February 4-12 with ext. 12-18, 2023
Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Edison Buenano
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February 4 – Extra Day - Salamanca Island Road National Park, North University

Most of the group arrived a day early for the tour so we scheduled an extra day of birding at Salamanca. Our first stop was along the way at a small wetland along the road. We quickly spotted the hoped-for Northern Screamer at the back of the marsh. Plenty of other species were also present including such highlights as Wattled Jacana, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Pied Water-Tyrant, and Yellow-hooded Blackbird. Not bad for a roadside stop!

A few minutes later we arrived at the headquarters of Salamanca Island Road National Park. Before long we were looking at our main target, the endemic Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird. We spent the next several hours birding this mangrove forest with many more highlights. Multiple Pied Puffbirds perched out in the open, an American Pygmy Kingfisher perched in a shady spot, a couple Chestnut Piculets foraged high in the trees, and Golden-green and Spot-breasted Woodpeckers dazzled with their colorful plumages!

After getting our fill of many new species, we headed to lunch along the Magdalena River where we enjoyed fresh fish and a couple of us enjoyed “the best” Coconut Lemonade of the whole trip! After an afternoon break, we headed up to North University in Barranquilla where after a short wait we ended up getting good views of the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca. We were all ready for the main tour to start the following day!
February 5 – North University, Kilometer 4 Road, Las Gaviotas

After breakfast we headed back to North University for more looks at Chestnut-winged Chachalacas. It only took a few minutes before we were enjoying great views of this endemic. We also enjoyed good looks at Yellow and Baltimore Orioles. It was time to move on to kilometer 4 road where we would be spending the rest of the morning. The open woodlands, ponds, and marshes were teeming with birds! A couple Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, Black-collared Hawks, and many Snail Kites kept our eyes on the sky while White-headed Marsh Tyrant and Stripe-backed and Bicolored Wrens kept our eyes trained lower. The highlight of the morning though was great views of at least four Turquoise-winged Parrotlets, a Colombian endemic.

Afterwards, a fantastic lunch along the Piedras River provided quite a few new birds including our only Gray Seedeaters of the trip. After lunch, we started our drive east to Riohacha with a birding stop at Gaviotas, a side road through lowland forest that ends at the beach. It proved to be a great stop with many highlights. Our only Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds of the trip provided nice views alongside a White-chinned Sapphire, a couple Lance-tailed Manakins, a few Blue Dacnis, and a single Purple Honeycreeper. It was a great stop for the middle of the afternoon! It was time to continue our drive to Riohacha after a great day of birding the lowlands.

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February 6 – Los Flamencos Area

After picking up our local guide, we made our way to a road outside of Camarones that bisects some great desert habitat. We had many new species throughout the morning despite having to deal with many small bees that were desperate for any moisture they could find! A beautiful, Red-billed Emerald, Black-crested Antshrikes, White-fringed Antwrens, and White-whiskered Spinetails were all seen well in the first flock we encountered. Throughout the morning we added some more difficult species such as Tocuyo Sparrow, Chestnut Piculet, and Pale-tipped and Slender-billed Tyrannulets.
We spent the rest of the afternoon on small boats at Los Flamencos National Park to look for American Flamingos and Scarlet Ibis. A flock of 170ish American Flamingos was a spectacular sight and some distant Scarlet Ibis seemed to glow neon in the sun. On our way back, we stopped to bird in some mangrove habitat. As we were walking to one area to look for Mangrove Rail, our group found the 3rd record (according to ebird) of Palm Warbler for Colombia. It was a lifeer for our local guide! Before long, we also had views of Mangrove Rail and its chicks. This species is most likely under-reported for Colombia, but at this point, there are few records of this species. When we arrived back at our van on the beach, we spent some time scanning the flats where we picked up quite a few shorebirds including a Marbled Godwit as the sun was setting after another great birding day.

After a great lunch along the Caribbean, we spent the rest of the morning birding at some very active feeders. Our main target, the Vermilion Cardinal put on a show! We also had great views of many other species including Scaled Dove, Pileated Finch, Buffy Hummingbird, and Black-faced Grassquit. A short walk around the area also produced great looks at Green-rumped Parrotlet.
February 7 – Los Flamencos Area, Gaviotas, and Sierra Sounds

