 years, the Fuerte's Parrot was rediscovered in 2002 with an estimated population of less than 300 birds. Sadly the initial rediscovery location is off limits due to security issues, but in 2014 another group of birds were found at a much more accessible location just outside of Santa Rosa. It is not possible to make an easy morning trip to see these rare birds.

Logistics: From Ibague, I took a van (4 hours, 28,000 pesos) to Pereira and then another van (30 min) to Santa Rose de Cabal. I stayed at the Coffee Town Hostel because the owner speaks English and I was hoping he'd be able to help me sort out a vehicle for the next day (which he was able to do). I highly recommend staying at that hostel. Cheap, clean, and good wifi. My driver for the morning was Jose, phone number: 3215921567. If Jose isn't available, the owner of Coffee Town will be able to find someone else. I paid 180,000 for 6 hours. Although the vehicle was a jeep, if you have your own small rental car, you'll still be able to make it (it is a bit rough but still very doable in my opinion). The spot is 25km from town and it took 70 minutes. If for some reason you're trying to hire another driver and need to explain the location, say it's the road to the "paramo" or the "laguna", but make sure they understand you only need to go 25 km as the laguna is much further away. Head out of town towards the Termales de San Vicente, but then keep left at 4.865198, -75.607702. From here it's a straight shot to the location (although you'll eventually see another sign for a right turn to Termales de San Vicente, ignore it). You'll eventually pass an un-manned army checkpoint and descend through some farmland to a lookout near a large forested valley at 4.856169, -75.484659, 3120m. I arrived at this spot shortly after 0600 and quickly had 4 Fuerte's Parrots flyby. It took another 3 ½ hours of waiting until I found another group of 8 quietly feeding near the forest edge which I was able to watch from only 30 meters away! Be aware that there are plenty of other parrots in the area including Scaly-naped, Speckle-faced, and Golden-plumed Parakeet.

Birding: As stated above, I arrived shortly after 0600 and had four fly by. I stayed in the same spot all morning as fog rolled in and out. I eventually found a group feeding just east of the GPS points along the edge of the forest bordering the field. I found them after hearing a few soft calls, otherwise I might have totally missed them as they were very inconspicuous. So be alert. While waiting for the Fuerte's I had a few groups of Golden-plumed Parakeets flyby and also had Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan and Black-headed Hemispingus.

Target Birds: Fuerte's Parrot

Good Birds: Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Red-crested Cotinga, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Purple-backed Thornbill, Grass Wren



Fuerte's Parrot



Scanning area for the parrots, I found the flock along the forest edge to the left of this picture

Rio Blanco:

Summary: Rio Blanco is a reserve that was established to protect the watershed of Manizales. It is owned and maintained by the local water company and therefore you need to coordinate permission before visiting. There's accommodation on the premises, but it's also possible to stay in Manizales and visit for the day. Rio Blanco is commonly referred to as one of the best birding spots in Colombia and rightfully so. There are a few antpitta feeders attracting truly rare birds as well as a few other species that can be difficult to find elsewhere in Colombia or even all of South America (i.e. Masked Saltator).

Logistics: Coordinating permission to visit can be a little cumbersome, but as long as you start the process early enough you shouldn't have any major issues. The person to contact has changed a few times over the years, but currently email Natalia at reservarrioblanco@augasdemanizales.com.co to make reservations. They do regularly fill up with large groups so don't wait too long to schedule a date. A guide is mandatory for the reserve and if you're only visiting for the day, you can schedule meals in advance. 70,000 per night (3 meals included), 60,000 for guide for all day (Spanish), 20,000 entrance fee if not staying, 9,000 breakfast, 14,000 lunch or dinner. They can also arrange transportation to and from the lodge, 60,000 each way. We stayed at Mountain Town Hostel which is near the entrance road for Rio Blanco, I'd recommend staying near here and Manizales is a very hilly city and if you're staying on the other side of town it could take quite some time to make it there. The driver picked us up at 0600, breakfast is at 0630, and antpitta feeding starts at 0700.

Birding: I'm not going to be very detailed as you'll have a guide. We spent 1 day at the reserve and came away with all our targets. After our 0630 breakfast, we made it to the first feeder by 0700. Chestnut-crowned Antpittas eagerly showed up, but Brown-banded Antpitta was a no show. We spent over an hour waiting and during this wait a large flock passed by which held a single Masked Saltator, which can be very tricky to track down here. Eventually we headed to the second antpitta feeder which after a 20 minute wait, a single Bicolored Antpitta showed up. After another 20 minutes, two Brown-banded Antpittas also came in! The rest of the day was spent birding the road and although we had a 2 ½ hour rain break midday, we were still able to find a number of interesting species including Dusky Piha, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, and White-rumped Hawk.

Target Birds: Bicolored Antpitta, Brown-banded Antpitta, Masked Saltator, Dusky Piha, Rusty-faced Parrot

Good Birds: White-rumped Hawk, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Slate-crowned Antpitta, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Ocellated Tapaculo, Blackish Tapaculo, Ash-colored Tapaculo, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, Stygian Owl (missed, but roosting lately), White-throated Screech-Owl (heard at dusk near lodge), Band-winged Nightjar

Nevado de Ruiz:

Summary: This high elevation birding spot consists of a few locations including La Mirador, Las Brisas entrance to the National Park, and Thermales de Ruiz. The area offers spectacular scenery, a few endemic birds, and lots of interesting hummingbirds. The paved road is in excellent condition, but if you don't have your own vehicle, it is best to hire a vehicle for the day, as getting around by public transportation would be very difficult.

Logistics: It takes just under two hours to get from Manizales to the vicinity of the birding areas. We hired a car for the day which was coordinated with the help of Sebastian. Rodrigo, phone number 3122862467, charged 250,000 for the day and drove a nice SUV. If you plan to find your own transport make sure you at least give yourself a few days because normal taxis would have to submit paperwork to operate outside of the city limits.

Birding: We spent a single morning birding this area and focused on three main birding areas. There is a little bit of strategy to birding this area as large groups of tourists will eventually arrive from Manizales. I recommend starting at the Mirador at dawn and doing a quick walk for the parrot (check the fields along the first part of the road to Thermales as well). If you can't find the parrot, take a break and head to Las Brisas no later than 0800. This should give you some time to find the Buffy Helmetcrest around the visitor center before all the tourists arrive. Apparently the hummingbird disappears at times



when there's a lot of human activity. You can always return to look for the parrots again and eventually make your way midday to Thermales de Ruiz for the hummingbirds. The "old road" back down to Manizales past Thermales can make for an enjoyable afternoon of birding if you have time. We didn't have too long to check out this section but still picked up a few good birds (Purple-backed Thornbill being the best). This area is known for Crescent-faced Antpitta, but our few short attempts came up empty.

La Mirador: Located just before the turn for Thermales de Ruiz, La Mirador is a reliable site for Rufous-fronted Parrot. This arguably is the most difficult target bird to find on the mountain. Park at 4.971508, -75.34387 (next to a restaurant and gate) and then cross the gate and head down the dirt road. Walking down this road provides a great opportunity to scan for the parrots in the large valley (on your left) or feeding in the scrubby vegetated hillside (on your right). We found a flock of Rufous-fronted Parrots at around 0930 at 4.96978, -75.345987 feeding on the hillside. Another area for the parrots is the first part of the road towards Thermales de Ruiz. There are some farm fields around 4.96029, -75.36191 where the parrots apparently sometimes feed.

Las Brisas: The Las Brisas entrance to the National Park is the stakeout spot for the Buffy Helmetcrest. You do not have to actually enter the park (or pay a fee) which is nice. We found multiple helmetcrests hanging around right next to the visitor center and along the last 75 meters of road for the center. There's also a small trail behind the visitor center where we had Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, White-chinned Thistletail, Andean Siskin, and Tawny Antpitta.

