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## **NORTHERN COLOMBIA BIRDING TOUR**

**15 DAYS/ 14 NIGHTS**

### **OVERVIEW**

With more than 1,950 species (almost 20% of the world's total) counted so far, Colombia has more species of birds than any other country on the planet. It is easy to see why. Colombia is tropical, yet it also has ample elevation changes due to the Andes mountain range. Furthermore it has both the Pacific and Caribbean coastlines. Many different habitats ensure an abundance of bird species, with new ones still being discovered and new records being announced often.

We will spend our first day of birding in the paramo of Sumapaz National Park, home to the endemic Silvery-throated Spinetail, Noble Snipe, the endemic Apolinar's Wren, the endemic Pale-bellied Tapaculo and both Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers. The target of the day will undoubtedly be the highly sought-after endemic Green-bearded Helmetcrest.

Our next morning we will spend in Bogota, where we shall look for the endemic Bogota Rail and Subtropical Doradito before beginning our descent towards the Magdalena Valley. We will stop at The Indigo-capped Hummingbird Reserve take in their impressive set up of hummingbird feeders. We will then make our way to Ibague to bird the Combeima Canyon before heading to Honda, in preparation for birding at the Bella Vista Natural Reserve, where we will search for likely species such as the endemics White-mantled Barbet and Beautiful Woodpecker. Then we will cross a large portion of the Magdalena Valley searching for Northern Screamer on our way to the Rio Claro Reserve.

Two days at Rio Claro Reserve will likely yield the endemics Antioquia Bristle-tyrant and Magdalena Antbird. Then we ascend the central Andes towards the town of Sabaneta, Antioquia. A morning of birding at La Romera Municipal Park in search of the endemic Red-bellied Grackle and the near endemic Yellow-headed Manakin, before embarking on a drive to the Medellin airport. .

We will then catch our flight to Barranquilla, on the Caribbean coast. This trip will take us to Tayrona, Isla Salamanca and Flamencos National Parks, where birding through mangroves, humid forests, dry-scrub forests and coastal wetlands should yield species such as the near endemic Buffy Hummingbird, the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca, Lance-tailed

Manakin, Russet-throated Puffbird, the near endemic Chestnut Piculet, Bicolored Conebill and Panama Flycatcher.

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is the highest coastal mountain on the planet and one of the most important endemism centers in the world, with 36 species of birds restricted to it. We will search for many of these endemics including Santa Marta Screech-owl, Antpitta, Mountain-tanager, Tapaculo, Foliage-gleaner, Brush-finch, Parakeet, Bush-tyrant, Seedeater and a plethora more! This tour starts and ends in Bogota.

## DAILY SUMMARY

<b>DAY 1</b>	Arrival in Bogota
<b>DAY 2</b>	Sumapaz National Park
<b>DAY 3</b>	Indigo-capped Hummingbird Reserve
<b>DAY 4</b>	Combeima Canyon and Honda
<b>DAY 5</b>	Bella Vista Natural Reserve and Rio Claro
<b>DAY 6</b>	Oilbird Caves and Rio Claro Reserve
<b>DAY 7</b>	Rio Claro and flight to Barranquilla
<b>DAY 8</b>	Isla Salamanca and Minca
<b>DAY 9</b>	Minca to El Dorado Lodge
<b>DAY 10</b>	El Dorado Lodge to Cerro Kennedy
<b>DAY 11</b>	Birding in the vicinity of El Dorado
<b>DAY 12</b>	El Dorado Lodge to Tayrona National Park
<b>DAY 13</b>	Tayrona National Park and Riohacha
<b>DAY 14</b>	Los Flamencos National Park and flight to Bogota
<b>Day 15</b>	Departure Bogota

## DETAILED DAILY ITINERARY

### DAY 1: Arrival in Bogota

After arriving at El Dorado International Airport in Bogota, you will be met by your Nature Travel Bird Guide and be transported to your comfortable city hotel.

Bogota is the capital of and largest city in Colombia, and is the political, economic, administrative, industrial, artistic, cultural, and sports center of the country. Bogota was founded *Bacatá*, which in the Chibcha language means "The Lady of the Andes." Further, the word 'Andes' in the Aymara language means "shining mountain," thus making the full meaning of the name Bogota as "The Lady of the shining mountain." The city is located in the center of Colombia, on a high plateau known as the Bogota savanna. It is the third-highest capital in South America (after Quito and La Paz), at an average of 2,640 metres (8,660 ft) above sea level. Subdivided into 20 localities, Bogotá has an area of 1,587 square kilometres (613 square miles) and a relatively cool climate that is constant through the year.

