

## Trip Report: Colombia, March 10-24, 2023



Our tour took us through four unique bioregions, including the central Andes, the geographical valley of the Cauca River, the Western Andes, and finally, the lowlands of the Choco Bioregional regions. This enabled us to explore a variety of habitats during our journeys, such as humid tropical forests, dry forests, premontane forests, cloud forests, and the Paramo ecosystem, resulting in an impressive 455 bird species in 2 weeks! Many thanks to our fantastic guide, Jose Costano of Andigena Tours, who got us on the birds! His local knowledge, keen eyes and ears, and unbelievable birding skills made for an incredibly successful tour!

Day 1: After flying into Medellin the day before, our trip starts in the central Andes. To begin the journey, we visited a site near San Pedro, searching and successfully finding the critically endangered Antioquia Brushfinch. This elusive species is known to live in bushes surrounded by livestock. During our observations, we also spotted the Yellow-breasted Brushfinch. Other birds we encountered included Azara's Spine-tail, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Black-capped Tanager, Blue and Black Tanager, and Black-throated Flower Piercer.

In the afternoon, we found the endemic Antioquia Wren. We also had great looks at the Apical Flycatcher, Moustached Puffbird, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, and Yellow-olive Flatbill. We spent the night in the lovely, picturesque colonial town of Jardin.

Day 2: Early this morning, we journeyed to the cloud forest in 4-wheel drive vehicles, searching for the endemic Yellow-eared Parrot. After a bit of searching, we were lucky enough to find two of these rare birds nesting in a hollowed snag, as well as view another four flyovers. The birding in the cloud forest, Reserva Alto de Ventanas, was terrific! We saw over 50 species that morning, including Sickle-winged, Guan, Tomerline Sunangel, Speckle-faced Parrot, Streak-headed Antbird, Undulated and Chami Antpitta, Spillmann's Tapaculo, Pearled Treerunner, White-browed Spinetail, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Rufous-crowned Tody-flycatcher, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, and Sharpe's Wren at a nest.



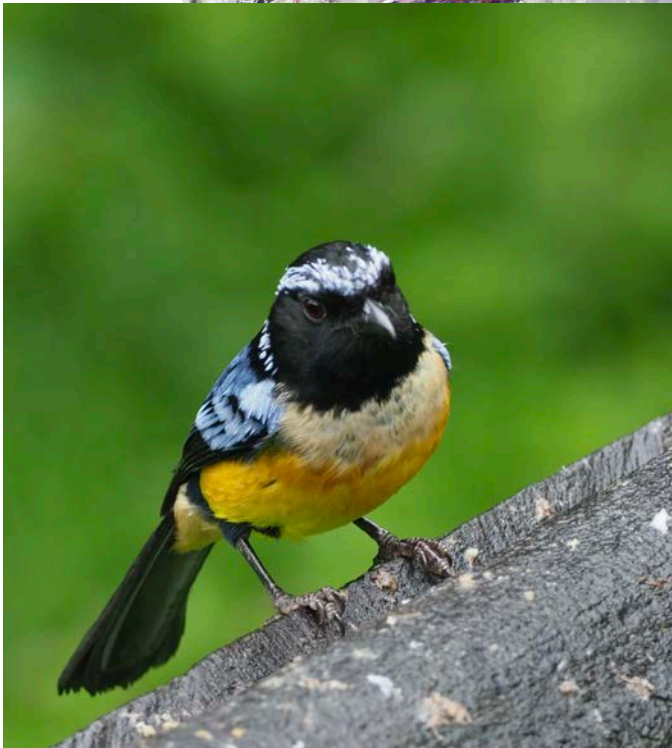
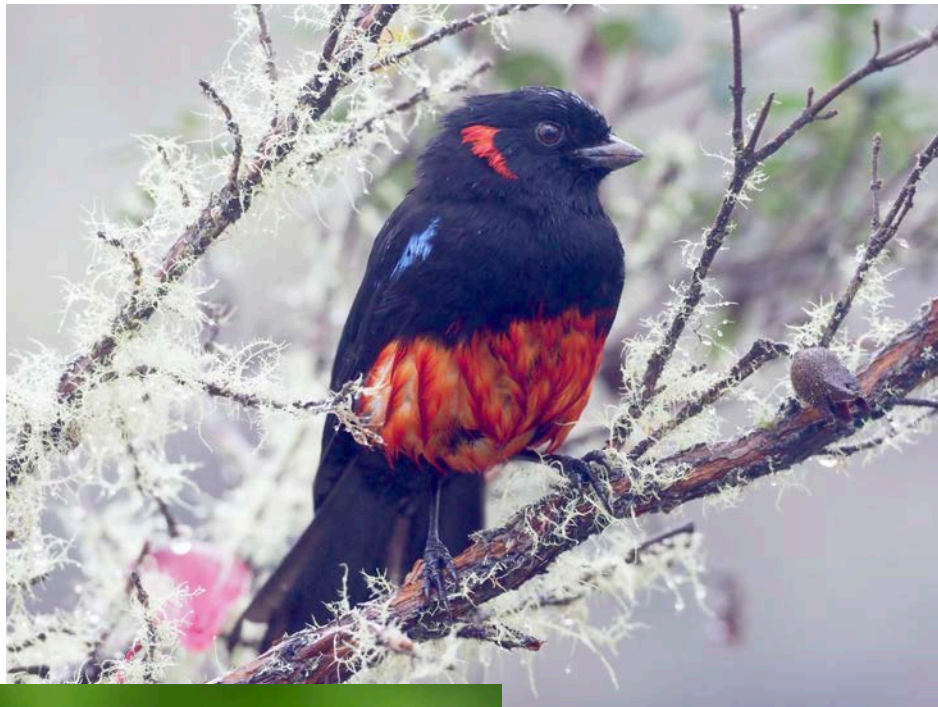
In the afternoon, we visited the incredible **Andean Cock-of-the-rock** lek in Jardin, where we had stunning close-up looks at multiple displaying males! Also seen were Russet-backed Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped Cacique and Red-bellied Grackle. After that fantastic experience, we topped it off with a beautiful meal at our guide, Jose Castano's mother's house. She has a gorgeous garden, which attracts many fabulous birds, including Colombian Chachalaca, Andean Motmot, Red-headed Barbet, Black-billed Thrush, Black-capped, Scrub, and Blue-necked Tanagers.

