

Colombia: Birding & Culture in the Central Andes

Trip Report | Nov. 7 – 18, 2022 | by Dave Mehlman



With guides Luis Urueña and Dave Mehlman, and participants: Betsy, Colin, Dana, Elizabeth, Jan, Janine, Jayne, Lu, Martha, Steve, and Susan

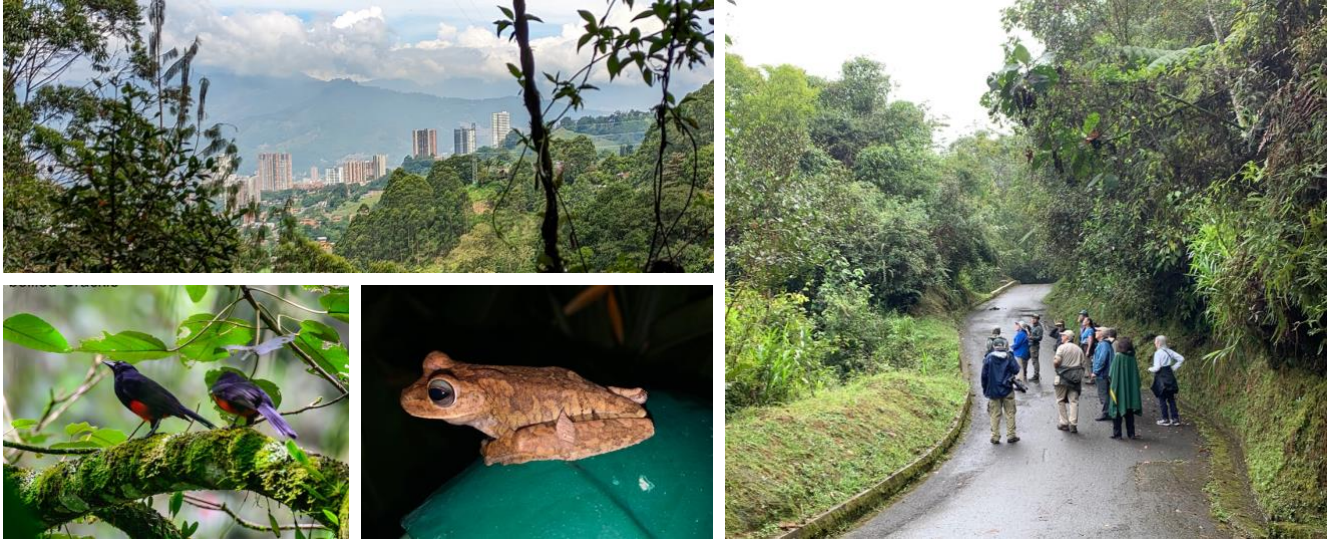


Mon., Nov. 7 Arrival in Medellín

Our group assembled in Medellín at our base in the city, the GHL Hotel Portón, over a period of several days. Thanks to the expert logistical arrangements of our Colombian operator, Manakin Tours, everyone's flight was met at the international airport in Rio Negro by a driver and then transferred to the hotel after arrival. Since everyone had arrived in plenty of time, we had our welcome dinner in the evening in the El Village restaurant at the hotel, preceded by a small session of introductions, basic overview of the tour provided by Luis, and some miscellaneous questions. In anticipation of a full day the next day (with an early start!) we then headed to our rooms to finish packing and get some sleep.

Tues., Nov. 8 La Romera | Los Colores

We awakened early to a rainstorm in Medellín and then opened the buffet breakfast at the GHL, with a nice selection of breakfast items, including excellent fresh papaya. Finishing up, we got all our gear and met Leo, the super driver of our spiffy Mercedes Benz bus, and then loaded up and left the hotel to start our Colombia adventure. Our destination for the morning was the Reserva La Romera, a privately-owned tract of land in the hills outside Medellín. We drove a short way in the entrance road, and then proceed to walk in and back out of the entrance road for a few hours, birding and naturalizing on the way.

