



Santa Marta Blossomcrown

Colombia

With Schoodic Institute

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma

February 1-12, 2026

February 1 – Cienega de La Virgen

Since everyone in our group arrived a day early, we had some bonus birding time on this morning. With a very rare weather event, a cold front from North America dipping all the way down to Colombia, we had to dodge some rain. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived back at our hotel, we were all soaked through. But the birding was quite good! We walked down the beach where we saw our first Bicolored Wrens, several Saffron Finches, Royal and Sandwich Terns, and several Semipalmated Plovers. Next, we walked across the road, to walk back to a bay with some extensive mud flats. On the walk back, we enjoyed good looks at a Ringed Kingfisher, a Roadside Hawk, and many egrets and herons. After enduring some heavy rain, we had a dry spell where we had enough visibility to scan through the shorebirds. American Oystercatchers, Hudsonian Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones, Red Knots, and Semipalmated Sandpipers were among our highlights! Before heading back to the hotel, a couple of Double-striped Thick-knees appeared in a nearby field - our only sighting of the trip of this unique species!



Collared Forest-Falcon

February 2 – Matute Birding Nature Reserve, Cartagena City Tour

After an early wakeup and some coffee at the hotel, we drove for about an hour to Matute Birding Nature Reserve south of Cartagena. Our local guide, Roger, had some flight issues the previous day, so we were without him for this morning. However, we met with Hugo, a local guide from this area. As soon as we were out of the vehicle, the birds became very active. Red-crowned and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers were seen well, a single Chestnut-fronted Macaw perched nearby, Boat-billed and Social Flycatchers showed well, and Crested Oropendolas provided good looks. As we walked down a back road through some dry forest habitat we saw our first endemic, a group

of Chestnut-winged Chachalacas. The rest of the road also provided some great birds and we added Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, a pair of Russet-throated Puffbirds, and rare eye-level looks at a Rufous-browed Peppershrike. After walking back to our vehicle and driving a short distance, we took another walk, this time towards the main building at Matute. As soon as we got out, we heard a Collared Forest-Falcon nearby. It didn't take long until Hugo spotted the bird - a dark morph! We all had great scope views of this difficult-to-see raptor.

After a delicious breakfast, we decided to get back out and walk some trails. It was raining, but luckily it wasn't heavy. The birding was a bit slow due to the weather, but we had great views of a Gray-headed Kite, a couple of sloths, Black-chested Jays, and several Prothonotary Warblers. After a couple of hours, we headed back towards the main building. After enjoying some down time, we had another delicious meal, saw a couple of Hooded Tanagers and White-browed Gnatcatchers, and walked back to the vehicle. When we arrived back at the hotel, we met Roger, had a short break, and gathered back up to head to Cartagena. As always, we had a fascinating visit to this historic city!

February 3 – Agrícola Camelias, Humedal Hueso de Vaca, Magdalena River

We had another early departure on this morning to drive to Agrícola Camelias, a small reserve that protects a patch of dry forest. It was still a bit dark when we arrived but as we walked up to the main building, we were serenaded by the dawn chorus of birds. Whooping Motmots and Little Tinamous were among the favorite voices. As we arrived, we had our first look at a Straight-billed Woodcreeper, lots of Black-chested Jays, a couple of Yellow Orioles, and Glaucous Tanagers. A flock of the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalacas also provided some great looks. Our host, Rafa, along with a couple from our group went to check on a roosting Rufous Nightjar.



Rufous Nightjar

While they were gone, we had great looks at a small flock of Turquoise-winged Parrotlets, another endemic of Colombia. When Dave, John, and Rafa arrived back with big smiles, we knew the night-jar must have been found. The rest of the group headed out there and had great looks at a roosting adult. On our return hike we saw our only Greater Anis of the trip and had spectacular looks at a pair of Russet-throated Puffbirds. Luckily, while we were gone, the parrotlets had made a return visit. After breakfast and some more good looks at birds visiting the feeders, we took a short walk to a pond on the property. As soon as we arrived, we had nice looks at Yellow-chinned Spinetails, Wattled Jacanas, and a Purple Gallinule. A pair of Lesser Kiskadees and a Green Kingfisher were also nice highlights. At this point, it was time to head back to our vehicle. On the way, we had looks at a pair of Jet Antbirds and a Trinidad Euphonia!



