

**CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA: THE GUAJIRA PENINSULA AND THE
SANTA MARTA MOUNTAINS
JULY 28-AUGUST 5**

The Caribbean lowlands of northwestern Colombia and the isolated mountain range of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria comprise what is perhaps Colombia's most endemic-rich avian region. With over 1900 species, a relatively undeveloped infrastructure and a landmass the size of Texas, Colombia presents a challenge to the visiting birder. Where does one begin to explore this rich region. This tour is perhaps the easiest answer to that question as it gives birders an opportunity to delve deeply into the Colombian avifauna without having to cover vast distances. In short, this is a relatively easy tour that begins in then coastal city of Barranquilla, which is only a 2.5 hour flight from Miami.

The Guajira Peninsula is the driest region in all of Colombia receiving on average only a little more than 20 inches of rain annually. The arid landscape is dotted with cacti and thorny acacia lending visitors the impression of being in the Chihuahuan deserts of northwestern Mexico rather in one of the wettest countries on earth. Despite the arid and sometimes foreboding nature of the Guajira, it is home to 10 regional endemics and a host of other interesting birds not easily found anywhere else. The regional endemics include Bare-eyed Pigeon, Buffy Hummingbird, Russet-throated Puffbird, Chestnut Piculet, White-whiskered Spinetail, Slender-billed Inezia, Glaucous Tanager, Tocuyo Sparrow, Orinoco Saltator and the resplendent Vermillion Cardinal. These birds are also found in northern Venezuela, but the current political situation in that country makes visiting a dicey and generally unrealistic possibility for most birders. In addition to these regional endemics, the Guajira region boasts a large coastal salt lagoon where a nice variety of gulls, terns and shorebirds can be seen.

The tour will also allow us some time to visit the coastal mangroves around Salamanca National Park. The entire park stretches along the coast from Barranquilla to Santa Marta and is composed of a mosaic of habitats including saltwater ponds, mangroves, scrubby patches of woodland, open fields and freshwater marshes. The road between Barranquilla and Santa Marta is a busy 2-lane affair, but we will find places to escape the traffic and look for mixed flocks moving through the wooded areas. One of the very rare, but hoped for species here will be the critically endangered Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird which was once thought extinct, but of which there have been reliable reports from here in recent years. The mangroves also host Bicolored Conebill, Green ibis, Limpkin and Straight-billed Woodcreeper.

In freshwater marshes we can look for Snail Kite, Purple Gallinule, Yellow-chinned Spinetail and a variety of herons and kingfishers. In open areas there will be Bronzed Cowbird, Cattle Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, Spot-breasted Woodpecker and more. The diversity of habitat here makes for a rich variety of birds and a lengthy day list.

The tour's other major venue will be the recently opened El Dorado Lodge which is operated by the Colombian conservation group ProAves. The lodge is situated at an elevation of 6300 feet on the San Lorenzo ridge and commands a breathtaking view of the Caribbean and the city of Santa Marta far below. Depending upon how you count or what particular taxonomic authority you choose to follow, the San Lorenzo ridge is home to between 15 and 20 endemic

birds. As an island mountain range, the flora and fauna that occurs here has been isolated for eons by the surrounding lowlands which inhibit the dispersal of mountain-loving avian species. The entire taxonomy of this region is in constant flux with new species continually being argued for and against by the ornithologists choosing to study here. Despite all of this uncertainty, what is known for sure is that there are a lot of birds to be seen on the San Lorenzo ridge and that El Dorado Lodge is the best place to be if one desires to see them. We will spend 3 nights at El Dorado which will give us plenty of time to explore areas around the lodge as well as some higher portions of the road on the ridge above. The lodge maintains an impressive set of hummingbird and fruit feeders that attract a continual procession of colorful hummingbirds including Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Black-capped Tanager and both Sierra Nevada and Santa Marta Brush-Finches. The lodge is located in a small clearing with a wonderful garden and a forested track leading above and below making it a terrific place to wander about on your own during breaks. On at least one morning we will take 4WD vehicles to the top of the ridge in hopes of finding some of the more difficult endemics like Santa Marta Parakeet.

DAILY ITINERARY: Note that this tour can be taken on its own as a separate 10-day affair or in conjunction with the Central and Western Andes tour which begins on July 18, 2019.

Day 1, July 28, Arrival in Barranquilla: The tour begins today in the coastal city of Barranquilla (Airport code BAQ). American Airlines offers direct daily flights from Miami to Barranquilla. Those people who are joining this tour after completing the Central and Western Andes tour will fly to Barranquilla this morning from Medellin. **The cost of this flight is not included in the tour price, but we will arrange the flights for anyone doing both tours. The approximate cost at the time of this writing is \$150 USD per person.** Night in Barranquilla.