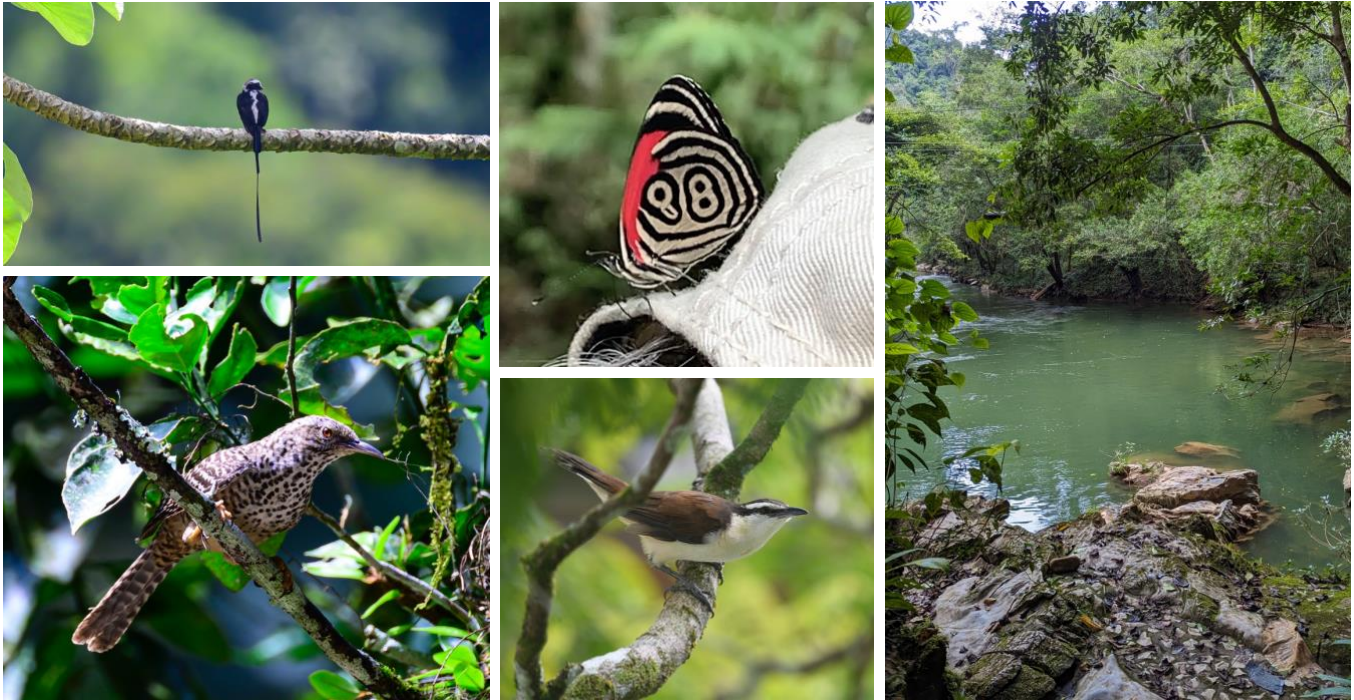


Although the damp and cloudy morning meant less bird activity than normal, though with a lot of effort on Luis' and the group's part, some very excellent birds were seen. Of most interest were glimpses of a Yellow-headed Manakin by some in the group (a near-endemic species primarily found in Colombia) and excellent views of several Red-bellied Grackles (a Colombian Andes endemic), including what appeared to be a young bird begging from its parents. Other highlights included Andean Solitaire, Golden Tanager, Rufous-naped Greenlet, and a very nicely seen Spotted Barbtail. Several neotropical migrants were seen, including Blackburnian, Canada, and Black-and-white Warblers and several Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Toward the end of the morning, the sun came out and with it, many fabulous butterflies, including the amazing Cindy's Leafwing, Bellona Metalmark, Lamplight Altinote, and an Andromica Clearwing (the latter of which perched for scope views for the group). At this time, Jan revealed himself to be a butterfly magnet with several perching right on his hand for close inspection!

Finishing our walk here, we boarded the bus and continued on our trip to the mid-Magdalena River Valley, with a stop for lunch in Guarne at one of the many El Rancherito roadside restaurants, just outside the Medellín metro area. After lunch we continued on the main highway that connects Medellín to Bogotá for a few more hours until we arrived at our destination for the next several days: Los Colores Ecoparque outside of Puerto Triunfo. We settled into our rooms, then met for the first of our many daily checklist sessions, discussion of the plan for the following day, and dinner at Los Colores' restaurant.

