

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

JANUARY 11-18, 2020

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Please note that this tour can be taken in combination with
Undiscovered Colombia: Birding Secrets of the White Sands of Inírida, January 4-11, 2020.



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 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.

In addition to our visit to the reserve, we'll have a full day in Bogotá, where we plan to visit the Chingaza National Park, a high-Andes location where we will be introduced to the páramo, a distinctive habitat that hosts Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager and Golden-fronted Redstart. In addition, we will also enjoy a hummingbird site hosting an incredible mix of bright colored species such as Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Glowing and Coppery-bellied pufflegs, White-bellied Woodstar and Great Sapphirewing.



January 11, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá. Participants who are continuing from the *Undiscovered Eastern Colombia* tour (January 4-11) will have today on your own in Bogotá. Other 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 5:00 AM), so you may consider arriving a day early. Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to our hotel in Bogotá for the night.

For those arriving early, we recommend that you contact Diana Balcázar (dianabirdingcolombia@gmail.com), an English-speaking Bogotá native. Diana conducts city tours as well as birding trips to Cerro Monserrate, which is reachable via a short but steep cable-car. Situated above 10,000 feet, this location gives astonishing views of Bogotá and is also home for Silvery-throated Spinetail, Golden-fronted Whitestart, Pale-naped and Grey-browed brush-finches, Rufous-browed Conebill and the recently described Pale-bellied Tapaculo. 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 12, Day 2: Full Day in the Bogotá Area: Chingaza National Park and Hummingbird Observatory at La Calera. Located in the northeast of Bogotá, Chingaza National Park offers the opportunity to observe birds in elfin (high montane) forest as well as páramo (high Andean scrub). The scenery of this park is absolutely astonishing and offers views of the Bogotá plateau. We should leave around 5:00 a.m. to reach the pre-páramo vegetation where Grass Wren, Pale-bellied Tapaculo, Silvery-throated Spinetail, Coppery-bellied and Glowing pufflegs, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, and Crimson-mantled Woodpecker occur. We will also keep our eyes peeled for feeding flocks, which bring the opportunity to observe Rufous-browed Conebill, Golden-fronted Whitestart and Superciliaried Hemispingus, along with astonishing Scarlet-bellied and Buff-breasted mountain-tanagers and Black-crested Warbler, as well as Masked and Black flowerpiercers. Many specialized tyrant-flycatchers occur in the high Andean scrub, and a good sample includes White-throated Tyrannulet, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant (commoner in páramo) and Black-capped Tyrannulet. Once in the higher elevations (depending upon mist and visibility, we plan to reach 12,000 feet), we will be exposed to another habitat and indeed to more new birds. This area is what we call páramo and is home for Green-bearded Helmetcrest (can be difficult to locate in the dry season), Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Black-headed Hemispingus, Rufous Antpitta (difficult to see), Many-striped



Great Sapphirewing © David Ascanio

Canastero, White-browed Spinetail, White-chinned Thistletail and the robust Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. In the afternoon, we will head to the Hummingbird Observatory at La Calera where we should get close views of Blue-throated Starfrontlet as well as Great Sapphirewing, Green and Sparkling violetears, Glowing and Coppery-bellied pufflegs, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Black-tailed and Green-tailed trainbearers, White-bellied Woodstar, and Amethyst-throated Sunangel. Generally speaking, many hummingbird species perform altitudinal migrations and our visit during the dry season will be reflected in the number of rare or occasional species that we will see there.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

January 13, Day 3: Flight to Yopal; Drive to Hato La Aurora.

An early departure to the Bogotá airport will allow us to take the 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, Black-bellied and Fulvous 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 Hato La Aurora.

NIGHT: Ecolodge Juan Solito, Hato La Aurora, Colombian Llanos

January 14-16, Days 4-6: 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 unique and bizarre Hoatzin, a folivorous 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 Amazonian Black-Tyrant. 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



Wire-tailed Manakin © David Ascanio

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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. Hato La Aurora is also famous as a site to look for the Giant Anteater.

NIGHTS: Ecolodge Juan Solito Lodge, Hato La Aurora, Colombian Llanos



Orinoco Goose © David Ascanio

January 17, Day 7: 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 flight to Bogotá.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

January 18, Day 8: Departures for Home. Transfers to the airport will be provided for departures at any time today.

NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR: Until recently, 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. Be prepared for walking short distances, mostly on even terrain. The ecolodge has ten 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:

- Expect a full day of birding at high elevations, above Bogotá.
- 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.
- You might want to consider bringing rubber boots. First, to keep your feet warm in high elevations and second, to avoid chiggers and ticks in the Llanos.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Ascanio



David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent 33 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Orinoco and Amazon river basins, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Costa Rica, 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 the songs of the birds of Venezuela, 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 pan-tepui 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 **\$3,395** per person in double occupancy from Bogotá, Colombia. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. 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 would like to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express 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 www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), 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 (August 14, 2019) prior to the tour departure date.

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 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: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 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, 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 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 your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, 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.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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 Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™**. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance** include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** 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.