If your arrival time in Bogota permits we can visit La Florida Park, an urban wetland where we shall look for the endemics Bogota Rail and Apolinar's Marsh-Wren. We may also find the Noble Snipe, Silvery-throated Spinetail, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Subtropical Doradito, Spot-flanked Gallinule, American Coot, Andean Duck and many other aquatic species in this urban park.

We will enjoy a sundowner drink and welcome dinner at our accommodation and the Tour plan for the next 15 days will be discussed while we all get to know each other.

🏠 **Accommodation: Hotel Grand Plaza**

### DAY 2: Sumapaz National Park

We will rise early and make our way to the high elevation Sumapaz National Park. It was declared a National Park of Colombia in 1977 because of its importance as a biodiversity hotspot and main source of water for the most densely populated area of the country, the Bogota savanna.

Birding within the park will surely yield many endemics and specialties, and this is our chance to experience the unique Colombian Paramo. Some of our targets will be the rare Black-headed Hemispingus, Rufous and Undulated Antpitta, and the near endemic Rufous-browed Conebill. For those that have an affinity for hummingbirds, there will be chances to view the endemic Green-bearded Helmetcrest, Coppery-bellied and Glowing Puffleg, Amethyst-throated Sunangel and the near endemic Blue-throated Starfrontlet.

Two other endemics on our target list include Silver-throated Spinetail and Pale-bellied Tapaculo. An encounter with a mixed flock could yield Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Hooded Mountain-Tanager, Pale-naped Brush-Finch, Plushcap and the noisy Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager. The uncommon and endemic Brown-breasted Parakeet is also a possibility, although an encounter will require some luck. That same luck may even yield views of the endangered Spectacled Bear!

We will return to our hotel in Bogota for dinner and rest.

🏠 **Accommodation: Hotel Grand Plaza**

### DAY 3: Indigo-capped Hummingbird Reserve

We will have an early departure from Bogota towards the Indigo-capped Hummingbird Reserve. Enjoying a packed lunch on the road should have us at the Indigo-capped Hummingbird Reserve in time to enjoy the feeders. The main target is the endemic Indigo-capped Hummingbird, and they visit the feeders regularly. More than 20 species may use these feeders, some only briefly, others nearly year-round. Possible species include White-bellied Woodstar, Green Hermit, Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeteer, Andean Emerald, and with good luck even Gorgeted Woodstar. We will spend the afternoon crossing the Magdalena Valley past the city of Ibague to the Combeima Canyon.

We will enjoy dinner at our hotel and settle in for the night.

🏠 **Accommodation: Hotel Iguaima**

### DAY 4: Combeima Canyon and Honda

An impressive 5 endemics can be observed in the Combeima Canyon, including the mega targets Yellow-headed Brush-finch, Blossomcrown and the very range-restricted Tolima Dove. The trail along the Combeima River can yield pairs of Torrent Duck, whilst higher up the montane forest offers opportunities for Ash-colored Tapaculo, Superciliaried Hemispingus and Sword-billed Hummingbird. Other species of interest include the spectacular Red-hooded Tanager, Agile Tit-tyrant, Crested Quetzal and Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia.

The afternoon will be spent driving along the Magdalena Valley to Honda, a small colonial town on the banks of the Magdalena River. The city was the main river port of the country in the late 1800s, and all the imported goods and articles arrived to Bogota through this port city.

We will have dinner and enjoy a good night's rest at our hotel.

🏠 **Accommodation: Hotel Posada Las Trampas**

## DAY 5: Bella Vista Natural Reserve and Rio Claro

The Bella Vista reserve covers a small area but is teeming with birds, many of them specialties that will surely crave your ornithological appetite. The reserve protects a tract of humid forest in the middle Magdalena Valley. Birding in the reserve is mainly along the roadside. The reserve has recently gained a reputation among birders as a relatively easy place to see Tody Motmot, a diminutive Motmot that is widely distributed but quite difficult to see in most places. The endemic Velvet-fronted Euphonia, the intimidating Collared Aracari and the stunning Saffron-headed Parrot are only a few of the amazing species this site has to offer. Black-faced Antthrush, Sooty Ant-tanager, Yellow-browed Shrike-vireo, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Olivaceous Piculet and Violet-bellied Hummingbird. The list keeps on going!

Five species of Manakin can be observed at Bellavista: Striped, Blue-crowned, Golden-headed, White-bearded and White-bibbed. The afternoon will be spent en route to the Rio Claro Reserve, with some birding once we arrive (time permitting).

