



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

COLOMBIA: BOGOTÁ, EASTERN ANDES & THE MAGDALENA VALLEY

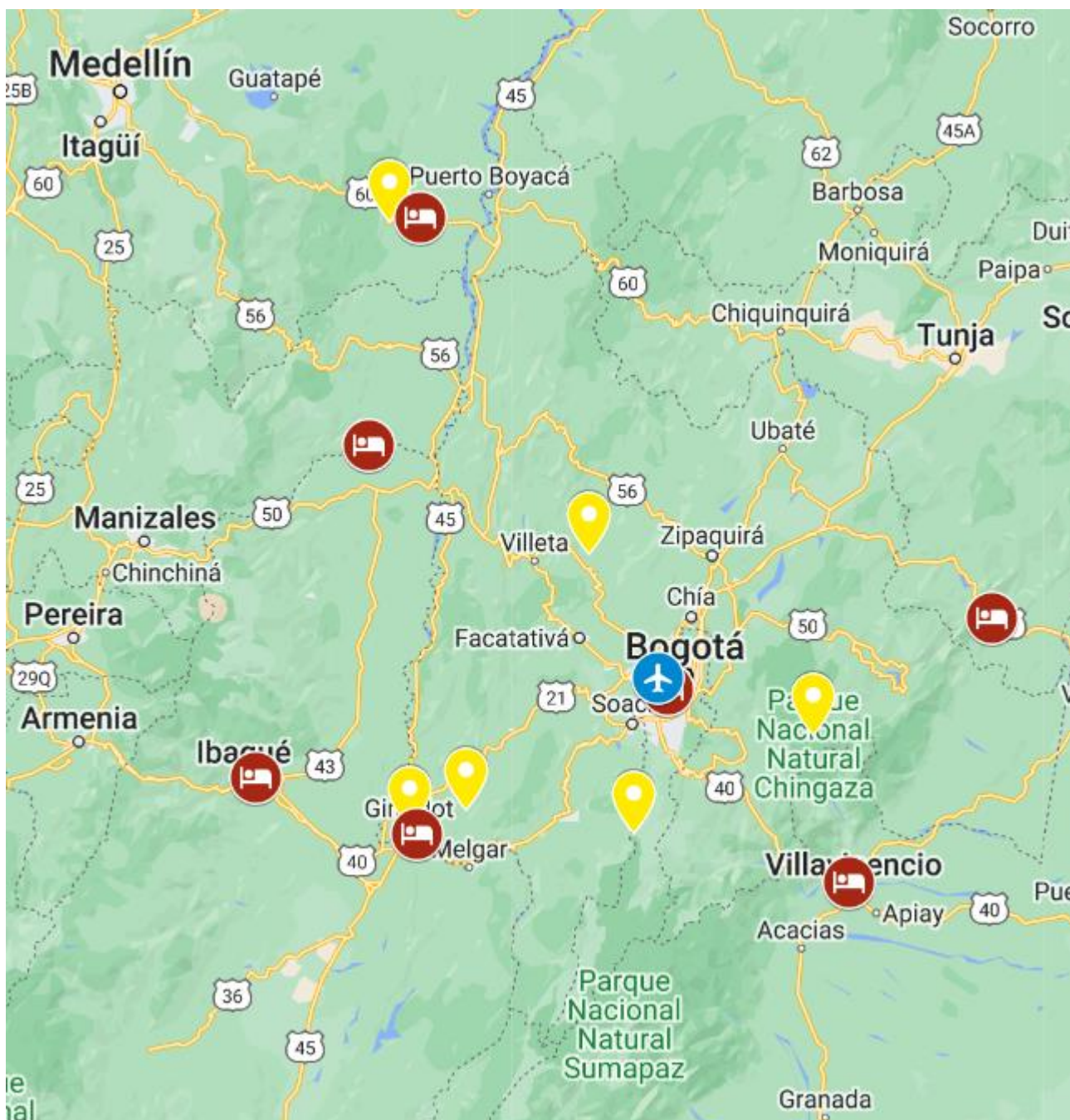
FEBRUARY 1–FEBRUARY 16, 2025

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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. Simply put, more species of birds have been recorded in Colombia than anywhere else in the world. Colombia now boasts the largest list, over 1,900 species at present. It is a remarkable testimony to the determination of a new generation of young and energetic Colombian students and ornithologists that this list, now a source of considerable national pride, continues to grow and observers continue to travel and work almost throughout the country. Since the publication of Hilty and Brown's landmark Guide to the Birds of Colombia in 1986, several species new to science have been described and more than one hundred and sixty species have been added to the country list, and the list continues to increase.

For years birders and naturalists have looked longingly at Colombia's ever-growing list of birds and of the enticing number of endemics –some 70 species – found only within its borders. And, there are many other near-endemics that barely extend beyond Colombia's borders. A number of reserves have now been established to protect these endemic species and our tour route takes maximum advantage of this, staying in key sites throughout the trip. We will begin near Bogotá with a visit to a lovely little valley where we are likely to see several manakins and a wonderful assortment of tanagers and other species, and a nearby hummingbird garden is sure to have a spectacular array of hummingbirds.

