

Birding From Bogota | July 27-August 2, 2025

Trip Report by Bryan Shirley



NJ Guide Bryan Shirley & local guide Cristian Daza
Tour Participants: Darren, Riley, Cliff, Anindya, Jeff, Carol, Lorna, & Dana



July 27, 2025 Chingaza National Park Pre-Tour Extension | Andean Condor

This morning was the one-day pre-tour extension to Chingaza National Natural Park – a high elevation national park in the mountains east of Bogota. Every participant arrived last night and was up and excited to be birding this morning just after 5 AM. After meeting our guide Cristian, group introductions, and some coffee, we were ready to go. Because of the poor road conditions today, we were using SUV vehicles – three of them for our group. We drove about an hour before stopping in a small town for breakfast. We were meeting the Chingaza NP guide here and while we waited, we had a few minutes to familiarize ourselves with some of the town's common birds like Great Thrush, Tropical Mockingbird, and a few Brown-bellied Swallows. We continued onward and upward until we eventually reached the entrance to the park. After a brief introduction and potty stop, we started down the bumpy dirt road into the park. We had a lot of ground to cover today, but stopped for birds when we could and enjoyed the scenery from the vehicles. One of the best birds of the day was an Andean Condor soaring above a large cliff – apparently nesting in the area. We continued on and eventually



reached the visitor center where we'd planned on having lunch. It was raining on and off, but we made the best of it and spent a bit of time birding around there with nice views of our first Golden-fronted Redstart and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanagers – they both elicited many oohs and aahs! A pair of Rufous Wrens showed themselves well in a nearby tree and we got our first hummingbird of the trip – a Tyrian Metaltail.

After lunch, we continued on toward the area that the guide told us would be our best bet for seeing a bear, but after a while, we realized that we were never going to make it, so we decided to spend more time birding. We got into a great mixed flock and had a gorgeous Crimson-mantled Woodpecker land in a small bush next to us – it was one of the trip favorites! A pair of White-chinned Thistletails took a bit of work, but eventually one popped up and posed for a while. We spent most of the afternoon making the long drive back to our hotel where we enjoyed a nice dinner after our long day.

July 28, 2025

La Florida Wetlands | Bogota Rail | Doradito

After the long drive yesterday, we were happy to have our first stop today close to the hotel! We only had to drive about 20 minutes and we were birding at La Florida wetlands. It was a wonderful place! It is a large park with a lake surrounded by reeds and marshy areas, with some scrubby forest around that. On the lake, there were Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and lots of Andean Ducks (with varying amounts of white in the cheek - many seemed identical to Ruddy Ducks). A Spot-flanked Gallinule was sneaking along the shoreline with several Bare-faced Ibises. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were not shy and we got lots of good photos! One of our main targets here was a Bogota Rail. After working our way along the shoreline for a couple hundred yards, we reached a nice-looking marshy area and soon found this rare endemic. Another bird we were really hoping for here was the Subtropical Doradito – an unobtrusive yellowish flycatcher that likes reedbeds. While we were checking the marsh from a hide, Cristian heard the Doradito and, after a bit of playback, it eventually popped into view in front of the hide! It was pretty exciting and was even voted bird of the trip by one person. It was great to have time to explore this area in depth and see so many birds! Eventually we left and drove about 2 hours into the foothills above Bogota to Estancia San Antonio – our lodging for the night. Estancia San Antonio is an old farm that has been converted into a guest house. The rooms and building had an old ranch feel to them – the décor and art was quite interesting too! A great lunch was ready for us, but it was hard to get to the restaurant with birds in the gardens! We had Great Thrush, Eastern Meadowlark, Yellow-backed Oriole, and Black Flowerpiercer in the garden in front of the hotel. After lunch, we drove a few minutes above the lodge to a patch of stunted forest just a bit lower in elevation than the páramo. We walked slowly along the paved road searching for birds in this unique habitat. Black-chested Mountain Tanager and Northern Slaty Brushfinch were



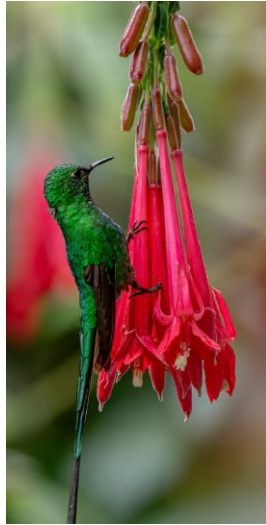
both highlights for the afternoon, but a flock of Brown-breasted Parakeets stole the show. Unfortunately, they didn't land, but they had perfect light on them as they flew past and banked right in front of us, giving us all an amazing look at their beautiful colors.