Thermales de Ruiz: This hotel/hotspring has a very nice hummingbird setup that is visited by a number of cool species. I've been to a lot of hummingbird feeding stations in South America and I think this one was my favorite (but maybe that is due to the pleasant surprise of feeding a Rainbow-bearded Thornbill from a tiny pink cup...) It was 20,000 pesos to enter and visit the feeders (wifi in the building as well). We spent about 1 ½ hours here. Highlights included Black-thighed Puffleg, Golden-breasted Puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Mountain Velvetbreast, and Viridian Metaltail

Target Birds: Rufous-fronted Parrot, Buffy Helmetcrest, Black-thighed Puffleg, Golden-breasted Puffleg, Black-backed Bush-Tanager (missed)

Good Birds: Tawny Antpitta, White-chinned Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Mountain Velvetbreast, Sword-billed Hummingbird



Rainbow-bearded Thornbill



Buffy Helmetcrest

Rio Claro:

Summary: Rio Claro Natural Reserve is located about 3 ½ hours east of Medellin and is a reliable spot for a number of the mid-magdalena endemics and specialty birds. The private reserve is also a popular destination for tourists, but despite reading some reports about “avoiding peak times” the tourists are busy doing touristy things (boat rides, cave tours etc) so even though we were there over New Years (and it was very touristy) we still didn’t see anyone along the Mulata Trail (which is where all the good birds are). The reserve offers a few different types of accommodation and all but the camping are full board (three meals). The reserve is probably the most reliable spot to find the endemic Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant, but it is also home to Beautiful Woodpecker, White-mantled Barbet, Magdalena Antbird, Sooty Ant-Tanager, and some range restricted species that are very difficult to find elsewhere including Saffron-headed Parrot and Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner.

Logistics: After taking an afternoon van from Manizales to Medellin, we spent the night in Medellin because it was New Year’s Eve and there weren’t any more vans or buses heading towards Rio Claro. The best we could do was a 0550 departure (24,000 peso) on New Year’s Day so we left at that time and made it to the park gate by 0930. We made reservations through the website <http://www.rioclaroreservanatural.com/en/home/> which I’d recommend since the place does seem to get very busy. We paid at the front office and walked 1 km to the restaurant area where we got our key and walked another 500 meters or so to the Cabanas. The room was fairly basic for how much we were paying, but the birds here are worth it. Cost was 260,000 per person for 2 nights plus meals. Breakfast is from 0800-1000, Lunch 1200-1400, and dinner 1800-2000. This schedule worked out pretty well, we skipped breakfast, but could easily eat lunch at the hottest part of the day and then dinner after it got dark. Leaving Rio Claro is pretty straight forward. One report mentioned that they had issues catching a bus, but we had no problem flagging one down at 0730 when we went to leave.

Birding: After arriving at 0930, we ended up birding Rio Claro the rest of that day, a full day, and an early morning leaving around 0730. Even though it got very hot quickly, birds remained active both days until about noon and then picked up again around 2:30 in the afternoon. I spent almost all of my time on the Mulata Trail other than an evening trip to the oilbird cave. Alex spent a little more time than me birding the road and also took a boat ride down the river the second afternoon.

Mulata Trail: The start of the trail is on the right side of the road just before the bridge along the entrance road (didn’t take a GPS, but you can’t miss it). The trail starts off steep (passing a house on your right) before continuing on until it hits the stream. From here you need to walk upstream for about 50 meters (depending on water level this might be very tricky to do without getting wet) and from there the trail crosses the stream and continues fairly steeply up to a clearing at 5.88672, -74.863229, 447m. Although the trail is only ~1.3 km long, it feels a lot longer as it’s quite steep and usually it’ll be fairly hot and humid. The lower portion of the trail produced a fair number of flocks and Alex saw an Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant near the beginning of the trail. Magdalena Antbird can easily be found as the trail descends to the stream (5.890084, -74.860586). After crossing the stream, there was a pair of Antioquia Bristle-Tyrants on territory at 5.889426, -74.861314. The flock that Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner was in also worked its way to this area as well. The first time we found the foliage-gleaner was slightly further uphill from the bristle-tyrants on a small trail leading off to the right. We found a single vocal Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner at 5.889573, -74.861665. This small side trail eventually loops back around to the main trail. Heading further up the main trail, there is a Golden-headed Manakin lek at 5.888571, -74.861554 and just past that a Black-faced Antthrush came in for good views at 5.888441, -74.861881. Past the antthrush spot, you start to get good views of the valley on your left. From here up, keep an eye out for Blue Cotinga, Toucans, Saffron-headed Parrot (good looks at a pair both days), White-mantled Barbet (5.887749, -74.86272) and a gully at 5.8873, -74.862819 had Sooty Ant-Tanager. The clearing starts at 5.88672, -74.863229, 447m. At the beginning of the clearing there was a very vocal Blue-lored Antbird. We easily taped in a Beautiful Woodpecker in the middle of the clearing and near the far end, Bare-crowned Antbirds were on territory (5.886157, -74.863458). It’s not worth walking past this spot as the trail soon ends at the edge of a large field. Blue Cotinga was also found around the clearing and keep a lookout for Black Oropendola. I had a pair fly past and my friend was able to see and document them from the clearing two weeks after me. Other birds to look for during the hike include Grey-capped Nunlet (missed), White-whiskered Puffbird, Dusky Antbird (just before clearing), Chestnut-backed Antbird, Checker-throated Antwren, Pacific Antwren, and Scarlet-browed Tanager.

Entrance Road/Oilbirds: I didn’t spend much time birding the entrance road, but there was a vocal pair of Barred Puffbirds just past the bridge in a large tree in the clearing at 5.894778, -74.858138. Alex also had Cinnamon Woodpecker in the area. The oilbird caves are located along the trail past the Cabanas. After walking for another 10-15 minutes past the Cabanas, you come to a cave on the other side of the river at 5.886938, -74.85272. Since Oilbird was a lifer for Alex, I sat on the bank while he swam across and climbed into the cave to get better looks. As it got dark, at least 100 oilbirds made their way out of the cave.

Target Birds: Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant, Magdalena Antbird, Beautiful Woodpecker, White-mantled Barbet- Sooty Ant-Tanager, Saffron-headed Parrot, Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner, Black Oropendola, Bare-crowned Antbird, Blue Cotinga, Oilbird

Good Birds: Black-faced Antthrush, Western Striped Manakin (missed), Olivaceous Flatbill (missed), Barred Puffbird, White-whiskered Puffbird, Grey-capped Nunlet (missed), Checker-throated Antwren, Pacific Antwren, Dusky Antbird, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Buffy-crested Tanager, Scarlet-browed Tanager, Dusky-faced Tanager, Bronze-vented Plumbeleteer, Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo, and Slate-colored Grosbeak.

