February 4-10, 2024

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Luis Cuartas

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February 4 – Andes Bird Observatory, Guajira Forest Reserve

Our first day started out with an early departure with a drive across Bogota and up into the eastern Andes. After a quick breakfast with the owner of the Andes Bird Observatory, we headed up to his property. On the way, we made a stop in some paramo habitat. As we got out of the vehicle, Great Sapphirewings displayed overhead. After a few minutes, a large mixed flock moved through! White-throated Tyrannulets, Slaty, and Pale-naped Brushfinches, Black-crested Warblers, Golden-fronted Redstarts, Black-chested, Scarlet-bellied, and Buff-breasted Mountain Tanagers, and Black-headed Hemispingus were among the highlights. It was a fast-paced first stop!

As we continued to the observatory, we added a few more species such as White-capped Dipper and Andean Solitaire. As soon as we reached the property, we spotted an ibis. It turned out to be a Green Ibis which was the first ebird record for the property and the surrounding area. As we started our hike, a Sharp-shinned Hawk zipped overhead, another new species for the property. When we reached the first patch of forest, one of the specialties of the property, the Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, made an appearance and we were able to get good views of a couple individuals. Next up was the Muisca Antpitta (endemic), which was easily coaxed out in return for a few worms. As we hiked down the hillside, down to our main target of the morning, the Andean Potoo, we came across all of our other hoped-for species. Brown-breasted Parakeet (endemic), Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, and a Strong-billed Woodcreeper (which was a lifer for the property owner) all made appearances. Eventually we made it to the Andean Potoo which provided great views!
Andean Potoo

Muisca Antpitta
After our great stop at the observatory, we continued to the Guajira Forest Reserve. On our way, we came across a great flock where we saw several new species including Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Mountain Cacique, Beryl-spangled and Blue-and-black Tanagers, and Gray-hooded Bush Tanager. Once we reached the forest reserve, we enjoyed great views of many hummingbirds including the spectacular Sword-billed, the near-endemic Longuemare's Sunangel and Blue-throated Starfrontlet, and the bee-like White-bellied Woodstar. We also had crushing looks at a Masked Trogon and our only Smoky Bush-Tyrants of the trip. It had been a fantastic day! It was time to leave for the airport, but on the way out we had to stop when Mikki spotted a Whistling Heron!

Once we made our flights (after a missed flight) and made it to Pereira, we were all ready for some rest and ready to see some new birds the next day!

February 5 – Otun Quimbaya Fauna and Flora Sanctuary

We started early again this morning, arriving at our first birding stop as it was getting light. It's always a delight being able to listen to the morning chorus of birds and this morning was no different. Our best looks at Sickle-winged Guans, our only Golden-bellied Flycatcher, and a cooperative Smoke-colored Pewee all made for a good start. We heard many Red-ruffed Fruitcrows giving their low pitched, blowing into a bottle vocalization. Eventually we had several looks at this difficult species. We spent most of the day birding down the road that cuts through the reserve and had to dodge (or not dodge rain for quite a bit of the day). But the birding was great, and we spotted many targets.
Cauca Guan (endemic), White-booted Racket-tail, Southern Emerald-Toucanet, Green Jays (Inca), and Fawn-breasted, Saffron-crowned, and Metallic-green Tanagers all showed well. During one heavier spell of rain, we were slowly driving down the road when we came upon a flock. We all decided it was worth getting wet and we were soon rewarded with the stunning, endemic Multicolored Tanager!

Just before lunch, with the rain still falling, we gave it another go. A couple of Crested Ant-Tanagers, another stunning Colombian endemic, provided some views. By the late afternoon, we made our way to a bridge over the Otun River. This spot is typically a great place to look for Torrent Ducks. We had spent about an hour and a half here, seeing some nice birds such as a point-blank Andean Motmot, White-tipped Swift, and our first Blue-necked Tanager. We were about to give up, when a female Torrent Duck came swimming up the rapids towards us! We had great views as she floated down the rapids directly beneath the bridge. It was time to head back now, but one more look revealed a male! It was a great way to end our day and made us even more excited to start birding the next day.