We'll follow this with two days in the high Andes and then descend to the bustling town of Villavicencio at the base of the Eastern Andes. From there we'll explore a variety of low and middle elevations on the eastern slope of the Andes before returning to Bogotá and then descending again, this time into the Magdalena River Valley where we will encounter an almost completely different avifauna that is likely to include numerous endemics such as the Tolima Blossomcrown, Yellow-headed Brush-Finch, Velvet-fronted Euphonia, White-mantled Barbet and Sooty Ant-Tanager. Finally, we'll set our sights on a lovely private forested reserve in the Magdalena Valley lowlands for our final days of birding.



About This Tour: There is one hike (Day 9) that involves a rather long and steep downhill walk that will take most of the morning. Also, there is another 30–45-minute walk (gentle uphill but steeper the last ten minutes) on Day 11 to reach our breakfast site and morning birding but it is worth it because the birding and the site is absolutely spectacular. There also are a few lengthy drives that involve some curvy mountain roads. Transport will be via air-conditioned bus, but we may use 4x4 vehicles or small pickup trucks on one or two occasions if road conditions warrant. Food is generally good, with large meals, and we have had relatively few health issues related to food and water. Tap water is perfectly safe in Bogotá, although elsewhere you must drink bottled water and you should use restraint when eating salads in small country restaurants. If you enjoy spicy foods, bring your own special hot sauce. Hotel breakfasts are usually light (typical in pre-

dawn hours), but we supplement them and provide snacks for mid-morning breaks. Birding will take place on roads or trails and these are generally good but walking sticks may be necessary on the downhill road at the Chicaque Reserve (Day 9), and possibly on one trail at the Río Claro reserve. We may reach an elevation of about 13,000 feet on two days. All other sites are lower. Security is fine in all of the sites that we visit. Finally, this trip focuses, to some extent, on Colombia's endemic species, but we'll take time to enjoy the commoner birds as well, and we will not overlook some of the more interesting flowering trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants as well. Some of the endemic birds are time-consuming to find and we probably won't find them all, but along the way we'll see a splendid cross-section of Colombia's beautiful, "green" Andes, where so many of these marvelous birds are found and where Colombia's world-renown coffee is grown.

Finally, we recommend that for study you use a previous year's tour field report (2023 or earlier trips will contain c. 400 species; the 2024 trip was unusually dry) and review the possibilities for each day on this itinerary. You also may wish to study a larger sample of possible species by reviewing birds on our daily checklist, which you will receive a few months before tour departures.

Note: Endemic and near-endemic species are noted in boldface in the daily itinerary below.

February 1, Day 1: Arrival in Bogotá. Participants may arrive any time today, but keep in mind that we will be departing for our first day afield quite early the following morning (by about 5:00 a.m.), so you may consider arriving a day early. Upon arrival you will be met and transferred to our hotel in Bogotá for the night. A bustling city of more than seven million, Bogotá boasts an outstanding array of pre-Colombian gold artifacts at its famous Gold Museum (closed Mondays). There's also a spectacular overview of the city from atop the tram that ascends to Cerro de Montserrat and visitors can usually add several interesting hummingbirds there as well. In the past few decades, the city has transformed its internal transportation system with sleek, articulating buses that enter and exit elevated stations and are capable of loading and unloading rapidly. And, in an effort to encourage people to get outside and exercise, on weekends the city closes many boulevards and streets to all motorized traffic, so it is not unusual to see thousands of people of all ages out walking, jogging, bicycling, skating and enjoying Bogotá's pleasant climate. The views of the imposing eastern range of the Andes will be spectacular from almost anywhere in the city but Bogotá, at an elevation of 8,600 feet, is high enough that visitors may want to rest and relax upon arrival. Nights are cool but not cold.

We will likely not visit Parque La Florida, a wetland near the international airport, nor Cerro de Montserrat in Bogota and for those arriving a day or two early, these are excellent nearby birding sites that offer the possibility of three or four endemic birds as well as other interesting species. We do, however, hope to see these endemics elsewhere on our tour route. For assistance with reservations for early arrivals at hotels and airport transfers, please contact the VENT office.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

February 2, Day 2: Laguna Tabacal and the Enchanted Garden (Hummingbird Garden). We'll drive westward across the plateau of the Sabana de Bogotá early this morning and descend to warmer mid-montane elevations above the Magdalena Valley. At our first site, by a small wooded lake, three near-endemic species are possible: the **Spectacled Parrotlet**, **Bar-crested Antshrike**, and **Scrub Tanager** as well as the endemic **Velvet-fronted Euphonia**. Other species of interest found here on previous tours include Red-billed Scythebill, Ash-browed Spinetail (an isolated population), Stripe-breasted Spinetail, White-bellied Antbird, Blue-lored Antbird, Rusty-breasted Antpitta, Cinereous Becard, Striolated (formerly Striped) Manakin (western subspecies), Golden-headed Manakin, White-bearded Manakin, Black-bellied Wren, Speckle-breasted Wren (this race sometimes regarded as a distinct endemic species, the **Colombian Wren**), Scrub Greenlet, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, **Gray-throated Warbler**, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Golden-hooded and Blue-necked tanager, and Crimson-backed Tanager. That's quite a stellar line-up and to search for these, we'll spend the morning here.