We will enjoy dinner and a good night's sleep at our hotel.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Los Colores**

## DAY 6: Oilbird Caves and Rio Claro Reserve

We will take a short drive to La Cueva del Condor, a cave that was named after a Condor. However, no Condor inhabits the area, but we will be on a search for Oilbird. This very interesting nocturnal bird uses sonar to navigate, and it will be a delight to get acquainted with it. After visiting the cave we will bird in the vicinity and search out the very territorial wrens: Bay, Black-bellied, and Band-backed Wren.

Rio Claro is a hotspot for bird diversity and other birds we might encounter include the elusive Blue Cotinga, the endemic Magdalena Antbird, Purple-crowned Fairy, Bay-breasted Warbler, Buff-rumped Warbler, Western White-tailed Trogon, Black-throated Trogon, Rufous Motmot, Broad-billed Motmot, Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner, Western-Slaty Antshrike, Black-faced Antthrush, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Pacific Streaked Antwren, Checkered Antwren, Moustached Antwren, Yellow-backed Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager, Orange-crowned Oriole and many others.

We will devote all afternoon to the area and return to our hotel for dinner and overnight stay.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Los Colores**

## DAY 7: Rio Claro and flight to Barranquilla

A full morning of birding in Rio Claro will have us birding along a dirt road in search for specials like the endemic White-mantled Barbet and Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant and the very conspicuous Barred Puffbird. Other birds we might encounter include Panama Flycatcher, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Becard, One-colored Becard, Yellow-tufted Dacnis, Purple Honeycreeper, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Citreous-throated Toucan, Collared Aracari, Olivaceous Piculet and Fulvous-vented Euphonia. We will also have the opportunity to find two species of Manakin: Western Striped and White-bearded.

Another target we will hope to encounter is the endemic Magdalena Antbird, We will spend the afternoon driving up the central Andes to the Medellin airport to catch a one hour flight to Barranquilla.

Barranquilla lies strategically next to the delta of the Magdalena River, 8 kilometres (5 miles) from its mouth at the Caribbean Sea, serving as port for river and maritime transportation within Colombia. It is also the main industrial, shopping, educational and cultural centre of the Caribbean Region of Colombia. The city is home to one of the most important folk and cultural festivals of Colombia, the Carnival of Barranquilla, which was declared a National Cultural Heritage by the Congress of Colombia in 2001 and recognized by UNESCO in 2003.

Depending on our arrival time to Barranquilla, an afternoon of birding in search for the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca is possible near town. This is one of the most attractive Chachalacas in Colombia and possibly all of South America. The dry forests in the outskirts of town will also provide opportunities for species such as the very photogenic Russet-throated Puffbird and the common Brown-throated Parakeet.

We will have dinner and stay overnight at a comfortable city hotel.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Barranquilla Plaza**

## DAY 8: Isla Salamanca and Minca

We will rise early and spend the morning birding at Isla Salamanca National Park, 35 minutes from Barranquilla. The flora and fauna is in abundance here because of the confluence of sweet water flowing from the Magdalena River and saline water of the Caribbean Sea. The park was created in 1964 to protect the abundant bird life and coastal mangroves. We will bird the newly rebuilt walkways through the mangroves in search of Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Bicolored Conebill, Brown-throated Parakeet, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, and Yellow-chinned Spinetail among many others. We will

also have time to bird some wetlands in the area in search of Northern Screamer and other specialties.

After a morning of birding we will embark on a 2-hour drive to Minca, a quaint little town with nice lodging along the river. Located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Minca is a great location to bird for lower elevation species. We will arrive in town and visit some hummingbird feeders while having lunch where Rufous-breasted Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Long-billed Starthroat, the near endemic Red-billed Emerald and Violet-crowned Woodnymph can be found. We will also have time to explore the surroundings in search of birds such as Black-backed Antshrike, Scaled Piculet, Swallow Tanager, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Keel-billed Toucan, Masked Tityra, and Whooping Motmot.

We will have dinner and enjoy a good night's rest.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Sierras Sound**

## DAY 9: Minca to El Dorado Lodge

This day will have us birding through a vast altitudinal gradient, birding different elevations along the road to El Dorado Lodge. Birding up the mountain will surely yield a large number of species, including Golden-winged Sparrow, Rosy Thrush-tanager, Rusty-headed Spinetail, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, the recently described Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, Santa Marta Tapaculo, Black-backed Antshrike, the magnificently colored Blue-naped Chlorophonia, and the attractive Rufous-capped Warbler.

