

# Colombia: Santa Marta & the Atlantic Coast | Trip Report | March 2-11, 2025 | by Dave Mehlman



**Guides: Cristian Daza and Dave Mehlman, with participants: Chris, David, Elliott, Jane, Jess, Kathy, Livia, Nate, Rebecca, and Scott**



## **Sun., Mar. 2 Arrivals in Barranquilla | Travel to Ciénaga**

Nine of the group (almost everyone except for Dave, who arrived late the evening before, and Jane, who arrived in early evening) were met at the Barranquilla airport by Cristian and our masterful driver Virgilio. After meeting up, they loaded on our tour bus and drove on the long drive across the barrier islands at the mouth of the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta to our first night's hotel in the city of Ciénaga: the Cienaguas Hotel. Upon arrival, everyone got their suitcases, checked in, and then had a bit of free time while Dave, Cristian, and Virgilio went to shop for snacks and supplies. Meeting at the hotel lobby late in the day, we drove in the bus a few blocks away to Restaurante Luan for our kickoff dinner of the tour, getting our first tastes of Colombian food. After that, we returned to the Cienaguas Hotel to turn in for the evening, as we had a reasonably early start the next morning.



## Mon., Mar. 3 Palermo/KM 4 | Isla Salamanca National Park | El Vale

Due to the length of the drive to get to our first birding spot, we were up early, on the bus, loaded and ready to go in the pre-dawn darkness. After driving on the road across the coastal strip at the mouth of the Cienaga, we arrived at an Altoque in Palermo and immediately foraged for breakfast, with many getting coffee, pan de bono, and various treats. Suitably fortified, we headed to the nearby birding site known as “Kilometer 4” and met our local guide Omar. Though this was an inhabited dirt road through a rural community, this first morning proved to be the best single outing of the tour in terms of total species found: 70 total species recorded! We were delighted with the variety of species, with many Russet-throated Puffbirds posing nicely, a decent sighting of the rare Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Black-crested Antshrike, Chestnut Piculet, Chestnut-winged Chachalaca, a few Blue-winged Teal in a wetland, Glaucous Tanager, and a sweet sighting of Dwarf Cuckoo toward the end of the walk.

Returning to the bus, we traveled a bit, stopped for a rest stop and cold drinks, and had a notable sighting of a Northern Screamer along the highway. Continuing, we then arrived in late morning at our second site: the Cocos Visitor Center of the Isla Salamanca National Park. This park had a wonderful boardwalk through the mangroves, one of the best constructed we had ever seen, that took us on an extensive hike to a lookout tower. Right at the start, we found Bicolored Conebill (a mangrove specialist in this part of its range), Pied Puffbird, a Whimbrel roosting in a small pond, Panama Flycatcher, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Bare-faced and Glossy Ibis, and some Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures flying overhead. After finishing our productive walk here, we loaded back on the bus and Virgilio drove us back across the Cienaga causeway to town, where we enjoyed a tasty lunch at El Rancho Restaurante, then returned to the Cienaguas Hotel for a break in the heat of the afternoon.

In late afternoon, most in the group reassembled and we went out for a late afternoon birding trip to some coastal forests a bit further north off the highway to Santa Marta. This site, known as El Vale or the “chachalaca hotspot” was mostly surrounded by banana plantation, but yielded some great sightings. We indeed saw perching Chestnut-winged Chachalacas, for which the hotspot was named, and also found Gray Kingbird, Boat-billed and Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Greater Ani, Blue-black Grassquit, and Short-tailed Swifts flying overhead. We also had the unique experience of seeing a “banana train,” in which bunches of bananas are pulled along an overhead cable to the area where they are loaded—who knew? Finishing here, we returned to the Cienaguas for a short break. Meeting late in the afternoon, we drove over to the Restaurante Luan where we enjoyed another fine dinner, did our daily checklist, and went over our plans for the next day. After returning to the Cienaguas, we turned in for the night, once again serenaded by the loud music from the bars nearby!