Russet-throated Puffbird

After we said goodbye, we made the drive back to our hotel where we packed up, had lunch, and started our longer drive to Barranquilla. Along the way, we stopped along the road to scan some wetlands. Our only White-faced Whistling Duck and White-cheeked Pintails were seen among many Blue-winged Teal. A little further along, we made another stop at a roadside lake and marsh. The birding was great here and we saw many Common Gallinules, our first Limpkins, lots of Wattled Jacanas, Least and Pied-billed Grebes, a very hidden Least Bittern, Black-collared and Savanna Hawks, Snail Kites, and our only White-headed Marsh Tyrant and Pied Water-Tyrant of the trip. We were doing well on time as we came into Barranquilla, so we decided to make a stop along the Magdalena River. As soon as we got out, we had good views of a pair of Northern Screamers! The well patterned Large-billed Terns made some close flybys, several Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures showed off their head coloration, and a Peregrine Falcon passed overhead. Just a little further down river, we stopped to see the Shakira statue - her hometown is Barranquilla. Of course, we added some birds too. Our only Gull-billed Terns of the trip were the biggest highlight and a great way to end the day!

February 4 – Ciénaga de Mallorquín Eco Park, Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta

Our morning started with a short drive to a park on the edge of the city. Ciénaga de Mallorquín Eco Park is a new park with an extensive boardwalk that provides access into some great mangrove habitat! We had an excellent walk through the mangrove habitat and had some wonderful bird encounters. A Panama Flycatcher and Northern Scrub-Flycatcher provided good views, Russet-throated Puffbirds perched in the open, Sapphire-throated Hummingbirds slowed down enough for all of us to see them, a Cocoli Heron quietly stalked prey, and best of all, a couple of American Pygmy Kingfishers made their presence known with their quiet calls! Plenty of other birds were seen as well including many Prothonotary Warblers, a couple of Northern Waterthrushes, and several Bicolored Conebills! Once we reached more open water, we added great views of many herons and egrets and several species of shorebirds.



American Pygmy Kingfisher

After we were done at the park, we continued east along the coast until we reached Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta. This body of water is the largest brackish water lagoon in Colombia. After a delicious lunch along the shores of the Caribbean, we hopped in a boat to explore the mangroves and open water of this ciénaga. On our way out, we saw plenty of Magnificent Frigatebirds, Snowy and Great Egrets, and our only Bare-throated Tiger-Herons. However, the highlights of the boat ride was the impressive flock of 1500+ American Flamingos! We were able to watch these impressive birds as they fed and took flight around our boat. It was quite the show in pink! On our way back to the dock, we saw many more kingfishers including Ringed, Amazon, and Green. After getting some cold drinks back on land, we finished our drive to Santa Marta where we switched into 4 4X4 vehi-

cles that we would be using for our days in the Santa Marta Mountains. By the time we checked into our next lodge, it was already dark, so we were all eager for the sunrise the next morning!



American Flamingos

February 5 – Colores de La Sierra and Surrounding Areas

We started our morning watching our lodges' feeders while enjoying some coffee. The birding was great and new birds came quickly throughout the morning. Our first Blue-naped Chlorophonias became much loved for their vibrant colors. Thick-billed Euphonias and Purple Honeycreepers also lit up the morning with their brightly colored plumages. Our first White-vented Plumeleeters and White-necked Jacobins visited the hummingbird feeders. Several species of tanagers also kept us busy and we tallied Gray-headed, White-lined, Crimson-backed, Blue-gray, Palm, and Bay-headed Tanagers! After hearing Golden-winged Sparrows for quite a while, a pair perched up in bare branches allowing great looks for all of us. Eventually, we took a walk along the entrance road to the lodge where we spent a long time looking for a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl that gave us a brief view. We were all a little disappointed, but luckily, just down the road, we had much better looks at one of these owls! Other highlights along the entrance road included great looks at a King Vulture, Lineated Woodpecker, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, and Masked Tityra. Our hoped-for Scaled Piculet didn't show, but when we walked back and towards the viewpoint at our lodge, Seth spotted one nearby. We all had close looks at this tiny woodpecker! The viewpoint provided a nice place to spend the late morning. While enjoying some cold drinks, we had good views of Streaked Saltator, Pale-breasted Spinetail, and Yellow-bellied Seedeater.