We will spend the next three nights in the El Dorado Reserve, overnighing at the famous El Dorado Lodge. The reserve was created in 2006, based on the urgency of conserving one of the most fragile and important zones in Colombia, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, home to a large number of unique bird, plant and animal species. It currently covers an area of almost 2000 acres, in an altitudinal range between 900 and 2600 meters above sea level. One of the most important characteristics of both fauna and flora of the reserve is the presence of a large number of endemic species or species with some degree of threat of extinction.

 **Accommodation: El Dorado Lodge**

## DAY 10: El Dorado Lodge to Cerro Kennedy

We will rise early and head up to higher elevations towards Cerro Kennedy, in search of these endemics: Santa Marta Parakeet, Santa Marta Warbler, Santa Marta Mountain-tanager, Santa Marta Bush-tyrant and Brown-rumped Tapaculo, among many others.

We will have a picnic at high elevation with great views of the Sierra Nevada, and bird along the road on our way down, hoping to run into awe inspiring species such as Swallow Tanager, Grove-billed and Santa Marta Toucanet, Black-chested Jay, the endemic White-lored Warbler, Golden-breasted Fruiteater and the near endemic White-tipped Quetzal.

After dinner we will certainly scout for the endemic and recently described Santa Marta Screech-owl. Then we will settle in for a good night's rest.

🏠 **Accommodation: El Dorado Lodge**

### DAY 11: Birding in the vicinity of El Dorado

After breakfast we will have time to enjoy the well-maintained feeders at the lodge. Hummingbirds that visit the feeders include the endemic White-tailed Starfrontlet, White-vented Plumeteer, and Long-tailed Hermit. The bananas that are put out attract, amongst others, the Santa Marta and Colombian Brush-finches, both endemics. The many flowers in the garden attract White-sided and Black Flowerpiercers.

We will spend some time trying to see Santa Marta Antpitta, a skulker that will definitely take some work. A day of birding near the lodge will have its rewards, a special treat being the near endemic Black-fronted Wood-quail that visit the lodge's compost pile in the afternoon.

We will again have dinner and overnight at the lodge.

🏠 **Accommodation: El Dorado Lodge**

### DAY 12: El Dorado Lodge to Tayrona National Park

We will spend the day birding the road en route to our beach-side hotel to enjoy the pristine Caribbean beaches. We will make stops along our 3 to 4 hour drive to catch any birds we may have missed on the way to the coast. We will spend one night at Finca Barlovento, an exquisite lodge right on the beach that is touted as one of the best places to stay in Colombia.

🏠 **Accommodation: Finca Barlovento**

### DAY 13: Tayrona National Park and Riohacha

We will have a morning visit to the Tayrona National Park. The park covers approximately 30 square kilometres (12 sq mi) of maritime area in the Caribbean sea and approximately 150 square kilometres (58 sq mi) of land. It is one of the most visited national parks in



Colombia, as it contains not just abundant natural beauty, but also about 108 species of mammals and 300 species of birds.

If we are lucky, the critically endangered Blue-billed Curassow could show up for us. Otherwise, this is a great place to see some species which we are not as likely to see elsewhere on the trip. One abundant bird that is easy to see here is the stunning Lance-tailed Manakin. Sometimes it can be found with its relative, the White-bearded Manakin. The birds here are varied, from Crane Hawk and Boat-billed Heron to Greater Ani, Solitary Eagle, White-necked Puffbird and Rufous-tailed Jacamars. Blue-headed Parrot is common, and Lineated Woodpeckers are impressive to see as they forage on the large trees.

White-bellied Antbirds belt out their song from the understory, and maybe they will even show themselves. The complex songs of Buff-breasted and Bicolored Wrens are heard in the forest, along with the repetitive songs of Scrub Greenlets, nasal sounds of Barred Antshrikes or loud calls of Boat-billed and Streaked Flycatchers. Crimson-backed Tanagers and the gorgeous Red-legged Honeycreepers give a lot of color to the local flocks. While birding here it is common to see the Cottontop Tamarin, a gorgeous little monkey dwarfed by the less common White-fronted Capuchin. While our visit to Tayrona will be cursory, we will see a lot, and enjoy the company of our trained guides here who will have the pulse on where the birds are.

The afternoon will be spent driving to Riohacha (2 to 3 hours), with a stop at a known spot where Double-striped Thick-knee is often seen.

Founded by conquistador Nikolaus Federmann in 1535, Riohacha was named after a local legend "The legend of the Axe". The area is mostly desertic and inhabited by Amerindians, predominantly by members of the Wayuu ethnic group. During colonial times Riohacha was a very important port due to the discovery of vast numbers of pearls in the area.