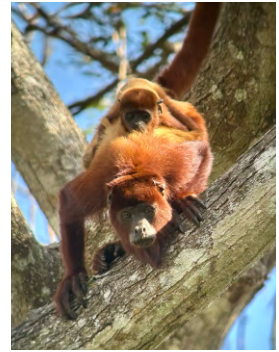
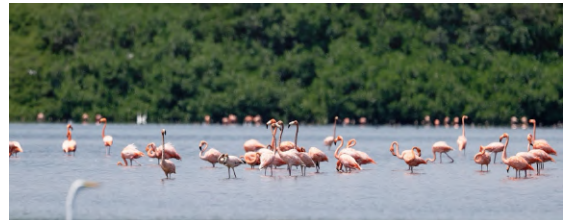


## **Tues., Mar. 4 Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta, Nueva Venecia**

Today proved to be a very memorable day. We enjoyed a cooked breakfast on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor terraza of the Cienaguas, with plenty of coffee, arepas, and a few Bicolored Wrens to top it off. After breakfast, we loaded all our gear in the bus, keeping our field equipment, and then headed off a short distance on the causeway to the Parador Turistica, the start of our boat tour of the Ciénaga Grande. Donning life jackets, we climbed aboard the comfortable and sturdy boat, thankful for the roof, and started off on our Ciénaga adventure. Cruising across the shallow water (and dodging numerous fishing nets), we were surrounded by Neotropical Cormorants, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Laughing Gulls, and a few Large-billed Terns.

We soon arrived at the mouth of a small river draining into the east side of the Ciénaga and commenced serious birding. The delightful mix of mangroves, marshes, and the waters of the lake produced some nice birds, including Black-collared Hawk, Purple and Common Gallinule, Muscovy Duck, Pied Water-Tyrant, Northern Screamer, and both Black-bellied and White-faced Whistling-Ducks flying by. We next swung by a monstrous cormorant colony with hundreds of nesting and roosting birds, picking out a few Wood Storks among them. We also had short, but great, views of Golden-green Woodpecker, a real beauty in the woodpecker world. Passing by an equally enormous roost of egrets allowed us to pick up Limpkin, Black-necked Stilt, and some Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures among the multitudes of birds present. About mid-morning, we arrived at the stilt house community of Nueva Venecia, built completely out in the Ciénaga, complete with colorful houses and many boats. We made a quick bathroom stop at one of the houses, and then transferred to another boat, this time a long, narrow lancha, for our final boat trip of the morning.

This last trip took us back into a shallow, vegetation-filled lagoon that was crammed with birds of all kinds. Among the multitudinous Great Egrets were large flocks of American Flamingos, always a treat. Also to be found were lots of Blue-winged Teal, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Osprey, Gull-billed Tern, Least Grebe, and Snail Kite. After finishing this amazing boat trip, we returned to the house in Nueva Venecia, where we enjoyed an excellent lunch of mojarra frita, patacones, and arroz con coco accompanied by agua panela to drink—delicious! While finishing lunch, we received a visit from some local Carnaval characters (either marimondas or monocucos, depending on who you ask), who stopped by and entertained us briefly—a wonderful example of local culture on Mardi Gras itself.



After lunch, we started on the boat trip back to the dock, first stopping at the house of Edulfo, a local craftsman, who discussed the kinds of boats he builds for various uses in the community. He also welcomed us with gifts of a small decorated boat made of balsawood—a nice memento of our visit to this fully aquatic community. Upon leaving Nueva Venecia, we headed straight back to the boat dock, found Virgilio waiting with our bus, and then started the 2.5-hour drive along the northeast coast of Colombia to our next destination: Finca La Jorará near the town of Palomino. After arriving at the Finca, we checked in and were taken to our rooms, which proved to be very lovely and located in small houses at varying distances from the main building, surrounded by trees. Meeting again in the early evening in the Finca's dining room, we did our daily checklist, discussed plans for the next day, and then enjoyed a very nice dinner in the open-air dining room. Then, off to bed after a truly wonderful and memorable day.