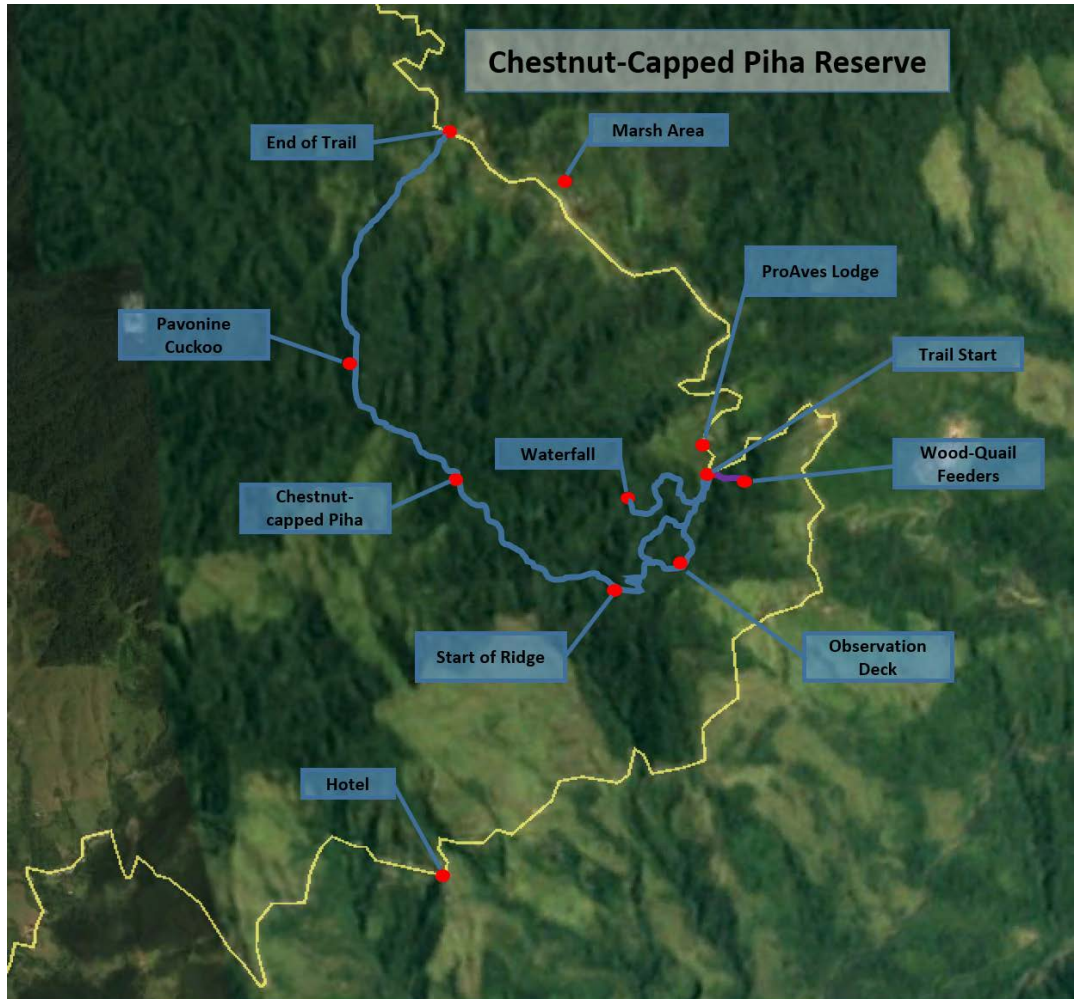
Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve:

Summary: The Arrierito Antioqueño Bird Reserve was established after the discovery of the critically endangered Chestnut-capped Piha in 1999. Luckily, the piha is fairly easy to track down within the reserve along with a number of other endemic and hard to find species. Multicolored, Scarlet-and-White, Purplish-mantled, and Black-and-Gold Tanagers can all be found in the reserve. Along with other interesting birds such as Red-bellied Grackle, Brown-billed Scythbill, and Green-fronted Lancebill, the reserve has also recently become a fairly reliable spot of Pavonine Cuckoo. The reserve is located about 45 minutes before Anori and there's a small village below that reserve which provides an easy location for visiting birders to set up base camp.

Logistics: We caught an early bus (0730-1140) back from Rio Claro to Medellin

so that we could catch the 1430 bus to Anori and have time to stop and buy supplies at a grocery store (we weren't entirely sure what the accommodation/food situation was going to be near Anori). We had bought our ticket to Anori prior to going to Rio Claro so that we knew we'd have seats (good thing as the bus was full). There are a few buses heading to Anori each day, but the only two afternoon times are 11:15 and 14:30 so plan accordingly. We arrived at our destination just past the small village of El Roble at 1845. The coordinates in Burton's report for accommodation were accurate and we were able to find a place to stay. The entrance to the "hotel" is at 6.967722, -75.124167 (between a store and a steep bank). Walk 100 meters down the dirt road to the "hotel" at 6.966669, -75.123951. The rooms were very basic (as you'd expect for the middle of nowhere), but clean (15,000 a night and I still had cell service with Claro). Although we brought food with us, the lady down the street agreed to cook us dinner. Also, the hotel has a kitchen/fridge, so you could always bring supplies to cook there. From the hotel to the reserve is another 5km up the road. The walk isn't too bad and took us about an hour to do. The start of the trail is about 300 meters before the actual ProAves lodge on your left (didn't take GPS but it's obvious, first part goes up some steps). When you're ready to leave, there are four buses that pass by every day. I can't remember the morning times, but the afternoon times were 1300 and 1600. We left at 13:10 so it pretty much was on time. I'd make sure to ask to see if times have changed. We arrived back at the north terminal in Medellin at 1720.

Birding: We spent 1 ½ days in the reserve. The first morning we woke up at 0300 and walked the hour uphill to the reserve and then tried for owls a few times. No Colombian Screech-Owls, but we did have Tropical Screech-Owl, Mottled Owl, and Wattle Guan. We spent the entire first morning concentrating on the piha. We spent the majority of the time birding the trail from the small observation deck (6.979964, -75.119134) up to the start of the ridge as well as the waterfall trail. Although we couldn't find the piha we had plenty of other interesting birds including Multicolored Tanager, Streak-capped Treehunter, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Stile's Tapaculo, Moustached Puffbird, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Brown-billed Scythebill (waterfall trail, 6.981645, -75.112359), and Green-fronted Lancebill (at waterfall, 6.981717, -75.114678). By midday we had made our way up to the top of the ridge and had started down the backside. At around 1330 I heard a piha call and eventually we tracked down a pair at 6.981431, -75.120442, 1827m. Although we didn't find a nest, it appeared they were on territory. We continued further down the trail planning on doing the entire loop. The forest of the backside isn't that great and overall I wouldn't recommend going any further than where we had the piha. The only highlight was a very responsive Pavonine



Cuckoo at 6.989422, -75.125368. If you do plan on doing the whole loop, make sure to take the right (down the very worn path) at marker 15. The trail eventually goes through two gates in an overgrown field and then drops down into more degraded habitat before reaching the road at 6.997834, -75.120734. From here we hiked back to our hotel passing the small marshland (6.992333, -75.115017) mentioned in most reports (Blackish Rail and White-throated Crake) as well as a good spot for Parker's Antbird (6.990898, -75.11849) in the secondary growth. The ProAves lodge is at 6.984672, -75.11977 and Pavonine Cuckoo has also been seen just up the road from the lodge (although we only heard it there). On the second day, we caught a ride up to the lodge from another birder who had rented a car and then walked directly up the trail towards the ridge. We spent the morning on the ridge finding a Chestnut-capped Piha (6.978623, -75.115951) as well as Purplish-mantled Tanager, Black-and-Gold Tanager, Uniform Antshrike, and many others. We saw the piha pair at their territory mid-morning and then headed back down towards the road the same way we had walked in so that we could make it back in time to catch our bus at 1300.

Target Birds: Chestnut-capped Piha, Stile's Tapaculo, Red-bellied Grackle (missed), Multicolored Tanager, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Scarlet-and-White Tanager (missed), Black-and-gold Tanager, Pavonine Cuckoo, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet

Good Birds: Wattled Guan, Chestnut Wood-quail (not reliable at the feeders anymore), Streak-capped Treehunter, Chestnut-crowned Gnatcatcher, Brown-billed Scythebill, Green-fronted Lancebill, White-tailed Sicklebill (missed, waterfall area), Uniform Antshrike, Moustached Puffbird, Ochre-breasted Antpitta



Entrance road to the hotel



Our hotel just below ProAves (and Stephan's rental car)



Chestnut-capped Piha

Jardin:

Summary: Jardin is a typical little tourist town that also happens to be the best location for Yellow-eared Parrot. Located about four hours south of Medellin, there are plenty of buses heading to the town. Although there is a decent tract of forest at the top of the mountain near the parrot location, there really aren't too many birds here that you can't find somewhere else.

Logistics: We made a last minute decision to head here for the afternoon after quickly getting our targets at La Romera. We took a bus from Medellin's south bus terminal at 1030 and arrive in Jardin just after 1430. Unknowing to us, we had just arrived on the first day of a four day festival. It took way too long to find a hotel with an empty room and we way overpaid (100,000 pesos). It also took a few minutes to find a taxi (apparently there are only 5 in town). This was also a bit pricey costing 150,000 for the next 3 hours. The road up to the ProAves lodge (and parrot spot) is in good shape and can be done with any car. It takes about 45 minutes to get to the Lodge/pass area.