After lunch and a short break, we headed slightly higher up the mountain to spend some time birding along a side road. Shortly down the road, we came across our first Santa Marta endemic, the



Golden-winged Sparrow

Santa Marta Antbird. Our second endemic came soon thereafter with good looks at a pair of Streak-capped Spinetails. A few moments after, our first Santa Marta Brushfinches came into view too. It was a great way to start our walk! Gray-lined Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk (Plain-breasted) made passes overhead as we sorted through the many birds in the surrounding forest. A little further down the road, we had great looks at several Groove-billed Toucanets. Eventually it was time to head back to the lodge and enjoy another delicious dinner after a great day of birding.

February 6 – Reserva Gairama, Colores de La Sierra, Hacienda La Victoria, Mountain House Bird Lodge

We started with an early departure to drive down toward the Gairama Reserve. We needed to arrive early to give ourselves a chance to see the impressive Military Macaws! When we arrived, it was still fairly dark, but we enjoyed listening to the many Rufous Nightjars, Common Pauraque, a couple of Common Potoos, one of which we watched in flight, and a Spectacled Owl. As it was lightening up, we started to hear some raucous calls. Macaws! Over the course of the morning, we had good scope views of perched Military Macaws and some closer flyovers of several more. Other highlights included a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Golden-fronted Greenlets, and Orange-crowned Orioles. A short walk down the road resulted in a diverse mixed flock with hordes of Tennessee Warblers and lesser numbers of Cinnamon Becards, Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrants, Brown-capped and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Rufous-and-white Wrens, Thick-billed Euphonias, and Bay-breasted Warbler. At the end of our walk, we also added brief views of our only Blue-black Grosbeak of the trip. Afterwards, we headed back to our lodge for breakfast, a little more birding, and to pack up and move higher up the mountains.



Swallow Tanager

Our next stop was at Hacienda La Victoria where we took a tour of their coffee farm and went shopping for coffee, chocolate, and craft beer. We also added a couple of birds to our list while we were there. A Black Phoebe and Louisiana Waterthrush both made appearances for our group. Eventually it was time to drive up to our next lodge, Mountain House. As soon as we arrived, we enjoyed a whole new suite of birds visiting the feeders. We had to pull ourselves away for lunch, but we spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying the feeders and grounds of the lodge. Hummingbirds were the first group to steal our attention. We had good looks at Lazuline Sabrewing, the endemic Santa Marta Blossomcrown, Sparkling, Brown, and Lesser Violetears, and Steely-vented Hummingbirds. The fruit feeders attracted many Blue-naped Chlorophonias, several Black-headed and Black-capped Tanagers, and a pair of Yellow-backed Orioles. We also had our first Sierra Nevada Brushfinch, another endemic species of this mountain range. After dinner at our lodge, we were all ready to get some rest as we had a very early wakeup call the next morning.

February 7 – El Dorado ProAves Reserve, San Lorenzo Ridge, Mountain House Bird Lodge

After loading into the vehicles at 4 am, we started our drive up to the San Lorenzo Ridge. The reason for leaving so early was to look for the endemic Santa Marta Screech-Owl. Once we had driven a ways up the mountain, we made our first stop to try for the owl. It wasn't long after Roger played a recording that we heard a response. One was nearby! We eventually heard at least three individuals and after several minutes, Roger turned on his light and there it was! The hardest part about finding it was that it was almost too close to believe! It was a great start to our morning. After making the rest of our drive up to the ridge, we made it in time to enjoy the beautiful sunrise over the Santa Marta Mountains. We started adding many endemics as it brightened up. Many Rusty-headed Spin-

etails were singing all around, lots of Santa Marta Brushfinches provided great looks, Black-backed Thornbills fed high in the trees, and a female White-tailed Starfrontlet visited the feeders. As we started to walk over to where they feed a Santa Marta Antpitta, we heard one of our main targets - a pair of Santa Marta Parakeets! After enjoying the parakeets, we made it over to the feeder and it only took a few minutes for the antpitta to appear! Afterwards, we took a walk along the road that follows