There were still a few species that we were missing from the Los Flamencos area, so we visited a few sites where we hoped to pick up these last few species. As we were picking up our local guide, we saw our first target, the Glaucous Tanager. After a short drive, we stopped at a trail to look for the Orinocan Saltator. After a couple minutes, we all had great views of this range-restricted species. Later, a stop along the highway resulted in great looks at several Double-striped Thick-knees and a Savanna Hawk. Next up was another trail through an open area bordered by forest. A pair of Hooded Tanagers was somewhat unexpected, a Crane Hawk, and several Rufous-vented Chachalacas were among the highlights. On our way back west, we made another stop at Gaviotas on our way to Minca and the Santa Marta Mountains. It was much slower birding on this day, but after a lot of effort, we had good views of a pair of White-bellied Antbirds (thanks to great spotting by Sally!) and our only White-winged Becard of the trip. We made it to Sierra Sounds in Minca with a little light left for some birding. Unfortunately, the sand flies made for an itchy evening, and for some, an itchy few days.
February 8 – Faunal, El Dorado to Minca Road, El Dorado Lodge

Our first stop this morning was at Faunal, just up the road from Minca. The feeders and surrounding forest provided great birding throughout the morning. It didn’t take long before we were watching our main target at this location, the Golden-winged Sparrow. They allowed for some close views and studies as they visited the feeders throughout the morning. Other highlights included Blue Ground Dove, Blue-black Grosbeak, Gray-headed and Swallow Tanagers, Black-chested Jay, and Crested Oropendola. In the late morning, raptors started soaring and a Black-and-white Hawk Eagle eventually soared over. It was a great spot by Mikki and the 1,000th lifer for Mikki and Kirk!
After a great morning, we started our drive upslope to El Dorado Lodge. A couple stops along the way resulted in some new species such as the endemic Santa Marta Antbird, Streak-capped Spinetail, our only, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush of the trip, and our first Bay-headed Tanagers, the Bay-and-green subspecies that occurs in northern South America. We had a relaxed afternoon once we reached El Dorado Lodge, spending some time birding around their feeders, having lunch, and getting settled into our rooms. We added many new species while birding around the feeders including the endemic White-tailed Starfrontlets, Santa Marta and Sierra Neveda Brushfinches, and tanagers such as the Black-capped Tanager.

February 9 – San Lorenzo Ridge, El Dorado Lodge

We had a very early start this morning since we had a short (distance), but long (time) drive to the ridge, and we planned to stop for the endemic Santa Marta Screech-Owl on the way up. After a few stops, we had luck with the screech-owl, but we didn’t hear or see any sign of our other hoped for owl, the Stygian Owl. Once we arrived on the ridge, many Santa Marta endemics came quickly. Yellow-crowned Redstart, Santa Marta Warbler, Santa Marta Parakeet, Rusty-headed Spinetail, Black-cheeked Mountain Tanager, and Hermit Wood-Wren were all seen in quick succession! The Sierra Nevada Antpitta vocalized but was only ever seen briefly in the shadows. The Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant was one of the last endemics we needed to see at this high elevation. With a lot of
patience, we eventually had great views! As a few of us headed back to a tree that was being visited by a Black-backed Thornbill a large dark bird flew right over our heads. It was a Stygian Owl! Luckily, the owl perched in an open area, and we watched it over the next 20 minutes.

For the rest of the morning, we birded our way back down the mountain towards El Dorado Lodge. More endemics were in store such as a Brown-rumped Tapaculo that allowed us clear views. Black-throated Tody-Tyrant and Black-hooded Thrush also showed well as a flock moved through. A quick roadside stop at a White-tipped Quetzal nest resulted in great looks at a male and female quetzal. After lunch, we enjoyed some down time after a very early morning. Some of our group birded around the lodge and saw many of the good birds that reside around the rooms and feeders.
February 10 - Minca to El Dorado Road, Mary’s Feeders, El Dorado Lodge

We were still missing several of the endemics to the Santa Marta Mountains, so we headed downslope from the lodge. As soon as we got out of the vehicles we had good looks at Groove-billed Toucanet, Masked Trogon, Keel-billed Toucan, and Crimson-crested Woodpecker. As we birded our way down the road, we found several difficult-to-see species. First up was the Rusty-breasted Antpitta, then a Gray-throated Leaf-tosser, and eventually a Santa Marta Tapaculo (endemic). Several Golden-breasted Fruiteaters and Moustached Antpitta were also seen well. We eventually made it down to Mary’s feeders where we were hoping to see the endemic Santa Marta Woodstar and Santa Marta Blossomcrown. The blossomcrown came in for great views before too long, but the woodstar was nowhere to be seen. After lunch, we took a walk down the road, and there it was! A female perched up along the road for great scope views (a great spot by Kirk!). Just a little further down the road and we saw our last possible endemic at this elevation, the Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner. It had been a very successful day, as we picked up many of the last Santa Marta endemics we hadn’t seen.
February 11 - Mountain House Bird Lodge, Road to Reserva Guirima, Highway to Barranquilla

