

The Colombian Amazon w/ Bogotá Extension

Aug. 6 – 16, 2023 | Trip Report | by Dave Mehlman



Guides: Manuel Espejo, Dave Mehlman, Josué (Jota) Peña (Inírida), and Omar Casas (Mitú) with participants: Barb, Don, Greg, and Rob



Wed., Aug. 2 Arrivals in Bogotá

Barb, Don, Rob, and Manuel arrived at various times today and were transferred to the comfortable Hilton Garden Inn Bogota Airport, a short drive down Avenida El Dorado from the airport itself. Greg and Dave had come in a day early, so they spent the morning at the Jardín Botánico Celestino Mutis, doing some early birding. All except Rob (who arrived in the evening) met in the dining room of the Hilton Garden for dinner, introductions, and a briefing about the tour and the next day's activities.

Thur., Aug. 3 La Florida Park | Jardín Encantado | Tabacal Lagoon



Our first full day of the tour (technically, the first day of the pre-trip extension) began early; this was a fact of life on our tour! In Bogotá, early starts are essential in order to not get stuck in too much traffic. After grabbing

coffee in our rooms or the lobby, we were loaded into our van by 5:00am and off we went to the Parque La Florida, arriving in a timely fashion just before dawn. Manuel had to spend a bit of time locating the guard to let us in the controlled area, so we munched on some field breakfasts prepared by the hotel, including bread, fruit, and a hard-boiled egg, and watched constant flocks of Bare-faced Ibis fly overhead.

After we were let in by the guard, we spent about 2 hours at this lovely spot, a remnant of the vast wetlands that used to occur on the Sabana de Bogotá. Emerging at the lake after a short walk through the woods, we right away found some waterbirds, including Andean Duck, American Coot (appearing slightly different than North American ones we were used to), and a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. However, we were after a much rarer bird, the Bogotá Rail! With persistent searching along the water's edge, we were rewarded with excellent, close looks at a pair and a downy chick of this lovely rail species, only found in and around Bogotá. While at it, we had good views of several elegant Spot-flanked Gallinules, along with Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, Pied-billed Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and a seemingly way-out-of-elevational-range Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. Some additional work on Manuel's part with tape play-back yielded decent views of another species endemic to the area: Silvery-throated Spinetail.

This great start to the day and our tour got us all charged up, so off we went to our next destination: the Jardín Encantado in the small town of San Francisco, on the west slope of the Eastern Cordillera, off the road down to the Magdalena River Valley. This lovely, quiet home had an impressive display of nearly 50 hummingbird feeders out, along with some seed feeders, so we soon got down to work parsing the feeder traffic. After about an hour of study, we were able to get everyone on to every species and sort all of them out. The most common hummingbirds here were Black-throated Mango, Indigo-capped Hummingbird (another Colombian endemic species), and Sparkling Violetear. These were complemented by less frequently visiting Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Gorgeted Woodstar, with Brown and Lesser Violetear putting in appearances, and a rare visit by White-vented Plumeleteer, White-bellied Woodstar, and White-necked Jacobin—whew! The seed tray attracted Saffron Finch, Crimson-backed Tanager, and Shiny Cowbird to add some variety.



After all this morning birding, our appetites were worked up, so we drove to the Los Naranjos Restaurant in the nearby town of La Vega for lunch. As we were eating on the top deck of the restaurant, we could look out over the nearby landscape so before, during, and after lunch we added to our birds list, spotting a pair of Cattle

Tyrants, Spectacled Parrotlet, Blue-necked Tanager, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Olive-gray Saltator. Definitely a birding tour kind of lunch place!

After lunch, we continued on the highway a bit further and lower down to the Laguna El Tabacal Ecological Park, a private reserve with forests and ponds. Our late afternoon hike in this area was delightful, with the forests yielding singing Streaked Saltator, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Brown-capped Vireo, White-bearded Manakin, Velvet-fronted Euphonia, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, and incredibly great views of a Ruddy Quail-Dove walking on the forest floor. Returning to the van, we saw a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers in the parking lot to finish an excellent day in the field. We then headed back to Bogotá, arriving back at the Hilton Garden in time to unpack our gear and have dinner in the hotel restaurant. Then off to bed for an even earlier start the next day.