After lunch, we'll stop for an hour at the Enchanted Garden, where an amazing array of hummingbirds and yet another endemic, the **Indigo-capped Hummingbird**, is likely. We've seen quite a variety of hummers here in the past, and during the course of a year, more than 35 species of hummingbirds have been recorded at these feeders—some only briefly, others nearly year-round. Likely species during our visit also include Green Hermit, Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeleteer, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Andean Emerald, White-bellied Woodstar, and perhaps even Gorgeted Woodstar (irregularly present). We will return to Bogotá for our overnight.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

February 3, Day 3: Early Morning Start to the Eastern Andes Above Bogotá. Today we plan to visit the large and spectacular Chingaza National Park located in the mountains east of Bogotá. Elevations will range from about 8,600 feet at Bogotá to possibly as high as 12,000 feet, although we may not get above 11,000 feet if it's foggy. This beautiful park serves as a watershed and water source for the city of Bogotá and, as such, preserves a wonderful cross section of high-elevation humid forest and also distinctive páramo vegetation, which is found above treeline. Approaching the park, the road initially passes through several kilometers of montane forest and later enters open páramo dotted with *Espeletia* spp. (frailejón), a group of fuzzy-leaved Asteraceae (sunflower family) that are taller than the grass covering the region and having a distinctive appearance, with rosettes of leaves near the upper part of the plant. A sampling of birds we could encounter in the elfin forest/páramo ecotone or higher includes Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Bronze-tailed Thornbill, White-chinned Thistletail, Grass Wren,



Blue-throated Starfrontlet— Photo: S. Hilty

Glossy Flowerpiercer, **Rufous-browed Conebill** (near endemic) and Plain-colored Seedeater. In mossy stunted forest at lower elevations, possibilities include a few of the preceding species, as well as Tyrian Metaltail; Amethyst-throated Sunangel; Great Sapphirewing; Coppery-bellied Puffleg; Glowing Puffleg; Crimson-mantled Woodpecker; Pearled Treerunner; Montane and Strong-billed woodcreepers; **Pale-bellied (Mattoral) Tapaculo** (near endemic); Black-capped Tyrannulet; White-throated and White-banded tyrannulet; Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant; Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant; Black-collared Jay; Rufous Wren; Great Thrush (common); Superciliaried and Black-capped hemispingus; Hooded, Scarlet-bellied, Lachrymose, Buff-breasted, and Black-chested mountain-tanager (scarce); Blue-and-black Tanager; Blue-backed Conebill; Glossy, Masked and Black flowerpiercers; Slaty and Pale-naped brushfinch; Golden-faced Redstart; and Black-crested Warbler. We'll also plan a visit to another hummingbird feeding site, the Observatorio de Colibris, this one at about 10,000 ft elevation, with the possibility for such high elevation species as Green-tailed and Black-tailed trainbearer, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, Sword-

billed Hummingbird, Tyrian Metaltail and one or more pufflegs. We sometimes also find the endemic **Silvery-throated Spinetail** and a Black-backed Grosbeak here as well. Afternoons are often foggy in and near the national park and in any case, we should be back in Bogotá by late afternoon.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

February 4, Day 4: Sumapaz National Park. We plan to visit the high páramo once again, this time just for the morning, but Páramo Sumapaz is a beautiful site and not far from Bogotá. It is Colombia's largest páramo; in fact, it is the largest anywhere on the planet, and certainly one of the most picturesque. Páramo may be thought of as a tropical alpine grassland, a vegetation type found only above treeline and mainly in the northern Andes. It occurs

in Costa Rica (very limited), Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and to a limited extent also in northern Peru. It is open, often windy, cold, and usually quite wet. Not surprisingly, the plant life in true páramo is unusual (to say the least) and almost always dominated by several species of *Espeletia*, an Asteraceae of unusual rosette structure. Best of all, some of Colombia's most sought-after endemics and high-elevation species are relatively easy to find in this park, among them **Apolinar's Wren** and **Green-bearded Helmetcrest (but there is some seasonal movement of this latter species)**. Other possible species here include Andean Teal, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Noble Snipe, Great Sapphirewing, Shining Sunbeam, Bronze-tailed Thornbill, Tyrian Metaltail, Chestnut-winged Cinclodes, Andean-tit Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta (this race may soon be split as a separate species), Rufous-fronted Conebill, Pale-naped Brushfinch, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, and Plain-colored Seedeater. By mid-day we'll return back toward Bogotá, stop for lunch, and then drive eastward over a lower pass and begin the two-and-a-half-hour descent to the bustling city of Villavicencio at the eastern base of the Eastern Andes.

Night: Hotel del Llano, Villavicencio, department of Meta

February 5, Day 5: Foothills of the Eastern Andes; Bavaria Reserve. The Bavaria Reserve is little more than fifteen minutes from Villavicencio and at elevations ranging from about 500 to 800 m (1,650-2,650 feet). The Bavaria Reserve is steep and humid, and will require some uphill walking above what can be reached by our bus. We will spend the morning birding here and with some 240 species recorded for this area, there are plenty of possibilities. In fact, the site lies at the juxtaposition of three important avifaunas—Andean, Amazonian and llanos grasslands—making this a particularly exciting area to visit. A sample of birdlife here includes: Speckled Chachalaca, Gray-fronted Dove, Cobalt-winged Parakeet, White-bearded Hermit, Glittering-throated Emerald, Yellow-billed Nunbird, Gilded Barbet, Green-backed Trogon, Chestnut-eared Araçari, White-throated Toucan, Little Woodpecker, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Northern Slaty-Antshrike, Black-faced Antbird, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher, Short-crested Flycatcher, Golden-headed and White-bearded manakins, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Violaceous Jay, Purple and Green honeycreepers, Blue Dacnis, Black-faced Dacnis, Turquoise Tanager, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Golden-bellied (White-lored) Euphonia, and Oriole Blackbird. By late morning we will depart for birding and lunch at a nearby site known as Rancho Cumaná, which has an avifauna more typical of the “llanos.” A sample of species here could include Scaled Piculet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Cattle Tyrant, Plain-crowned Spinetail, and Carib Grackle.