### **Wed., Mar. 5 Finca La Jorará | Gaviotas Road | Finca La Ponderosa | Boca de Camarones | Loma Fresca**

We were up early today for coffee and breakfast at La Jorará before packing and loading our gear and setting out for the day. While having breakfast we were treated to a calling Common Pauraque, the only one encountered during the tour. After leaving we drove a short distance to where the Gaviotas Road leaves the highway, parked the bus, and assembled for a full morning of excellent birding along this quiet road through semi-dry coastal forest. Indeed, this morning proved to be the second most productive of the entire tour, and we found numerous great things; perhaps most intriguing were great views of a pair of Colombian Red Howler monkeys, the female with its young still clinging to it. The birds, with Cristian's help (of course!) really delivered, too, with some highlights including Lance-tailed Manakin, Orange-crowned Oriole, Scrub and Golden-fronted Greenlet, Long-billed Gnatwren, Long-billed and Rufous-breasted Hermit, White-chinned Sapphire, and Blue-black Grosbeak. After finishing our walk, we boarded back on the bus and continued our journey east toward Riohacha.

Nearing the town of Camarones, and by this time clearly in a more desertic habitat, we pulled off the highway by a ranch (Finca La Ponderosa) at a spot Cristian knew about. He asked everyone to start scanning the grasslands and shrubs carefully, so, after a bit of looking, we turned up a pair of Double-striped Thick-knees roosting under a shrub! Also present were a pair of Savanna Hawks (perhaps nesting), Southern Lapwing, Vermilion Flycatcher, and some Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures. Driving a short distance more, we entered the community of





Camarones and stopped for lunch at the Hostal Castillo del Mar, which at this point provided badly needed food and drink.

After lunch, we took advantage of our location and drove a very short distance to the edge of the nearby lagoon, which formed part of the Flamingo Sanctuary. This quick stop yielded a lot of waterbirds for our day and trip list, including both white and dark phases of Reddish Egret (dancing away!); Royal, Sandwich, Caspian, and Common Tern; Semipalmated Plover and Sandpiper; a Black-bellied Plover; and a far-off Scarlet Ibis hanging out with a huge crowd of Snowy Egrets. Upon leaving the restaurant, we had also noted a pair of Tropical Gnatcatchers to add to our list.

After this birding break, we drove a very short distance to the Loma Fresca Wayuu indigenous community for a fascinating cultural exchange session. We met as a group with Ruben Dario Pushaina, who explained many facets of Wayuu culture and life for us and answered many questions (with Cristian and Dave to help translate). After the Q&A, those who wished had their chance to get their faces painted in the traditional Wayuu fashion and many in the group acquired new (and very spiffy) woven handbags which were for sale. Finally, we were treated to a local dance, in which a woman (dressed in a red costume to mimic a cardinal) and a man danced around each other, later joined by another woman, also dressed in red. A few adventurous souls in the group donned the red dress and joined in, to much applause from all assembled.

At this point, the afternoon was waning, so we boarded our bus and continued our trip to the town of Riohacha, the largest city in the area and the capitol of La Guajira Department. We arrived at the very nice Hotel Taroa, a multi-story hotel right on the malecón and across from the beach, in late afternoon and checked into our spacious rooms. We met again in the downstairs dining room (alas, the terrace restaurant was closed for renovation 🙄) in early evening for our bird list, discussion of plans for the following day, and a great dinner. After that, off to our rooms to rest since we had an early start the next day to beat the heat.

## **Thur., Mar. 6 Toll Booth Road | Camarones | Mar Azul | Las Antenas | Flamingo Sanctuary**

After an early coffee at the hotel in Riohacha, we got on the bus and traveled west about an hour to spend some time birding the coastal scrub at a site known as “toll booth road” since it left the highway right next to the Ebanal Peaje (toll booth). This proved to be a very productive morning walk with new species and great views of



previously found species, despite some very treacherous vines on the paths constantly trying to trip us up. Among the highlights were both sexes of the elegant Black-crested Antshrike, a pair of flyover Blue-crowned Parakeets, a cooperatively perched Striped Cuckoo, an equally cooperative Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Bare-eyed Pigeon (which remarkably resembles the familiar White-winged Dove in flight), Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Green-rumped Parrotlet, and, for a lucky few, the highly sought-after Tocuyo Sparrow. Finishing this short, but excellent, walk, we returned to the town of Camarones for a sumptuous breakfast at a house in town known as “Sabores Donde la Negra.”