Birding: We only had one target and had about 2 hours to find it before it got dark. Luckily, the Yellow-eared Parrots are pretty conspicuous and easy to find. We actually saw our first flock just as we were leaving town to head up the mountain, but they didn't stick around for good looks. We continued driving up to the ProAves Lodge (5.538939, -75.804226) and then about another 2 km further to a large clearing at 5.530045, -75.804099. We arrived just after 1530 and spent about an hour waiting for parrots to fly by. During our hour-long stakeout, we saw a few pairs closely fly by. On our way back down to Jardin we found another flock perched on a distant hillside. Tanager Finch and Chestnut-crested Cotinga are two other good birds to see here, but we didn't have time to look (and we'd both seen the cotinga before and Alex had already seen the Tanager Finch).

Target Birds: Yellow-eared Parrot, Chestnut-crested Cotinga (missed, didn't look), Tanager Finch (missed, didn't look).

Bolombolo:

Summary: The magical town of Bolombolo is located at the base of the road to Urrao and also happens to be at the midway point along the route from Medellin to Jardin. The actual birding spot is about 4 kilometers away from Bolombolo near the 3km mark along the road towards Urrao. The open dry forest here is good for three endemics: Antioquia Wren, Greyish Piculet, and Apical Flycatcher. The road here is very busy which is quite annoying.

Logistics: We left Jardin at 0530 and arrived at Bolombolo just after 0700. If you're coming from Medellin it takes about two hours by bus. In Bolombolo we hired two motorcycles to drop us off at the 3km mark and coordinated for them to pick us back up at 0930 (10,000 each way). The main birding area is near the 3 km mark 5.96648, -75.860436. There are hotels in Bolombolo if you want to arrive the evening before.

Birding: I've read a lot of reports that the birds are fairly easy to find here, even during the heat of the day. We arrived shortly after 0700 and quickly found Antioquia Wren at 5.96648, -75.86043. We also found an Apical Flycatcher at this spot. From here we slowly started to work our way downhill looking for Greyish Piculet. Despite 90 minutes of searching we were unable to find a piculet before our drivers came back to pick us up. We also visited this spot after our trip to Urrao. This time we arrived from Urrao on a bus and just had the driver stop as we approached the 3 km spot. It was 1600 and it only took about 20 minutes until a pair of Greyish Piculets responded at 5.964226 -75.85928 (where the heck were they a few days ago??). Afterwards I just called the motorcycles that we had used a few days prior, although with all the traffic it probably would be simple to hitch a ride or even walk back down to Bolombolo.

Target Birds: Antioquia Wren, Greyish Piculet, Apical Flycatcher

Urrao (Dusky Starfrontlet Lodge):

Summary: Colibri del Sol is the ProAves lodge located in the cloud forest below the only known site for the endemic Dusky Starfrontlet. The area also has a few other endemics including the recently discovered Urrao Antpitta (which visits a feeder), Paramillo Tapaculo, and Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer. The lodge itself isn't accessible by vehicle and involves a 1 ½ hour hike or horse ride. Surprisingly this trail is often used by Colombian hikers going to visit the paramo and we were amazed by the number of people we saw during our stay (30-50 people each day!).

Logistics: The bus from Bolombolo takes about 4 hours. We waited at the rest stop in Bolombolo until a bus passed that we could take. It took about an hour and the bus was full, but we were able to convince the driver into letting us stand (eventually people got off and we were able to sit). Once we arrived in Urrao, we took a taxi to Chuscal (30 min, 25,000 pesos) which is where the ProAves guide was waiting for us with two horses. We used one horse for our gear and took turns riding the other one (the hike isn't hard, more just for the novelty of it). The first part of the hike is through farmland and eventually gets steeper as you enter the forest and make your way up to the lodge. It took us 1 ½ hours to get to the lodge which is 5.2 km from the starting point. This is the only ProAves lodge we stayed at and it was ridiculously expensive. For what it's worth, if you're really motivated, you could definitely do the hike as a day trip from Urrao. We saw numerous groups of hikers (most who weren't legit hikers, just normal Colombian tourists) who were hiking up to the paramo as a day trip. Frustratingly you'd still have to pay \$50 a person to hike through the ProAves property, but that's cheaper than staying there. Contact me if you're interested in doing it as a day hike and want to discuss the logistics more.

Birding: We arrived in the early evening just as it was getting dark. We had a full day and a morning here. The first morning we started at 0630 at the Urrao Antpitta feeder which is only a 10 minute walk from the lodge. After seeing two antpittas we crossed back over the river (White-capped Dipper) and headed up the trail next to the lodge. It took us about two hours to reach the steps heading up to the edge of the paramo although we were walking slow and birding the whole time. After climbing the steep steps you reach the first set of feeders and then the upper feeders a bit higher at 6.437912, -76.088175, 3478m. From the lodge to the upper feeders is 3.5km. At the upper feeders we saw a few Dusky Starfrontlets as well as Black-throated and Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercers. We continued further up the trail past the upper feeders and found a few different Paramillo Tapaculos (6.43724, -76.087755 and 6.436355, -76.087441). Although the book says they prefer bamboo, we found them more common in the thick mossy habitat closer to the paramo. From here we headed back down the trail and despite the heavy fog, we took the Chusque Trail and heard a few Chestnut-naped Antpittas (seen at 6.434838, -76.089234) and saw Citrine Warbler in a mixed flock. The afternoon was slow with the majority of the time spent at an overlook halfway back to the lodge waiting for Rusty-faced Parrots. We heard a flock and Alex briefly saw them and we had nice looks at Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager. The next morning we decided to visit a cliff face that the Rusty-faced Parrots sometime visit in the early mornings to eat minerals. Stephan and Claudia had arrived the night prior so the four of us took horses up the trail leaving at 0500. We arrived at 0600 near the steps to the paramo and then took a different trail that was a 25 minute hike to the cliff. We sat at the cliff from 0630-0845 but we never heard or saw any parrots. The guide says they only sometimes visit (he showed up pics he took of them in Nov & Dec, so maybe they are a bit seasonal as well). We then hiked back down to the lodge and at noon headed back to Urrao and onward towards Las Tangaras.

Target Birds: Dusky Starfrontlet, Paramillo Tapaculo, Urrao Antpitta, Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer, Rusty-faced Parrot (ssp), Citrine Warbler (ssp)

Good Birds: Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Slaty-crowned Antpitta, Black-throated Flowerpiercer, Plushcap, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Sword-billed Hummingbird, White-capped Dipper, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Black-capped Hemispingus, Black-headed Bush-Tanager



Urrao Antpitta

Las Tangaras:

Summary: Most people who visit the western Andes opt to visit Montezuma instead of Las Tangaras, but if you have the time, I'd highly recommend visiting both. Although there's a significant amount of overlap in bird species, both places provide better opportunities for specific species and a number of the choco specialities can be difficult to find, so the more time you have in their range, the better. Birding Las Tangaras consists of mostly birding along a public road, but there is also a single trail that heads into the forest for a few kilometers (this trail used to loop, but doesn't anymore due to a large landslide). There's also a hummingbird feeding station at the highest part of the road.

Logistics: From Urrao we easily caught a bus back to Bolombolo (4 hours) and from there took a chiva to the town of Bolivar. Although we took a chiva at 1700, apparently they usually stop around 1600. Bolivar is only about 25 minutes away so if you need to take a taxi it wouldn't be too expensive. From Bolivar it would be possible to take a bus to El Carmen, but it was getting late and we wanted to make sure we had plenty of time to coordinate a ride for the next morning so we opted to take a taxi (1 hour, 60,000). Although it would be possible to stay in El Siete (the town along the highway), I'd recommend El Carmen as it's only 10 minutes further up the road and you have better food, sleeping, and transportation opportunities. Although it was the last night of the festival, we were able to find a chiva driver that agreed to take us up to Las Tangaras at 0400 the next morning (40 minutes, 70,000). All other rides/pickups were only 50,000. The dirt road is 4.3 km past El Siete on your left at 5.852194, -76.180105. It is the first possible left you can make. After crossing a bridge you head uphill until the crest at 5.807919, -76.17991. There is a short trail here that leads to some hummingbird feeders. From here the road starts heading back downhill to where the Las Tangaras trail starts at 5.806473, -76.181704. The trail first goes through a clearing and then through good forest for a few kilometers. You will cross a few small streams including one with a waterfall and eventually reach the highest point at 5.812699, -76.189471, 1854m. From here there's two trails, but both end. I wouldn't bother birding any further than the top at 1854m. Each time we got dropped off, we coordinated a time for our chiva to pick us back up. Otherwise you'd have to walk out, as there's very little traffic on the road to hitch a ride with. Of note, the road is in good condition and any rental could make it to the trail.