This was our last day on the main tour so after breakfast and packing up, we headed down the mountain back towards Minca and eventually Barranquilla. Our first stop was at some nice feeders at Mountain House Bird Lodge. We enjoyed great looks at Keel-billed Toucans, our only Spectacled Tyrannulet of the trip, a singing Yellow-legged Thrush, many Blue-naped Chlorophonias, stunning Yellow-backed Orioles, and a Black-headed Tanager. On our way to some lower elevation forest, we made a stop at an overlook along the side of the road. The view was great, but the birds were even better! As we stepped out of the vehicles, a Black-and-chestnut Eagle was soaring with some vultures. A few minutes later a Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle made a close flyby. Next up was a King Vulture that made an even closer pass! We eventually made our way further down the mountain to a side road through some open forest. We added several new species including a very vocal Black Hawk-Eagle. At lunch in Minca, we enjoyed some great food and hummingbird feeders before beginning our drive back to Barranquilla. We picked up many waterbirds on our way back and a quick stop along the highway produced a Northern Screamer, a species we had missed earlier in the trip! Our main tour was coming to an end, so it was time for a few of us to head home while the rest of the group continued on to Bogota the next day. It was a fantastic week of birding with countless highlights, a great group of birders, and over 325 species recorded!
February 12 - Flights to Bogota, Observatorio de Colibries

After morning flights from Barranquilla to Bogota, we hopped in our van at the airport and headed up into the mountains for some birding at Observatorio de Colibries. This magical property’s hummingbirds entertained us for the next several hours. Several of the hummingbird species we observed wouldn’t be seen again through the rest of the trip such as the Longuemare’s Sunangel, Black-tailed and Green-tailed Trainbearers, Glowing Puffleg, and Blue-throated Starfrontlet! It was a great first afternoon of birding in the central Andes.
February 13 - Parque La Florida, Jardin Encantado

Our morning started early to beat some of the Bogota traffic on our way to Parque La Florida on the west side of the city. Our main target, the endemic Bogota Rail, didn't take long to come out into the open as it swam across a channel through the marsh. Spot-flanked Gallinule, Masked Duck, Andean Duck, and Yellow-hooded Blackbird were seen around the marsh as well. In the wooded area, a pair of Silvery-throated Spinetails eventually revealed themselves for great views and after a lot of work we had great views of 2 Rufous-browed Conebills, a near endemic. Before long it was time to continue driving west towards Liberia with a stop at Jardin Encantado on the way for lunch and more birding.

The hummingbird feeders were great and our group enjoyed great looks at the endemic Indigo-capped Hummingbird. The numbers of Saffron Finches, Ruddy Ground-Doves, and Bananaquits was overwhelming! Our only Scrub Tanagers also made several appearances. The lunch was delicious and our hosts were wonderful, but it was time to continue our drive to Liberia where we would be spending the night. Our drive included a birdy stretch along the Magdalena River where Groove-billed and Smooth-billed Anis, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Red-breasted Meadowlarks.

Bogota Rail
February 14 - Via Villermosa, Humedal El Hato

We made a short drive outside of Liberia to bird along a road that bisects nice forest and scrubby habitats. After heavy rain the night before, we were lucky to see blue skies as we made our way to our birding destination. Our main targets this morning were Yellow-headed Brushfinch and Crested Ant-Tanager both of which are endemics to Colombia. As soon as we got out of the van a Lineated Woodpecker provided great views and our first Blue-necked Tanagers foraged overhead. A Yellow-headed Brushfinch vocalized from the hillside, but we were never able to get looks. As we started walking down the road we added many new species including a very cooperative pair of Spectacled Parrotlets and several Golden Tanagers. After walking a little further down another Yellow-headed Brushfinch began singing and this time, we had great views! Soon after we came across a nice flock that contained our other target, the Crested Ant-Tanager! There were many highlights in this flock including Black-headed Brushfinch and Olivaceous Piculets.

After packing up at our hotel, we started driving to our next birding destination, Humedal El Hato. We came across some great flocks while birding along the road here and quickly found the endemic Velvet-fronted Euphonia. Some of the highlights within the flocks included Jet Antbird, Cinereous and Cinnamon Becards, Lesser Kiskadee, and Blue Dacnis. After lunch, we continued looking for one of our main targets, the endemic Apical Flycatcher. Unfortunately, we never had more than a possible flash of this species and we needed to start our drive to Manizales. It was disappointing to miss this flycatcher, but the birding had been great throughout the morning. The rest of our day consisted of a beautiful drive through the spectacular Andes!
February 15 - Hacienda El Bosque, Los Nevados National Park, Hotel Termales del Ruiz

Our birding on this day would visit several high elevation sites including birding the paramo habitat at elevations over 13,000 feet. On our way up the mountains, our first stop was at Hacienda El Bosque. After a delicious breakfast, we made a short, but slow (due to the elevation) hike to a feeding station for the Equatorial Antpitta. After a long wait with our local guide for the property calling for the antpitta, we had to give up and move onto the next location. At least a Gray-browed Brushfinch came in for worms while we were waiting. At the next location, our local guide started calling again. This time it didn't take long for a Crescent-faced Antpitta to appear! We enjoyed great views of this antpitta, a Barred Fruiteater, many hummingbird species and a mixed flock that moved through the area.
After enjoying all these new birds, we moved on to our next feeding station where we were met by a couple of Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans! The birding here was great and we had great looks at Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Red-crested Cotinga, Golden-fronted Redstart, and Hooded Mountain Tanager!