Fri., Aug. 4 Chingaza National Park | Observatorio de Colibríes

We had an early start today, to avoid traffic again, leaving the Hilton Garden at 4:30AM in the pre-dawn darkness. We made a stop about an hour later in La Calera for breakfast at the Asadero de Arepas Las Delicias and enjoyed the excellent (and typically Colombian) coffee and arepas -- yummy! We then continued up the mountain to start our day in the páramo of Chingaza National Park at about 3500 m elevation (11,500 ft). The morning was beautiful up this high, above the clouds and above treeline, so we admired the view and the unique birds found up at this elevation. After starting up high, we slowly birded our way down the mountain, stopping at various places that either looked interesting or had noticeable bird activity. The birding was good up here, way too many species to mention, but some of the highlights (which we were not to find elsewhere on the tour) included Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager (always a crowd-pleaser!), White-chinned Thistletail, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle (soaring high overhead), Glossy Flowerpiercer, Brown-backed and Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Smoky Bush-Tyrant, and a Band-winged Nightjar calling from a cliff face (unfortunately not seen). Feeding in the many flowers up there were several hummingbirds, too, such as Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Tyrian Metaltail, and Glowing Puffleg. We also spent some time trying to actually see a Grass (Páramo) Wren (which was calling but did not reveal itself) and Pale-bellied (Matorral) Tapaculo, which we actually glimpsed!

Probably the best birding of the morning was a mixed species flock we stumbled upon a bit lower down. The action was wild and crazy for a brief while, with Blue-backed Conebill, Black Flowerpiercer (here, we had the



white-shouldered form which occurs in the Eastern Cordillera), Golden-fronted Redstart (individuals here are of the Yellow-fronted form), Superciliaried Hemispingus, White-throated Tyrannulet, and Pearled Treerunner all coming and going in the same tree—it was hard for Manuel and Dave to get everyone on each species, but they tried! After this flock, our morning was about done, so we headed to La Calera for a nice lunch at the picnic tables at El Tambor by the highway (where some Andean Siskins put in an appearance for us!).

After lunch, we headed to our final stop of the day, the Observatorio de Colibries just outside of La Calera. This lovely setting is full of hummingbird feeders and we promptly got to work identifying the comings and goings. The ubiquitous Sparkling Violetears were complemented by Tyrian Metaltail, Glowing Puffleg, Black-tailed and Green-tailed Trainbearer, Great Sapphirewing, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, and an occasional appearance by Sword-billed Hummingbird. A fantastic set of spectacular species for observation and photography! All of this was complemented by several Red-crested Cotingas, Pale-naped Brushfinch, and a Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant posing on a telephone pole. Leaving here completely satisfied, we spotted 4 Andean Teal on a roadside pond on the way out to put a final nice touch on the bird list for the day. After that, we proceeded back to the Hilton Garden, had dinner, went over our bird checklist, then got some sleep for the next day.

Sat., Aug. 5 Chicaque Natural Park

We had a slightly later start today, leaving at 5:00am for Chicaque Natural Park, a private reserve on the western outskirts of Bogotá where the Sabana de Bogotá drops off abruptly to the Magdalena River Valley. We arrived early, before the site was even open, to try to beat the weekend crowds that Manuel knew would be coming. As we waited for the entrance gate to open, we birded the parking area at the top of the reserve, picking up a lot of new birds for our trip, including Fawn-breasted, Blue-capped, and Blue-and-black Tanager; Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager; Rufous Spinetail; and Band-tailed Pigeon. The restaurant feeders at the top were quiet that early, though we did note a Tourmaline Sunangel coming to visit.

Finally, the gate was opened and we began our long hike down to the Refugio at the bottom on the old road. Though it was steep, it was fairly easy walking and, of course, it was all downhill! The several hour walk down is very productive for birding, with pretty good viewing due to the slope. Almost 500 species of birds have been recorded at Chicaque and we saw our share. Highlights included Black Inca (endemic to Colombia and restricted to a small part of the Eastern Cordillera near Bogotá), Slaty Finch (a nomadic species whose presence is unpredictable; Manuel noticed a female feeding on seeding *Chusquea* bamboo, its preferred food); Common



and Ash-throated Chlorospingus (one of the latter of which posed incredibly well for us while sunning itself in a shrub); Southern Emerald-Toucanet; Rusty Flowerpiercer; Black-crested and Gray-throated Warbler (the latter a

Colombian endemic, but only seen by Manuel and Dave, unfortunately); Montane Foliage-Gleaner; Montane and Strong-billed Woodcreeper; Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher; and Moustached Brushfinch.