Birding: We spent 1 ½ days birding here. The first day, Alex and I started along the road a few hundred meters above the trail entrance. Although we saw a few very interesting birds such as Uniform Treehunter, Toucan Barbet, Alto Pisones Tapaculo, and Narino Tapaculo, by 0800 we decided to head into the forest along the trail. In the first open section we found a few White-headed Wrens and as you enter the forest we had Crested Quetzal, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, and our first Cloud-forest Pygmy Owl. We had a fantastic morning finding numerous large flocks. Our first large flock contained Buffy Tuftedcheek, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, and Black Solitaire. We had another large flock near the covered bench at 5.812746, -76.186212 which included Choco Vireo, Crested Ant-Tanager, Olive Finch, and lots of furnarids. We also had good looks at a Cloud Forest Pygmy-Owl at this spot. From here we worked our way up to the highest point to look for Gold-ringed Tanager. We didn't find any, but had other good birds including Flavescent Flycatcher, Club-winged Manakin, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, and another Choco Vireo. By early afternoon things slowed down because of fog so we worked our way back out to the main road and walked up to the hummingbird feeders. Highlights included Velvet-breasted Coronet, Empress Brilliant, Brown Inca, and Purple-throated Woodstar. The next morning we only birded the road from the hummingbird feeders down to the trail. Things started slow because of fog, but we eventually found a few flocks including Indigo Flowerpiercer, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, and Beautiful Jay.

Target Birds: Black Solitaire, Choco Vireo, Bicolored Antvireo (missed, difficult here), Beautiful Jay, Alto Pisones Tapaculo, Narino Tapaculo, Cloud Forest Pygmy-Owl, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Black-and-Gold Tanager, Crested Ant-Tanager, Gold-ringed Tanager (missed), White-headed Wren, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia

Good Birds: Toucan Barbet, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, Crested Quetzal, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, Empress Brilliant, Brown Inca, Purple-throated Woodstar, Velvet-breasted Coronet

Otun Quimbaya:

Summary: Otun is part of the National Park system, but the actual reserve is run by a private company. Most of the birding occurs along the 6 km of dirt road from headquarters to El Cedal, but there's also a trail system behind the headquarters and housing buildings that's good for Chestnut Wood-Quail. The birding here is interesting because, although there's not a huge variety of species, there are a few birds such as Moustached Antpitta, Red-ruffled Fruitcrow, and Cauca Guan that are very difficult other places, but are all very common and easily encountered here. Otun has also recently become a reliable spot for the almost mythical Hooded Antpitta.

Logistics: A few days prior to visiting I made reservations by emailing yarumoblanco2009@hotmail.com. They responded fairly quickly and confirmed my reservation. It does seem that they are fully booked at



times, so it'd be best to make reservations and not just show up unannounced. I left El Carmen at 1030 and after a full day of traveling, arrived in Pereira at 1900. I had the staff at Otun arrange a ride for me and at 1930 an old gentleman picked me up at the bus station and we drove the hour to Otun. Although the road is in rough shape, a small rental could make it (although you might scrape a little). I was charged 90,000 for the ride (way overpriced, but can't say I was surprised). I forget the original price they tried to charge me for staying at Otun (100,000ish), but it included 3 activities and 3 meals per day. After I explained I didn't want any activities and that I only needed dinner, I got the price down to 60,000 per night. El Cedal is 6 kilometers away, so if you plan to try for the Hooded Antpitta you'll have to start very early as it's necessary to be there before first light. There's also a trail system behind the lodge and also on the other side near the river. As of last year, you now need a guide to accompany you along the trail system. This is super annoying because the guide times are only 0900 and 1500. Not great times for birding. It only costs 5,000 pesos, but the timing is terrible. Also, playback isn't allowed (which can make seeing the wood-quail tricky). That being said, it's only the National Park staff that cares about these rules, not the Otun staff. The National Park staff doesn't arrive at work until after 0800, so if you go rouge and bird the trails from dawn until 0800 by yourself, no one will care (which is what I did). Also, if you do have to use a guide, ask for Juan Manual. He knows his birds and will be able to answer any questions if you're looking for something specific. Leaving Otun is quite easy. There's a chiva that passes by 3 times a day (0800, 1200, and 1700, 4,000 pesos), but it seemed often be 30 min late. On the weekends the times are 0930, 1000, and 1700. The chiva drops you off in the middle of Pereira and from there you can take a short taxi ride back to the bus terminal.

Birding: I spent 2 ½ days here. The first morning I left at 0300 to look for owls on route to El Cedal. Tropical-screech Owls are common around the lodge. I didn't find my first Colombian Screech-Owl until 2.7km (4.715822, -75.559711) from the lodge. From here to El Cedal, Colombia Screech-Owl was fairly common. For the Hooded Antpitta you need to be at the spot before first light as it usually only sings at first light and at dusk. The location is about 200 meters before El Cedal just past the end of the large clearing at 4.705435, -75.540186. The bird favors the right side of the road (up the steep hillside) and often can be seen from the roadside. I spent the rest of the morning birding the road back to the lodge area. Moustached Antpitta was very common (at least 11 heard and 2 seen), Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Multi-colored Tanager, Crested Ant-Tanager, Red-ruffled Fruitcrow, and Cauca Gun. Along the river trail I saw Torrent Tyrannulet and Torrent Duck. The trails behind the lodge is the best location for Chestnut Wood-Quail. Near trail marker B17 and near B18 are two good locations to try and tape them in. Chestnut-breasted Wren and Stile's Tapaculo are also common along the trail. If you're interested in Greyish Piculet or Bar-crested Antshrike, the best place is at the end of the H trail which can easily be reached by walking to the far end of the soccer field.

Target Birds: Hooded Antpitta, Cauca Guan, Colombia Screech-Owl, Multicolored Tanager, Greyish Piculet, Chestnut Wood-Quail, Stiles Tapaculo, Crested Ant-Tanager, Red-ruffled Fruitcrow

Good Birds: Torrent Duck, Moustached Antpitta, Ashy-headed Tyrannulet, Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet (missed), Torrent Tyrannulet, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Bar-crested Antshrike

Montezuma:

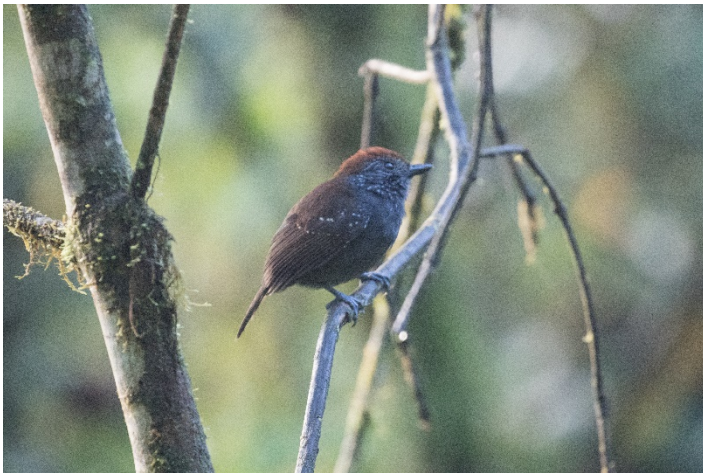
Summary: Montezuma is the private lodge located at the edge of Tatama National Park. The road leading through the national park, commonly referred to as Montezuma, is often hailed as one of the best birding spots in the entire country. As stated in the Las Tangaras section, birders usually only visit here or Las Tangaras, but if you have the time, I recommend visiting both. For us, Montezuma was a bit of a disappointment, mostly due to terrible weather.