Day 2, July 29, Salamanca NP and travel to Riohacha: We will depart Barranquilla early this morning and begin driving along the coast through Salamanca National Park. If we are lucky we may encounter an endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca sitting atop a shrub in the early morning sunlight. We'll spend the entire morning exploring the diverse habitats within the park which include mangrove forest, open fields, saltwater ponds, freshwater marshes and woodland scrub. Some of the species expected will be Brown-throated Parakeet, Bicolored Conebill, and if we are extremely lucky, the critically endangered Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird. After lunch, when the heat sets in, we will drive north along the coast to the bustling town of Riohacha. Night in Riohacha.

Days 3-4, July 30-31, Flamenco National Park and the Guajira Peninsula: We will have two full days to explore the areas around Flamenco National Park and other remote places in this arid, but bird-rich landscape. The area is home to an indigenous group called the Wayuu, who manage to eke out a very humble existence in this unforgiving corner of the world. The Wayuu can be wary of and uninviting to strangers, so using local guide here is essential if we are to be able to access the best birding sites, which often are watering holes that the locals use for their livestock. Specialties of this region include Crested Bobwhite, Vermillion Cardinal, Tocuyo Sparrow, Buffy Hummingbird, Orinoco Saltator, Chestnut Piculet, Slender-billed Inezia, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Pileated Finch, White-whiskered Spinetail, Bare-eyed Pigeon, Green-rumped

Parrotlet, Rufous-vented Chachalaca and Glaucous Tanager. Most of these are relatively common and with the help of our local guide we should be able to find most without too much difficulty. The Tocuyo Sparrow and Buffy Hummingbird can sometimes be elusive, but with 2 days we hope to see all of the target birds here. Besides the arid specialists, Flamenco National Park hosts a large array of waterbirds in its coastal areas, mudflats and in a large salt pan lagoon. Some of the more striking possibilities will include Scarlet Ibis, Greater Flamingo and Roseate Spoonbill. Other common species include Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Magnificent Frigatebird. Both Collared Plover and Southern Lapwing nest here, but can be difficult to find. Most birding tours opt to spend only one day in this area, but we prefer to stay longer so that we can explore some of the lesser known areas north of Riohacha where species like Burrowing Owl, Double-striped Thick-knee, Crested Caracara etc. Let's face it...you're probably only going to be here once in your life, so let's make the most of it and not rush. Nights in Riohacha.

Day 5, August 1, Tayrona National Park and travel to Santa Marta: This morning we will explore Tayrona National Park, a lovely natural area on the shores off the Caribbean Sea. Tayrona is a very comfortable destination with white sand beaches, good accommodations, an excellent network of hiking trails and a very impressive bird list that exceeds 350 species. One of the enticing possibilities here is the very rare Blue-billed Curassow which occurs in the park in small numbers and which we will devote much effort to seeing. The odds of finding it will not be in our favor, but perhaps we will be lucky rather than good. Other species available at Tayrona include Lance-tailed Manakin, Cocoa Woodcreeper, White-bellied Antbird, White-necked Puffbird, Southern Bentbill, Crested Guan, White-chinned Sapphire and Gray-capped Cuckoo. One of Colombia's most endearing primates, the Cotton-top Tamarin is also found at Tayrona and will add some spice to our mammal list. We will stay at a very nice beachfront hotel and be sure to allow time for participants to swim, walk on the beach or just laze by pool. Night in Santa Marta.

Day 6, August 2, Transfer to Minca and El Dorado Lodge: This morning we leave early and begin heading to the Santa Marta Mountains and El Dorado Lodge. Once we reach the town of Minca at an elevation of 2000 feet, the road deteriorates rapidly and it will be necessary to transfer to 4WD vehicles in order to reach El Dorado. However this is not a problem as the remnant forests outside of Minca and the gardens within provide great habitat for many birds that will not be available as we move higher. So upon arrival in Minca, we will spend a couple of hours exploring its environs which include an elaborate hummingbird feeding station at Hotel Minca. Birds commonly attending these feeders include White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeleteer, Rufous-tailed and Steely-vented hummingbirds, Brown Violetear, White-chinned Sapphire, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Red-billed Emerald and Santa Marta Woodstar. In the forests around town we can look for species like Golden-winged Sparrow, Black-crowned Antshrike, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Keel-billed Toucan, Scaled Piculet, Rufous-and-white and Bicolored wrens, Rufous-capped Warbler and Swallow Tanager. After lunch we will begin the 2-hour drive from Minca to El Dorado making stops along the way if we encounter mixed flocks. Possible species in this transition zone include Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Blue-naped Chlorophonia (common at the lodge), Santa Marta Brush-Finch, Southern Emerald-Toucanet. Upon reaching the lodge we will check into our rooms and spend the remainder of the day enjoying the spectacular view of the Caribbean and the never ending parade of colorful visitors to the feeding stations in the garden. Night at El Dorado Lodge.