After breakfast, we drove a short distance through the sand roads to the Mar Azul to spend some time at its feeders. This proved to be another delightful stop, especially for the photographers, with many species coming to feed at the seed and hummingbird feeders. Putting in close appearances were Red-crowned Woodpecker, Orinocan Saltator, Yellow Oriole, Pileated Finch, Scaled Dove, Black-faced Grassquit, and, the stars of the show, both male and female Vermilion Cardinal. Meanwhile, White-whiskered Spinetails skulked around through the underbrush while an occasional Buffy Hummingbird came to drink at the feeders. All this was complemented by a few Crested Caracaras that came by to get a drink of water. After this super experience, we went for one more walk in the scrub, by which time it was getting hot. Thanks to Cristian’s great skills, the entire group had great looks at a pair of Tocuyo Sparrows, and we also found Tropical Gnatcatcher, Slender-billed Tyrannulet, and Red-billed Emerald. Even better, there were intriguing looking barrel cactus growing on the ground and numerous huge Velvet-winged Grasshoppers. For one of the latter, we obtained photographic documentation of it being 1 meter long! As we left this spot, we passed a gravel pit with some water which had a Lesser Yellowlegs, some Wattled Jacanas, and a Least Grebe in it. At this point, our morning was done so we returned to the house in Camarones for a lovely lunch in the pleasant, shady back yard, then returned to our hotel for a rest.

Late in the afternoon, after the heat had subsided, we returned to the lagoon-front in Camarones for a sunset boat trip in the Flamingo Sanctuary. Much to our delight, we started out under sail in two boats, heading downwind in search of birds and wildlife. Egrets, herons, and other waders abounded: Snowy, Great, and Reddish Egrets; Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-Heron; Roseate Spoonbill; and another (or perhaps the same) Scarlet Ibis mixed in with White Ibis. As we looked closely, however, it was apparent that one of the Ibis was not like the others: in fact, it was a Scarlet x White Ibis hybrid with a distinct pink color (aka as a Hybis)! With the aid of some tape playback, we had extraordinary views of a Mangrove Rail as it first ran in and out of the mangrove roots and then made a long journey around us by walking, wading, and swimming—one of the most extended views of any rail most of us had ever had! In addition to all this, there were numerous shorebirds present (Whimbrel, Willet, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper), terns, frigatebirds, pelicans, and many more.





As the sun set, we slowly returned to shore, watching as the local fishing community waded into the waters to start on their nightly catch. A truly wonderful and magical experience in the Guajira! We then returned to the Hotel Taroa for a brief clean-up, then met for our checklist and dinner in the lobby dining area.

### **Fri., Mar. 7 Santa Marta | Mountain House | El Dorado Lodge**

We started the day with breakfast at the Taroa, then gathered all our gear and loaded our bus to begin our journey to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. After about 2 hours driving west, we pulled into a small parking lot outside the town of Santa Marta, where we met a fleet of four jeeps which would take us up into the mountains (the road up was not passable by a large bus). We then started climbing on the winding paved road that led higher and higher, eventually passing through the town of Minca, which was quite crowded due to the weekend influx of visitors. Above Minca, we stopped briefly by a large stand of massive bamboo, where the guides pointed out a pair of Black-and-white Owls roosting high overhead. Continuing our trip, we eventually turned off the paved road onto the much more rugged dirt/cobble road, arriving a bit before noon at our first destination, the lovely Mountain House.

Mountain House proved to be a very enjoyable spot, with comfortable facilities, a great porch, an array of bird feeders, and super birds—so enjoyable, in fact, that we returned there several times during our tour! Today, we began by clustering on the porch and watching the feeder traffic. Among the very common Crowned Woodnymph, Lesser Violetear, and Brown Violetear, we gradually learned to pick out Steely-vented Hummingbird, Lazuline Sabrewing, White-necked Jacobin, and a very infrequent Santa Marta Blossomcrown among all the traffic. We all kept a steady eye peeled, at Cristian's request, for the extremely rare Santa Marta Sabrewing, which had been reported earlier in the day, but it never showed for us at any time. Coming to the fruit feeders were many Tennessee Warblers, Black-headed and White-lined Tanager, and Buff-throated and Streaked Saltator. On the ground, scratching for seed, the group was able to glimpse Sierra Nevada and Santa Marta Brushfinch along with many White-tipped Doves. All these birds worked up our appetite, so at the appropriate time, we sat down to a very tasty fish lunch right in the main room.