As we approached the bottom, a bit tired from the long walk, we enjoyed a brief rest on some benches. However, the rest was rudely interrupted (at least for some!) by the appearance of a small flock in the nearby trees, which yielded Saffron-crowned, Metallic-green, Plain-colored, and Beryl-spangled Tanager; Blue Dacnis; Streaked Xenops; and Slate-colored Restart. This invigorated us for the final leg of the hike and we soon emerged at a large clearing harboring the Refugio, where we went inside, sat down, and enjoyed an extremely merited lunch—kind of a pot of food at the end of the avian rainbow. After lunch, we walked back up the short trail to the rest area and then climbed into 2 jeeps, which Manuel had kindly arranged to take us all the way back up to the top. I think everyone agreed that while the hike down was great, the ride back up was even better! After reaching the top, we spent a bit of time watching the restaurant hummingbird feeders, but could only pick out the Tourmaline Sunangels again plus a few Lesser Violetears. However, Manuel thought he had spotted something on the road, so we walked a short distance on the road to a clump of flowering *Bomarea* (a neotropical genus of flowering vines which have big clumps of bright-red flowers) and proceed to stake it out. After about a half hour wait, one of the better birds of the day appeared to feed on the flowers: a Golden-bellied Starfrontlet (another hummingbird endemic to the Eastern Cordillera of Colombia). We also heard, but (of course!) could not see a Blackish Tapaculo. With that, we called it a day and headed back through the usual heavy traffic to the Hilton Garden and said good-bye to Mauricio, our able driver for the past few days. This was followed by our checklist, dinner, and another night's rest.

Sun., Aug. 6 Open Day

Today was a free day, originally designed as a break for participants in the extension and the arrival day for participants in the main tour. However, in addition to relaxing, Manuel kindly organized a “shopping” expedition in the afternoon. Using a van, we drove to the Usaquén district of Bogotá, where we visited the Almacén Catación Pública to buy coffee. Catación Pública is a specialty coffee roaster featuring high quality regional coffees from all over Colombia. We had a tasting of several varieties after a careful explanation from the barista, then most of us picked up a few kilos to take back home. We then went to the nearby Carulla



grocery store to pick up a few extra supplies. We then returned to the Hilton Garden to finish a quiet, restful day.

Mon., Aug. 7 Monserrate | Flight to Inírida | Los Pepes

As it turned out, our flight on Satena Airlines to Inírida was not until early afternoon, so Manuel and Dave organized an extra field trip for the morning to one of the most famous Bogotá attractions: the Cerro de Monserrate. At the top of this mountain is a church containing a shrine to El Señor Caído (The Fallen Lord), reportedly the source of many miracles. Unfortunately for us, this Monday was one of Colombia's many holidays (this one apparently to commemorate the Battle of Boyacá), so there was a massive traffic jam and large numbers of people at the base station when we arrived. But, Manuel quickly obtained tickets and we joined the line to get on the funicular for the 5-10 minute ride to the summit.

After arriving at the top (called the cima, in Spanish, with an elevation of 3129 m/10,200 ft) we promptly commenced birding, attracting quite a bit of attention from the locals while doing so! Although a slight drizzle started, we were well prepared for this with our brand new, light-weight ponchos we had bought from a street vendor below. Despite the crowds and the weather, many birds were around! We found some familiar species (Black Flowerpiercer, Pale-naped Brushfinch, Glowing Puffleg) and some interesting new ones, including Andean Guan, Gray-browed Brushfinch, Black-backed Grosbeak, and Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet. One of the restaurants at the top had some hummingbird feeders which we spent some time at, getting great views of Shining Sunbeam and Sword-billed Hummingbird. Nearby, while we were watching, a female Purple-backed Thornbill was well seen by all as it foraged on some flowering trees (this is a species that typically does not come to feeders) and we noticed foraging White-sided Flowerpiercer and Andean Siskin.

Finishing up here, we took the funicular back down to the base and drove back to the hotel for a quick lunch and then transfer to the airport for our flight. Fortunately, our flight was on time and after about an hour and a half, we were on the ground in Inírida where we met Luis Urueña, the owner of Manakin Tours, who had come in early to do some arrangements for us. After retrieving our bags, we met our fleet of 4 tuk-tuks (the essential



form of transportation in Inírida) and drove to our hotel, the comfortable and quiet Fuente de Guainía, Hotel de Lujo. We checked into our rooms, got our field gear together, and then piled into the fleet of tuk-tuks for a bit

of late afternoon birding in the extensive white sand savannahs that surround Inírida, in the company of excellent local guide Josué (Jota) Peña. For this outing, we stayed on the paved road running through the white sand savannah in a part of the area known as “Los Pepes” and enjoyed a beautiful late afternoon. Unique birds found included Wedge-tailed Grassfinch; Burnished-buff, Red-shouldered, and Black-faced Tanager; Plain-

crested Elaenia; Yellow-headed Caracara; and the sought-after white sand specialist White-naped Seedeater (which perched extremely cooperatively for views and photos). Amazingly enough, the cooler of drinks brought with it just happened to have some cold Aguilas in it (appropriate beer brand for a birding trip!), which we enjoyed as a way to celebrate our first birds in eastern Colombia. We then returned to the Fuente, freshened up, then drove in the tuk-tuks to our first great dinner at Moro’s, a restaurant in town that was cooking especially for our group. Then, we returned to our hotel for a good night’s rest.