After lunch we'll depart for the Santa María area, a somewhat higher elevation and cooler site to the north.

NIGHT: Hotel La Esmeralda, Santa María, department of Boyacá

February 6-7, Days 6-7: Vicinity of Santa María. Two relatively small private reserves are located near the little town of Santa María and both offer excellent birding opportunities. The area also is well known to butterfly aficionados for its high diversity of butterflies. We plan to divide our time between these two reserves, spending two days here. Among many bird possibilities are Black-and-white Owl, White-tipped Sicklebill, Gray-chinned Hermit, Blue-fronted Lancebill, White-chinned Jacamar, Chestnut-eared Araçari, Lined Antshrike, Northern Slaty-Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren, Crested Spinetail, Black-billed Treehunter, Black-and-white Becard, ventbird.com



Black-and-white Owl—Photo: S. Hilty

Dusky Antbird, White-crowned Manakin, Striolated (formerly Striped) Manakin, Speckled (formerly Spotted) Nightingale-Thrush, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Turquoise Tanager and Orange-bellied Euphonias. Several rarities also occur in these reserves, among them Spot-winged Parrotlet and Short-tailed Antthrush, although we'll need some luck to see any of them. Flowering trees here also attract a number of hummingbirds including Glittering-throated Emerald, Green-bellied Hummingbird and Golden-tailed Sapphire, and we often see Fasciated Tiger-Heron along the stream below the town.

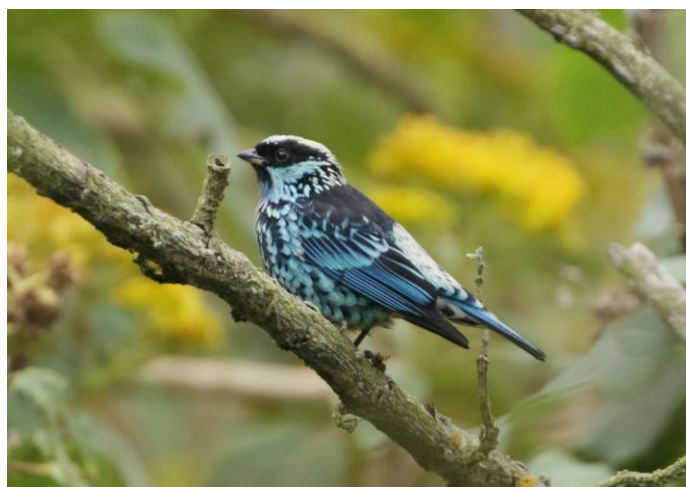
Our accommodations here are simple and there is (at present) no hot water but the little town of Santa María is charming, and we think the fantastic birding more than compensates for the rather simple meals and lodging.

NIGHTS: Hotel La Esmeralda, Santa María, department of Boyacá

February 8, Day 8: Morning Birding in Vicinity of Santa María, with Late Morning Departure for Bogotá.

If road conditions and traffic are normal, our afternoon drive should take about four and a half hours, allowing us to reach Bogotá early enough for a little rest.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá



Beryl-spangled Tanager—Photo: S. Hilty

February 9, Day 9: Early Morning Start to Reserva Chicaque, a Private Reserve Southwest of Bogotá; Afternoon Drive to Girardot.

Although the Bogotá region is heavily settled, a number of canyons and slopes with good forest can be found relatively nearby. Today we'll visit one of these, about an hour southwest of the city. This area boasts an exciting bird list but we must leave early to avoid heavy truck traffic in the south part of the city. A remarkable eleven species of colorful tanagers (all formerly in *Tangara* but now separated into several genera) occur here, although we would have to be quite lucky to see all of them in a single day. Hummingbird feeders adjacent to the parking lot where we begin our birding sometimes host Golden-bellied Starfrontlet, Collared Inca, Tourmaline Sunangel and Sparkling Violetear.

The humid montane forest in this reserve is quite steep, but a road that we will walk (see caution under "About This Tour") descends through this wonderful area and offers excellent access. The area is notable for mixed-species flocks that roam these slopes and, with luck, we may encounter several of them. A sampling of species in the upper elevation zone (about 7,900-8,200 feet) could include Montane Woodcreeper; Andean Solitaire; Masked, Bluish and Black flowerpiercers; Superciliaried and Black-eared hemispingus; Citrine Warbler; Blue-and-black Tanager; Beryl-spangled Tanager; Blue-capped Tanager; Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager; Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager; Grass-green Tanager; Russet-crowned Warbler; and Pale-naped and Slaty brushfinch. At somewhat lower elevation, flocks may contain more flycatchers and furnariids, among them Montane Foliage-gleaner, Streaked Xenops, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, Flavescent Flycatcher, Marble-faced and Variegated bristle-tyrant, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Black-capped Tanager, and Brown-capped Vireo. Close to the bottom of the slope (at about 7,200 feet) and at the lodge and clearing, still other species are possible, including Acorn Woodpecker, Flame-faced, Metallic-green, Golden, Saffron-crowned, and Bay-headed tanager. The rare **Black Inca (endemic)** is occasionally seen around the lodge if there are suitable flowers. During northern winter months this area hosts a variety of migrants, among them Summer Tanager, Blackburnian Warbler (very common), Tennessee Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler and Canada Warbler. Other interesting species of this region include Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant, Blackish Tapaculo, and Black-billed Peppershrike. Early this afternoon we'll depart the reserve and continue downward into the warmer and much drier floor of the Magdalena Valley.