Wed., Nov. 9 Rio Claro | Los Colores

After an early breakfast, we boarded our bus to visit the nearby Rio Claro Canyon Natural Reserve, a biodiversity hotspot on the eastern slope of the Central Andes. We drove in a ways on the entrance road and then got out and spent our time birding and looking for wildlife along the road which travels alongside the actual Rio Claro and is surrounded by tall forest. Like the day before, the birds were not numerous, but were very interesting and unique. With Luis' expert help and the many pairs of eyes available, we built a very good bird list for the morning. Highlights included Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant (endemic to this part of Colombia), Dusky-faced Tanager, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Bay Wrens, a nicely obliging perched Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Purple-crowned Fairy, White-bearded Manakin, and numerous Bay-breasted Warblers (a common to abundant wintering migrant at lower elevations in the Andes). To emphasize the biodiversity here, a White-faced Capuchin crossed over the road to provide mammalian biodiversity. Plus, several butterflies appeared, including a Widespread Eighty-Eight which perched conveniently on Lu's hat, and a glowing Periander Metalmark. We spent the morning here and headed back for lunch at Los Colores with a quick stop at the Reserve's entrance gate which yielded two Long-tailed Tyrants perching on phone lines.



After lunch at Los Colores, we took a quick break, then returned to Rio Claro in the late afternoon. Oddly, there was a relatively great deal of traffic on the entrance road since the filming of a Hungarian version of *Survivor* was wrapping up (I can't explain it, I just write it!), but the objective of this late visit was to look for more birds late in the day and then take a short hike to a cave on the river at dusk. Although quiet at this time in the afternoon, we were able to find Bicolored Antbird, White-tailed Trogon, Buff-rumped Warbler, and White-vented Plumeleteer. Reaching the Reserve's main building at about 4:30pm, we hiked on the trail by the river and arrived by the cave about 5:00pm and settled in on the shore of the river. A little before 6:00pm, the bizarre noises of the Oilbirds that roost in the cave could be heard above the din of rushing water and soon enough several Oilbirds were easily seen with the aid of a flashlight flying in and out of the cave. These are some of the strangest birds of the Americas and spend their evenings foraging far and wide for fruits before returning to the cave for the day. Having enjoyed the Oilbird Show, it started to thunder and we headed back down the trail in the dark with the aid of flashlights, stopping periodically to look for critters. Most impressive was a huge scorpion nestled in a crack of a rock; also seen were some frogs and a whipscorpion. Our timing was extraordinarily impressive as the skies opened up literally just as we got back to our bus! We then returned to Los Colores for dinner, the checklist, and plans for the next day. During dinner, there were several bouts of torrential downpours which made such a racket on the metal roof that all conversation had to cease (but, at least the frogs were very happy!).

Thurs., Nov. 10 Puerto Triunfo | Torrelavega | Los Colores

We started today with breakfast in the Los Colores dining area and then met Leo and the bus for a full day of exploring the Magdalena River Valley near Puerto Triunfo. Our first stop was for some roadside birding on a lightly traveled road next to some open, very wet cattle pasture. Despite the slight drizzle, the birding was quite productive as we walked along. The trees along the road and out in the pastures yielded some interesting birds, including Chestnut-fronted Macaw; Orange-winged, Blue-headed, and Yellow-crowned Parrot; and Spectacled Parrotlet (a nice assortment of psittacines to start the day). Several birds perched very cooperatively on the phone wires, including a stunning Russet-throated Puffbird, a not-so-stunning Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, and the usual assortment of Tropical Kingbirds, Rusty-margined Flycatchers, and Blue-gray Tanagers. The wetlands in the grasslands added a lot of diversity; notable sightings included adult Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Pied



Water-Tyrant, and Wattle-necked Curassow. The grasslands themselves yielded distant, but clearly identifiable, sightings of Red-breasted Meadowlark (or Blackbird) and Yellow-headed Caracara.

Finishing up here, we continued our journeys and crossed over the Magdalena River (Colombia's largest) noting Cooi Heron and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck from the bus as we drove over the long bridge. Our next stop was the entrance road to the Torrelavega Farm, where we again birded a dirt road alongside mostly cattle pasture with scattered trees and shrubs. The weather had improved so we found quite a few great things here, including more Russet-throated Puffbirds, several Pied Puffbirds, Scrub Greenlet (at very close range), Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Black-crowned Tityra, and a breath-taking view of a pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaws flying by.