Logistics: From Pueblo Rico, it is about a 45 minute drive along a rough road to Montezuma Lodge. Reservations are needed to visit and it's highly recommended to make them early as the place often fills up with tour groups. The owner can be contacted at polatapasco@hotmail.com or through Facebook at Rain Forest Montezuma. Costs are 140,000 per night, 100,000 daily guiding fee (required), transportation from Pueblo Rico to Montezuma 70,000, transportation to the top to walk back down 180,000. I'd recommend getting a vehicle at least for a day to drive you up to the highest point. On the second day we just walked from the lodge up to 1780m before light which wasn't bad at all.

Birding: Stephan, Claudia, and I spent 1 ½ days here. The first day we started at the top for Munchique Wood-wren and Gold-ringed Tanager, but we were soon rained out for the rest of the day. Although I spent the entire day out on the road, very little was seen except for a single flock at around 1500 which included a single Choco Vireo. On the second day, we quickly found a pair of Bicolored Antvireos at 5.245891, -76.097164, 1744m and then spent the rest of the morning birding back down towards the lodge. We ran into a number of flocks with highlights being Fulvous-breasted Flatbill, Scarlet-and-White Tanager (Stephan only), Choco Warbler, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, and Choco Tyrannulet.

Target Birds: Black Solitaire, Choco Vireo, Bicolored Antvireo, Beautiful Jay (missed here), Alto Pisones Tapaculo, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Black-and-Gold Tanager, Gold-ringed Tanager, Munchique Wood-Wren, Crested Ant-Tanager, Tanager Finch (missed)

Good Birds: Fulvous-breasted Flatbill, Scarlet-and-white Tanager, Toucan Barbet, Yellow-breasted Antpitta, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, plenty more



Bicolored Antvireo



Black-and-Gold Tanager



Gold-ringed Tanager

Santa Cecilia:

Summary: Located about an hour further downhill from Pueblo Rico, Santa Cecilia provides an easy and (usually) safe place to explore the Choco lowlands. This area is rarely visited by birders (no tour groups come here), but if you aren't planning to go to the Choco lowlands (but are visiting Montezuma), spending a day here will add a lot of interesting birds including the endemic Baudo Oropendola.

Logistics: After visiting Montezuma, Stephan, Claudia, and I drove down to Santa Celcilia (Stephan had rented a car). I also visited this area briefly before we went to Montezuma by public transportation. Before visiting this area make sure you check on the security situation with the police in Pueblo Rico, but recently it has been very safe. When visiting this area, it's necessary to use a local guide to visit the Alto Amurrupe Reserve. Though if you only want the oropendola, you can easily visit Gito on your own. Our local guide was Blas, phone number 3219404276. We paid him 60,000 to accompany us from 0600-1200. Blas is very active in the local conservation community and is very knowledgeable of the area. He doesn't speak English, but was still very helpful and highly recommended. There are a few hotels available in Santa Cecilia.

Birding: Unfortunately we only spent a single morning in the area. The goal was to see the Baudo Oropendola and then explore some of the lowland Choco forest as there's very little (if any) info online about this place. Below is information on two places worth visiting in the Santa Cecilia area.

Gito: To reach Gito you need to drive 20 minutes downhill to the military checkpoint just before the bridge at 5.35696, -76.18974. If you have a car you can park at the checkpoint. From here take the trail up river to the little cabana/restaurant area at 5.35992, -76.18934. A group of up to 30 Baudo Oropendolas commonly feed in the cecropias near the river and often perch in the tall bamboo as well. When we arrived shorting after 0600 it was pouring rain and continued to do so until 0930. While it rained, we scanned from underneath one of the shelters finding a few birds including Spot-crowned Barbet, Green-backed Thornbill, and Pacific Antwren. Once the rain stopped, the oropendolas became active and we saw upwards of 10 Baudo Oropendolas as they moved across the hillside opposite the river. A single Grey-headed Chachalaca also perched up and offered good views. The locals who own the shelters/live here are very interested in birds and conservation. One of the guys had a camera and excitedly showed us a bunch of pictures of the birds he's seen around the property. The most interesting being the oropendolas and Baudo Guan. They also currently have a pet juvenile Baudo Guan which apparently had shown up in the area a few days before our arrival. They told us we were the first tourists to visit and were very welcoming. We made sure to tip both guys who were helping us out to make sure they realize the importance of the birds and positive effects ecotourism can have. So if you visit for this endemic, please make sure to make a donation!



Bridge at Gito, park at the military checkpoint on the right and walk upstream

They told us we were the first tourists to visit and were very welcoming. We made sure to tip both guys who were helping us out to make sure they realize the importance of the birds and positive effects ecotourism can have. So if you visit for this endemic, please make sure to make a donation!

Area de Manejo Especial Etnico del Alto Amurrupe: You need a local guide to visit this area. The start of the trail for this area is just downhill from Santa Cecilia (you can walk there from the plaza). The start of the dirt road is at 5.34326, -76.15072. Park here and walk down the dirt road past a few houses until you come to a large wooden suspension bridge crossing the river. Cross the bridge and turn left. Continue for about 200 meters until you see a sign with a Baudo Oropendola on it at 5.34326, -76.15072. At this sign take a right and head up the trail. The first few hundred meters of this trail are steep and very muddy (wear rubber boots or plan to get wet). The first part of the trail passes through secondary forest, but after about 20 minutes of walking, you start to reach really nice forest. Unfortunately, I didn't get to this area until almost noon and I had to turn around (we originally continued hiking along the main river for quite a way, this wasn't a good idea). Although I didn't see much, this area should hold a number of good Choco birds including Rose-faced Parrot, Lita Woodpecker, Choco Woodpecker, Blue-tailed Trogon, Blue-whiskered Tanager, and of course Baudo Oropendolas. I saw a few Baudos at 5.33603, -76.1568 and another one on the walk out right near the suspension bridge.

Target Birds: Baudo Oropendola, Baudo Guan, Choco specialties

Good Birds: Due to poor weather and lack of time we didn't do this area justice. A few eBird reports indicate that most of the Choco specialties should be around. There are some really nice tracts of forest to explore.

Sumapaz:

Summary: Sumapaz National Park is located south of Bogota. Not only is it claimed to be the largest expanse of paramo in the world, it also happened to be a reliable spot for Green-bearded Helmetcrest. For birding purposes, you hardly enter the park, only needing to focus attention around La Laguna at 3700m.

Logistics: Getting here was a lot trickier than I anticipated. I took an overnight bus from Pereira to Bogota (1700-0300, 56,000 pesos) and got off at the south bus terminal in Bogota. I expected to find a large bus station (being a major city), but the south terminal is actually just a small building and at 0300 nothing was going on. I waited around for 1 ½ hours before taking a taxi to the town of Usme (20 minutes, 21,000 pesos). I was originally told that a bus would be coming by heading towards Sumapaz at 0500, but that info soon changed to 0800! That of course didn't work for me, and after a few more minutes a van stopped that was heading in the direction of Sumapaz, but would be stopping 5 km before the Laguna. Of course, to me it made total sense to just take it and either pay the guy to continue to my destination or just walk, but at first take the locals didn't get the plan. After a little more explaining, I got in the van, but this goes to show that there's always a way and not to get frustrated if your public transportation plan doesn't work out. Often you just have to be creative and usually willing to spend a little extra money. Anyways, it took 80 minutes to get from Usme to Sumapaz and cost me 20,000 pesos, after I convinced the driver to go just a little bit further. There's a fair bit of traffic along the road so hitching a ride down shouldn't be too hard. I was told buses pass heading towards Usme at 0930, 1000, 1430, and 1500. When I went to leave I saw a bus pass at 0900 and not wanting to miss the next bus (not knowing if the 0900 bus was the 0930 or not) I took the next bus which passed at 0930. Getting back to Usme took 90 minutes and cost 10,000.

Birding: I spent a single morning from 0630-0930. When I arrived it was very foggy, and although I could see some water, I had no clue where the marsh could be. I started walking around the lake in a clockwise fashion and quickly found a few Apolinar's Wrens. I eventually found a little bit of marshy habitat at 4.285246 -74.204207, but couldn't find any Bogota Rails. I did however flush two Nobel Snipe and saw three male Green-bearded Helmetcrests chasing each other around. By 0730 the fog had cleared and it was apparent that there wasn't much marshy habitat around the lake. Instead, other side of the road, opposite the Laguna, held tons of marshy habitat. I moved over into that area and quickly had a Bogota Rail respond to the tape, but never did get to see it (4.289478, -74.203263). There were a lot of Apolinar's Wrens in the area as well as Many-striped Canastero and Tawny Antpitta. I spent about 1 ½ hours wandering around looking for hummingbirds, but was only able to turn up 1 more Green-bearded Helmetcrest (a female) and a single Bronze-tailed Thornbill. There just weren't many flowers around so hummingbird numbers were very low.