Our hotel for the night is, again, right on the beach!

🏠 **Accommodation: Hotel Taroa**

## DAY 14: Los Flamencos National Park and flight to Bogota

Very close to the city of Riohacha is Los Flamencos National Park and the village of Camarones. This is the western edge of the Guajira desert, where dry forest becomes shorter and sparser and bare dry earth separates the trees from each other. But before you have a mistaken idea of a parched world, Los Flamencos is on the coast and it has shallow water bodies that fill as the rains come, and evaporate during the dry season. These evaporating ponds concentrate salt, and then brine shrimp bloom which brings in the namesake bird of the park – American Flamingos! Their numbers vary depending on

water levels, but they can be here in the hundreds on a good day. If you have not had enough pink, how about the even brighter Scarlet Ibis? They concentrate here as well, with their very close relatives the White Ibis. They are so close in fact that every once in a while a hybrid “Pink Ibis” is seen here. Gulls, terns, and many migratory shorebirds are to be found at Los Flamencos.

Retreating to the forest though, one is quite surprised that a series of very attractive regional specialties are found here. The sole South American offshoot of what is really a North American group, the strikingly red Vermillion Cardinal can be seen here. The very good looking White-whiskered Spinetail is also on our target list here.

We will also search for Crested Bobwhite, Blue-crowned Parakeet, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Black-crested Antshrike, White-fringed Antwren, Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Bare-eyed Pigeon, Buffy Hummingbird, Russet-throated Puffbird, Chestnut Piculet, Tocuyo Sparrow, Slender-billed Inezia (Tyrannulet) and Orinoco Saltator, amongst many others.

After lunch we will drive the short distance to Almirante Padilla Airport in Riohacha, from where we will take a 90 minute flight to El Dorado airport in Bogota.

We will have dinner and stay overnight at our comfortable hotel close to the airport.

 **Accommodation: Hotel Habitel**

## DAY 15: Depart Bogota

Depending on the time of your departure flight, you will leave for the airport after a fantastic, lifer-rich birding trip in Colombia!

## **INCLUSIONS:**

- All accommodation
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Local flights (Medellin to Barranquilla & Riohacha to Bogota)
- Bottled water in vehicle
- Air-conditioned Vehicle
- Fuel
- Park entry fees
- Full time services of a personal Nature Travel bird guide

## **EXCLUSIONS:**

- Items of a personal nature
- International flights into and out of Bogota
- Laundry
- Gifts
- Souvenirs
- Tips
- Alcoholic beverages and drinks

## **ACCOMMODATION:**

Lodging will consist of a mix of 3-4 star hotels in cities and basic lodges with en suite bathrooms at the more rural destinations like Minca. In Honda we stay at a very nice boutique hotel in an old monastery and the rural hotel in Combeima is also very quaint. There is a pool at the hotel in Barranquilla, so pack your swim wear! We will stay at the top-notch birding lodge in El Dorado, and the beach front eco lodge Barlovento, that is touted as one of the best spots to stay in Colombia by Lonely Planet. We expect relative comfort, hot showers, and excellent local food and provide a nice variety of snacks and purified or bottled drinking water available throughout the trip.

## **INFORMATION:**

Colombia has an incredible amount of diversity in a small space. Although the distances are not great between the sites we visit, and roads are good in the lowlands, we do have to contend with some rather windy mountain main roads and some very poor secondary mountain roads. The worst are found in the Santa Marta Mountains, where 4 x 4 vehicles are necessary. Most of the time we will be travelling in a comfortable vehicle.

Please note that we will be sleeping at 8530 feet(2600m) for 1 night during our visit to Colombia. We will mostly be birding on dirt roads or wide trails with the vehicle nearby in case participants want to take a rest. Please note that roads may be steep and slippery and we may occasionally venture off into small trails that spur off the roads. We suggest that you generally practice carrying your equipment for the amount of time and distances that you may encounter during this trip so you are well prepared!

We will have purified or bottled drinking water available throughout the trip. One should be prepared for early morning birding, as it is important to be out before it becomes too hot. Whenever possible we shall have an early afternoon break, before continuing out in the late afternoon. Also for those interested in mammals and night birds there will be some opportunities for owling and maybe spotlighting for a mammal or two.

Most of our meals will be sit-down meals, although field breakfasts, lunches or even a field dinner is likely somewhere along the trip. If you have specific food allergies, please communicate these to us on signing up.

Note that the tour starts and ends in Bogota.

**Thank you for choosing Nature Travel Birding.**