All this morning birding had left us famished, so we went back across the Magdalena to the nearby town of El Doradal for lunch at Asados del Camino, right in town. El Doradal's claim to fame is that it is where Hacienda Nápoles is located. Nápoles was former drug lord Pablo Escobar's country estate which has now been converted to a kind of theme park. After lunch, we returned to Los Colores for a rest and then we reconvened in the afternoon for a walk around the grounds. At this point, the weather had turned beautiful with clear skies and pleasant temperatures and Los Colores' grounds proved themselves to be a great place for birding! We began our walk with excellent views of a Swallow-tailed Kite and a King Vulture flying overhead and things continued from there. Golden-hooded, Crimson-backed, and Swallow Tanagers posed nicely for everyone, and Yellow-rumped Cacique, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet put in appearances as we walked around trying to avoid the ubiquitous (and quite large) Green Iguanas lounging about. Toward the end of the afternoon, we visited the pond based on a tip from Dana and Martha (who had not gone to Rio Claro the previous day in the late afternoon) and we were rewarded with a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail coming out of the wetlands in response to a playback of its calls and, best of all, a pair of White-throated Crakes with two, black, downy chicks out foraging! For a species that is typically very hard to see, the latter sighting was astounding (and many pixels were slaughtered in recording it). This exciting day drew to a close with our usual dinner, checklist review, and discussion of the plans for the day.



Fri., Nov. 11 Victoria | Bellavista Reserve | Charco de Guarinocito

After our by-now normal breakfast routine at Los Colores, we boarded our bus with Leo at the helm and headed out for more exploration of the mid-Magdalena River valley, this time to the south. We crossed over the river again, then headed south on the east bank before crossing back over again to the west bank. At this point, we were actually in the Department of Caldas and we headed up into the foothills to the small town of Victoria. A quick stop at a gas station to use the facilities and pick up local guide Arturo yielded a surprising Savanna Hawk flying overhead and a Shiny Cowbird on the station roof. We then continued on to our destination for the morning: the Cuchilla de Bellavista Reserve owned and managed by the Development Corporation of Caldas. The day started off great almost immediately with one of the more elegant birds of the entire tour: a very cooperative, perching Rufous Motmot, which allowed scope views and plenty of time for photographs. This very productive site, again involving walking along a road through the forest, yielded excellent species throughout the morning, including White-bibbed, Golden-headed, Striolated, and White-bearded Manakin; White-mantled Barbet (Colombian endemic); Plain-brown Woodcreeper; Gray-headed Tanager; Black-bellied Wren; White-necked Jacobin; Beautiful Woodpecker (another Colombian endemic); and White-thighed Swallow. For the entomologically inclined, there were lots of butterflies, too, such as the colorful Orange-washed Sister. To top it off, we enjoyed great views of a small group of White-footed Tamarin (also endemic!) crossing the road in the trees. In the category of “friends from home,” we also noted many Bay-breasted Warblers, Swainson’s Thrushes, and an Eastern Wood-Pewee.

Once again famished after a long, but excellent, morning birding, we had lunch at a roadside restaurant overlooking the Magdalena River in the town of Dorada. Although we came for the food, we left with some interesting birds, including Osprey (flying over the river), Rufescent Tiger-Heron, great views of Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and a pair of the very attractive White-eared Conebill. After this late lunch, we started the return trip with one final stop for the day at the Charco de Guarinocito, an oxbow lake wetland. This was a different habitat from most that we had visited on the tour so far and we found some new and very interesting birds, including Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Black-capped Donacobius, a somewhat unexpected Least Bittern, Yellow-



billed Tern (the only tern of the tour), the aptly named Plain-colored Tanager, and a pair of very nicely posing Rufous-tailed Jacamars. After this very satisfying end to a great day in the field, we returned to Los Colores for dinner, the checklist, and review of plans for the following day.