Day 3: We had a predawn start, packed up our two 4x4 vehicles, and headed up to Mirador El Roble Reserve, where we spent a glorious morning with incredible looks at Slate-crowned and **Chestnut-naped Antpittas**, **Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher** and Black-billed Mountain-Toucan. The feeders were active with Sparkling Violetear, Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, and White-bellied Woodstar. Also, we had excellent looks at Green Jay, Gray-browed and Slaty Brushfinches, Black-capped, Oleaginous, and Superciliaried Hemispingus. We enjoyed all these beautiful birds while being served a delicious breakfast. One of the highlights of the morning was to witness an **Oncilla** come out of the forest to feed on raw fish. It was difficult to leave Mirador, but we needed to get to our next destination. We birded through the beautiful forest and eventually reached the famous Road to Manizales. We were happy to get views of the endemic Yellow-headed Brushfinch during our travels, along with a Whiskered Wren.



Day 4: This morning, we headed to the Highlands of Los Nevados National Park. We found Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Pale-naped Brushfinch, and Plumbeous Sierra Finch. We also saw Andean Duck, Stout-billed Cincloides, and Grass Wren in the harsh habitat of the Paramo.

We had a fabulous lunch at Hotel Termales and had a fantastic time spotting various bird species. We were delighted to see a Rainbow-bearded Thornbill feeding on flowers around the hot spring pools. Hummingbirds were also active at the feeders, and we were able to observe Viridian Metaltail, Black-thighed and Golden-breasted Pufflegs, Shining Sunbeam, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, and Great Sapphirewing. Highlights were seeing the stunning Lacrimose Mountain Tanager and **Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager**. Additionally, we spotted Blue-backed Conebill, White-throated Tyrannulet, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, and Great Thrush.



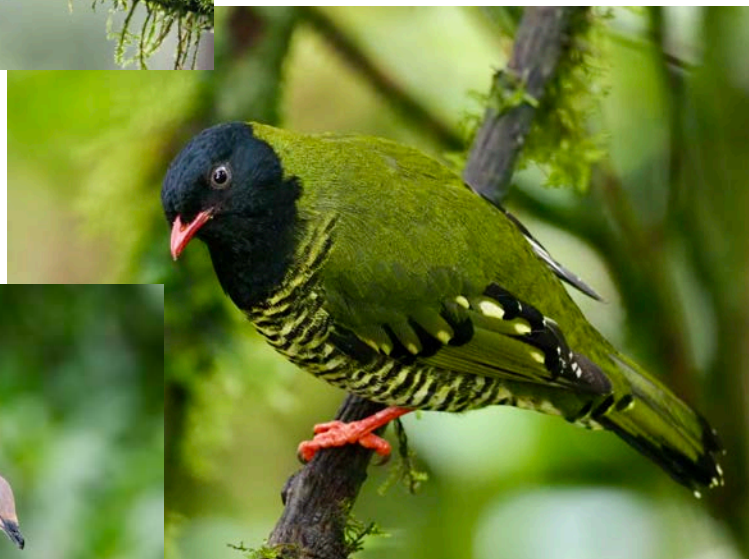
Back on the road and just before we started our descent from the Highlands, our excellent guide, Jose, found a patch of flowers where we observed our target species, the beautiful Buffy Helmetcrest. It was a feeding on flowers and gave us quite a show.