In mid-afternoon, we reluctantly gathered our gear and departed Mountain House to continue our trip up to the El Dorado Lodge. Boarding our jeeps, we soon arrived at the El Dorado main gate (though not without a quick road stop to see a pair of Masked Trogons). Here, we unloaded all our large bags which were put into a small flatbed truck, while the group, in units of 4, used a tuk-tuk to go up the trail to the main Lodge building. Once all were arrived (and we had finished taking in the amazing views!), we were assigned to our cabins. We then had a



bit of free time to unpack our gear and do some casual birding at the Lodge's feeders. Present were Lined Quail-Dove, Band-tailed Guan, Santa Marta Brush-Finch, and singing Black-hooded Thrush. We then all assembled in the dining room after dark to do our bird list for the day, discuss plans for the next day, and enjoy a very lovely dinner. After that, with headlamps and flashlights available, we found our way back to our cabins to enjoy our first night in this mountain paradise.

### **Sat., Mar. 8 San Lorenzo Ridge | El Ramo | El Dorado Reserve**

We were up very early today in the darkness to gather at the Lodge building—funny how the trails look different in the total darkness! As sufficient of us gathered, we got in the tuk-tuk and rode down to the gatehouse to find the jeeps. While waiting, most of us took a moment to admire the extraordinary star display right above us. All assembled down below, we climbed into our jeep fleet and off we went, steadily bumping and climbing on the uneven road, higher and higher on the mountain. Our destination for the morning was the Cuchillo de San Lorenzo (San Lorenzo Ridge), one of the outlying ridges of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta relatively close to the coast. As it was starting to get light, we arrived at the ridge parking area next to the small Reserve guard station at 2585 m (8,480 ft). In the coolness, we put on a few extra layers and then enjoyed a picnic breakfast before we started birding as the sun hit the ridgetop.

The birding here was truly excellent and we found many of the Santa Marta endemic species that pretty much can only be found at this elevation: Santa Marta Warbler, Brushfinch, and Antpitta; Rusty-headed and Streak-capped Spinetail; Yellow-crowned Redstart; and Hermit Wood-Wren. A small feeding station at the guard house had a female White-tailed Starfrontlet, Tyrian Metaltail (of the endemic Santa Marta subspecies), Mountain Velvetbreast, and the usual Lesser Violetears. At the appointed time, we huddled together to watch as a very obliging Santa Marta Antpitta came out of the brush for its daily ration of worms. Meanwhile, a wide variety of species new to the tour were found as we watched: White-throated Tyrannulet, Band-tailed Pigeon, Blackburnian Warbler, Montane Woodcreeper, and Scaly-naped Parrot.

We then took a short walk along the ridge road, at this point more-or-less level, to look for flocks and other species we had missed. We soon found another object of our birding quest: a nicely perching Santa Marta Parakeet, probably near its nest, that posed for photos for a very long time. Numerous Scarlet-fronted Parakeets were found nesting in broken off trunks of wax palms that had been killed in an earlier fire, and we added Mountain Elaenia, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, and (upon returning to our vehicles) a stunning male White-tipped Quetzal.





Highly satisfied with this morning, we began our descent, stopping on the way down to visit the Hostal El Ramo, a bit further down from the top of the ridge. The feeders here had a pair of White-tailed Starfrontlets present, with the male aggressively defending them from all other hummer-comers—the male Starfrontlet is a very, very distinctive hummingbird and a true stunner! Also present were several Black-cheeked Mountain-Tanagers, a large tanager also endemic to the Santa Marta, that came to chow down on the fruit. Returning eventually to the Lodge gate area, we thanked our jeep drivers and took turns using the tuk-tuk to go back up to the restaurant for lunch, followed by a short break.