Day 7-8, August 3-4, El Dorado Lodge and the San Lorenzo Ridge: We will have 2 full days to explore this island mountain paradise that is one of Colombia's most endemic-rich bird sites. Some of the endemics here are fairly common and easy to see (Santa Marta Brush-Finch, White-colored Warbler, Yellow-crowned Redstart), while others are either shy and skulking (Santa Marta Antpitta, Santa Marta Antbird, Santa Marta Tapaculo) or just plain uncommon or rare (Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant). Some are colorful and exciting (Santa Marta Warbler & White-tailed Starfrontlet) while some are typical "little brown jobs" (Santa Marta and Brown-rumped tapaculos). But we like to look at all of the birds, not just the pretty ones and over the course of 2 full days we will have plenty of time to work the areas around and above the lodge and should be able to find most of them. Of course we will hope to find all of them, but given the restricted range and shyness of some, a clean sweep can't be guaranteed. The birding around El Dorado is fairly easy as it involved mostly walking along a roadbed with almost no passing traffic. When we go further up to the ridge top we will use 4WD vehicles, so there will be no inordinately strenuous hikes. Our daily routine will involve a simple picnic breakfast, a full morning of birding followed by lunch at the lodge, a mid-afternoon break and an optional late afternoon birding foray. On one evening we will go out and look for nightbirds including an undescribed species of screech owl that is almost certainly a new species. In addition to the endemics, the area around the lodge has many other resident species including Lined Quail-Dove, White-tipped Quetzal, Masked Trogon, Southern Emerald-Toucanet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Red-billed Parrot, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Gray-throated Leaf-tosser, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Olive-striped Flycatcher, Black-throated Tody-Tyrant, Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Black-chested Jay, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Black-hooded Thrush, Black-capped Tanager and many more. The lodge itself is very comfortable with a nice restaurant and full bar. It is not plush or fancy, but surprisingly comfortable and an easy place in which to settle in and relax after a day in the field. Nights at El Dorado Lodge.

Day 9, August 5, Travel to Barranquilla: After a final morning at El Dorado we will begin the journey back to Barranquilla (about 4 hours). We will make a few birding stops along the way in attempts to see things we have missed or just to enjoy a final Colombian avian experience. We will plan to reach our hotel by late afternoon where we will have a final dinner together and tally our final bird list. Night in Barranquilla.

Day 10: August 6, Flights home from Barranquilla: Participants can schedule their flights home today at any time.

TOUR LIMIT: This maximum number of participants for this tour will be 7.

TRIP COST: The price of this tour is \$3495 double occupancy from Barranquilla. The quoted price includes all meals beginning with dinner on July 28 and ending with dinner on August 5, nine nights of accommodations beginning and ending in Barranquilla, all ground transportation during the tour, airport transfers in Barranquilla, guide service provided by local guides as well as by Jan Hansen from Otus asio Tours, all entrance fees and bottled water throughout the tour. It does not include round trip airfare between your

originating destination and Barranquilla, optional tips to guides and drivers, laundry service or alcoholic beverages (one bottle of the Colombian national beer will be included with dinner). The single supplement for the tour is \$375.

REGISTRATION: A \$500 deposit and a completed and signed registration form are necessary to register for this tour. If you register by email the deposit and paperwork must be received within 10 days of the email in order to secure a place. Final payment will be due 90 days before departure (April 29, 2019). Final invoices will be sent out in early April 2019.

TRIP INSURANCE: Trip insurance is strongly suggested in the event that you need to cancel after you have registered. Tour deposits and remittances have to be well in advance of the tour and any cancellations made within 90 days of departure cannot be refunded in full. The tour registration form details the refund policy, but cancellations within 60 days of the tour will be limited to the amount that can be recouped from the various vendors and cannot be determined until that time. Trip insurance will be your safeguard against such contingencies.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The lodges we will stay at during this tour are quite varied. The hotel in Barranquilla is a standard business hotel with large rooms and a pool. It is used by most birding groups coming and going from Barranquilla. The hotel in Riohacha is in the middle of this bustling city's business district and though it can be noisy, the rooms are clean and it provides easy access to the best birding sites. It does not have hot water showers, but the weather here is generally very hot, so cold afternoon showers are welcome and refreshing. Decent lodging options are limited in Riohacha and we feel this is best all around choice. In Santa Marta the hotel is a very nice 4-star affair with direct beach access, a pool and wifi. The El Dorado Lodge is one of the jewels of the ProAves network of Colombian ecolodges. Though simple it has an understated elegance with lovely gardens, a gorgeous Caribbean view, hot water, wifi, a nice restaurant and a full bar.