Day 5: This day was spent at the fantastic reserve Rio Blanco, where we were able to see Andean Motmot, Plushcap, Sicklet-winged Guan, White-throated Daggerbill, Powerful and Crimson-mantled Woodpeckers, Dusky Piha and Grass-green Tanager. We had stunning looks at the Blue-capped Tanager, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, and **Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager**.

Slate-crowned, Bicolored, and Brown-banded Antpittas came to various feeding stations. Also, a Green-and-black Fruiteater came in to check out what was happening at the feeders. Following a delicious lunch at the reserve, we continued birding on the lovely trails before packing up and heading back down the mountain, taking in the beautiful scenery. During our journey, we enjoyed observing White-capped Dippers feeding on algae growing on a wall surrounding a water treatment plant. Furthermore, we were delighted to spot a Green-fronted Lancebill drinking water from a pool.

Day 6: This was the day we planned to spend at Hacienda El Bosque. It is a agricultural farm in the Highlands, where the owners are bird lovers and excellent chefs. It has become well known for its amazing birds, photo opportunities, and food! The problem was getting up the mountain with rain all night before there were several mudslides, resulting in traffic being unable to go through the mountain roads. At one point, we started walking with umbrellas up the mountain because we were determined to get to the birds. The owner of Hacienda El Bosque came down the mountain to pick us up after we walked several miles. We got to the beautiful grounds in time to see the feeding of a famous Crescent-faced Antpitta. We also saw impressive displays of hummingbirds coming to feeders, including Sword-billed Hummingbird, Black-thighed Puffleg, and Tourmaline Sunangel. The day's highlight was 11 **Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans** coming to fruit. They were so close up, giving us fantastic

photo opportunities. We also saw **White-throated Quail-Dove, Barred Fruiteater, Golden-fronted Redstart, Chestnut-bellied Chat-Tyrant, and Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant**. And we were treated to a wonderful lunch in their beautiful dining room overlooking the mountain. The road back down the mountain was again blocked by mudslides, delaying our return to our hotel. It was quite an adventurous day, and at one point, we thought we might be spending the night on the mountain roads in our van!



Day 7: We began our travels to Otún Quimbaya Fauna and Flora Sanctuary, a beautiful protected reserve. We birded the roads going through the forest. We found Cuaca and Sicklet-winged Guans, Speckled-faced and Bronze-winged Parrots, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow, Collared Trogon, Mustached Antpitta, Rusty-winged Barbtail, and Black-capped, Scrub, Blue-necked, Golden, and Metallic-green Tanager!

Day 8: After birding at the reserve grounds, we packed our things and drove to Montezuma. On our way, Jose suggested stopping at a spot to look for the lovely Turquoise Dacnis. As usual, he found us the bird, a beautiful male that was foraging in a nearby tree. We also had nice looks at a couple of Yellow-backed Orioles.

Late in the afternoon, we reached Montezuma Rainforest Lodge, and feeders were very active with Green Thorntail, Collared Inca, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Green-crowned Brilliant, **Empress Brilliant**, Purple-throated Woodstar, Andean Emerald, **Violet-tailed Sylph**, and Blue-headed Sapphire.



Day 9: This wonderful day was devoted to the Tatama National Park/Montezuma Road. We had Narina and Tatama Tapaculos, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Handsome Flycatcher, Beautiful Jay, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, Yellow-throated and Dusky Chlorospingus, **Tanager Finch**, Tricolored Brushfinch, Black-and-gold, Purplish-mantled, Beryl-spangled, Saffron-crowned Tanagers, Indigo and Bluish Flowerpiercers, and Golden-collared Honeycreeper. The star of the day was nice views of the endemic **Gold-ringed Tanager**, one of Colombia's most sought-after birds due to its scarcity and beauty!