Tues., Aug. 8 Sabanitas

We started the day with the tuk-tuk convoy back to Moro’s for a very satisfying breakfast, then went to a nearby store to get rubber boots for all those who did not have them. At breakfast, a few Crested Oropendolas put in an appearance, feeding in some palms on the street and a small flock of Blue-headed Parrots flew overhead. We then went for a full morning walk in the white sand forests of the Sabanitas community, which exposed us to both the great birds and intense heat and humidity that occur here! The birds were excellent; a sampling of some of the highlights included Spotted Puffbird, Versicolored Emerald, Amazon Antshrike (a species in which the female is more colorful and easier to identify than the male), Cobalt-winged Parakeet (perched, rather than flying over as is the norm for this species), White-throated Toucan, Gilded Barbet, Golden-spangled Piculet (which was around us for a long time, but literally never was still for even a second, making it surprisingly hard to get bins on), White-winged Becard (this species occurs in several plumage forms; the ones here were the all black-subspecies *tenebrosus*), Pompadour Cotinga (female), Opal-rumped and Fulvous-crested Tanager, Brown Jacamar, and a Dark-billed Cuckoo (probably the most interesting and unusual species found during the morning).



We arrived at the actual community of Sabanitas in late morning and gratefully sat in the shade of a roofed palapa and had some cool drinks. We then enjoyed one of the better, if not the best, meals of the tour, a delicious lunch of bocón (a local fish), rice, and patacones—everyone cleaned their plates today! After lunch,

we took a short transfer in a wood canoe to the end of the nearby road, where we were picked up by the tuk-tuk crew (though not after Don and Barb had great looks at a Sunbittern and Greg found a flock of Brown-throated Parakeets in a tree!). Manuel also showed us the large numbers of sundews and bladderworts that were growing in the wet, sandy soil and shallow water around the road end—fascinating. We then returned to the Fuente de Guainía for a rest. Reconvening in the afternoon, we headed out in the tuk-tuks for some more road birding in the white sand savannahs. However, a clearly threatening rain storm began to deliver the goods as soon as we started birding, so we had to abort our birding mission and return to the hotel while a downpour commenced. During the downpour, the power went out, too—part of life in this area of remote eastern Colombia. However, the rain finally slacked off in time for us to go back to Moro's for dinner, where the power was clearly on. After doing our checklist and eating another great meal, we returned to the hotel where the power was back on and all was well. So ended our first day in Inírida.

Wed., Aug. 9 Cerros de Mavecure | Remanso | Caño Cunubén

We began today with our usual trip to Moro's for breakfast, this time at the very civilized hour of 6:30am! Before and during breakfast, we were again treated to Crested Oropendolas, plus fly-over Chestnut-fronted Macaws. After breakfast, we drove to the Inírida waterfront, a very busy place, where we boarded a boat for the much-anticipated trip up the Río Inírida to the Cerros de Mavecure. The Cerros (there are 3 in total) are volcanic remnants of the ancient Guiana Shield, are probably the main tourist attraction in Guainía Department, and are considered sacred sites by the local native Americans—no one is allowed to climb them.

The boat trip from Inírida to the small community of Remanso, at the base of the Cerros, is about 2 hours. The boat ride was delightful, with endless nearly unbroken tropical forests on either side of the river. A few characteristic birds of Amazonian Colombia riversides were spotted from the boat, including White-winged Swallow, Ringed and Green Kingfisher, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Drab Water-Tyrant (for those with sharp eyes; interestingly, they apparently can fly as fast as a boat travels!), and a Bat Falcon. We disembarked at Remanso then headed to the local; while there, we noted a pet Crested Curassow wandering around!



After this brief break, we took a walk on a road out of Remanso through the shrubby white sand forests that surround the town; the local landscape is dominated by the tallest Cerro, Pajarito, looming over everything. This walk was pretty productive, despite it being in mid- to late-morning. Highlights included a Squirrel Cuckoo, a

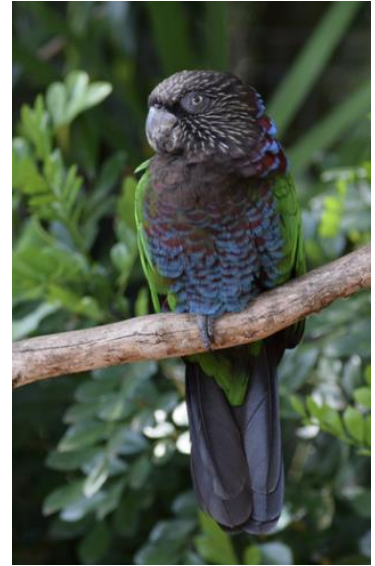
Laughing Falcon, White-browed Purpleuft, a female and young male Pompadour Cotinga, Black-tailed Tityra, distant Red-and-green Macaws flying, Orinoco Piculet, Green-tailed Goldenthrout, and Golden-headed Manakin. After the walk, we returned to the hostel (somewhat interestingly named La Cueva de la Princesa) for cool drinks and a tasty lunch.