NIGHT: GHL Hotel Club El Puente, Girardot, department of Cundinamarca

February 10, Day 10: Mana Dulce in the Magdalena Valley and the City of Ibagué on the East Slope of the Central Andes. Today we'll visit a site that is almost on the floor of the Magdalena Valley (near the city of Girardot) and at much lower elevation. It is also one of my favorite little reserves. Here it is much drier and a good deal warmer (hot by mid-day). Mana Dulce is a private eco-park with a variety of habitats including dry forest, riparian woodland, pastures and scrub, all of which can be accessed from roads. The region hosts a surprising variety of birds including the **endemic Apical Flycatcher** and **Velvet-fronted Euphonia**. Among others we have seen here are Crested Bobwhite; Blue Ground-Dove; Orange-chinned Parakeet; **Spectacled Parrotlet (near endemic)**; Yellow-crowned Parrot; White-vented Plumeleteer; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Whooping Motmot; Red-crowned, Lineated and Crimson-crested woodpeckers; Barred Puffbird; Black-crowned Antshrike; Jet Antbird; White-bellied Antbird; Lance-tailed Manakin; Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Black-bellied Wren; Tropical Gnatcatcher; Pale-breasted Thrush; Scrub Greenlet; Gray-headed and Crimson-backed tanager; White-eared Conebill; Streaked Saltator; Saffron Finch; Gray, Yellow-bellied, and Ruddy-breasted seedeaters; Tropical Parula; Rufous-capped Warbler; and Thick-billed Euphonia. Several North American breeding warblers are present here during northern winter months, including American Redstart, Yellow Warbler, and Northern Waterthrush. Our birding at Mana Dulce will be along a relatively quiet roadside. Early this afternoon we will continue on to the city of Ibagué for the night.

NIGHT: Hotel Sonesta Ibagué, department of Tolima

February 11, Day 11: The East Slope of the Central Andes Near Ibagué.

We plan to spend a full morning near Ibagué, where we have opportunities for several more endemics and exciting mountain birding. In fact, on some trips our highest day lists have been in this valley. Please note, however, that we will depart quite early this morning and there will be a 30–45-minute walk, most with a gradual uphill slope, to the Ukuku Rural Lodge (ca. 6,500 feet elevation) where we will have breakfast. The lodge setting is spectacular and has both hummingbird and fruit feeders, as well as lovely flower gardens. On clear mornings we also should have magnificent views of nearby Nevado del Tolima, a steep-sided and nearly symmetrical volcano whose glacier-topped summit is just over 17,000 feet high. Estimated to be only about 40,000 years old, it is one of the youngest volcanoes in the northern Andes and remains active, although there has not been a major eruption recently. **Endemic species** here include **Tolima Dove** (now at feeders), **Tolima Blossomcrown** (local), and **Yellow-headed Brush-Finch**. The mix of forest and settled areas and clearing in this area provide excellent habitat for a wide variety of passerine birds including Green and Sparkling violetear; Collared Inca; Andean Emerald; Speckled Hummingbird; Bronzy Inca; Booted Racquet-tail; **Bar-crested Antshrike (near endemic)**; Torrent Tyrannulet; Golden-faced Tyrannulet; Black Phoebe; Brown-capped Vireo; Green Jay; Blue-and-white Swallow; Black-billed Thrush; Three-striped Warbler; Fawn-breasted, Beryl-spangled, Golden, Bay-headed, Blue-necked, and Scrub tanagers; and White-naped Brushfinch (split from Yellow-throated Brushfinch).



Tolima Blossomcrown—Photo: S. Hilty

The mix of forest and settled areas and clearing in this area provide excellent habitat for a wide variety of passerine birds including Green and Sparkling violetear; Collared Inca; Andean Emerald; Speckled Hummingbird; Bronzy Inca; Booted Racquet-tail; **Bar-crested Antshrike (near endemic)**; Torrent Tyrannulet; Golden-faced Tyrannulet; Black Phoebe; Brown-capped Vireo; Green Jay; Blue-and-white Swallow; Black-billed Thrush; Three-striped Warbler; Fawn-breasted, Beryl-spangled, Golden, Bay-headed, Blue-necked, and Scrub tanagers; and White-naped Brushfinch (split from Yellow-throated Brushfinch).

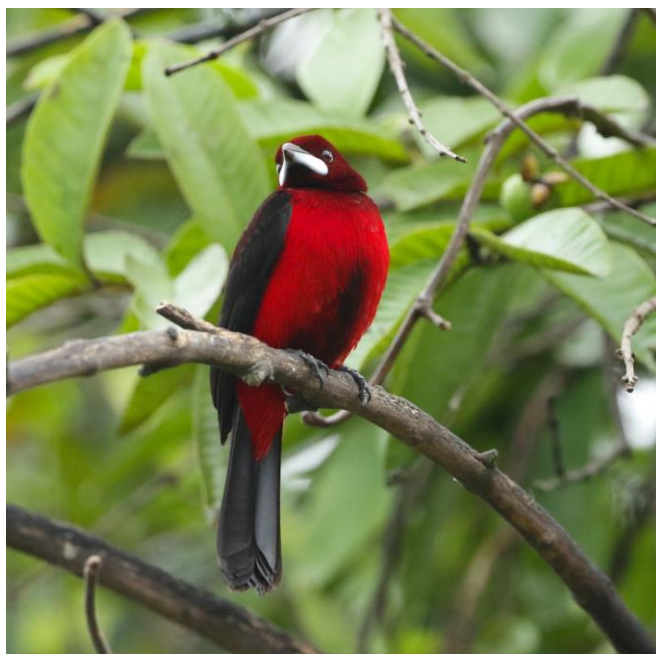
By mid-day we will depart for lunch and later for the small town of Victoria (near Mariquita), which lies about four hours further down the Magdalena Valley and at much lower elevation. It may be nearly nightfall before we arrive at Victoria.

