

# Colombia: Santa Marta & the Atlantic Coast Species List | March 2 – 11, 2025 with Naturalist Journeys



**Compiled by guide Dave Mehlman with local guide Cristian Daza. Our clients included Chris, David, Elliott, Jane, Jess, Kathy, Livia, Nate, Rebecca, and Scott.**

This tour was a wonderful adventure into one of the most interesting (and diverse) parts of Colombia: the legendary Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the adjacent Atlantic Coast from Barranquilla east to Riohacha on the arid Guajira Peninsula. Our great group enjoyed superlative birding, with many lifers for everyone on the tour. Although this was the first time in Colombia for most, this area contains one of the highest concentrations of endemic species (birds and other taxa) of any location in the world, so it was almost guaranteed to produce new sightings. In fact, through the incredible skills of our guide Cristian and many local experts, we found 27 endemic or near-endemic (only found in northeast Colombia and adjacent parts of Venezuela) bird species, a huge proportion of the accessible endemics in this area. There were so many top species among the group that the total list was very long; however, the “top 5” proved to be: Mangrove Rail, Swallow Tanager, White-tipped Quetzal, Santa Marta Screech-Owl, and Golden-breasted Fruiteater.

In addition to the birds themselves, we enjoyed an equally wide variety of incredible landscapes and habitats, from coastal mangroves, to the vast expanses of the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta (filled with uncountable quantities of egrets, flamingos, and cormorants), to the lovely deserts of the Guajira, and the unforgettable views from high on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta itself. These were accompanied by some fabulous meals (e.g., the excellent *mojarra frita* in a stilt house in the community of Nueva Venecia), cultural experiences in an indigenous Wayuu community, a sampling of the spirit of the Carnival of Barranquilla (which was ongoing as we arrived), and excellent company and group camaraderie. We were all sad to leave Colombia after this amazing tour and cannot wait to get back!

Following is a list of the birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and miscellaneous critters we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

**BIRDS (307 species were recorded of which 11 were heard only, 4 were seen by the guides only, 27 were endemics or near-endemics, and 2 were introduced)**

The eBird link below details the 307 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click “Show All Details” on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many. In addition to these species, we saw one hybrid, a Scarlet x White Hybis, from the boats in the Flamingo Sanctuary

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Endemics (E) and Near Endemics (NE):

- (NE) **Northern Screamer** *Chauna chavaria*—This odd-looking waterbird, found only in northern Colombia and Venezuela, was recorded on the first 2 days of the tour at several wetland sites
- (E) **Chestnut-winged Chachalaca** *Ortalis garrula*—We found this on the first day on trips near Palermo and Cienaga; it is only found in the lowlands of northern Colombia, west of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
- (NE) **Black-fronted Wood-Quail** *Odontophorus atrifrons*—A difficult bird to see, we heard this at El Dorado Lodge; it is only found in the Sierra Nevada and a few other nearby mountain ranges on the border with Venezuela
- (E) **Santa Marta Screech Owl** *Megascops gilesi*—Endemic to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, we had superlative views of one attracted to playback on our owling trip at the El Dorado Lodge
- (E) **Santa Marta Blossomcrown** *Anthocephala floriceps*—Restricted to certain elevations in the Sierra Nevada, we saw this on one of our visits to Mountain House
- (E) **Black-backed Thornbill** *Ramphomicron dorsale*—Also restricted to higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada, some in the group saw this foraging high in a flowering Eucalyptus at the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo
- (E) **White-tailed Starfrontlet** *Coeligena phalerata*—This incredible hummingbird was well seen at El Ramo, where a male was aggressively defending the feeders
- (E) **Santa Marta Woodstar** *Chaetocercus astreans*—Seen by some of the group at several places visited in the Sierra Nevada
- (NE) **Red-billed Emerald** *Chlorostilbon gibsoni*—Found only in the arid lowlands of Central Colombia and northern Venezuela, we found this in the desert scrub near Camarones
- (NE) **Chestnut Piculet** *Picumnus cinnamomeus*—This very elegant piculet, only found in northeast Colombia and northwest Venezuela, was well-seen on 2 days of the tour at KM 4 and the toll booth road
- (E) **Santa Marta Parakeet** *Pyrrhura viridicata*—Endemic to its namesake mountain, we had nice views of these on our trip to the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo
- (E) **Turquoise-winged Parrotlet** *Forpus spengeli*—Restricted to a small area of coastal Colombia between approximately Cartagena and Santa Marta, we had good views of this on the first day at KM 4
- (E) **Santa Marta Antbird** *Drymophila hellmayri*—We had good views of this lovely antbird on the Minca Road one day; however, it is remarkably similar to other antbird species and best told by its occurrence in the Sierra Nevada
- (E) **Santa Marta Antpitta** *Grallaria bangsi*—One of these came to a feeding station at the guard house on the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo for great views
- (E) **Sierra Nevada Antpitta** *Grallaria spatiator*—Found on the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo trip
- (E) **Brown-rumped Tapaculo** *Scytalopus latebricola*—Glimpsed by some in the group as it sang and darted among the tangles on the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo trip
- (E) **Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner** *Clibanornis rufipectus*—Very nice views (at least for a foliage-gleaner!) were had of this on our birding trip on the road below Minca
- (NE) **Streak-capped Spinetail** *Cranioleuca hellmayri*—Seen well by all in the group at Cuchillo de San Lorenzo; only found in the Sierra Nevada and the Serranía de Perijá, which is shared between Colombia and Venezuela
- (E) **Rusty-headed Spinetail** *Synallaxis fuscorufa*—Recorded on 3 days of the tour at El Dorado Reserve, though most often heard
- (E) **Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant** *Myiotheretes pernix*—Heard by Cristian at Cuchillo de San Lorenzo
- (E) **Hermit Wood-Wren** *Henicorhina anachoreta*—Seen and heard numerous times on the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo trip; endemic to higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada
- (E) **Santa Marta Warbler** *Myiothlypis basilica*—This lovely warbler was well-seen near the guard station at Cuchillo de San Lorenzo
- (E) **White-lored Warbler** *Myiothlypis conspicillata*—Found at several locations on two days when birding along the Minca Road
- (E) **Yellow-crowned Redstart** *Myioborus flavivertex*—This lovely redstart (actually a whitestart!) was found on 2 days, at higher elevation such as Cuchillo de San Lorenzo and near the Lodge
- (E) **Black-cheeked Mountain-Tanager** *Anisognathus melanogenys*—This amazing tanager was very well seen at El Ramo, where it repeatedly came to a fruit feeder