Sat., Nov. 12

Aquitania Road | Medellín

Today, we completed the first part of our tour covering the mid-Magdalena River Valley and the east slopes of the Central Cordillera. We started with our final breakfast at Los Colores, settled all outstanding charges at the front desk, and finally loaded all our gear in the bus. Although we were to end the day back in Medellín, we started our return trip with a birding morning on the road to the small town of Aquitania off the main highway. A typical outing on this part of the tour, we spent several hours walking and driving along this quiet road that passed through a mix of forests and fields. This provided ideal viewing conditions and we found a lot of interesting things to add (or complement) our bird list, including White-whiskered Puffbird, Long-billed Gnatwren, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Becard, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, and Bay-headed Tanager. A few new North American migrants were found, too, including Great Crested Flycatcher and a Scarlet Tanager. After finishing birding, we continued back to the highway and on up the mountain, stopping for lunch at one of the best spots on the tour: El Palacio de los Frijoles. Though not built of beans, this restaurant had spectacular balcony dining with views out over a broad valley. Unfortunately, the bird feeders that Luis had seen here previously were not stocked, but we still had to make some tough choices between our meal and the birds moving nearby. With diligent attention to both food and birds, we had great views of Lemon-rumped Tanager (actually a subspecies of Flame-rumped Tanager), Scrub and Plain-colored Tanager, Streaked Saltator, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Band-backed Wren. A great lunch stop! And the food was good, too. Continuing on our drive, we climbed up and over the mountain and then entered the long tunnel that leads to downtown Medellín in the valley. We arrived back at the GHL Hotel Portón in mid-afternoon and, after an incredibly slow check-in process, we had the afternoon free to relax, enjoy hot water showers again, and organize our belongings. We met again for dinner in the hotel's dining room and did our checklist and received our plans for the following day.

Sun., Nov. 13

Medellín City Tour

Today was designed both to provide a bit of a break in the middle of the tour and as a day for everyone to learn more about Medellín, Colombia's second largest city. We started with a late breakfast and then met our guide



for the day, Carolina, at our bus and headed out to explore the city. Our first stop was Inflection Park, a memorial to the victims of the drug wars that plagued Colombia, particularly Medellín, from 1984—1993. The park is built on the former site of the Monaco Building, Pablo Escobar’s former home in the city, which was demolished to banish the memories and allow the construction of this lovely memorial. This is quite a moving site, even for those of us who did not experience the violence firsthand. The next stop on the tour was quite fun. We took our bus to the Miraflores Station on the Medellín tram line (Medellín has a large and very sophisticated metro system, one of the best in the world) and then took a cable car to the Trece de Noviembre Station at the top of Line M. The ride provided awesome views of Medellín from the air, so to speak, and Carolina gave us a full overview of how the City of Medellín built these public transportation systems to allow the people, many of who were forced to live on the sides of the mountains, access to the many activities (and work opportunities) to be found in the valleys. This was definitely a memorable excursion for all! The next stop on the tour was the Casa de la Memoria Museum, and extremely moving and powerful museum built by the City to honor and memorialize the victims of all the violence (drug lords, guerillas, paramilitaries, etc.) that occurred in Medellín, Antioquia Department, and Colombia for so many decades. The multimedia exhibits were cause for much reflection by all who entered. This sobering visit was followed by a lovely lunch at Hacienda Restaurant in downtown Medellín, featuring many dishes typical of Antioquia. After lunch, we boarded our bus and drove by the bustling Plaza Botero, which is dominated by 23 of the large sculptures of Fernando Botero, one of Colombia’s best-known artists. We then concluded the day with a short walk over the Puente Sur over the Medellín River in the center of the valley and many enjoyed an afternoon coffee and desert at Dulce + Suiza to conclude the tour. We returned to the GHL in late afternoon, then met again for dinner and an overview of the next day.

Mon., Nov. 14 Amagá | Bolombolo Dry Forest | Hacienda Balandú

Today, somewhat to our surprise, was another Colombian holiday (the second Monday in a row for us)! But, we buckled down to our buffet breakfast as normal, got all our gear into the bus, and checked out for the next stage of our tour. With Leo at the helm as usual, we began our journey to southwestern Antioquia. Our first stop after about an hour or so was a roadside El Rancherito in the town of Amagá; we stopped here for a coffee and to watch the fruit feeders set out in the back. Acorn Woodpeckers appeared right as we arrived (who knew they ate plantain?), and were soon followed by Colombian Chachalacas, the ubiquitous Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, and both sexes of Flame-rumped Tanager (this time with orange rumps, unlike the lemon rumped forms we had



seen earlier). A variety of other birds were at or around this delightful stop, including Summer Tanager, Black Phoebe (the resident Colombian subspecies), Olive-gray Saltator, and Thick-billed Euphonia. Continuing down in elevation toward the Cauca River, we stopped at a gravel road through another mix of forests in field not far from the town of Bolombolo. The habitats at this, much lower, elevation of the Cauca Valley are a dry forest type, though everything was still green as the rainy season had not ended. During this easy walk, we found a variety of species, some we had seen, others were new. New Sightings included Moustached Puffbird (our sixth species of this unique tropical family, the Bucconidae, sighted during the tour!), Slate-headed Tody-Tyrant, Grayish Piculet (endemic to the dry forests of the Cauca Valley), Bar-crested Antshrike, and Tropical Parula. We also spotted several lovely Golden-headed Geckos, which cooperatively posed for pictures for many. In mid-morning, we were interrupted by one of the many “only in Colombia” experiences of the tour, when a motorcyclist carrying a large cooler full of ice cream drove by and stopped as if he could sense some hidden need in the group! Seizing the opportunity (eat ice cream first!), Dave treated all who wanted to a morning ice cream treat in the middle of nowhere. Now, THAT is how to do a birding trip!