NIGHT: Hotel Maria Paula, Victoria (near Mariquita), department of Tolima

February 12, Day 12: Early Morning Departure for Reserva Natural Bellavista; Afternoon Drive to the Reserva Natural Cañon del Río Claro. We will leave early for the short drive to a restaurant near the Bellavista Reserve. The reserve is small but provides habitat for several key birds including four endemics and others whose presence here might seem surprising. The endemics include **White-mantled Barbet** (first discovered new to science in the 1940s), **Beautiful Woodpecker**, **Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant**, and the lovely **Sooty Ant-Tanager**. As with many endemics, their cooperation is never guaranteed (particularly the woodpecker and the bristle-tyrant). Other species we might find include Cocoa and Streak-headed woodcreeper, Red-billed Scythebill, Streaked Flycatcher, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Striolated (formerly Striped) Manakin (western *antioquiae* form), White-bibbed Manakin (local), White-bearded Manakin, Golden-hooded Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Streaked and Buff-throated saltator, and Yellow-bellied Seedeater. By late morning we should be retracing our route back to the main north-south highway that parallels the Magdalena River. Then, once we begin driving north, we'll cross and then recross the Magdalena River before turning westward toward the Río Claro Valley. Along the way we will likely make a stop or two, planning to spend some time in an area of marshes and an old oxbow of the Magdalena River. Stops en route today could produce a variety of aquatic species, namely Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Great and Snowy egret, Little Blue Heron, Cocoi Heron, Bare-faced Ibis, and perhaps **Northern Screamer** (near endemic species shared only with northwestern Venezuela), Roadside Hawk, Pearl Kite, Yellow-headed Caracara, American Kestrel, Large-billed Tern, and Black Skimmer (on river sandbars). Ranchland and marshes could produce Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Common Tody-Flycatcher (almost any patch of trees), Vermilion Flycatcher, Cattle Tyrant, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Fork-tailed Flycatcher,

White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, White-winged Swallow, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Saffron Finch, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater.

NIGHT: Hotel Agualinda, Rio Claro



Crimson-back Tanager—Photo: S. Hilty

February 13-14, Days 13-14: Days at Reserva Natural Cañon del Río Claro and Nearby Sites. The centerpiece of this reserve is the beautiful Río Claro; At an elevation of ca. 2,000 feet, this reserve boasts a surprising number of endemics including **Beautiful Woodpecker**, **White-mantled Barbet**, and **Sooty-Ant-Tanager**, as well as **Antioquia Bristle-Tyrant**, **Colombian Chachalaca** (a recent split from Speckled Chachalaca) and **Magdalena Antbird** (a recent split from Dull-mantled Antbird). In addition, Oilbirds can be seen after dark at a nearby cave. Other species of particular interest include Saffron-headed Parrot (irregular in occurrence), Gray-cheeked Nunlet and Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, although none of these are common. Fasciated Tiger-Heron has, on occasion, been seen fishing from rocks in the river (Río Claro). Among a long list of other birds recorded here are Laughing Falcon; Roadside Hawk; Black Hawk-Eagle; Plumbeous Pigeon; White-tipped and Gray-chested dove; Pauraque; Crested Owl; Orange-chinned Parakeet; Blue-headed Parrot; White-collared, Band-rumped and Short-tailed swift; Rufous-breasted

Hermit; Long-billed Hermit; Stripe-throated Hermit (split from Little Hermit); Blue-chested hummingbird; Crowned Woodnymph; White-tailed Trogon; Rufous and Broad-billed motmot; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Collared Araçari; Channel-billed (formerly Citron-throated) Toucan; Yellow-throated Toucan; Cinnamon and Lineated woodpeckers; Plain Xenops; Wedge-billed, Cocoa and Streak-headed woodcreepers; Checker-throated Antwren; Chestnut-backed Antbird; Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet; Sepia-capped Flycatcher; Long-tailed Tyrant; Great-crested Flycatcher (northern winter); Dusky-capped and Panama flycatcher; Masked and Black-crowned tityra;

One-colored Becard; Purple-throated Fruitcrow; Black-bellied Wren (common); White-breasted Wood-Wren; Red-eyed Vireo; Gray-headed, White-shouldered, Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped (Lemon-rumped), and Plain-colored tanagers; Thick-billed and Fulvous-bellied euphonias; Yellow-tufted (Black-faced) Dacnis; Orange-billed Sparrow; and Chestnut-headed and Crested oropendolas. The list is long and we'll likely not see all of these species but there are sure to be some exciting birding moments in this lovely area. Most of our birding will be on a level road.