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. ***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 responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

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 of a second piece of luggage 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: Throughout this tour we will visit areas where the climate may vary from cool, damp and foggy in Chingaza National Park, to hot and dry in the Llanos. Although this is not a peak rainy period (rains are heaviest in April, May, and September to early November), participants should expect some rain as the Colombian Andes generally receive fairly high rainfall. 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. Chingaza National Park is at a fairly high elevation and likely to be cool, even cold (and often damp and foggy) and will require a long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket; warm sweater or down jacket (or light jacket and down vest combination in layers); and warm hat and gloves. For the Llanos we suggest loose-fitting khaki 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 but you might want to consider bringing them for some muddy or wet areas on trails and some tall, wet grass in some areas. The sun can be more intense at higher elevations 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), 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 or rain, 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. There are two malaria prophylaxis recommended in areas where chloroquine-resistant malaria is present: Mefloquine (Lariam) and Malarone. For travelers who are unable to take either Malarone or Mefloquine, the CDC recommends the drug Doxycycline as an alternative. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations. Hepatitis A vaccination is strongly recommended as a precaution. 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 less developed, 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. Your polio, tetanus, and typhoid protection should be current. Leishmaniasis is a disease transmitted by a small fly that is mainly active at dusk or during the night. It is not a common insect and only a few of the flies are disease carriers; proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are your best protection, and this disease is not considered a threat on this route. Dengue fever and the Zika virus also are very infrequent and are transmitted by day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. The key will be to keep away from large urban areas or densely populated communities.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

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.

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.

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 the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, 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 particular, 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 commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as “Cutter” to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutter” or “Off!” Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- 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.
- 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.

Zika Virus – This tour visits an area or areas where Zika virus is known to occur or could occur; however, we believe the risk to VENT travelers is extremely low. The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne infection transmitted by mosquitos of the genus *Aedes*, and is related to other tropical diseases: Dengue, Yellow Fever, and West Nile virus. This type of mosquito bites during the day and typically is found in areas of dense human habitation where sanitation and drainage of standing water is poor. Zika virus presents the greatest threat to women of childbearing age. For others who become infected, the effects are usually nonexistent to mild, although some people exhibit symptoms such as mild fever, rashes, joint and muscle pain, and red eyes. If infected, the best treatment is plenty of rest, nourishment, and other supportive care. There is no vaccine to prevent or cure the disease; however, Zika virus is not contagious and, therefore, cannot be transmitted through air, food, or water.

Your safety is our highest priority, and we want to emphasize that the best way to avoid Zika virus (and other mosquito-borne diseases), is to take appropriate precautions to avoid mosquito bites:

- Stay informed about the Zika virus
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, socks and shoes, and a hat*
- Use effective insect repellents (those containing DEET) and reapply regularly

***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.

For the latest information and news about Zika virus, please visit the website of the CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/zika/>

CURRENCY: Colombian Peso (COP). We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport in Bogotá upon arrival in Bogotá. 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. Also, for those with the appropriate chip in your mobile phone (iPhone, Samsung, etc.) or iPad, you should be able to connect via one of Colombia’s main telecommunications services such as CLARO or MOVISTAR (CLARO has more coverage in remote rural areas, such as this one). Sometimes this entails a trip to a local telecommunications service center, something best done in Bogotá before the trip begins. Those with Apple phones or iPads can obtain a chip from the Apple store in Bogotá. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia near populated areas, although in rural areas there might not be signal (this is usually a local issue). 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:

- McMullan, Miles, T. M. Donegan & A. Quevedo. 2014. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia.*, 2nd edition. Published by ProAves, Bogotá, Colombia. Ca. 360 pages. Paperback. Illustrates every species known to have occurred in Colombia, and includes a very small range map for each species. Although you will want this for the updated taxonomic treatment of species, and for the maps, you will find that even in this improved second edition many species still cannot be identified accurately because of the 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 2000 species in a book that is remarkably compact and portable.
- 2018. Mc Mullan, Miles. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia.* Rey Naranjo editors. The most recent field guide project to Colombia. Compared with the field guide mentioned above, this publication is heavier but more comprehensive. In both field guides, the illustrations lack details. The strong point of this newer field guide are the updated maps and the subspecies distribution in the maps. Nevertheless, bear in mind that the caption is so small that you’ll need your reading glasses to be able to read it.
- Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1986. Now a classic but still a good source for basic Colombia bird identification. Excellent source of information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now dated because of many new changes. For those that object to the size of this volume we suggest you simply remove the plates AND maps and have them bound separately so that you can carry this portion into the field. Please note that in an avifauna as complex and confusing as that in Colombia, accurate RANGE MAPS are essential too. At present this book is out of print and may be difficult to find.
- Restall, R., C. Rodner, and M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America.* Vol. 2, 2006. Plates and maps. Christopher Helm, London. 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.

A Birding Adventure in the Llanos of Colombia: Hato La Aurora, Page 11

Bird Apps:

- eBird. This is the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science project. Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. An app that has become a great field assistance for bird photography. You will need to download the package for each country before visiting it. As of January 2019, it is only available on the App Store for iOS devices.

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; topics include diversity of birds, hummingbird communities; mixed species flocks; antbirds and army ants; colorfulness, song structure in relation to environments, and much more.
- Kricher, John C. *The New Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Excellent broad-based resource on just about everything from plants and birds to insects, herps and mammals in the Neotropics.
- 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*. 2018. A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar travel book (see four others below) should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. Also see: Colombia Handbook; Rough Guide; Bradt Guide; Michelin Green Guide Colombia; and others. Colombia Handbook has the latest edition out August 2015; Bradt is current to November 2015; the highly rated Michelin guide is current to April 2011.

Recordings:

- Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde and A. M. Cuervo. *Guía sonora de las aves de los Andes Colombianos* (A Guide to the Bird Sounds of the Colombian Andes). CD discs 1-7. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. 2007. Good source for bird sound recordings for the Andes of Colombia (over 600 species). Songs are not introduced at beginning of each track (follow with booklet).

History:

- Rockefeller, J.D. 2015. *Pablo Escobar: Colombia's Greatest Hero or Villain? History of the Greatest Drug Lord*. 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.

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