After lunch, we got back in the boat and took a brief excursion upriver to Raudal Mavicure, where the Río Inírida dramatically flows between the 2 smaller Cerros and the shoreline is mostly pure, smooth, eroded rock. Along the shore we saw a pair of Capped Heron, Pied Lapwing, Spotted Sandpiper, and a nicely posing Yellow-headed Caracara. A walk on the shoreline revealed many fascinating plants, including more sundews and bladderworts. Getting back in our boat, we headed downstream toward Inírida for our return trip, noting a Cocoi Heron flying over the river on the way. Before reaching town, we made a short boat detour into Caño Cunubén, a waterway off the main river. This short trip into the varzea forest (forests that are fully flooded during the rainy season) was quite productive, with sightings of Osprey, White-banded Swallow, Varzea Schiffornis, Black-collared and Slate-colored Hawk, Long-billed Woodcreeper, Black-crested Antshrike, Red-capped Cardinal, Little Cuckoo, Thrush-like Wren, and Rusty-backed Spinetail. However, the absolute highlight of the Caño Cunubén visit was very close-range views of Amazon (Pink) River Dolphins close to the boat! This species forages in the flooded forest, well off the main stem river, during high water and we were rewarded with excellent views of this intriguing freshwater dolphin. Sometimes they were close enough to easily hear them exhale when they surfaced!

We finally returned to the “boat dock” (not sure you can really call it that!) in Inírida about 5:00pm, returned to the hotel, then went out in the tuk-tuk fleet for our last dinner at Moro’s. We then returned to the Fuente de Guainía, settled our bills, and went to bed after an amazing day.

Thur., Aug. 10

Caño Matraca | Flight to Bogotá



Since our return flight to Bogotá was not scheduled until just after noon, we took advantage of the available morning for one final outing. We were up early and into the tuk-tuks, having organized our belongings the night before. Once again, we went to the “port” of Inírida on the river and this time had a quick breakfast of coffee, arepas, and eggs at a local restaurant. Then, we climbed into another boat, this one longer and skinnier than the two previously used, and headed a short distance downriver to the Caño Matraca, another flooded river channel into the varzea forest. Although our trip only lasted about an hour due to a steady drizzle which started up during the trip, we enjoyed a fabulous morning. Highlights included a Large-billed Tern flying over the Río Inírida as we departed the port (in fact, the only tern of the entire trip), nice views of both sexes of Blackish-gray Antshrike in the caño, Long-billed Woodcreeper flying back and forth over our heads in response to playback, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Velvet-fronted Grackle, Black-throated Nunbird, and Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper (an unusual find here). We also had the pleasure of watching a troop of Humboldt’s Squirrel Money scrambling through the treetops. It was a real shame that the rain became too much for us, but that’s the way it goes sometimes!

Therefore, up went the umbrellas and on went the ponchos, and we headed back to town in the boat, unloaded, and tuk-tuk-ed back to the Fuente de Guainía. We got all our luggage and got back in the tuk-tuks for the last drive to the airport where we said good-bye to our faithful drivers and guide Jota, then checked in for our flight. Curiously, we saw our first Gray-breasted Martins of the tour right in the terminal building! Fortunately, our flight was on time, we landed back in Bogotá, and we were picked up and transferred to the Hilton Garden (our home away from home in Bogotá!). We then had a free afternoon, followed by a checklist review and dinner before retiring for the evening.

Fri., Aug. 11

Flight to Mitú | Bocatoma White Sand Forest

Today began rather leisurely with breakfast at the Hilton Garden, following which we checked out and were transferred back to the domestic terminal of airport (locally known as Puente Aéreo or Terminal 2). We grabbed a bite to eat at the Subway in the airport, then boarded our flight to Mitú.

Arriving about mid-day, we paid our mandatory tourism entrance tax, then were met in two “normal” vehicles by our drivers, Marvé and Gabriel, driving a pickup truck and minivan, respectively. They took us to our nearby hotel (the Hotel Brasilia) where we checked into our rooms and got all our field gear ready for an afternoon outing. We met our outstanding local guide, Omar Casas, at the hotel before departing for the afternoon. We



then got in the vehicles and proceed to our first Mitú birding destination: the Bocatoma White Sand Forest, all wearing our rubber boots. This was a great first birding stop; a flat walk through the forest, though most of the time in a bit of standing or running water. Highlights included Paradise, Silver-beaked, and Palm Tanager; Black-throated Antbird; Spot-backed Antwren; White-bearded and White-crowned Manakin; Epaulet Oriole; and Rufous-bellied Euphonia. Not bad for stepping right off the plane!