NIGHTS: Hotel Agualinda, Rio Claro

February 15-16, Days 15-16: Early Morning at Río Claro and/or With Birding Stop in Marshes Near Pto. Triunfo or Elsewhere Enroute Back to Bogotá. Our departure plans this morning will depend largely on what we have seen previously but we will likely be departing before mid-morning. The drive to Bogotá is about seven hours, so we will break up the drive with one or more short birding stops and lunch and plan to reach Bogotá late in the afternoon, arriving in plenty of time to meet international flights late tonight (and arriving at your home destination on February 16) or departing early tomorrow morning (February 16). Note that many international flights to the US depart quite late at night. Because of varied flight schedules, however, dinner will not be included tonight. Note: when we arrive late this afternoon in Bogotá, rooms will be booked for everyone at the Hilton Garden Inn Bogota Airport and these can be used as "Day Rooms" to repack for your flight, or for overnight use for those not departing until tomorrow morning.

NIGHT: Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport, Bogotá

TOUR LIMIT: This tour is limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Steve Hilty with the assistance of a local leader



Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and author of *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press, as well as the popular *Birds of Tropical America*, *A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, has described two species of birds new to science in Venezuela, and another, with a team of scientists, in Colombia. He also wrote the text and species accounts for the tanager family for the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. In a departure from ornithology, Steve also wrote *Dirt, Sweat, and Diesel: A Family Farm in the 21st Century*, a book focusing on a Midwestern farm family. However, he returned to birds with his recent (2021) *Birds of Colombia*, published by Lynx Editions of Barcelona, Spain. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has

worked at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, and as a broker with Merrill Lynch. He is currently a research associate in ornithology at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute. Since 1983 he has also worked for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, guiding trips throughout North and South America, and co-leading trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With more than four decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two daughters.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$7,295** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 15, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Bogota, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone 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 be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$400**. 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 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 (September 4, 2024) prior to the tour departure date.

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 you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance 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 its **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: <https://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/

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, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

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
ventbird.com

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.

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.

TRIP CLASSIFICATION: This may be regarded as a physically moderate trip with much of our birding along roads or easy trails but there are some longer walks that will require much more exertion. The birding walk on Day 9 will be somewhat more demanding and includes a lengthy (ca. 3-4 kilometers) steep downhill walk on a partially paved road with some of the track potentially slippery if wet. On Days 3 and 4 we may reach elevations of ca. 13,000 feet and everyone is advised to walk slowly and drink plenty of liquids on these two days. Foggy and damp and misty conditions often make these two areas quite chilly and warm clothing is advised. Lastly, on Day 11 we will have a 30-45 minute mostly gently rising trail (but steeper at end) to a lodge where we will have breakfast and spend our morning birding. On lowland walks, temperatures may be warm to hot, and humidity may vary from quite dry to humid, but birding at all of these sites will be mostly on road and/or trails that are nearly level, or with moderate gradients (except as noted above). In general, expect warm to hot conditions in the lowlands, and pleasant to cool temperatures at mid-elevations between about 4,000 and 7,000 feet.

BAGGAGE LIMITS: All tour participants are asked to limit their luggage to **a single bag of no more than forty-four pounds (20 kilos) and a single carry-on item such as a small backpack. Luggage space on our buses and 4x4s is limited and excessive luggage may have to be stored in passenger seats, thus limiting seating options in our vehicles. Therefore, we ask that you adhere to the luggage limits outlined above both for your comfort and for the comfort of others on the trip. Please pack in duffels with wheels if possible** as these will fit better in our buses and will be more useful in the lodges where we stay. There are six one-night stands on this trip and there are a few fairly long drives, and on most days we will be visiting new locations, so the pace of the trip will be brisk. Amenities at the lodges and hotels where we stay vary. At three hotels (Bogota; Giradot and Ibague) there should be porter service, but porters will not be available at other sites where we stay. **When packing, we urge you to give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring a few plastic bags large enough to protect your clothing and/or luggage in case of rain.**

LAUNDRY: Laundry services are available at the Hilton Garden Inn Bogotá Airport. But we are there the first three days and only for a single night later in the trip. Limited laundry service may be available at Santa María but you should inquire about this the first evening when we arrive. Note that both Girardot and Ibague are located in warm and dry regions where quick-dry travel clothes readily dry overnight. **Therefore, we recommend that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through the trip and/or bring items that can be washed and will dry quickly (i.e. COOLMAX® shirts, etc.) in your rooms.**

CLIMATE: Weather conditions can be variable due to the wide range of habitats and elevations visited. Lowland areas in the Magdalena Valley (e.g. Río Claro) can be hot and humid (temperatures in the high 80s to low 90s). Most other sites where we stay are in the mountains. Chingaza National Park and Sumapaz are at high elevations and likely to be cool, even cold (and often damp and foggy) and **will require at least a medium weight jacket and/or sweater plus one or two thermal layers underneath. Light weight gloves and a warm hat will be useful in the early morning hours.** Participants should dress with layers for changing conditions. Early morning temperatures can be quite chilly in the mountains but are likely to be warm mid-day. Although this is not a peak rainy period (rains are heaviest April, May, and September to early November), participants should expect some rain as the Colombian Andes, generally, receive fairly high rainfall.

NOTE ABOUT THE HOTELS: There are two sites on this tour where there is no hot water. The first one, La Esmeralda Hotel, is at Santa María (elevation 900 m, ca. 3,000 ft), a warm but not hot climate, and the water will feel cold at first but not unpleasant. The second site is at the Río Claro Reserve, a lowland region that is hot and humid and cold-water showers here are likely to feel refreshing.

