



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

A BIRDING ADVENTURE IN THE LLANOS OF COLOMBIA: RESERVA CASANARE & HATO LA AURORA

JANUARY 13–19, 2025

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Please note that this tour is part of our Colombia Trilogy,
and it can be taken in combination with these two superb tours:

Undiscovered Eastern Colombia: Birding Secrets of the White Sands of Inírida, January 5-13, 2025
and *Diverse Western Bogota January 18-24, 2025*



Giant Anteater © David Ascanio

Colombia is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world, with an amazing number of distinctive biomes from high-peak mountains in the Andes to extensive flatlands and Amazonian rainforest. This has made Colombia a dream destination for birders and nature lovers alike. VENT is proud to offer this short trip that concentrates on the Llanos (Plains) of the Orinoco, a vast area rich in waterbirds and forest species alike.

Our tour's focus is Reserva Casanare (Juan Solito Lodge) and the contiguous Hato La Aurora, a working cattle ranch where dazzling species such as the Scarlet Ibis share the wetlands with gorgeous Sunbittern and bizarre Hoatzin. You can expect a wealth of tropical birds and some of the easiest and most pleasant birding anywhere. During the tour, we should get close to 200 species, which include such spectacular birds as Jabiru (stork), Orinoco Goose, Great Potoo, Scarlet Macaw, Horned Screamer, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Pale-headed Jacamar and many others. Evening spotlighting of mammals, night birds, reptiles, and amphibians from the custom-designed observation truck is superb and is often considered one of the highlights of the tour.

January 13, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá. Participants should plan to arrive in Bogotá (El Dorado International Airport code BOG) at any time today, but please bear in mind that we will be departing for our first day afield quite early the following morning (by about 4:30 to 5:00 AM), so you may consider arriving a day early. On arrival, you will be met and transferred to our hotel in Bogotá for the night. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with early arrival lodging and airport transfers.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

January 14, Day 2: Flight to Yopal; Drive to Hato La Aurora. An early departure to the Bogotá airport will allow us to take a flight to Yopal, in the heart of the vast Colombian Llanos, a grassland broken by forest-bordered rivers and occasional low-lying, swampy regions. As soon as we're out of the airport, we will begin our six-hour drive to the heart of this biome. We will make stops along the road and will pay special attention to grass fires, which attract raptors such as Aplomado Falcon; Savanna Hawk; and Zone-tailed, Roadside, and White-tailed hawks. Some of the most popular birding spots are the borrow pits and wetlands along the road since these bring opportunities to look for the impressive Jabiru and Maguari storks (the latter is rare) as well as many other waterbird species including White-faced and Black-bellied whistling ducks. Particularly beautiful are the unique Whistling Heron and the striking Scarlet Ibis, both of which are possible today. Our base for the next four nights will be the Ecolodge Juan Solito, in the Reserva Casanare.



Wire-tailed Manakin © David Ascanio

NIGHT: Ecolodge Juan Solito, Reserva Casanare, Colombian Llanos

January 15-17, Days 3-5: Hato La Aurora. During our three full days in this unique and bird-rich biome, we will explore the key habitats including riverine (gallery) forest, wetlands, patches of tropical dry forest, scrubby vegetation and shrubs. Each of these habitats offers distinctive wildlife. For example, the gallery forest hosts the



Orinoco Goose © David Ascanio

unique and bizarre Hoatzin, a florivorous bird with an elongated esophagus, an adaptation to ferment the cellulose in the leaves they eat. This habitat also hosts more restricted distribution species including the Pale-headed Jacamar and the White-bearded Flycatcher. Additionally, some more widespread but spectacular birds include Sunbittern and Green-and-rufous Kingfisher. In more open areas, one can find wetlands and with them, the enormous Horned Screamer. A favorite among tour participants is the astonishing Scarlet Ibis, a species restricted to northern South America. Another interesting area to look for birds is the ecotone forest-grassland, which is the transition between these two habitats. Here, we will look for Blue-tailed Emerald and Blue-chinned Sapphire. In the Llanos, there are endless opportunities to keep adding birds to your list. There will be time to look for the Orinoco Goose, Pied Lapwing and Sharp-tailed Ibis. Once we have seen the commoner species, we will pursue less easy-to-see birds including Crestless Curassow, Wire-tailed Manakin and Sepia-capped Flycatcher. Along with the bird diversity, a visit to the Llanos offers a great cultural experience. The local cowboys, locally named *Llaneros*, stand as a heavy mix between the Spaniards and the Amerindian tribes that once populated this area. They are used to living in rough conditions and are also great musicians; their songs usually reference the flora and fauna of this splendid area. Many flagship species are also present on the Llanos, and although our chances of actually seeing a Jaguar are very slight (there are photo records from camera traps!), it could happen. We should, however, see Capybara, the largest rodent in the world, and the impressive Anaconda. Reserva Casanare and Hato La Aurora are also famous sites to look for the Giant Anteater.