We had lunch delivered to us by the lodge staff via motorcycles so we could keep birding the amazing Montezuma Road the entire day. We had great looks at a singing endemic **Munchique Wood-Wren**. Just before dark, towards the bottom of the road before reaching the Lodge, we were happy to see Rufous-breasted Antthrush and several Crested Ant-Tanagers, making for a very productive day!



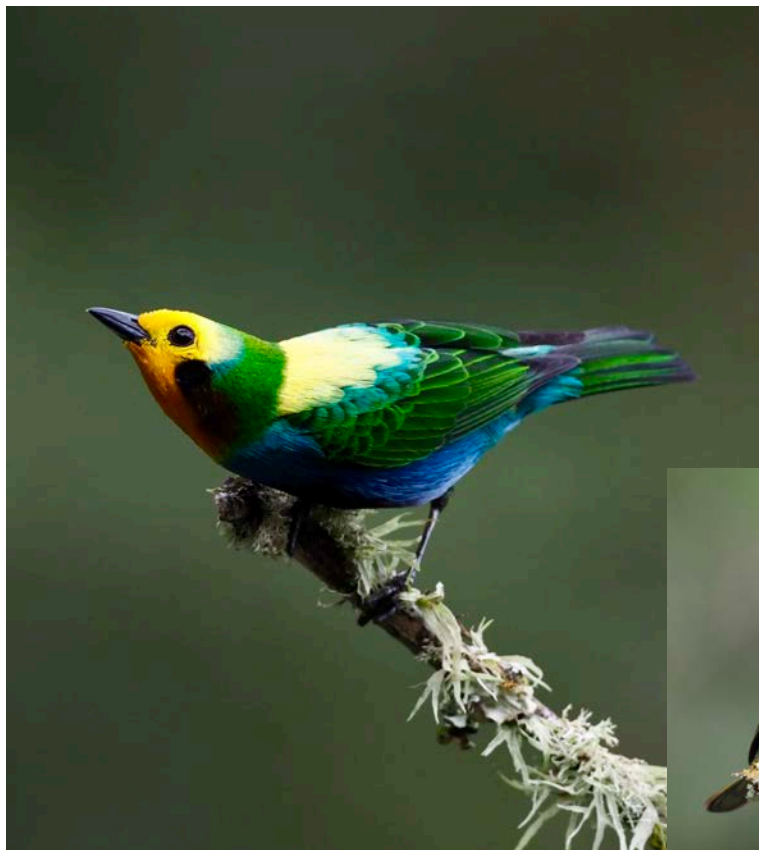
Day 10: Another fantastic day of birding on Montezuma Road in the Tatama National Park. We were able to spot a variety of rare and beautiful birds, including the Lanceolated Monklet, Club-winged, Striolated, and Golden-winged Manakins, Scaled Fruiteater, Black Solitaire, Ochre-breasted Tanager, White-whiskered Hermit, Ornate Hawk Eagle, Barred Hawk, Golden-headed Quetzal, Toucan Barbet, Yellow-vented Woodpecker,



Pacific Tuftedcheek, Uniform Treehunter, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant, Black-billed Peppershrike, Choco Vireo and many more! It was indeed a day to remember!

Day 11: We had one last birding session at the beautiful Montezuma Rainforest Lodge, where we added to our list: Tawny-bellied Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Grayish Piculet, Zeledon's Antbird, Golden-collared Manakin, Black-billed Thrush, Black-chested Jay, Black-headed Brushfinch and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. It was difficult to leave this incredible birding hotspot, but we were ready to head to the beautiful Araucana Lodge with a birding stop. Our stop was targeted for the stunning Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, which we found feeding on flowers. Also, we saw Spectacled Parrotlet, Chivi Vireo, Yellow Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters at this productive stop. We arrived at the beautiful Araucana Lodge in time for dinner with delicious homemade pizza made in a brick oven.

Day 12: The lodge was stunning, adorned with various active bird feeders. We explored several trails in the morning and were thrilled to spot Parker's Antbird, an endemic species, along with many other excellent birds such as the White-throated Spadebill, Streak-capped Treehunter, Rufous-naped Greenlet, Sooty-headed Wren and Golden-crowned Warbler to name a few. Following a great lunch, we visited La Florida Bosque de Las Aves, famous for its incredible bird feeders. We were lucky enough to spot the beautiful **Multicolored Tanager**, as well as other species such as Chestnut-capped and White-naped Brushfinchs, Golden-winged Manakin, **Red-headed Barbet**, Montane Woodcreeper, Scaled Antpitta, Three-striped Warbler, Golden-naped, Saffron-crowned and Golden Tanagers.