It had been a great morning, but now it was time to head up to 13,000 feet at Los Nevados National Park. When we arrived, the visibility was very low, and unfortunately it stayed like this throughout our visit. Our main target, the Buffy Helmetcrest, had been present earlier in the day, but without any visibility it proved impossible to find. We did add our only Plumbeous Sierra Finch and heard our only Tawny Antpittas of the trip.
For the rest of the afternoon we birded at Hotel Termales del Ruiz. This beautiful property is centered around a hot spring with beautiful views of the surrounding mountains and has some great birding too! The fruit feeders were being visited by Lacrimose and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanagers. Golden-breasted and Black-thighed Pufflegs, Viridian Metaltail, Shining Sunbeam, and Great Sapphirewings were all visiting the hummingbird feeders. And, we had a brief view of a White-capped Dipper in the river. With just a few minutes left before we had to leave, Edison spotted our last target; the Rainbow-bearded Thornbill! It was a great way to end our day.
February 16 - Rio Blanco Ecological Reserve

We spent most of this day at the fantastic Rio Blanco Ecological Reserve. The birding was great and we recorded almost 100 species at this reserve alone. After breakfast at the reserve we made a short walk to the feeding area of the Bicolored Antpitta. Within a few minutes, one made a quick visit, grabbed a worm or two, and was gone. It wasn't a long view, but at least we had close views of this antpitta! Next up was the Chestnut-crowned Antpittas who were already waiting at their feeding location. A large flock moved through this area and as we birded from the edge of the antpitta feeding spot, the antpittas paid us no attention and continued feeding right next to us! The flock was great with one of the highlights being a couple Plushcaps.

Next up was the Slate-crowned Antpitta. It didn’t take long until one of these cute, little antpittas made an appearance. We continued birding and eventually went back to the visitor center when it started to rain. The birding had been great and we had one more antpitta to look for close to the visitor center; the Brown-banded Antpitta, another Colombian endemic. Again, it didn't take long and this antpitta made a lengthy appearance! Throughout our visit we enjoyed many new hummingbird species that were visiting the feeders at the center including Tourmaline Sunangel, Speckled Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph, Bronzy and Collared Incas, Buff-tailed Coronet, and Fawn-breasted Brilliant. As we were birding around the clearing a flock started to move through. A flock of White-capped Tanagers, a rather uncommon species, popped out and gave our whole group great views. As we began our drive out of the preserve we had one more stop to look for a few more special species. White-capped Dippers gave our group incredible views and we were even able to watch one catch a small fish as it foraged.
The nearby flowers attracted one of our other targets; the White-throated Daggerbill. A glowing Andean Emerald also fed nearby and was our only sighting of this species on the tour. As we were driving out, and starting out drive to our next lodging, Steve and Bob spotted an Andean Motmot. It was a great spot and a great bird to end our visit to Rio Blanco!
February 17 - Otun Quimbaya and Flight to Bogota

We left from our lodging in the early morning and arrived at our first stop a little after sunrise. The ethereal song of the Chestnut-breasted Wren greeted us as we started to look for one of our main targets, the Hooded Antpitta. Unfortunately, the antpitta was a no-show on this morning, but we did see many other good birds during our time here. The endemic Cauca Guan provided some great looks and over the course of the morning we had several confiding Red-ruffed Fruitcrows. We stopped along the road, next to some flooded forest where our local guide had seen Blackish Rail recently. After a couple minutes, one came in close and allowed for some nice views. On our way down the road, a pair of Masked Trogons perched closeby and a Green Jay (Inca) made an appearance. Before long, we came across a mixed flock. Metallic-green Tanager was one of the highlights, a Black-billed Peppershrike finally revealed itself, a couple Cerulean Warblers foraged above us, and a Yellow-throated Vireo appeared. The Yellow-throated Vireo is relatively rare in this area and was a lifer for the local guide!

Since we had flights to catch in the afternoon, we headed back to our lodging to pack up and have lunch before spending the rest of the day traveling back to Bogota. We had a delicious final dinner in Bogota and talked about all the amazing locations, birds, and wildlife we’d seen during our two weeks in Colombia. Over the course of the trip we had recorded 507 species.