Barranquilla: Hotel Barranquilla Plaza www.hbp.com.co

Riohacha: Hotel Barbacoa www.barbacoahotel.com

Santa Marta: Costa Azul Hotel en.ghlhotelcostaazul.com

El Dorado Lodge: www.conservation.co

FOOD: This will not be a tour for foodies or those seeking a gourmet experience. That said, the food will be plentiful and tasty, just not exotic or fancy. Vegetarian options will be available in most cases, but it will be simple and limited in scope. Menus will be set at ecolodges while the usual options will be available at larger hotels and in restaurants.

AIR TRAVEL TO COLOMBIA: This tour begins and ends in Barranquilla (airport code BAQ). At the time of this writing, American Airlines offers the most direct access

to Barranquilla with a daily direct flight from Miami. If you need help with arranging your flight to Barranquilla, please feel free to contact me and I can assist you.

YELLOW FEVER: We will be spending 3 nights in the town of Riohacha which is considered to be in the Yellow Fever Risk area by then CDC. It is always best to consult your physician and the CDC website for recommendations regarding the need for a yellow fever vaccine for travel to particular areas. Previously, the vaccine was considered good for ten years. As of July 2016 the vaccine is considered valid for the lifetime of the vaccine according to the CDC. Please consult with your physician about whether it is appropriate for you to receive the vaccine or the 10-year booster (there are contraindications for some individuals) for this trip. People over 70 years of age are generally not given the Yellow Fever vaccine in the US due to possible severe side effects. If you are in this category, a letter stating such from your doctor will suffice for documentation in any areas where the vaccine is required for entry.

HEALTH CONCERNS: Please consult your physician or the CDC website for suggestions about other travel-related medications for a trip to this part of Colombia. It is always a good idea to be current on your tetanus vaccine. Malaria is also not of great concern on this route although the disease is present in parts of Colombia. Note that your tour guides will not be taking malaria medication, but that is not a recommendation for participants and it is best to consult your physician regarding any medications for the tour and to make decisions based upon your own peace of mind.

INSECTS: Biting insects are not expected to be a problem on this tour due to most of it being conducted at high elevation or in very arid locales. However recent rainfall and moisture levels can sometimes make things worse than expected, so it is always best to be prepared for the possibility of biting insects. The best defense is wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and having an adequate supply of repellent.

CURRENCY: The Colombian Peso (COP) is the currency used in Colombia and you will need to use it to pay for incidental expenses like alcoholic beverages and souvenirs. It is best to exchange your dollars for COP at the airport in Barranquilla as other methods of exchange may be difficult to find once we are underway.

ELECTRICITY: There will be electrical outlets that you can use to recharge batteries at all of the places we stay. Electrical plug-ins in Colombia are of flat two-pin variety, the same as those used in the U.S. It is not unusual to find sockets that lack the third grounding pin, so carrying an adapter for those cases is a good idea. Also, though there are outlets in all of the hotels, power outages are not unusual so it is a good idea to bring several spare batteries or a portable battery pack.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wifi will be available in most of the hotels although it may be accessible only in common areas and not in the rooms. Cell service is very good in Colombia and you should be able to receive a signal most of the time.

ENTRY INTO COLOMBIA: Visas are not required for travel to Colombia. You will need a valid passport, which has an expiration date six months after your departure date.

FIELD GUIDES: There are two options for field guides for Colombia. The oldest and most comprehensive guide is *Guide to Birds of Colombia* by S. Hilty and W.L. Brown. This is a large book and over 20 years old. It is heavy and cumbersome in the field, but has excellent illustrations and textual coverage of the birds. Because of its age, the taxonomy is outdated. The biggest objection most people have to this book is its size which makes it impractical to carry in the field. A good way to remedy this issue is to cut the plates from the book and have them bound separately.

A more field friendly option is the recently published *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia* published by ProAves, a Colombian ornithological organization. This is an excellent accessory as the taxonomy is current and the book is much smaller and easier to carry. However the illustrations are not always accurate making out difficult to use as a field identification guide in all cases.

The best choice for having solid reference material in Colombia is to have both Hilty's plates and the ProAves guide at your disposal.

GUIDES: The leaders for this tour will be Jan Hansen from Otus asio Tours and Luis Eduardo Uruena. Luis is a biologist who has been guiding birders in Colombia for 16 years. He has led tours for VENT and Field Guides and is an expert in field identification of Colombian birds and I am very pleased to add him to our cadre of international leaders.

TRANSPORTATION: For most of the tour we will travel in a comfortable mini-bus. To reach El Dorado we will use 4WD vehicles from the town of Minca.

INFORMATION: For additional information regarding this tour contact Jan Hansen at 919-259-9423 or at otusasiotours@gmail.com