We then returned to the Brasilia, having stocked up on cervezas along the way, for our checklist and dinner cooked right in the hotel's kitchen. Then, off to rest up for the next day in our air-conditioned rooms.

Sat., Aug. 12 Ceima Cachivera | Urania Bridge

We were up early today due to a longer drive to our morning's birding site, so, after breakfast at 4:30am, we got into the vehicles and headed out. We arrived at Ceima Cachivera, our birding location, around 5:30am and started a several hour walk through the forests around this small village. This area proved quite productive, with the forested part of the walk yielding great birds such as Plumbeous Euphonia, Gray-crowned Flycatcher, 2 Red-fan Parrots perched high in a dead tree, Mouse-colored Antshrike, Imeri Warbling-Antbird, and Black-banded Woodcreeper. Emerging into a clearing, Manuel somehow noticed a Blackish Nightjar roosting on the ground which was not disturbed by us at all, allowing for close, long, and detailed views and photographs. Continuing our walk, the trail gradually started to ascend a little bit and we started to encounter large boulders—the end point of our hike and where we began to search for Guianan Cock-of-the-Rocks, which nest in and have their leks surrounding these large rocks. A few in the group spotted a female Cock-of-the-Rock which flushed off the ground at our approach, but otherwise the area was very quiet. Unfortunately, at this time, it began to rain so we hustled on down the trail to a large rock shelter just as a downpour began.

Right as the rain started, however, the ever-vigilant Omar spotted a male Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock from the edge of a rock, so with a bit of effort, we all had a glimpse of this incredible species, before retreating into our shelter as the rain came down for about an hour. After the rain slacked off, we got out our umbrellas and ponchos and proceeded on our return hike. Emerging in the clearing again, we discovered the Blackish Nightjar still there! This was complemented by a mixed-species flock that appeared, delighting us all with a lot of Paradise Tanagers dangling from the trees like Christmas ornaments. Careful searching among the flock also yielded Turquoise, Opal-crowned, and Green-and-gold Tanager, Blue Dacnis, a lovely Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher, and super good looks at a Slate-colored Grosbeak (which is actually a Saltator!). As we continued the final leg of our hike out on the old road, we saw both Squirrel Monkeys and Black Tamarins in the trees and, one of the best birds of the tour, a Tawny-tufted Toucanet perching directly overhead for an extended period.



Manuel spent a lot of time trying to coax that latter bird out and we were all grateful to him for his efforts in this regard, particularly because he was so successful!

Arriving back at the cars, we were greeted by a chorus of 3 Southern Lapwings sounding off on events of the day at the cachivera (a small waterfall), then loaded up for the trip back to the Hotel Brasilia for lunch. Along the way, we stopped for a Burrowing Owl perched on a fence post and noted a few Black Caracaras flying by. After arrival, we unloaded our gear, had another great lunch, and then took a short afternoon break.

In late afternoon, we headed out in the vehicles for the short drive to the bridge to the community of Urania. We birded from the bridge itself (which spans a waterway and connects the community to town) and the area immediately around the beginning of the bridge. This proved to be a great and easy outing with many birds both in or near the water and on the land. Highlights from the bridge included several sightings of Sunbittern, White-winged and White-banded Swallow, Green Kingfisher, and a Scale-breasted Woodpecker attacking a termite nest. The land birding yielded Amazonian Scrub-Flycatcher, White-chinned Sapphire, Yellow-bellied Dacnis, Moustached Antwren, Masked Tanager, and a male Spangled Cotinga (truly a knock-your-socks-off bird, if there ever was one!). A wonderful outing to end an excellent day in the Mitú area, despite the early morning rain. Upon return, we had our usual break, did our checklist, and enjoyed another meal at the Hotel Brasilia.

Sun., Aug. 13 Puente Lata | Pueblo Nuevo | Urania Bridge

We were up very early today again, due to another long drive to get to our initial birding destination for the morning. After a quick bite to eat and some of Manuel's excellent coffee, we headed out into the darkness, arriving at our destination, Puente Lata, a bit after 5:00am. This bridge over a river has become known as THE place to go early in the morning to look for Fiery Topaz, so we promptly mounted our vigil from the bridge, peering through the mist and ever-increasing daylight. After about half an hour, we were rewarded by excellent views of a female Fiery Topaz for a long period of time. Initially perching in some trees along the edge of the river (where it was hard to pick out), the bird eventually started perching right over the water on some dead limbs and foraging over the water for small insects. Although we waited and waited, a male never made an appearance, but we were all happy to tick this much-desired species off our lists. While waiting, we also noted Epaulet Oriole, Versicolored Emerald, a small flock of lovely Black-headed Parrots, Olive Oropendola, and a pair of Golden-headed Manakin.