Santa Marta Antpitta

the ridge. A White-tipped Quetzal and Southern Emerald -Toucanets fed on palm fruits and we all had nice views. Next a pair of Black-cheeked Mountain Tanagers showed well followed by a pair of Yellow-crowned Redstarts. Further up the road, we had good views of a Sickle-winged Guan walking down the road, a pair of Hermit Wood-Wrens, a Strong-billed Woodcreeper, and a Santa Marta Warbler. Eventually, we made it back to the feeders where we had a field breakfast while watching more hummingbirds. Eventually it was time to bird our way down the road looking for our last couple of targets. We never found the Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant, but we did have good luck with the recently split Carriker's Mountain Tanager! We made a couple more stops as we headed back to Mountain House and added Black-hooded Thrush, Golden Grosbeak, and Blue-capped Tanager. On our way past El Dorado Lodge, one of our drivers, Cacique, spotted a quetzal. Over the next 20-30 minutes we had wonderful views of a pair as they visited a nesting cavity. And we were even able to enjoy some coffee from the lodge while watching.

After lunch at our lodge, we had a break before meeting back up to bird around the lodge and up the road from the lodge. As always, the birding around the lodge was great and we had good looks at Olive-striped Flycatchers, Mountain Elaenia, Yellow-legged Thrush, and our only Blue-black

Grassquits. While birding along the road we saw our only Slaty Antwrens of the trip, heard our first Rusty-breasted Antpittas, and had our first White-lored Warblers of the trip. It had been a great day of birding and another delicious dinner back at our lodge was a great way to top it off!



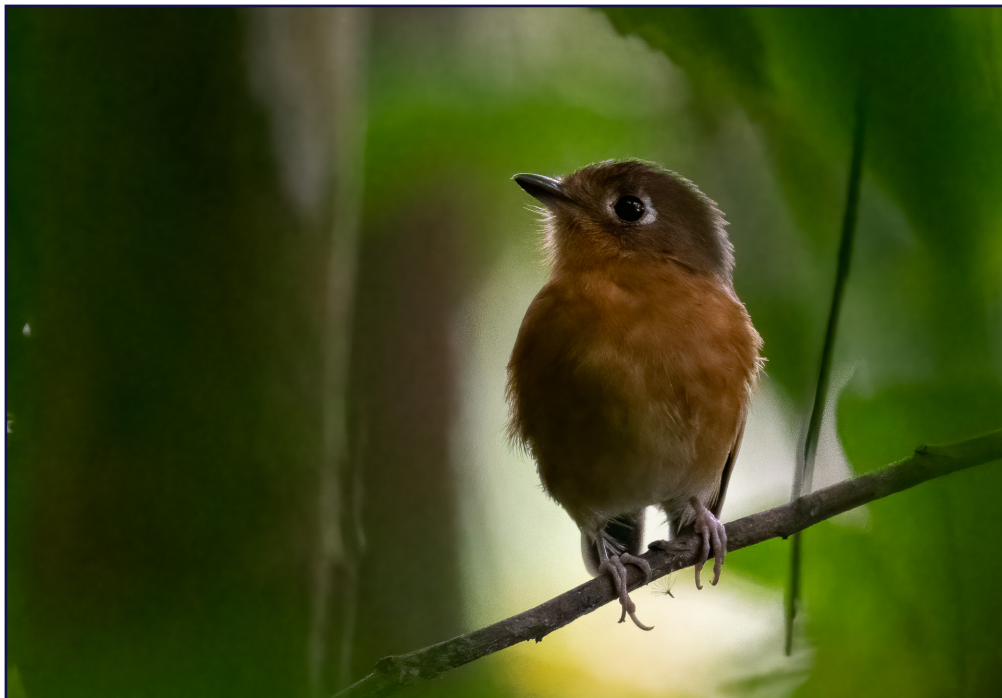
White-tipped Quetzal

February 8 – Cerro Kennedy, Doña Sofia, Mountain House Bird Lodge, La Tagua Road, La Tagua Road Cafe