February 6 – Otun Quimbaya and Hotel Tinamú

Our day started back in the same area as the day before, but lower down the road in areas we hadn't covered yet. We had many highlights, even if many of the birds proved difficult to see well. Chestnut Wood-Quails (endemic) vocalized from the hillside, a couple of Moustached Puffbirds, our only Red-headed Barbets, and a noisy flock of Orange-
Cauca Guan

Red-headed Barbet

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winged Parrots all started the day off well. Once we moved further down, we had great views of a White-winged Becard, Golden Tanagers, and Black-winged Saltators. We spent a lot of time looking for a vocalizing Scaled Antpitta, which sounded like it was on top of us, to no avail. It's times like this that make you even more appreciative of all the locals who now feed antpittas in the tropics. We made one last stop before we would have to head back to the hotel and depart for our next destination. The open areas above the town of La Florida provided us with a different suite of species. Smooth-billed Ani, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Gray and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters were among the highlights.

After packing up, we were on our way to Hotel Tinamú, but also with a stop for lunch. As usual on birding tours, we stopped at a place where there were also a few birds. A good number of Spectacled Parrotlets were the highlight out of the 25 species detected, all while enjoying a delicious lunch. We spent the afternoon birding the grounds at Hotel Tinamú. It was rather hot, so we took it easy, even birding from lawn chairs for a portion of it. It was well worth it as we recorded over 50 species for the afternoon!

February 7 – Río Blanco Ecological Reserve, Enchanted Forest

After an early drive to Río Blanco, we were greeted with many new species of hummingbirds as we stepped out of the vehicle. Ten species were present including the spectacular Long-tailed Sylph. Before long, it was time to go to the first antpitta feeding station. It took some coaxing from the antpitta “whisperer”, the first person to start feeding antpittas in Colombia, but eventually a Bicolored Antpitta made an appearance. Next up was the Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, which wasn’t quite as tame as usual, but eventually posed nicely for everyone in the stands. Our third stop was for the Slate-crowned Antpitta. This one really tested our patience, but eventually came to retrieve “his” worms. Last up was the Brown-banded Antpitta (endemic) which didn’t make us wait at all! However, when it comes to the worms, it only spends a second before disappearing. It makes it difficult for photos, but eventually you can get a clear shot. Of course we birded in between all of these antpittas and we ran into one great flock that included Streaked Tuftedcheek, Streaked Xenops, many Pearled Treerunners, Barred Becards, White-tailed and Black-capped Tyrannulets, Sharpe’s Wren, Russet-crowned Warbler, Golden-fronted Redstart, and more! In the afternoon, we were lucky enough to run into the owner of the Enchanted Forest, a private reserve close to Río Blanco. He invited us to join the group already going onto the property to see a roosting Stygian Owl. Not only did we see a Stygian Owl, we also we saw the rare Masked Saltator and had spectacular views of a Spotted Barbtail!
February 8 - Hotel Tinamú and Hotel Termales del Ruíz

We spent this whole morning birding the grounds of our hotel. By lunch we had recorded about 90 species! The thick forest in this area can make birding difficult, but with some patience, you eventually start seeing some of the many birds in this area. Not far down the trail, we started out with looks at Great Antshrike and our first Golden-collared Manakin. As we continued, we added many species including Cocoa Thrush, Gray-headed Dove, Bar-crested Antshrikes, Black-tailed Flycatcher, Black-chested Jay, Long-billed Starthroat, and many others. Towards the end of our hike, we had great looks at a roosting Common Potoo and spent some time at a Golden-collared Manakin lek.

After lunch, we went on a shorter hike through a different part of the property. A Plain-brown Woodcreeper, our only one of the tour, showed off nicely, but no matter how much we looked, a couple of vocalizing Sharp-tailed Streamcreepers would never show themselves. It was time to leave Hotel Tinamú and head to the higher elevations of Hotel Termales del Ruíz. We didn’t have much light left once we arrived, but we made the most of it. Our first bird, the dazzling Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, gave great looks despite the low lighting of the early evening. We also checked the hummingbird feeders which were being visited by many Shining Sunbeams, Golden-breasted Pufflegs, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, and Great Sapphirewings. It was a colorful way to end our day of birding!
Our morning began at sunrise outside the front doors of our lodging, Hotel Termales del Ruíz. Within a few minutes we were watching Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager s, their red bellies and ear patches glowing in the early morning light. Other stunners such as Golden-crowned Tanager, Golden-fronted Redstart, and Shining Sunbeam vied for our attention. While watching the hillside outside of our hotel, we spotted one of our targets, the Rainbow-bearded Thornbill on the same perch we had seen it the previous afternoon, but in much better light! After a quick (and delicious) breakfast, we started our short drive up the mountain to Los Nevados National Park.