Continuing on, we stopped at the roadside La Mayoria del Suroeste restaurant in the small town of Peñalisa, which is on the west bank of the Cauca River. Many enjoyed the delicious grilled meats this place specializes in, though there were plenty of menu offerings for all. Continuing our journey, we traveled another few hours to our destination for the next several days: the Hotel Hacienda Balandú, nestled just outside of the lovely Andean town of Jardín. At this point, we were actually on the east slope of the Western Cordillera. After getting settled in, we met again for dinner and went into town for dinner at the Las Margaritas Restaurante right on the side of the central plaza. While we ate, we enjoyed the nearly constant parade of the famous “high stepping” Paso Fino horses for which this area is known, clip-clopping on the cobble streets back and forth in front of the restaurant. What a great scene! After returning to the hotel, we did the daily checklist very quickly, then reviewed plans for the next day.

Tues., Nov. 15

Alto de Ventanas | Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve | Avistamiento de las Aves El Roble Feeders

Today, we were up extra early for an epic adventure into the Western Cordillera high above Jardín: a trip up and over the Alto de Ventanas road into the highest elevations of the tour, starting with coffee at the Balandú. This is a famous birding road and our transportation for the day, due to the rough nature of the road, was a true Colombian Chiva bus—absolutely the most Colombian form of birding transportation in the world and another



“only in Colombia” moment. Among the unique features of these buses, in addition to the open air sides, is that everyone has to hoist themselves into the bus from the sides, after choosing which row you want. Fortunately, the bus came with its own small ladder, so everyone was able to get on board with a bit of assistance. And off we went into the dawn, slowly grinding our way up into the mountains. After about an hour and 20 minutes, we arrived at our first destination: the Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve, administered by ProAves, a Colombian bird conservation organization. At this point we were well over 9,000 ft in elevation. Birding right from the road, Luis played calls of this very rare species of parrot for which the reserve is named and, to our great luck, a pair of Yellow-eared Parrots responded by flying right by in the full morning light, giving us great views of this elegant species! A short walk down the road to provide better views over the valley revealed a couple pairs of parrots perched in trees, allowing good, though distant, scope views of this highly sought-after species. A few other things showed themselves here, including Masked Flowerpiercer and Tourmaline Sunangel. After this feast for the eyes, we had box breakfasts to provide a feast for the stomach.

Continuing on up the road, we intermittently stopped, got out of the bus, and birded along the road, with the bus following along behind at a distance. While Luis and Dave thought the birding generally was slow, we were able to find birds scattered about, occasionally stumbling across a mixed-species flock. Some of the highlight species here included Golden-fronted Redstart, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Blue-capped Tanager, Lachrimose Mountain-Tanager, Sharpe’s Wren, and a Striped Treehaunter. A stop by a soccer field further on yielded a Broad-winged Hawk (here in its wintering habitat), Black-capped Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Flycatcher, and Blue-and-white Swallows flying overhead.

A bit further, we stopped by a roadside restaurant and were met by a local guide who would take those interested to some antpitta feeders a bit off the road on a small trail. At that point, Martha, Dana, and Dave opted to continue on in the bus to the Mirador El Roble nearby, our primary destination for the morning, while the rest of the group opted to take the trek to the feeders. There, they were rewarded with wonderful views of a Chami Antpitta being fed earthworms by the local guide. This is another Colombian endemic, only found in the Western Cordillera, and is a recent taxonomic split from the former Rufous Antpitta. During the hike to the feeders and back, the group enjoyed finding other birds such as Grass-green and Blue-and-black Tanager, Gray-browed Brushfinch, Plushcap, and Black-eared Hemispingus. After this hike, the group returned by bus to the



Mirador El Roble, a small house perched high on the side of a mountain. Typical of numerous such family-operated places in Colombia, the Mirador has hummingbird and fruit feeders set out and the family welcomes visitors in to enjoy the birds and, in our case, coffee and lunch.