Target Birds: Bogota Rail, Green-bearded Helmetcrest, Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Apolinar's Wren, Rufous-browed Thornbill, Pale-bellied Tapaculo

Good Birds: Andean Teal, American Coot, Ruddy (Andean) Duck, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta



Observatorio de Colibries:

Summary: This recently established hummingbird feeding station is located close to Bogota and is a very reliable spot for Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Coppery-bellied Puffleg, Glowing Puffleg, and both trainbearers!

Logistics: It's absolutely necessary to make a reservation. There is a massive wall around the property and a large locked gate. Don't just try and show up, it'll be a waste of time.

<http://www.observatoriodecolibries.com/> has all the contact info. The owner, Victoria, is very nice and speaks English. She charges 20,000 pesos for entrance. She will also send directions. From Bogota make your way to Calle 72. From here you can catch a bus towards La Calera (30 minutes). You can either get off at the turn for Observatorio at 4.67771, -73.99376 or continue on to La Calera and take a taxi from there. I wasn't sure how easy it would be to flag a taxi from the turn so I continued on to La Calera. From La Calera it took 20 minutes to get to my final destination and cost 25,000 pesos. I also coordinated to have the taxi pick me back up and drop me off at the main highway so I could catch a bus back to Bogota (15,000 pesos).

Birding: Not much to say, look at the feeders

Target Birds: Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Coppery-bellied Puffleg, Glowing Puffleg, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Green-Tailed Trainbearer

Good Birds: Sword-billed Hummingbird, about 18 species have been documented here



Feeder Area

Soata:

Summary: The eastern part of the Chicamocha Valley and mountains above it are home to a few birds that are tricky to find elsewhere in Colombia. This site is best known for the endemic Mountain Grackle and Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird, but Niceforo's Wren, Apical Flycatcher, and Indigo-capped Hummingbird can also be found in the area. This quaint little town is easy to reach, but it is kind of far, taking about 7 hours to get to from Bogota.

Logistics: Getting across Bogota is a pain thanks to way too much traffic. After I got off the bus at Calle 72 from La Calera, I took a taxi to the north bus terminal known as the North Portal. Due to traffic it took over an hour to get there and I still had to walk the last kilometer. Even more surprising than the small south bus terminal, the north terminal isn't even a terminal -- it's just the side of the road with some vendors. I arrived at around 1830, and was on a bus heading towards Soata by 1915. It took 6 hours to reach Soata (plan on 7 if leaving from the main terminal in Bogota), so I arrived at 0115. All of the hotels were closed, but luckily I was able to wake someone up and get a room. At 0445, I left my room and started to look for someone to hire to drive me up Onzaga Road for the grackles. Fortunately it didn't take long to find someone, but it was a bit pricey. The original price was 180,000 for the morning (0500-1200), but this turned into 225,000 for (0500-1100 & 1600-1800). Once you arrive at the forest above Onzaga, it's best to stop at Pedro Sanabria's house (there's only two houses, his is the second one just before the pass) to find out where the grackles have been hanging out. Don't plan on getting dropped off and hitching back down, as there is very little traffic on this road (I saw zero vehicles all day). Also, the start of the road is at 6.336905, -72.684401. From here if you encounter any splits in the road, always stay left (sorry didn't take GPS coordinates). If you get lost, either ask for Casa de Sanabria or if they don't know that, ask for La Escuela (and then continue heading further uphill). Leaving Soata is fairly straightforward -- take any number of buses passing through heading towards Bogota (although you might have to wait 1-2 hours).

Birding: There's two areas to bird here: the oak forests along Onzaga Road above Soata and the dry scrubby forest at the edge of town.

Onzaga Road: We left at 0515 and made it up to the school area by 0600 (if you drive fast directly to the pass it will take 35 minutes from town to the pass). I spent the first part of the morning birding the oak forest from the school up to Pedro's house, but apparently this was pointless because after talking with Pedro he said the grackles hadn't been seen much in that section this year. That's why it's probably best to just visit Pedro first unless you have reliable current information. Anyways, Pedro told me the grackles were being seen about 1 kilometer down the road on the other side of the pass. I headed that way and spent from about 0800-1130 in the area, but didn't hear a single grackle. I did however get great looks at Rusty-faced Parrot which were present almost the entire morning. I decided to head back downhill to search for Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird and returned to the pass arriving at 1630 (a bit later than I probably should have). This time Pedro joined me and my driver took us to the other side of the pass where Pedro had seen them the day prior. As soon as we got out of the car we could hear a flock of Mountain Grackles calling in the valley below us. Park at 6.360243, -72.742528 and there is a cattle trail heading downhill. We headed down this trail and had great looks at the grackles at 6.361402, -72.74204. Pedro said he had the

grackles right near the road where we parked the morning prior (but you need to get there early 0615-0630). Because I was so focused on finding the grackles, I didn't spend any time looking for Silvery-throated Spinetail here. They are around and it's worth looking here for them. If you have some time take the trail at the pass that leads uphill towards the summit area. Apparently they are common around there.

Soata: At around 1100, I took Carrera 3 from the plaza and headed downhill taking the second left onto a gravel road (as described in the book). There's a number of Yatago trees along here, but most only had buds (only a few flowers present). Therefore it took a while to find many hummingbirds, but eventually I saw a single Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird. I'm sure two weeks later once all the flowers bloomed there were probably tons around.

Target Birds: Mountain Grackle, Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird, Silvery-throated Spinetail (missed, didn't look, should have), Indigo-capped Hummingbird (missed, not enough flowers, already had seen), Apical Flycatcher (missed, heat of day, already had seen), Rusty-faced Parrot

Monterredondo:

Summary: This site located about 2 hours outside of Bogota is home to Cundinamarca Antpita. A very range restricted endemic that was only discovered about 20 years ago. Birding takes place along a dirt road through a nice tract of cloud forest where a lot of interesting species can be found. The lower levels of the road are also good and home to Green-bellied Hummingbird, a tricky near endemic that isn't easy many places.

Logistics: If you ever wondered if there was a van leaving from Bogota's main terminal heading towards Monterredondo at 0230 in the morning, the answer is yes. I took an overnight bus from Soata to Bogota (2045-0200, 35,000 pesos) and then a van heading towards Villavicencio with plans of getting off in Guayabetal (0230-0430, 20,000 pesos). The trip took two hours, but would have been a bit quicker had we not gotten a flat tire. It's best to pass Monterredondo and get off in Guayabetal as there's a lot more options for hotel/transportation etc, especially at 0400 in the morning. All of the hotels were closed, but after pounding on a door enough, I awoke a hotel owner and got a room to store my bags. From here I found a motorcycle that agreed to drive me up the road above Monterredondo for 50,000 pesos. It took 50 minutes to get from Guayabetal until 2250 meters where I got off the bike. After birding I walked the entire way back down to the highway as I wanted to look for Green-bellied Hummingbird along the lower sections. From the highway it was very easy to catch a bus back to Guayabetal and then another heading towards Bogota. Of note, the road is drivable in any type of car.

Birding: As you head uphill, you start to hit decent forest around 1900m, but you'll then come to some large clearings. Past these clearing at around 2270m you finally hit the beginning of good cloud forest. This is where you want to stop and start birding. I quickly found my first Cundinamarca Antpitta at 2290m and after sneaking down the steep hillside, soon had it singing four feet away from me in the open! Afterwards I found a small trail at 4.26655, -73.802602 which provides easy access to sneak downhill. Having seen my main target I continued birding up the road seeing multiple Ochre-breasted Brushfinches, Green-and-Black Fruiteaters, Blackish Tapaculos, and Slaty-crowned Antpitta (4.270635, -73.802962). I then started walking back downhill with hopes of finding Brown-breasted Parakeet. Although I twice heard groups fly by, I was unable to see any. At around 1950m I heard a Schwartz's Antthrush calling, but it was way too far away to tape in. I continued walking downhill and as I entered the small town above the highway, there was a large tree with orange flowers at 4.252713, -73.822679, 1415m. I spent a little time scanning the tree and soon found a male Green-bellied Hummingbird.