Considering our vigil at the bridge done, we turned around and headed back to our next destination for the morning, the town of Pueblo Nuevo. Of course, being a birding group, we were easily distracted by roadside birds, stopping at one point for several Paradise Jacamars perching on phone lines, along with Blue-headed

Parrots flying by, White-bearded Manakin, and a Black-faced Antbird lured out of the brush. Stopping again by some cattle pasture, we had great looks at a Red-breasted Meadowlark, along with a perching Bat Falcon and some Wattled Jacanas (of the Chestnut-backed form) far off around a pond.

Arriving at Pueblo Nuevo, we parked in front of the community maloca while Omar checked in with the village captain. We then started off on a several hour walk through the tall tropical forest that surrounds the community. Birding kicked off right at the cars, however, with a nice kettle of Plumbeous Kites over the soccer field and a great view of a Yellow-browed Sparrow on some wires. The shrubs at the end of the community yielded decent views of a Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher and a Common Ground-Dove sitting on a fence post, while Rufous-browed Peppershrike sang constantly from the trees. Entering the tall forest, we soon began to find birds. A pair of Pectoral Sparrows darted from branch to branch in response to playback. Omar spotted an Amazonian Motmot lurking in the trees in the back. With continued effort, we also found a male Blue-capped Manakin, female Common Scale-backed Antbird, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-tailed Foliage-Gleaner high in the canopy, Yellow-rumped Cacique, and White-fronted Nunbird. After emerging from the forest and returning to the community, we were all glad to take off our boots in the shade of the benches in the maloca and grab a drink! We then returned to the Hotel Brasilia for lunch and an afternoon break.

For our afternoon outing, we returned to the Urania Bridge due to its productivity the first time and since Manuel and Omar knew that we could find new and interesting birds there. Arriving back at the bridge, we walked over the channel again and soon found some of the same birds from the previous day (Green Kingfisher, Amazonian Scrub-Flycatcher, Moustached Antwren) and also added some newcomers, like Green Ibis, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, and an extremely lucky view of a fly-by Amazonian Umbrellabird. We then took a short walk into the riverside forest by the road and, with a lot of effort by Manuel and Omar, were rewarded with decent views of a perching Brown-banded Puffbird at the top of a tree. However, at this point, a rain shower began to come in, so we hurried over to the bridge (which is completely roofed) and hung out under the bridge for a while and watched sheets of rain come down. Finally, as it always does, the rain let up and we got back in the vehicles and headed back to town. On the way, we made a quick stop so that everyone could get looks at some Speckled



Chachalacas which were perched in a tree, along with (yet another!) male Spangled Cotinga. We then returned to the Brasilia for the evening, doing our bird list and enjoying another dinner, before retiring for the night.

Mon., Aug. 14 Mitú Cachivera | Bocatoma Terra Firme

We started our last full day in Mitú with a bit later breakfast, then met Marvé and Gabriel out front for our last morning field trip. We headed a short distance south of town to the community of Mitú Cachivera, located on the bank of the Río Vaupés. We were dropped off at the end of the paved road at the entrance to a covered bridge leading to the community and walked from there, through the community, into an extensive trail leading through white sand forest. The birding was great right from the start; almost right away we saw a few Point-tailed Palmcreepers sitting in the tops of palms, allowing great scope views and photographs. A short distance away and still in the village, we spotted a few elegant Orange-cheeked Parrots in a tree and got decent looks at some Turquoise and Masked Tanagers. As we headed to the forested trail, we got brief looks at 2 Kaway's Parrots in a tree before they flew off. This is a poorly-known species that was only recently discovered to occur in Colombia; it is not even shown in the brand new edition of Hilty's "Birds of Colombia!"

Entering the white sand forest, the action slowed down a bit, but we still found new and interesting things, including a pair of Cherrie's Antwrens, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Yellow-throated Flycatcher, and the unique Yellow-crowned Manakin. On our way back to the community, we took a break in the shade of the basketball court bleachers. To our surprise, a group of 3 King Vultures circled high in the sky overhead and Don spotted a White-vented Euphonia which flew into a tree at the edge of the court. We noticed some more bird activity around the court and picked up Sulphury Flycatcher, Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, and Ochre-lored and Gray-crowned Flycatcher. Not a bad rest stop! We then walked back through the village and over the bridge to our waiting vehicles, though not before having great looks at a perching Thick-billed Seed-Finch and a small flock of Maroon-tailed Parakeets right from the bridge. Upon return to the Brasilia, we had lunch and an early afternoon break.