These feeders provided some of the best hummingbird viewing of the tour, with a total of nine species showing up during our several-hour stay there. The most numerous (and combative!) were Buff-tailed Coronets and Sparkling Violetears. Joining in the fun, as they could fit their beaks in, were Speckled Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph, Tourmaline Sunangel, White-bellied Woodstar (behaving more like a feathered insect), Collared and Bronzy Inca, and Lesser Violetear. The fruit- and seed-eating birds were not to be denied, however, with Green Jay, Great Thrush, and Slaty Brushfinch putting in regular appearances, while White-sided and Masked Flowerpiercers foraged in the shrubs and stole nectar from the feeders. At one point, Martha put some bird seed in her hand and a Slaty Brushfinch came and ate directly from it! As if these birds were not enough, we enjoyed a delicious home-cooked meal of fried trout, plantains, and arepas under the porch—what a true birding (and eating) treat!

Alas, all good things have to come to an end, so in mid-afternoon we said our farewells, climbed back on board the Chiva, and started on our return trip to Jardín. We of course stopped a few times along the road on the way back where we found a flock or two to add some more birds to our list. Perhaps the star of the return trip was a nicely observed Sword-billed Hummingbird, a bird that has to be seen to be believed! We were able to watch it foraging in some long, tubular, red flowers and it perched cooperatively for great photos. A Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant spent some time along a cliff face, providing great views for many in the group. The mixed-species flocks yielded Capped Conebill, Superciliated and Black-capped Hemispingus, Bluish Flowerpiercer, and more Lachrimose Mountain- and Blue-capped Tanagers. We finally straggled back into the Balandú about 5:30 pm, tired from all the bouncing around in the bus, but extremely satisfied after our extraordinary day in the Andes. We then got together in the Balandú's dining room for dinner, the checklist, and discussion of plans for the next day.

Wed., Nov. 16

Finca Bambusa | Jardín Cock-of-the-Rock Lek

After breakfast at the Balandú, we boarded our bus for the relatively short trip to the nearby Finca Bambusa, another local home that has opened up to visiting birders in the Jardín area. Owned by Doña Piedad, this lovely house features fruit and hummingbird feeders in the back yard; an array of seats is provided on the back porch



so that visitors can seat comfortably and watch the show. This was definitely one of the most pleasant birding experiences of the tour, with constant comings and goings of many species and some delicious coffee to go along with it! Blue-gray, Palm, Scrub, and Flame-rumped Tanagers were the most regular visitors at the fruit, but diligent observing of the feeders and the trees showed Colombian Chachalaca, Black-chested Jay, Tropical Parula, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds around almost constantly. Patience was finally rewarded with a pair (male and female) of Red-headed Barbets at very close range on the feeders! After a few hours, we took a bit of a break and went for a walk down the road from the Finca to explore more of this delightful area. More great things were found, including Bronze-winged Parrots, White-lined Tanager, Crested Oropendola, and a large number of foraging hummingbirds (mostly unidentifiable, except for Black-throated Mango) way at the top of a fully flowering, bright yellow, Guayacan Amarillo (*Tabebuia* sp.). Toward the end of the walk, Luis decided to play his “mob tape” and a considerable number of birds responded, providing some wonderful birding. Among the many species that created a scene were Blackburnian, Black-and-white, Yellow, Canada, and Mourning Warbler; Bar-crested Antshrike; Streaked Saltator; and Summer Tanager—it was great fun to try to pick each one out.

At the close of the morning, we returned to the Finca for a lovely lunch on the back porch, with continued appearances by the Barbets along with Crimson-backed and Blue-necked Tanager. What a great morning! We followed this by returning to the Balandú for a brief break and then we drove into town for a bit of free time to explore the central square and the many cafes and artesanía shops that line it. After letting our inner shopper loose, we drove a short distance to the end of town to visit the famous Jardín cock-of-the-rock lek. This lek is literally within walking distance of the center of town and is a fairly well-known local attraction; as soon as one passes through the entrance gate, the noise of the displaying male Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks is inescapable! Everyone walked around to the various viewing points trying to get the best view and/or photo op, though the birds moved around so much (high, low, eye level) that it was often best to just sit and wait for opportunity to strike. What a visual feast! I personally would estimate that there were 20-30 males present, though no females put in an appearance during our visit. Just as we were about to leave, Lu, Luis, and Dave were able to glimpse a Crested Ant-Tanager lurking in the bamboos; another endemic ticked off our list. We returned to the Balandú for a brief break, then traveled back down to the central square for dinner at Toscano Pizzeria, a nice treat of some different (both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time) food. We then returned, did our daily checklist and received our briefing for the next day, and retired to our rooms for the night.