Target Birds: Cundinamarca Antpitta, Brown-breasted Parakeet (heard only), Ochre-breasted Brushfinch, Green-bellied Hummingbird

Good Birds: Highland Tinamou, Schwartz's Antthrush, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Green-and-Black Fruiteater, Blackish Tapaculo



Cundinamarca Antpitta

Mana Dulce:

Summary: The private reserve of Mana Dulce is located about 2 ½ hours from Bogota and provides easy access to a nice tract of dry forest. The draw of this site is a number of dry forest specialties that can only be found here and 750 km away in Tayrona National Park. A single morning should be enough time to track down the majority of the interesting species here.

Logistics: After my morning at Monterredondo, I was easily able to catch a bus back towards Bogota. As you enter the city, get off near the south terminal and walk to Calle 45 Sur where buses depart towards Ibague (or go to the South Terminal and catch a bus from there). Get off in Giradot and then catch another bus to Agua de Dios. From the town of Agua de Dios, it is a short 20 minute taxi ride (12,000 pesos) to Mana Dulce (4.351932, -74.65111). It is a popular spot so all the taxi drivers should know the location. Although reservations probably aren't necessary, I did contact the owner 3114495850 to let her know I was coming. She is extremely nice. Cost to bird the property was 12,000 pesos.

Birding: I spent a single morning here. I arrived before first light, but was unable to find any Pheasant Cuckoos. After talking with the owner later in the morning, she said she hasn't heard any in a while. I spent the majority of my time along the dirt road that runs through the reserve as well as the trail that leads up to the mirador (as you walk along the dirt road, there are three trails on your right that head uphill, the last trail right before the gate at the end, on your right, heads up to the natural bridge and then mirador). I also spent a good bit of time on the main road between the dirt road and the main entrance to Mana Dulce. Along the dirt road, I found all of my main targets including numerous White-bellied Antbirds (4.349144, -74.651989), Jet Antbirds (4.34994, -74.652945), and a single Lance-tailed Manakin (4.349497, -74.651919) that didn't start calling until nearly 0900. Velvet-fronted Euphonia was found right near the main entrance (4.351932, -74.65111).

Target Birds: Velvet-fronted Euphonia, Apical Flycatcher, White-bellied Antbird, Jet Antbird, Lance-tailed Manakin, Pheasant Cuckoo (missed)

Good Birds: Blue Ground Dove, Scrub Greenlet, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant, Fuscous Flycatcher, Orange-billed Sparrow

PR Chicaque:

Summary: This private reserve is located very close to Bogota and is a very reliable site for Golden-bellied Starfrontlet

Logistics: I took a bus from Agua de Dios towards Bogota and got off at Soacha (20,000 pesos). From here walk to the plaza and then two blocks west to a round-about. Take a bus that says it's heading towards Funza and tell the driver to drop you off at Chicaque (15 min, 3,000 pesos). From the main highway, it's a fairly easy 2.5km walk to the entrance of Chicaque. Once you enter the park, there are 3 hummingbird feeders in front of the restaurant.

Birding: I didn't spend much time here. All I did was walk the 2.5 km in, spent an hour at the hummingbird feeders, and then walked back out to the main road and continued on to Bogota. Numerous Golden-bellied Starfrontlets visited the feeders in front of the restaurants. Although Gorgeted Woodstar is often reported from here, I only saw White-bellied Woodstars.

Target Birds: Golden-bellied Starfrontlet



Entrance to Chicaque

La Florida:

Summary: Although this place is conveniently located near the airport, it's terrible and I don't recommend visiting unless you're desperate. That being said, I was desperate. I still needed to see Bogota Rail and I still needed Silvery-throated Spinetail.

Logistics: The park is located just NE of the airport. Because the park is near the city limit, taxis can not enter from the north side of the park. Therefore they need to approach from Calle 64 to the south and the last section of road has a lot of potholes that some taxis are unwilling to drive through (and this area is somewhat sketchy so I wouldn't get out and walk before light along here). Once dropped off at the entrance (4.72995, -74.148087) you'll need to climb through the large holes on the sides of the entrance gate. There's no signs saying you can't enter and there's no information on who to contact to open the gate, so going through the holes seemed like the best option to me.

Birding: Once inside the park, walk clockwise along the lake shore to a small observation hut at 4.725828, -74.150061. In the marshy area directly in front of the observation hut I saw multiple Bogota Rails, 1 Subtropical Doradito, and 2 Apolinar's Wrens (apparently the wrens are not doing well here and might not be around much longer). Yellow-hooded Blackbird was also present. After seeing the rails, I headed back out the main entrance and crossed the road in hopes of finding the spinetail. There is very little habitat remaining and the only place that looked decent was off limits. I eventually talked one of the security guards into escorting me for a small fee (15,000). We walked behind the buildings and started walking through the long waist high grass along a scrubby edge. We had to walk fairly far, eventually find a pair of Silvery-throated Spinetails at 4.727888, -74.146597. The grass was very wet and I got absolutely soaked in the process. The area we found the spinetails in is directly behind a nursery, but you're not allowed to walk through the nursery (who knows, maybe you can pay off that guard too). So walking through the grass is the only option.

Target Birds: Bogota Rail, Subtropical Doradito, Apolinar's Wren, Silvery-throated Spinetail, Rufous-browed Conebill

Good Birds: Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Spot-flanked Gallinule (missed), Ruddy (Andean) Duck, Lesser Scaup



Entrance to La Florida



Bogota Rail

Budget Breakdown:

- Overall, I was in Colombia for 42 days and spent \$3,291 which is an average cost of \$78 per day. This cost drops significantly (\$66) if you take out the Santa Marta Trek that was \$900 for six days.
- Roundtrip Airfare from Washington D.C. to Bogota was \$709 and a one way ticket from Bogota to Barranquilla was \$96.
- The food and accommodation categories below do not include the food and accommodation that are included in the separate trips. Therefore the food total of \$278 is based on 29 days or an average of \$9.59 per day. The same goes for accommodation with an average nightly cost of \$13.14 (although a few nights were spent on overnight buses or costs were split with Alex)
- Breakfast and Lunch most days were bought from grocery stores (bread, cheese, fruit, yogurt, ect). Dinner usually cost between 10,000-15,000 pesos and of course was a bit more in major towns or cities
- Accommodation in most towns was 25,000 and in larger towns or cities hostels were 25,000-30,000 with hotels being 45,000-55,000. As far as quality goes, it varied greatly how nice the place was for 25,000.
- Transportation was by far the biggest cost category of the trip. I spent A LOT of time on buses this trip, but overall, it's still a very cheap way of getting around the country. The main driver of this high cost bucket was the few occasions where I had to hire taxis or 4wd vehicles for the entire day. Luckily I was able to split these costs a few times with Alex, but a few times I had to pay the full amount by myself. Traveling in a group should really cut down on this cost category.
- The Perija trip was for 2 ½ days and includes the vehicle, driver, accommodation, and food.
- Rio Claro includes three meals a day plus the accommodation
- Urrao, the ProAves lodge, included three meals a day, plus horses
- Entrance fees include fees for National Parks, private reserves, as well as hummingbird sites
- Other includes a variety of things including tips
- Data was 20,000 pesos for 500 mb
- Exchange rate was 2937 pesos for 1 USD

Category	Total
Transportation	\$ 1,005
Santa Marta Trek	\$ 900
Accommodation	\$ 381
Food	\$ 278
Perija Trip	\$ 272
Urrao Trip	\$ 153
Other	\$ 134
Rio Claro Trip	\$ 89
Entrance Fees	\$ 52
Phone Data	\$ 26
International Airfare	\$ 709
Internal Airfare	\$ 96
Total	\$ 4,096



Hooded Antpitta at Otun



Colombian Screech-Owl