Back at the lodge we enjoyed a great dinner and afterwards several of us enjoyed going through our photos and notes for the day sitting near the cozy fire in the lodge.

July 29, 2025 Muisca Antpitta! | Hummingbirds Galore!

Normally this season doesn't see very much rain, but this year has been a very wet one and today was very rainy. We drove up the road a bit beyond where we birded yesterday. When we turned off the paved road onto a gravel road, we had only gone a couple of minutes before our driver slammed on the brakes and we piled out for a Black-billed Mountain Toucan! It was high on the list of targets for some of our group, so it was pretty exciting. The rain was trying to stop and it was mostly just misty with a slight drizzle when we reached our destination – Observatorio de Aves Los Andes (Andean Bird Observatory). We walked the very muddy entrance road for about 15 minutes to the small house with hummingbird feeders and a covered viewing area – perfect for wet days like this! Longuemare's Sunangels were probably the most common, but there was a constant variety of hummingbirds fighting for a spot at the feeders. Mountain Velvetbreast, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, both Sparkling and Lesser Violetear, and others, zipped in and out - sometimes perching for photos. A Sword-billed Hummingbird was an amazing sight as well – they have a bill as long its body! After we were satisfied with the hummingbirds, we put back on the rain gear and walked through a muddy pasture and into the forest for a rarely seen Andean Potoo that had been perching on the property lately. As we started back toward the van, we made a stop for the main event – a Muisca Antpitta. Antpittas have become easier to see because they are relatively unafraid of people and can become quite accustomed to being fed meal worms. Our guide called to the Antpitta for a few minutes before it jumped out of the thick understory onto a log only a few feet away from us. Even though they are not usually very brightly colored, Antpittas are so cute and it is so much fun to see them. They often are the favorite birds of the trip and this time was no exception.

We had planned on visiting another nearby reserve, but the road was too muddy (and it was raining again), so we drove a bit lower and birded along the road. We were just below the cloud banks at a moment it wasn't raining, so the birds seemed to be taking advantage and there was a lot of activity to keep us busy. We only ended up walking a quarter mile because we were seeing so much. Several Blue-capped Tanagers were moving through the trees and a Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager, though a bit far, was still a gorgeous bird to find. A bit



further down we also had Scarlet-bellied, Black-chested, and Hooded Mountain Tanagers. We also got great views of a Golden-crowned Tanager.

From there we drove the short distance down into town and had a fabulous lunch – a local soup dish with rice and beans (and fresh pastries for desert for some of us!). From there we made the drive back to our hotel in Bogota arriving just before the rush-hour traffic got bad.

July 30, 2025

Sumapaz NP | Helmetcrest | Hoatzin

Today was another great day. We started early again so we could get out of Bogota before traffic and drove out of the city and up into the foothills. We stopped at a small community reserve called Chiguaza Mutar, where they had breakfast prepared and waiting for us. The beautiful murals painted on the walls, plus the hummingbird feeders and flowers in the garden were the perfect setting for breakfast, and the food was great. While we ate, we kept jumping up to photograph some new bird. It was hard to leave, but we were anxious to get up to Sumapaz, our main birding area. Sumapaz National Park is a highland area of páramo in the Andes above Bogota. The plants looked like something out of Dr. Seuss! Of course, there are lots of unique birds in this habitat as well.

At our first stop, we had a Bronze-tailed Thornbill zipping around and it eventually perched for photos. Several Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles were soaring above us, a target bird for part of the group, so very exciting! One of the birds we all wanted to see here was Boyaca Antpitta. They are very vocal and we could hear them all around, but kept trying and trying without actually seeing one. After trying for quite a while and missing several, we had one calling in a ravine below us so we tried the call once again. It ran across an opening, providing only brief views, but at least we all saw it! We were watching in the same area to see if it would cross the opening again, when all of a sudden it called VERY close and then popped up in a bush literally about 5 feet from us. It sat there calling while all of our cameras were ripping off photos as fast as they could! It was an awesome experience.