- (E) **Sierra Nevada Brushfinch** *Arremon basilicus*—Recorded on 3 days, it was best seen on the first visit to Mountain House where a pair were foraging on the ground under the feeders
- (E) **Santa Marta Brushfinch** *Atlapetes melanocephalus*—This very attractive brushfinch was quite common and easy to find; we found it at many places visited on all our days in the Sierra Nevada

Heard only:

**Little Tinamou** *Crypturellus soui*—Heard on the Gaviotas Road birding trip

**Sickle-winged Guan** *Chamaepetes goudotii*—Wing rattling heard during the owling trip on the last day at El Dorado Lodge

**Black-fronted Wood-Quail** *Odontophorus atrifrons*—Heard at a distance on 2 days from El Dorado Lodge

**Common Pauraque** *Nyctidromus albicollis*—At Finca La Jorará

**Mottled Owl** *Strix virgata*—Heard during the owling trip on the last day at El Dorado Lodge

**Keel-billed Toucan** *Ramphastos sulfuratus*—At Mountain House on one of the visits

**Barred Forest-Falcon** *Micrastur ruficollis*—Heard during the owling trip on the last day at El Dorado Lodge

**Brown-rumped Tapaculo** *Scytalopus latebricola*

**Gray-throated Leaf-tosser** *Sclerurus aligularis*—Heard near El Dorado Lodge after the owling trip

**Rufous-and-white Wren** *Thryophilus rufalbus*

**Thick-billed Seed-Finch** *Sporophila funerea*

Seen by guides only:

**Smooth-billed Ani** *Crotophaga ani*

**Sooty-capped Hermit** *Phaethornis augusti*

**Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant** *Myiotheretes pernix*

**Saffron Finch** *Sicalis flaveola*

Introduced:

**Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia*

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

**MAMMALS (3 species recorded):**

**Colombian Red Howler Monkey** *Alouatta seniculus*—

**Red-tailed Squirrel** *Sciurus granatensis*—

**Tropical Cottontail** *Sylvilagus brasiliensis*—

**REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (1 species recorded):**

**Green Iguana** *Iguana iguana*—

**MISCELLANEOUS (3 species recorded):**

**Tarantula** *Kankuamo marquezii*—This species of tarantula was found by some in the group near the cabins at El Dorado Lodge. It is endemic to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and is named after famous Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez.

**Violet-winged Grasshopper** *Tropidacris collaris*—This very large grasshopper (see Nate's photo!) was found in the scrub near Camarones in the Guajira.

**Malachite** *Siproeta stelenes*—

**LOCATIONS AND NOTES:**

Day 1: Monday, March 3, 2025; Palermo, KM 4; Isla Salamanca National Park, Cocos Visitor Center; Ciénaga; El Vale/Chachalaca hotspot

Day 2: Tuesday, March 4, 2025; Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta; Nueva Venecia

Day 3: Wednesday, March 5, 2025; Finca La Jorará; Gaviotas Road, Finca La Ponderosa; Boca de Camarones; Loma Fresca Wayuu Community  
Day 4: Thursday, March 6, 2025; Toll booth road; Camarones; Mar Azul feeders; Las Antenas; Flamingo sanctuary (boat trip)  
Day 5: Friday, March 7, 2025; Riohacha; drive to Santa Marta and up into the Sierra Nevada; Mountain House; El Dorado Lodge  
Day 6: Saturday, March 8, 2025; Cuchillo de San Lorenzo (San Lorenzo Ridge); El Ramo; El Dorado Reserve  
Day 7: Sunday, March 9, 2025; El Dorado Reserve; road to Minca; Mountain House  
Day 8: Monday, March 10, 2025; El Dorado Reserve; road to Minca; Mountain House; Minca La Casona; Gairama Reserve