NIGHTS: Ecolodge Juan Solito Lodge, Reserva Casanare, Colombian Llanos

January 18, Day 6: Drive to Yopal; Flight to Bogotá. We may take advantage of the early morning to catch-up on any birds we've missed, and after breakfast we will prepare for our drive back to Yopal to connect with our afternoon flight to Bogotá.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

January 19, Day 7: Departures for Home. Transfers to the airport will be provided for departures at any time today.

NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR: Until a few years ago, Colombia was rarely visited by birders. Tourism infrastructure has been limited but is developing rapidly and accommodations are generally comfortable and the food is good. The transfer from Yopal to Juan Solito is about six hours each way and half of it is on a dirt road. Be prepared for walking short distances, mostly on even terrain. The ecolodge has eight rooms, all with private

bath (no heated water). The traditional structure of the building with palm roof is designed to keep it cool, and there is no air conditioning. Wi-Fi is available around the dining room at Juan Solito; however, it is unreliable.

CONDITIONS:

- There will be a domestic flight with luggage weight restrictions. We plan to arrange a luggage storage area in Bogotá for you to leave behind your cold weather clothing.
- The road from El Yopal to the ranch will be in 4-wheel drive vehicles through mud and uneven terrain.
- There is no mobile phone access at Juan Solito Lodge.
- Bring a small bottle of shampoo to be used at Juan Solito Lodge.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Ascanio & local guides at the Juan Solito Lodge



David Ascanio a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 35 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), the Orinoco River island species, and the pantepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author

of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3,595** per person in double occupancy from Bogotá, Colombia. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, internal flights, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Bogotá and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$350**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (August 16, 2024).

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which** ventbird.com

covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour. This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through

Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready

access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: We request that participants limit their luggage to one medium-sized, soft-sided bag and one carry-on as space in the vehicles will be limited. Bear in mind that domestic airlines in Colombia have a limit of one piece of checked luggage not exceeding 50 pounds (23 kilos). The cost for excess weight or a second piece of checked luggage is at your own expense and varies from \$50 to \$80 (prices and policies may change frequently). We will do our best to keep you posted with the latest policy if there is a substantial change. Please avoid bringing large suitcases. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service may be limited or unreliable on this tour. Therefore, we recommend that you bring sufficient clothes for the entire trip and/or bring items that can be washed and will dry quickly.

CLIMATE & CLOTHING: Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear, and avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; bright, noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals. Military camouflage clothing should not be worn as it conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we are likely to encounter at various highway checkpoints. We suggest loose-fitting khaki or dull colored clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. Walking shorts may be worn at lodges, but long pants are recommended in the field (we suggest you bring both). Footwear should include water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots, and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. Rubber boots are not mandatory on this trip. The sun can be intense so we suggest you bring a broad-brimmed hat for protection from over exposure and a good sunscreen. Shower thongs are highly recommended.

DOCUMENTS: A valid passport is required for U.S. citizens, with at least one blank page for entry stamps. We recommend your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Colombia. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens for stays of 90 days or less. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: All participants should bring sunscreen and lip balm, a good hat or cap for shade, a durable and reliable flashlight or head lamp (head lamps are easier to maneuver during short blackouts or low light rooms), extra batteries, a battery-operated alarm clock (today's mobile phones do have alarm settings), snacks (if you have a special diet), plastic bags to protect your equipment from dust, a daypack and/or small backpack. A compact umbrella and a dry bag for your camera and optic equipment are highly recommended. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one, we encourage you to bring it. All participants must have some type of refillable water bottle.