Another target bird of the area was a gorgeous hummingbird called the Green-bearded Helmetcrest. There are different species specific to the Western, Central, and Eastern Andes and here, in the Eastern Andes, it's the Green-bearded Helmetcrests that are endemic to the high Andes of Colombia. It is not rare in Sumapaz, but like many hummingbirds, without feeders they can be tricky to get satisfying looks at. Cristian called out Helmetcrest a couple of times, but all we saw was a blur as a hummingbird went cruising past. We were all getting worried when eventually we found one perched! It was taking a break from feeding. We watched it



through the scope and photographed it for several minutes before it finally took off. With the large, pointed crest and long pointed beard, it reminded us of an old elf and we were all ecstatic to have had such a great view at such an amazing bird – it was nearly unanimously voted the bird of the trip.

We had another nice meal back at Chiguaza Mutar and a little more time to enjoy the birds. We had a nice Black-backed Grosbeak in the flowers and a Green-tailed Trainbearer was showing off his long tail as he fed in the flowers just off the balcony.

After lunch we made the drive down, out of the Andes, into the lowlands. We got to our hotel on the outskirts of Villavicencio while it was still light and it was like a bird panic attack when we arrived – there were new and exciting birds going everywhere in the parking area! I felt bad for the person trying to check us in because we all ran out of the lobby about 15 times! There were Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwings, and Gray-cowled Wood-Rail in the parking lot, Hoatzin and Speckled Chachalaca in the trees, and Red-bellied Macaws flying around trying to find a suitable place to roost for the night. It was all pretty exciting and we were definitely looking forward to see what great stuff we would see tomorrow.

July 31, 2025

Lowland Birding at Finca El Silencio & Aitabu

Our birding today started at Finca El Silencio. It is a small nature preserve, not far from our Aitabu Hotel. As we wound our way along the small dirt road toward the preserve, the surrounding grasslands and patchy trees were great for birds. Double-striped Thick-knee stood motionless in the grass. A Whistling Heron posed alongside the road – a trip favorite for some. When we reached the preserve, we met our guide for the morning. He had a nice breakfast of eggs and homemade tamales wrapped in banana leaves. A pair of Two-banded Puffbirds flew into a large tree and hung around for quite a while, giving time for great scope views and photos. We also had a pair of Plain Thornbirds in the same tree – they had huge stick nest there. We did a walk around the property and it was very productive for a variety of birds. Hoatzin were constantly skulking about the trees and bushes. A fruiting tree provided a variety of tanagers including Blue-gray, Palm, and Swallow Tanagers. Once it started getting hot, we made our way back to the van. Lunch was brought in from a local restaurant and along with cold juice it really hit the spot. Our drive out had lots of the same birds as this morning, but we also had a Savannah Hawk scanning over the fields from a perch near the road. Back at our hotel we had a bit of free time to relax during the heat of the day. The swimming pool was wonderful!

In the late afternoon, we birded around the hotel. Gray-cowled Wood-Rail and the others from last night were still around, but today we were better prepared to watch and photograph them than last night during check-in!



We also had a Sunbittern walking around the perimeter of the parking area. As the sun got lower the Capybaras that are always in the pond slowly made their way up on to the grassy areas to feed. We ended the day with drinks and dinner in the restaurant, followed by the long bird list for the day.

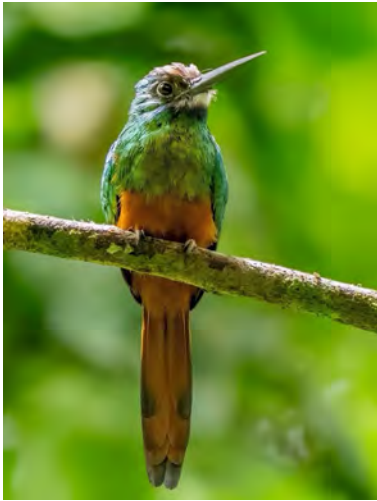
Aug 1, 2025 Bosque Bavaria | Motmots & Macaws

Wow – serious rain overnight and the restaurant was flooded with about a foot of water when we got up this morning! The rain had nearly stopped and we had planned on eating breakfast out this morning anyway, so we loaded up and left as scheduled. We drove into the city and had a nice breakfast at a local place. From there to our birding destination was a few minutes’ drive. Unfortunately, it had started raining again, but there was a covered deck at the gate to Bosque Bavaria, so we were able to stay dry while we looked for birds. Bosque Bavaria was formerly land belonging to Bavaria Brewery, but the area is now a protected watershed, which also makes for good birding. We only had to wait a few minutes before the rain stopped and we slowly started walking up the road. This lowland foothills was a new habitat for us so there were lots of new birds. We had several White-chinned Jacamars and Gilded Barbets, then a pair of Amazonian Motmots was a great find. The long racket-tails and beautiful colors always make them a favorite. A few Pectoral Sparrows were sneaking around in the brush on the side of the road and Blue-necked Tanagers worked the tall trees. We slowly worked our way up the steep road until lunchtime, then we headed back to Aitabu for lunch and some free time to swim, relax, or bird around the hotel.