CLOTHING: Lightweight field clothing is generally the rule. **Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear,** as it may frighten shy birds and animals and is likely to emphasize any movements that you make. At lower elevations we suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. 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. Also, please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials; noisy clothing is annoying to others and may frighten birds and animals. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. A long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket; warm sweater or down jacket (or light jacket and down vest combination in layers); warm hat; and gloves may be needed for the higher elevation sites which can be chilly (but not freezing) early in the morning. Bring a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a good sunscreen. **Footwear should include Gore-Tex water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots,** and perhaps a second pair of walking shoes and/or sneakers. **Rubber boots are not necessary on this trip although there may be some muddy or wet areas on trails and tall wet grass in some areas. If you prefer to wear rubber boots, then by all means bring them, although we believe that Gore-Tex hiking boots (ankle-height) should see you through this trip.** Shower thongs will be useful.

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS: 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 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. 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 also is very infrequent and is transmitted by day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

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).

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>.

INSECTS: Insects should not be a problem over most of our route (the highlands are particularly free of biting insects), but depending on rain, we could encounter some biting insects, as well as a few chiggers, in the lowland sites (generally below about 4,000 feet elevation). Wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and bring bottles or roll-on sticks of “Cutter” or similar insect repellents. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful. We urge that you not bring very strong-scented “natural” repellents, if possible, because these often have strong unpleasant odors that are inappropriate in group situations.

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>

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: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

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.

CURRENCY: Colombian Peso (COP). **We recommend that you exchange all or most of your dollars at the international airport in Bogotá upon arrival (e.g. adjacent to where you claim your luggage upon arrival). Most hotels will not be able to exchange dollars.** ATM machines are available in the airports and many other public sites where you can obtain local currency (and generally give the most favorable exchange rates).

DOCUMENTS: A valid passport is required for U.S. citizens, with one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. **A visa is not required; but you must fill out on-line and submit a CHECK-Migration form. This form must be completed during the 72-hour window of time prior to your flight departure (but not earlier). Also, keep a copy of this form on your mobile phone (or print a hard copy) to present to the airlines when you check-in. Additionally, you will be required to fill this form out again [on-line] within the same 72-hour window immediately prior to your departure from Colombia. The airlines will likely not ask to verify this when you depart Colombia, but this does serve as your official exit visa from Colombia (currently no one will stamp your passport on**

departure) Non-United States citizens should check with the airline they plan to fly, or online with the local Colombian consulate or embassy for further travel details.

EQUIPMENT: We ask that all participants please bring a **WIDE-mouth water bottle that can be easily refilled** (from a large 5- or 10-gallon tank in the bus). This reduces the plastic waste of using numerous small water bottles, which are also difficult to refill. Also, **a day pack is essential**. Other useful items include plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field, plenty of snacks such as trail mix or dried fruit, and any personal medications. A small, compact umbrella is highly recommended, and raingear (rain jacket or poncho) may be useful. Earplugs may come in handy at a couple of the hotels.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: There **will be** opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at virtually all locations where we stay (and in some cases, even on our bus), but 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.

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). Also, for those with the appropriate chip in your mobile phone (most iPhones, Samsungs, 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). Many international plans now also are available from service providers in the US. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia, although a few sites located in deep valleys may not be able to receive signals (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.

Field Guides: **recommended

****Hilty, S. L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia*.** 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 <https://www.lynxeds.com>, Buteo Books/ABA sales, and elsewhere.

Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986. **This was originally the “go-to” book on Colombian birds.** It is now a classic and still a good source for basic Colombia bird identification with information on voice, behavior, breeding, status and habitat, and range maps for almost all species. The plates are excellent but taxonomy is now dated because of many new changes. This book has now been superseded by several newer books (below). At present this book is out of print and may be difficult to find.

****Ayerbe-Quiñones, Fernando. 2019 (there is a newer edition). *Birds of Colombia*. Wildlife Conservation Society.** Small and compact book with fine, well-organized, computer-generated illustrations; a detailed map (with color-coded subsp. distributions) accompanies each species. No text but has comments pertaining to each genus. Lacks useful index (only Order, Family and genus but not English names). Small size and accurate illustrations make this book useful in field but paper cover (as well as all inside pages) printed on low-quality paper that is easily damaged by contact with moisture (always carry it inside a plastic bag for protection and do not let water reach this book). Now shown as available on Amazon. There is also a Spanish-language edition (2018). May be difficult to locate.

McMullan, Miles, T. et al.. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*., 3rd or 4th edition. Bogotá, Colombia: ProAves,.. Paperback. Illustrates all species known to have occurred in Colombia, and includes a small range map for each species. **Illustrations small, some not particularly accurate, and species in difficult groups may not always be identified accurately with this book.** Brief, text remarks accompany each species. An index and other improvements have been added in recent additions. The author has packed a lot of information in these later editions but the books have grown in size accordingly. Due to the quality of the illustrations, it should be regarded as a supplement for field identification (not a solution to all identifications). Also, may be difficult to locate.

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. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 (second edition). 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, a classic, and a book that ought to be read by anyone contemplating a visit to the American tropics.

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 travel book (see four others below) should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone.

Also see: Colombia Handbook; Rough Guide; Bradt Travel Guide; the highly rated Michelin Green Guide Colombia (and others along this line); most recent editions.

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).

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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