MISCELLANEOUS: Participants should bring enough spare batteries to last for a few days between charges in case of unplanned electrical outages. Electrical plug-ins in Colombia usually are two flat-pin type (same as in USA) and electrical current is 110 volts in virtually all areas (but always check first as 220 to 240 volts may be found in a few areas). If you plan to recharge batteries, bring appropriate converters; a surge protector also is recommended. Because much of this route traverses relatively remote regions where the variety (although not quantity) of food may be limited, we recommend that everyone, including especially those persons with dietary restrictions or other dietary requirements, bring at least some trail snacks and other emergency food items that are portable. Colombia is in the Central Time Zone. Spanish is the official language.

HEALTH: Malaria has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. However, it is not expected to be a problem on this route. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations.

While not a requirement for entry into Colombia unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country, a yellow fever vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world, tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for 10 years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination.

You should not drink local water or use it for brushing your teeth. All hotels will supply drinking water in your room. Bottled water of various kinds is available at all restaurants. Extra water for rooms may be purchased by tour participants and will always be available when we are in the field.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html (click on Travel Health).

INSECT PROTECTION: Insects are present but not usually troublesome. There are chiggers in the Llanos and some type of repellent is strongly recommended for these areas. We recommend bringing an adequate supply of insect repellent, including a stick-type form for your hands and face, plus a pump-style container of “OFF!” or “Cutter” for your clothing. Please, avoid bringing any spray-form of bug repellent as it may damage cameras or binoculars. Instead, roll-on or lotion forms are appropriate.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active

ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.

- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

***We strongly recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing.** Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to

insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

CURRENCY: Colombian Peso (COP). We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport in Bogotá upon arrival. ATMs are available in the airports and many other public sites where you can obtain local currency (and generally give the most favorable exchange rates).

INTERNET ACCESS: Colombia is one of the most “wired” countries in South America and most hotels have internet access and Wi-Fi (at least in the lobbies if not actually in hotel rooms), but it is unlikely to be available in the Llanos. Before leaving home, we suggest that you check with your personal service provider for roaming rates and coverage use areas pertaining to your personal calling plan.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds:

Hilty, S. L. *Birds of Colombia*. 2021. The recommended field guide for Colombia. Forward-looking taxonomy includes all species and subspecies groups (as in Clements checklist). Illustrations are from 16-vol. *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx) with many updates and additions. All species, as well as subspecies, and subspecies groups are illustrated and mapped. Unique for South America, this book contains a QR code for every species, which allows users to quickly link, via mobile phone, to Cornell’s *Birds of the World* website and listen to vocalizations, view photos, and read an expanded text. Almost like having an App embedded in this book (and Colombia has remarkably good cellular coverage so this feature should be usable almost everywhere). Available from Lynx Editions www.lynxeds.com, Buteo Books/ABA sales, and elsewhere.

Mc Mullan, Miles; T. Donegan, G. Pantoja-Peña; T. Tuncer-Navarro; A. Bartels & T. Ellery. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Bogotá, Colombia: Rey Naranjo Editores, 2018. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia and includes range map for each species. The text is concise and includes a description of the bird vocalization. A color-band separating each family may be a useful way to find the species when using in the field. Represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.

Bird References to Explore Prior to the Tour:

McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & A. Quevedo. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, 2nd edition. Bogotá, Colombia: ProAves, 2014. Ca. 360 pages. Paperback. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia and includes a very small range map for each species. Some users have expressed that it has poor printing (colors dull and muddy or inaccurate), especially hummingbirds, flycatchers, furnariids and some species in other families. A few brief, text remarks accompany each species. The index is brief but adequate and the print is very small. Despite some drawbacks we recommend that all visitors obtain a copy of this little book (available from Buteo Books, USA and Amazon store). It is jam-packed with helpful information but due to the quality of the illustrations, it should be regarded as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to all identifications). Nevertheless, it represents a significant achievement in simply dealing with nearly 2,000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.

Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1986. **A classic but now out of print and difficult (expensive) to find.** Good source of information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now dated.

Hilty, S. L. *Birds of Venezuela*. Second Edition. Princeton University Press, 2003. Very useful for this trip (we are within 30 kilometers of border) as a reference but heavy for field use. Excellent color illustrations and detailed maps showing specimen records and sight records.

Ridgely, R & G. Tudor. *Field Guide to the Birds of South America: Passerines*. Helm Field Guides, 2009. An essential field guide for those wanting to go birding in South America. Very well illustrated and concise but relevant accounts.