In the afternoon, those interested met at the dining room for a birding hike. We explored one trail from the lodge to the compost pile, then turned around and birded our way down the tuk-tuk road to the gatehouse and then on the main road to the old lodge building. Highlights of this walk included a pair of White-tipped Quetzals, several Blue-naped Chlorophonias (though mostly high in the canopy), Cinnamon Flycatcher, Slate-throated Redstart, Southern Emerald Toucanet, Black-capped Tanager, White-lored Warbler, and a heard-only Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush. We then took our turns on the tuk-tuk to go back up to the Lodge for a short break. At sunset, we gathered again on the Lodge deck to admire the stunning views, then did our bird list and another great dinner.

## **Sun., Mar. 9 El Dorado Reserve | road to Minca | Mountain House**

Today was designed for us to do as much birding as we could at a variety of stops and elevations below the El Dorado Lodge down to, and lower than, the town of Minca. We started the day with breakfast in the El Dorado Lodge dining room, again admiring the incredible sunrise over the snow-capped peaks of the Sierra. The group began the day with a birding walk down the tuk-tuk road to the main gate where we would meet our jeeps. The cool morning temperatures and shade contributed to little activity, but we did pick up some calling/singing species such as Black-hooded Thrush, Black-throated Tody-Tyrant, Black-chested Jay, and Barred Forest-Falcon. Boarding our trusty jeep fleet, we began to drive back down the mountain. A short stop along the road yielded decent views of a male Golden-breasted Fruiteater (a very sought-after species) and some Southern Emerald Toucanets. Arriving at Mountain House, we got out of the jeeps and spent some time birding around the House and at the feeders. Nice finds this morning included Yellow-legged Thrush, a pair of Masked Tityra, a pair of incredibly adorable (can I say that?) Scarlet-fronted Parakeets both sticking their heads out of a nest cavity, Spectacled Tyrannulet, and Rusty Flowerpiercer. The feeders hosted the usual suspects, including Lazuline



Sabrewing (but, alas, still no Santa Marta Sabrewing), Black-headed and Bay-headed Tanager (the latter of the Green-and-bay subspecies found here), and Slate-throated Redstart.

Before lunch, the group took another walk on the main road outside Mountain House, going further down the mountain and followed by the jeeps. This productive walk yielded some great sightings, including a pair of White-lored Warblers right outside the House, Plumbeous Kite, Yellow-legged Thrush, Black-chested Jay, a pair of Cocoa Woodcreepers, Olive-striped Flycatcher, and a calling Gartered Trogon which refused to be found. Returning to Mountain House, we enjoyed another great lunch in their dining area, followed by a bit more porch birding. The latter turned up Yellow-backed Oriole, Blue-gray and White-lined Tanager, and Streaked Saltator. After a lunch, a few in the group elected to return with one jeep to the Lodge, while the rest continued a birding trip in the jeeps, stopping several times by the side of the road to find new species at the lower elevations. Sure enough, we added many goodies to our species list for the tour, including Santa Marta Antbird, Rufous-breasted Antpitta, Whooping Motmot, a brief glimpse of Santa Marta Woodstar at some flowers, Crested Oropendola, Ruddy Woodcreeper, Gray-headed Tanager, Chestnut-capped Warbler, Rufous-breasted Wren, and an amazingly well-seen Santa Marta Foliage-Gleaner. The diversity of birds along the elevational gradient of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta truly is something to be experienced!

Finishing our afternoon birding, we turned the jeeps around, drove back to the lodge gate, performed the tuk-tuk drill, and then met for our last dinner at the Lodge Dining Room. After our checklist and plans for the following day, we enjoyed a final excellent dinner at El Dorado before turning in for a peaceful night.

## **Mon., Mar. 10 El Dorado Reserve | road to Minca | Mountain House | Minca La Casona | Gairama Reserve | Barranquilla**

Although this was the last full day of the tour, we started out with gusto by meeting in the pre-dawn darkness at the dining room for a short owling walk. Cristian led the assembled group in the dark down the trail past the compost pile into the forest where we stood quietly and listened while the tapes were played. As we waited, the eerie calls of Band-tailed Guans periodically rang out in the near distance, while both Band-tailed and Sick-winged Guans rattled their wings overhead in the tree canopies. After a wait, sure enough, a Santa Marta Screech-Owl was heard responding. Also calling in the distance was a Mottled Owl. As Cristian worked his calling magic, he began periodically to search in the nearby trees with the spotlight; finally, as if by magic, he spotted the Screech-Owl on a nearby branch, surprisingly low! Another lifer Santa Marta endemic for the





group!! As it began to get lighter, we slowly walked back to the dining room, savoring our excellent fortune that morning. As we walked, we were accompanied by singing or calling Black-hooded Thrush, Barred Forest-Falcon, and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser.