Thurs., Nov. 17

Hacienda Balandú | Finca Bambusa | Bolombolo Dry Forest | Medellín

The final full day of our tour started with breakfast at the Balandú, followed by final packing, loading and check-out. Before heading out, however, we went for a short walk around the grounds since we had not had an opportunity to do this yet. Bronze-winged Parrot, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, and Pale-vented Pigeons perched nicely in some of the tall, bare trees to provide great photo and scope ops. A lovely, sunlit tree provided super looks at Southern Emerald Toucanet, Green Honeycreeper, and Golden and Black-capped Tanagers to fill out an impressive list for this short outing. Not to be left out, a pair of Cattle Tyrants perched right on top of our bus, as if to say good-bye. After saying farewell to this lovely spot, we started on our way back to Medellín with another stop at Finca Bambusa, where we spent an hour and a half enjoying the feeder traffic and Doña Piedad's wonderful hospitality. Many by-now familiar birds put in reappearances, but the impressive diversity was added to by some newbies, including Bay-headed Tanager, Lineated Woodpecker, Green Honeycreeper, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Lesser Goldfinch, while Steely-vented Hummingbirds continued to forage in the blooming shrubs. Tearing ourselves away, we gradually descended back to the Cauca River valley and had lunch for the second time at La Mayoría del Suroeste in Peñalisa, then crossed over the Cauca bridge again and stopped at the Bolombolo dry forest area to try one more time for the endemic Antioquia Wren. Alas, there was little activity,



aside from a Slaty-capped Flycatcher to add to the list, despite our numerous attempts to attract the wren. Finishing here, we continued on our trip back to Medellín, arriving back at the GHL Hotel Portón about 4:30pm. We checked in, began organizing ourselves, and then met in the hotel dining room briefly for our final checklist session of the tour and a review of the airport transfer plan for the following day. After we were done with this, we got into our bus again and went to the very interesting Piqueo Restaurant, which specializes in Peruvian cuisine, for our final dinner. Returning to the hotel, we all said our good-byes, given the varied departure times for the following day, and then turned in for a final night.

Fri., Nov. 18 Departures

All made it home either today or soon thereafter (as far as I know!!), with separate airport transfers for each departing flight. This closed out our wonderful Colombian adventure.

Photo Credits: Group Hiking (Dana Swan - DS), Red-headed Barbet (Colin White - CW), White-bellied Woodstar (DS), Blue-gray Tanager (CW), Hairy Banana Plant (CW), Medellín Panoramic (CW), Red-bellied Grackle (DS), Chirique-Flusse Tree Frog (David Mehlman - DM), La Romera Birding (DM), Long-tailed Tyrant (DS), Band-backed Wren (DS), Widespread Eighty-Eight (DM), Bicolored Wren (Ludwig Carbyn - LC), Rio Claro (CW), Rufescent Tiger Heron (LC), Crested Caracara (CW), Rufous-breasted Hermit (DS), Pied Puffbird (CW), Charco de Guarinocito Scenic (CW), Spot-breasted Woodpecker (CW), Squirrel Cuckoo (DS), Green Iguana (CW), Black-capped Donacobius (DS), Gray-cowled Wood-Rail (CW), Medellín Hillside (DS), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (CW), Hairy Banana Plant (CW), Least Bittern (CW), Jardín Scenic (CW), Colombian Chachalaca (CW), Acorn Woodpecker (CW), Flame-rumped and Palm Tanagers at Feeder (CW), Group Birding Alto Ventanas (DM), Birding Chiva (CW), Great Thrush (DS), Collared Inca (DS), Mountain Scenic (CW), Green Jay (DS), Finca Bambusa (DM), Coffee Fruit (CW), Blue-necked Tanager (LC), Banana Plant (CW), Bay-headed Tanager (CW), Scrub Euphonia (CW), Female Red-headed Barbet (CW), Cattle (LC), Andean Cock-of-the-Rock (DS), Medellín Panoramic (Luis Urueña)