We began our morning by birding along the main road up through the Santa Martas. This rough road provides great birding access with very little traffic. One of our very first birds was a Gray-throated Leaf-tosser. It took some work, but eventually we had good scope views of this hard-to-find species! Next up, we spent some time looking for a Santa Marta Tapaculo that was singing nearby. Tapaculos are especially difficult to see, so it was nice to get a glimpse of this mouse-like bird as it foraged in the undergrowth. After getting our glimpses, we spent some time looking for Golden-breasted Fruiteaters. They were quite vocal, but it took a long time before we all had views at this stunning species. Luckily, a couple of Masked Trogons proved much easier to see. Eventually, it was time to head down to a garden to look for Santa Marta Woodstar. We didn't have luck with the woodstar, but we had great looks at a Santa Marta Blossomcrown and Sierra Nevada and Santa Marta Brushfinches. In the nearby forest, we heard a Rusty-breasted Antpitta. After a few minutes, we spotted the antpitta perched nearby. Over the next few minutes, we all had great looks at this cute, little antpitta. Now, it was time to head back to the lodge for lunch and another afternoon break, before more birding later in the day.



Gray-throated Leaf-tosser



Rusty-breasted Antpitta

After lunch, several of us kept birding around the lodge where we continued having great views of the regulars. Later in the afternoon, we birded along La Tagua Road. There were plenty of highlights, but the most memorable bird was one we didn't see. A Santa Marta Tapaculo sang from so close, but we barely even glimpsed it as it moved. Tapaculos are truly the most difficult of birds to see. Other birds seen included an Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, a couple White-lored Warblers, Scaled Pigeon, Keel-billed Toucan, and a Merlin! After some more birding and drinks at a cafe down the

road, we headed back to our lodge for our last night in the Santa Marta Mountains.

February 9 – Mountain House, Doña Sofia, Bellavista - La Yey, Hotel Minca, Finca la Jorará

After breakfast, some brief birding, saying goodbye to the regulars such as the Blue-naped Chlorophonias, and packing up, we left Mountain House happy. Our first stop was back at Doña Sofia where we had the same luck with the woodstar. We waited a long time, but the Santa Marta Woodstar was just not to be. However, good looks at a flock of Masked Tityras was a nice highlight. Next, we stopped at La Yey for one more chance at the woodstar and to scan the horizon for raptors. Yet again, the woodstar didn't cooperate, but we did see our only Coppery Emerald of the trip. The raptors took some time to start soaring, but eventually we had quite a few in view. Plenty of vultures including good looks at a King, two Black-and-white Hawk-Eagles, a Sharp-shinned (Plain-breasted), and a Zone-tailed Hawk were among our highlights! Afterwards, we continued our drive down with a stop at Hotel Minca for a delicious lunch and some busy hummingbird feeders.



Blue-naped Chlorophonia

Eventually, we made it out of the mountains and switched back into our big van, but due to some recent heavy rain damaging a bridge, we were going to have to say goodbye to our driver, walk across the bridge, and get into a new van. It wasn't a long drive until we reached our next lodge, Finca la Jorará, where we were met by the owner to show us around this beautiful property. After settling in, we gathered up for an afternoon walk on the property. Birding was a bit slow, but a Common Black Hawk made several passes overhead and we had great looks at a pair of Blue Dacnis and an Orange-crowned Oriole. It had been a great, but long day, so after dinner, it was nice to get some rest in this comfortable lodge.

February 10 – Finca la Jorará, Gaviotas, El Ebanal Toll Booth, La Isla Field

While walking down to breakfast at our lodge, there were several Collared Aracaris perched out in the open. Luckily, they stuck around and our whole group was able to enjoy these small toucans. Roger later noticed our only Yellow-rumped Caciques perched up nearby the aracaris too. It was a good way to start the morning. After breakfast, we made a short drive to bird the forest along the road at Gaviotas. Not far down the road, we had good looks at our first Lance-tailed Manakin. While trying to see a White-bellied Antbird in the same area, we noticed a Lesser Nighthawk roosting above us, it then flew, but we were able to refind it in a nearby tree. When we walked by a couple of hours later it was still roosting in the same spot and we had some better light to see it well. The White-bellied Antbird also cooperated and we all had views of this sometimes-shy species. As we continued further down, we came across our only Ruby-topaz Hummingbird of the trip. It wasn't the brightly colored male, but it was still great to see this uncommon hummingbird. As we continued on, we came across a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars that posed in the open for fantastic views!