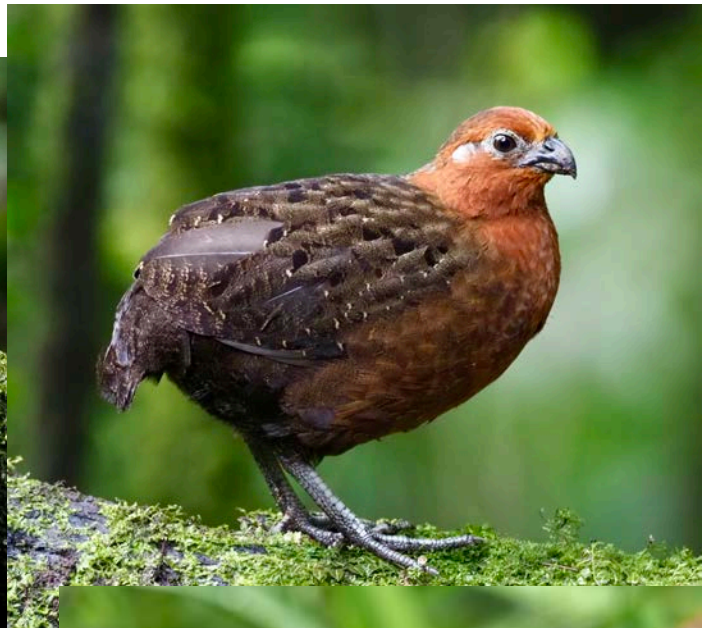


Day 13: This was an adventurous day trip to the village of San Cipriano. To get to this unique location, we had to ride into the town on a "**Brujita**," which is a motorcycle-powered railroad track vehicle. It is the only way to get in and out of this village. The village is on the banks of a pristine, crystal-clear river. We hiked the trail and found our target bird, the secretive **Sapayoa**, guarding its nest on the banks of a stream. We had many other great birds, including cute **Choco Screech-Owls** on a day roost, Berlepsch's Tinamou crossing the trail, King Vulture flyover, White-tailed and **Choco Black-throated Trogons**, Black-breasted Puffbird, Five-colored Barbet, and Blue-whiskered Tanager! After this incredible birding, we enjoyed a locally prepared lunch of fresh fish and began the reverse journey back to Araucana Lodge.



Day 14: This morning, we went birding at the stunning San Felipe Property. We were lucky to spot various birds, including the **Little Tinamou** and **Chestnut Wood-Quail** coming to feeders. We also saw the Southern Emerald-Toucanet with a close-up view. Additionally, we observed the Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Golden-rumped and Orange-billed Euphonias, and Andean Solitaire. Many colorful tanagers were posing at a reflection pond. We were treated to a delicious lunch before we packed up and headed to the famous Km 18 hotspot. This is another well-known birding road. Here we saw Uniform Antshrike, Plain Antvireo, Red-faced Spinetail, Green-and-black Fruiteater, **Blue-winged Mountain Tanager**, Multicolored, Black-capped, Beryl-spangled, Metallic-green and **Saffron-crowned Tanagers**.

After birding on this incredible area, we packed up and headed to our following location, Hacienda El Diamante. We arrived just before dark and added new birds to our giant list, such as Striated Heron, Bare-faced Ibis, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Vermilion, and Fork-tailed Flycatchers.



Day 15: We went birding the Sonso Lagoon and added many new species to our list, which was already quite extensive. Some of these new additions included the Horned Screamer, Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Southern Lapwing, Wattled Jacana, Neotropic Cormorant, Cocoi Heron, Snail Kite, Ringed Kingfisher, Yellow-crowned and Blue-headed Parrots, Greater and Smooth-billed Ani, Striped Cuckoo, **Common Potoo**, Common Nighthawk, Gray-Cowled Wood-Rail, Tropical Screech-Owl, Spot-Breasted Woodpecker, Jet Antbird, Oriole Blackbird, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, **Blackish Rail**, and Red-Breasted Meadowlark. to our delight just when we were leaving the trail, we found both Little and Dwarf Cuckoos! What a great way to end a great tour with great birds!

The following day, we got up early and transferred to the airport in Cali, where we made our international flights home.

We had a fantastic tour, discovering 459 bird species and a variety of captivating mammals and wildlife. I am grateful to the participants who have become lifelong friends after traveling together. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Jose Castano, a kind-hearted man, a remarkable ground agent, and an incredible bird guide. It's no surprise that he's sometimes referred to as the "King of Jardin" as he has an extraordinary talent for finding birds!