In the late afternoon, about half the group decided to stay around the hotel and the rest went back to Bosque Bavaria. At the hotel, the birding was good with lots of photo ops, including a Little Cuckoo that made a brief appearance. At Bosque Bavaria we had good looks at both Channel-billed Toucans and their smaller cousin, Many-banded Aracari. There was a hatch of some sort of long-winged flying ants and a bunch of White-Collared Swifts seemed to be enjoying them. We birded until sunset then headed back to the hotel for another great dinner.

Aug 2, 2025 Cundinamarca Antpitta | Feeders at Casa Hillebrand

Today was the perfect ending to our trip. It rained hard again overnight and was still raining in the morning when we checked out of our hotel. We drove about an hour up the highway toward Bogota into the foothills and by the time we arrived at our destination the rain had stopped. Three 4x4 vehicles were waiting for us and we jumped in and started up the steep, rocky road to Sendero La Herreria, our first destination for the morning. The scenery was stunning as we climbed higher and higher above the canyon floor into the Andes. Eventually



we reached our destination and were warmly greeted by the family who runs the preserve. A wonderful breakfast awaited us, but we had a hard time eating because we had to keep jumping up with cameras to photograph the hummingbirds coming to the feeders in front of us! Black and white Collared Incas chased the more drab Bronzy Incas around nonstop. A gorgeous Long-tailed Sylph was a popular target for the photographers when it made an appearance. With the help of partners including American Bird Conservancy and Audubon, this family farm has morphed into a preserve and is now the best place in the world to see the Cundinamarca Antpitta. Cundinamarca Antpitta was just described and named in the 1990s and has a tiny distribution dot on the maps. After our other two great experiences with Antpittas, we were excited to try for this one too. The fog and mist had rolled in again, but after breakfast we made the short walk to the Antpitta feeding station. I think our target Antpitta heard us coming and was excited for breakfast – it was waiting for us when we got there! It posed for photos and gave quite the show as it gobbled up the worms our guide had brought for it. As we climbed back up to the hummingbird feeders, we were treated to brief views of a stunning Ochre-breasted Brushfinch. Most of us spent the remainder of our time here watching the hummingbirds, but a few ventured out with the up-and-coming guide, Chiara, and were treated to three different types of orchids. As we were preparing to leave, we heard a swoosh and through the fog we could see a Black-and-chestnut Eagle sitting in a large cecropia tree just off the balcony!

Our other birding spot today was Casa Hillebrand and it was perhaps the highlight of the trip for many of us. Besides the hummingbird feeders, they had a fruit feeder that was packed with tanagers. Blue-gray Tanagers were the most common, but we had a half-dozen tanager species show while we were there. Turquoise Tanagers were a show-stopper and were even voted best bird of the trip by one participant. A striking female Red-headed Barbet also came to join the feeding frenzy. Another highlight was a pair of roosting Band-bellied Owls that the owner of the property was excited to share with us. Lunch here was fabulous and everyone was happy to see that they sold their own brand of coffee to take home as souvenirs for family and friends.

As is often the case on birding trips, we all wished we could stay longer at this wonderful spot, but eventually we pulled ourselves away and made the drive to our hotel in Bogota where we enjoyed our last evening together.

Photos: Group (Bryan Shirley - BS), Long-tailed Sylph (Anindya Sen - AS), Silver-beaked Tanager (AS), Inca Jay (AS), Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (AS), Group birding (BS), Yellow-hooded Blackbird (AS), Green-bearded Helmetcrest (BS), Sword-billed Hummingbird (AS), Golden-crowned Tanager (AS), Sword-billed Hummingbird (AS), Muisca Antpitta (AS), Longuemare's Sunangel (AS), Green-bearded Helmetcrest (AS), Green-tailed Trainbearer (AS), Sparkling Violetear (AS), Swallow Tanager (AS), Fork-tailed Flycatcher (AS), Common Tody Flycatcher (AS), Whistling Heron (AS), Burnished-Buff Tanager (AS), Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (AS), Gilded Barbet (AS), Hoatzin (AS), White-chinned Jacamar (AS), Glittering-throated Emerald (AS), Cundimarca Antpitta (AS)