Rufous-tailed Jacamar

After another short walk, we had good looks at a pair of Gartered Violaceous Trogons. And while we were watching the trogons, we started to hear a White-necked Puffbird. It wasn't long until we had nice scope views of a pair of these puffbirds! It had been a great morning, but it was time to head back towards our van and back to our lodge. Of course, we got distracted by birds. A White-bearded and Lance-tailed Manakin gave our group some close views. We made one more stop, at a nearby market, before heading back to our lodge for lunch, a mid-day break, and to pack up and head off to our next hotel. A few folks explored the grounds during our break and while birding was relatively slow, the only American Crocodile of our trip was seen.



White-bearded Manakin

Once we were packed up, we headed off towards Riohacha with a couple of planned stops. Our first stop was a toll booth - kind of a weird stop on a birding tour, but it provides a safe place to park and good habitat lines both sides of the road. It only took a short wait until one of our main targets flew into view - a pair of Green-rumped Parrotlets! Many other species kept us busy as we waited for our next target, the Rufous-vented Chachalaca which perched up in a tree across the road, just like we were hoping. Blue-crowned Parakeets, Black-crested Antshrikes, and a pair of Northern White-fringed Antwrens also showed up before it was time to continue on. Our next stop was at a roadside wet spot. Our hoped-for thick-knees weren't present, but we did see our only Harris's Hawks, perched Bare-eyed Pigeons, and our first Tropical Mockingbird of the trip. After settling into our hotel in Riohacha, we had dinner at their 10th floor balcony restaurant. Unfortunately, it was a very windy evening!

February 11 – La Plazoleta Road, Los Flamencos Flora and Fauna Sanctuary

After another early departure, we picked up our local guide, Jonas, and drove over to La Plazoleta Road. One of our very first birds was a small group of Orinocan Saltators! This species can sometimes be difficult to find, so it was nice to see them so quickly. Quickly thereafter a Vermilion Cardinal made its presence known and we had good looks at several individuals. Other interesting species we saw while we were birding in this dry, thorn scrub habitat included Red-billed Emerald, Chestnut Piculet, Red-billed Scythebill, White-whiskered Spinetail, Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant, a Tocuyo Sparrow, and a Pileated Finch. After we made it back to the bus, we made a short drive into town where we had lunch at Jonas' parents' house. They made us a delicious breakfast, but before long, it was time to continue to some nearby feeders. The feeders provided some excellent looks at Vermilion Cardinals, an Orinocan Saltator, a couple of Buffy Hummingbirds, and several Black-

faced Grassquits. It was getting into the heat of the day, so we headed back into Riohacha for lunch and to have a short break before heading back out for the afternoon.



Vermilion Cardinal

Due to Scarlet Ibis being a main target for several in the group and there being limited shorebird habitat due to high water levels, we decided to take a couple of small boats out into a lagoon where we would have a better chance at seeing the ibis. The wind made the journey out more difficult than normal, but on the way, we had a flyover Scarlet Ibis with a couple of hybrids and a White Ibis. Once both boats were able to get around the mangroves into a protected area, we found another in the mangroves! Scarlet Ibis have to be one of the brightest birds in the world. Next, we worked our way around the mangroves looking for Mangrove Rails. Jonas took us to one spot where the birds quickly responded but wouldn't come into view. It was nice to hear them though! On our way back, Jonas tried one more spot for the rails and as we were heading away, Jonas looked back and there they were! Over the next 10 minutes we had unbelievable looks at a pair. What a way to end our trip through northern Colombia.

The next day, we gathered for breakfast before heading to the Riohacha airport for our flights to Bogota where all of us would have international flight back home, except for Roger, our local guide, of course. In total, we recorded 364 species including almost all of the Santa Marta endemics and most of the regional endemics in this region of northern South America. The great lodges, delicious meals, and fun group made the trip even better! As always, we love running fundraising tours for not-for-profit groups like Schoodic Institute. If you don't know of Schoodic, make sure to check them out online - or join one of their next fundraising tours with us!



Mangrove Rails



Bay-headed Tanager