After lunch, we headed out for our final afternoon hike, this time to the Bocatoma Terra Firme area, an old road cutting through some tall forest that never floods. Quite a few birds greeted us at the start of the hike, including a Plumbeous Pigeon; a large tanager flock consisting of Paradise, Masked, Green-and-gold, and Bay-headed Tanagers; a female Gould's Jewelfront (one of the more sought-after and hard-to-find hummingbird species in this area); and Imeri Warbling-Antbird. Activity slowed down after this, but we spent some time (and Manuel and Omar worked very hard) trying to lure some of the local antbird species into view with mixed success after



they were heard calling. A pair of Gray Antbirds was seen poorly high in a tree, a White-plumed Antbird would not come in at all, and a Chestnut-crested Antbird teased us by calling constantly and coming very close; at the end of the day, only Greg and Omar, who stayed a bit behind the rest of the group, finally got to see the latter species. We then returned to the vehicles and drove back to the Brasilia, stopping along the way for a small group of Red-throated Caracaras (the only ones of the tour) and the Burrowing Owls again (this time for photos). We then returned to the Brasilia for our final checklist, dinner, and then final packing for our return trip to Bogotá the following day.

Tues., Aug. 15 Flight to Villavicencio | Transfer to Bogotá

Since our flight did not leave particularly early, we had a very leisurely breakfast at 6:00am, then loaded our gear in the back of the pickup truck and got in the vehicles with Marvé and Gabriel for the short drive through town to the airport. We said good-bye to them and Omar and checked in for our flight. After passing through security and sitting in the waiting room, everyone there was informed that the incoming flight could not land due to low cloud cover and that there would be at least few hours delay. In this case, if the incoming flight cannot land, it has to return to where it came from to refuel, then try again later. So, everyone in the waiting room (including us!) promptly left and Marvé came over with the truck and took us all back to the Brasilia, which was a more comfortable place to rest than the airport. So, we hung out at the Brasilia for about 2 hours, checking e-mail and watching telenovelas, then went back to the airport in late morning to try again. By this time, the weather had improved, so the incoming plane was able to land, we were able to board, and we successfully took off for our flight to Villavicencio.

Originally, the plan had been to be picked up at the Villavicencio airport and then spend a bit of time birding around town and along the highway back to Bogotá. However, the several hour flight delay ate up all our potential birding time, so after we climbed on the nice van driven by Raúl, we first stopped for lunch at El Amarradero del Mica in Villavicencio, then hit the road to Bogotá. Unfortunately, though the straight-line distance from Villavicencio to Bogotá is very short, this road climbs all the way up the east flank of the Eastern Cordillera, going from about 350m to 2600m in this short distance! So, even though the road has been improved, it takes a long time, since you get stuck behind many slow-moving trucks and there had been a recent washout of the road, which was only replaced by temporary bridges. To make a long story short, the drive back took about 4 hours and we arrived back at the Hilton Garden as it began to get dark. After arriving we checked into our rooms and those interested had a quick bite to eat and a farewell cerveza, before retiring for the night.

Wed., Aug. 16 Departures

Rob, Greg, and Dave left today at various times, heading straight to nearby El Dorado airport. Barb and Don stayed on for a couple more days in the field with Manuel, and therefore our incredible Colombian Amazon tour came to an end.

Photo Credits: Indigo-capped Hummingbird (NJ Stock), White-throated Toucan (NJ Stock), Red-capped Cardinal (NJ Stock), Amazonian Umbrellabird (NJ Stock), Spangled Cotinga (NJ Stock), Group Birding (David Mehlman - DM), Andean Duck (NJ Stock), Yellow-hooded Blackbird (DM), La Florida Park (DM), White-necked Jacobin (NJ Stock), Chingaza National Park Sunrise (DM), Golden-bellied Starfrontlet (NJ Stock), Smoky Bush Tyrant (DM), Red-crested Cotinga (DM), Beryl Spangled Tanager (NJ Stock), Bomarea Flowers (DM), Chicaque Birding (DM), Chicaque Refugio (DM), Andean Guan (NJ Stock), White-naped Seedeater (DM), Dark-billed Cuckoo (NJ Stock), Tuk-tuk (DM), Mavecure Scenic (DM), Yellow-headed Caracara (DM), Brown Jacamar (DM), Boat on Rio Inirida (DM), Inirida Harbor (DM), Mavecure Birding (DM), Paradise Tanager (NJ Stock), Guianan Cock-of-the-rock (NJ Stock), Red-fan Parrot (NJ Stock), Green Kingfisher (NJ Stock), Puente Lata (DM), Black-headed Parrot (DM), Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (DM), Red-breasted Meadowlark (NJ Stock), Orange-cheeked Parrot (DM), Lineated Woodpecker (DM), White-vented Euphonia (NJ Stock), Gray-crowned Flycatcher (NJ Stock), Red-throated Caracara (NJ Stock), Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch (DM), Mavecure Scenic (DM), Group Photo (DM)