Ascanio, David, G. Rodriguez & R. Restall. *Helm Field guides: Birds of Venezuela*. 2017. More compact than the above books but some may still consider it heavy for field use. Has good maps (smaller and less detailed than the Hilty book on Venezuela), a brief, high condensed text; color illustrations well organized, variable in quality but overall quite useful. Has updated taxonomy (to ca. 2016).

Restall, R., C. Rodner, and M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America*. Vol. 2. Plates and maps. London: Christopher Helm, 2006. Relatively up-to-date taxonomy but very different color plate style compared to previous two books (plates useful for some groups; less so for difficult groups like flycatchers); similar in size and almost as heavy as the Hilty book. It covers seven countries (over 7,000 images) which complicates field use because of the large number of illustrations. Maps are tiny and lack detail. All text is in a separate volume. Despite its large size and weight, a good reference.

Bird Apps:

- *Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The best app to use in the field. Nowadays considered the “future of birding.” Once the app is downloaded, you must download the packs for Colombia. As this itinerary was made, there are four packs for Colombia available. Includes a brief bird description, photos and voices. Also, there is a section for Bird Photo ID which can be useful. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Ebird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A friendly and essential tool for the modern birdwatcher, this is nowadays your best way to keep your life list, all in a single application. Users can compile personal bird lists by location and by trip. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, your list will be automatically updated. Furthermore, your guide will be able to share the daily list. You can just accept the shared list from your VENT leader and have it uploaded in your account! An essential tool to promote bird conservation. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**
- *Bird Data*. A free App that provides summarized information for each species, including the subspecies and presence in neighboring countries. It has a section of endemic species. Look for the Colombia package. Providing that you have data access in your phone, it will show the eBird hotspots near your location, thus being one of its main advantages.
- *The Birds of Colombia*. IMB publicación. A basic app showing a list of the birds of Colombia based in taxonomic order and arranged by family. Contains an ornithological dictionary.
- *All Birds Colombia*. Sunbird Images. Blue Level Series. Available in Apple Store. This app was made from the information in *Birds of Northern South America* by R. Restall et al (Helm Field Guide). It contains images, maps and bird voices. The user must be aware that the maps used from the publication were out-of-date at the time of printing. The most powerful aspects are the bird voices and the sonograms accompanying each species as well as the search tools. Good source to study the voice of the birds and get acquainted with the plumage and other aspects of the species natural history.
- *Colombia – guía de viaje y mapa offline*. Tripwolf. The free download provides limited information. A good source for those wanting to learn about culture, important dates and other aspects of the country. To access all the information, an upgrade must be purchased.

- **MAPS.ME.** This app allows you to navigate offline. Detailed maps, all free of cost. Once the application is downloaded, you will have to download the map (s) for Colombia.

Mammals:

Emmons, L.H. & François Feer. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals. A field guide.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Paperback. The best resource for mammals occurring in Colombia.

Natural History:

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity.* University of Texas Press, 2005. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes. Includes chapters on diversity, speciation, hummingbird and antbird communities, mixed species flocks, fruit eating adaptations, flycatcher radiation, manakin displays, plumage color in the tropics, Amazonian river islands, cacique and oropendola breeding behavior, environmental constraints on bird song and more.

Kricher, John C. *The New Neotropical Companion.* 2017. Princeton University Press. An introduction to the animals, plants and ecosystems of the New World Tropics. Recommended as a general, broad-based introduction to plants and animals of Amazonia.

Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature: Life & Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America.* New York: Scribners Sons, 1984. Does not deal much with birds but is a fantastic introduction to all kinds of topics relating to tropical wildlife including bugs, frogs, plant strategies, bot flies, and much more. Extraordinarily well written. Excellent introductory reading on tropical natural history.

General Travel:

Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid. *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia.* Most recent edition. A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar book should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. **Note that there are several other travel books available** (Rough Guide, etc.) and any of these may be equally good. See on www.amazon.com.

History:

Rockefeller, J.D. *Pablo Escobar: Colombia's Greatest Hero or Villain? History of the Greatest Drug Lord.* 2015. A comprehensive lecture about the life of Pablo Escobar and the economic repercussions of his career. A must to understand Colombia's recent past.

Albinson, Henry. *Colombia History, and Pre-Columbian Era: The Spanish Conquest, The Founding of the Nation.* Sonit Education Academy.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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