Back at the dining room, we tucked into our final El Dorado breakfast, said good-bye to the friendly staff, and then performed the tuk-tuk drill one last time to get back down to the gate area. When all were assembled there, our bags were loaded into the jeeps, we took our seats, and began the trip down the mountain to Santa Marta, where we would be reunited with Virgilio and our bus for the last leg of the trip to Barranquilla. However, there was birding to be done along the way! We could not resist a final stop at Mountain House, this delightful place where we had seen so much. Today did not disappoint either, with a pair of Swallow Tanagers perching high in a tree, Keel-billed Toucans calling, and a Dull-colored Grassquit to add to our bird list. We spent about an hour at the House, enjoying the feeder views and good coffee, getting great looks at many now familiar species (but, alas, still no Santa Marta Sabrewing—maybe next time!).

We reluctantly left and slowly descended the mountain toward Minca, stopping occasionally to sample the birdlife at increasingly lower elevations. One very productive spot yielded a pair of Rosy Thrush-Tanagers, a furtive Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Trinidad Euphonia, Long-billed Gnatwren, and a large flock of White-collared Swifts overhead. Another stop further on led us to a pair of Gray-lined Hawks, several very handsome Golden-winged Sparrows, and a Scaled Piculet. Toward the end of the morning, we finally pulled into the parking lot of the Hotel Minca la Casona, our designated lunch spot. While we ordered we watched the hummingbird feeders and were rewarded with many White-vented Plumeleteers and White-necked Jacobins, along with a few Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. Well nourished by lunch here, we returned to jeeps and kept descending, making one final stop on a side road at the Gairama Reserve. Here, we found a pair of Blue Dacnis, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Long-billed Starthroat, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, and a female White-bearded Manakin to complete our birding for the tour. Continuing, we arrived at the parking area outside Santa Marta, found Virgilio and our bus (actually, a different bus than the original one!), transferred all our bags, and profusely thanked our awesome jeep drivers. After that, we drove non-stop about 2.5 hours into downtown Barranquilla (passing the famous statue of Shakira on the Barranquilla riverfront along the way!) where we arrived at the Hilton Garden Inn, our last night's hotel. We all settled into our comfortable rooms, then met again downstairs for a farewell drink, final bird list, and a last dinner to toast our wonderful adventure.

## **Tues., Mar. 11 Departures from Barranquilla**

Everyone left this morning, with Virgilio providing the transportation. Jane, Dave, and Cristian went on the early bus to the airport, followed by everyone else a few hours later. Our travels complete, this wonderful adventure in Colombia to the Santa Marta and Atlantic Coast came to an end.

*Photos: Russet-throated Puffbird (Nathan Welch - NW), Brown-throated Parakeet (Scott Page - SP), Colombian Red Howler Monkey (Dave Mehlman - DM), Group (Cristian Daza), Black-cheeked Mountain Tanager (SP), Chestnut Piculet (SP), Common -Tody- Flycatcher (SP), Yellow-chinned Spinetail (SP), Snail Kite (SP), Golden-green Woodpecker (SP), Cienega Grande boat (DM), Nueva Venecia (DM), American Flamingo (SP), Colombian Red Howler Monkey (DM), Lance-tailed Manakin (NW), Striped Cuckoo (DM), Vermilion Cardinal (DM), Scarlet Ibis and Roseate Spoonbill (SP), Bay-headed Tanager (SP), Fishing in lagoon at Los Flamencos Sanctuary (SP), El Dorado sunset (DM), White-tipped Quetzal (NW), Scarlet-fronted Parakeet (DM), Southern Emerald- Toucanet (SP), Cinnamon Flycatcher (SP), Crowned Woodnymph (SP), Slate-throated Redstart (SP), Crimson-backed Tanager (SP), Bicolored Wrens (SP), Dawn in the Sierra Nevada (David Welch - DW), El Dorado Lodge (DW)*