The star of the show at Los Nevados is the Buffy Helmetcrest. Clouds were moving through when we arrived, limiting our visibility, but it didn't take long before one helmetcrest made an appearance! Over the next hour or so the sun broke through and provided nice lighting on our subject. With only about 1,000 individuals and an extremely limited range, we counted ourselves lucky to have such great views of this hardy hummingbird. A couple of Grass Wrens, Black-chested Buzzard, Andean Tit-Spinetail, and Brown-backed Chat-Tyrants added some diversity to our visit.
Lower down the mountain we added Plain-colored Seedeaters, Andean Duck, and Plumbeous Sierra Finch before heading back to Hotel Termales del Ruiz to bird around the grounds. As we were enjoying the hummingbird feeders, a local guide told us they had found a Black-thighed Puffleg a little ways down the trail. It wasn’t far, but it was exhausting. After hiking straight downslope to a river, we had to hike straight up the next hill. As soon as we arrived at the spot, a hummingbird shot over our heads and down the hill. After catching our breath from the hike, and a short wait, the puffleg zipped back in and gave everyone good, long looks. We still needed to see a couple of high-elevation tanagers, so we headed back to the feeder area. It wasn’t long before we had great views of a few Lacrimose Mountain Tanagers and the beefy Hooded Mountain Tanager.

We decided to spend the rest of the day birding some open areas where we hoped to see a few species we had missed earlier in the day. Our first stop was to look for Plain-capped Ground-Tyrants, a relatively rare species in this area. We were getting buffeted by the winds and clouds as they rushed across the valley to meet us, and we weren’t having any luck so we decided to leave. But, as we turned and started walking back, two ground-tyrants started vocalizing. We never could get our eyes on them, but the experience with the weather and the birds will be one I won’t soon forget.
We ended the day birding around Laguna Negra (Black Lake). After a short while, we had a brief sighting of two lapwings flying by, but the sighting had been so brief, we weren’t sure if they were Andean or Southern. Luckily, there was a small road leading down to where we had seen the lapwings flying. We walked a long way down, and saw our only Noble Snipe of the trip, but had no luck with the lapwings. Luckily, Mikki was determined and continued walking while the rest of us kept scanning the fields. After a short while, we heard a lapwing start calling and all of us had good views of this beautiful shorebird! We were a happy group as we headed back to our hotel where we enjoyed a delicious dinner and started dreaming about the birds we would be looking for the next day.

February 10 - Hacienda El Bosque

This was our last day of birding, before we had to catch an evening flight back to Bogotá. Hacienda El Bosque was a great way to end our trip. After some delicious breakfast in their restaurant, we walked down to the first antpitta feeding station. Within a few seconds, a juvenile hopped out and grabbed a worm. The adult wasn’t so quick to come into the open, but both of them stuck around the area for the whole time we stayed. While we were there, an Ocellated Tapaculo started vocalizing. It never came all the way in, but everyone was able to get looks at this stunning bird. Afterwards, we spent some time watching hummingbird feeders, before visiting the next antpitta feeding station. This feeding station attracted much more than an antpitta! First were two Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrants, then a couple of Mountain Wrens, an extremely cute Crescent-faced Antpitta, and eventually a Barred Fruit-eater! Afterwards, we headed down to their last feeders where the Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucans usually feed. Unfortunately, they decided not to visit on this day, but we still saw some great birds including our only Mountain Velvetbreast of the trip.

After lunch, we spent some time walking a trail on the property. Not far down the trail, we saw our only White-throated Quail-Doves of trip and further down we had views of White-browed Spinetail, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, and a singing Paramo Tapaculo that barely showed itself. Unfortunately, we had run out of time, so we headed back to the vehicle and had to say our good-byes. The trip was over, but while we were sitting in the airport, a bird perched just outside the window. A Fork-tailed Flycatcher, our last new bird of the trip!

All in all, we ended the trip with 325 species, 136 of which were photographed.