



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT COLOMBIA 5TH – 16TH NOVEMBER 2019

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TUESDAY 5TH NOVEMBER - *Departure*

Our Avianca flight departed London Heathrow at 2140 this evening bound for Bogota.

WEDNESDAY 6TH NOVEMBER – *Arrival to Barranquilla*

After arriving into Bogota around 4am local time, we made a smooth transit across the airport to our connecting flight on to Barranquilla, a further 90 minutes journey. This touched us down in the already sultry heat of the Caribbean around 7am, and being such a tiny airport, it did not take more than half an hour to disembark and be reunited with our luggage. Just outside the airport building, we saw our first common Neotropical birds – Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Ruddy Ground-Dove and Saffron Finch. Our driver met us here, and transferred us into downtown Barranquilla to our hotel, which very kindly had arranged for our room to be ready for us to have a shower and a couple of hours sleep to catch up! After lunch, we met our birding guide Edwin Campbell who had arrived from Panama City, and we set a rendezvous for 4pm once the heat had begun to die down a little and headed out for our first session.



Chestnut-winged Chachalaca – our first endemic!

A small botanical garden by the University in Barranquilla offered easy access to some dry scrubby habitat and produced a plethora of birds – top billing going to the endemic **Chestnut-winged Chachalaca**, which showed really well here with several individuals noted in one small area. Greyish Saltator, Yellow Oriole, Red-crowned Woodpecker, both Groove-billed and Smooth-billed Ani and Rufous-browed Peppershrike were also seen in the same location. In fact we remained in this one area until dark, picking up a female Red-billed Emerald at some flowering trees along the road, and another hummer which may have been Shining Green but which proved difficult in the fading light. As dusk fell, several Lesser Nighthawks began to emerge to hawk overhead and a superb Ringed Kingfisher flew in and laded on an overhead wire next to us. Tomorrow would be an early start so we headed back to the hotel for an early dinner and bed.

THURSDAY 7TH NOVEMBER – *Isla de Salamanca to Minca*

Needless to say we slept well after all the travelling yesterday, and it was an early start to get out of Barranquilla and into the dry forest area to the east around 'KM4'. This meant a 5.45am departure, and we were soon on site enjoying a coffee and pastry in the field and kicking off our first full days birding with a group of Pied Puffbirds close to the track. It was pretty birdy along the road, flanked on either side by scrub and small fields, opening up further down to wetlands. **Bicoloured** and **Stripe-backed Wrens** were both seen, the latter being common, and we soon added the desirable **Russet-throated Puffbird** which we ended up seeing many times and excellent views too.



Russet-throated Puffbird – a range restricted speciality

Other species included Cattle Tyrant, Common Ground Dove, Eared Dove, Scaled Dove, Greater Ani, **Spot-breasted Woodpecker**, Green and Amazon Kingfishers, **Straight-billed Woodcreeper** and Snail Kite. As the farmland gave way to marshy pools flanked by reeds, so all the regular herons and egrets put in an appearance, including Tricoloured and Cocoi Herons and Black-crowned Night-Heron. Bare-faced and Glossy Ibis fed side by side, and we also picked up **Pied Water-tyrant**, Striated Heron, Wattled Jacana, Black-necked Stilt, Solitary Sandpiper and American Purple Gallinule. It began to get very hot very quickly here, and by 9am it was already sweltering. As such, we didn't want to stay out in the open too long, and sought the limited shade offered by trackside acacias as we picked off Yellow Warbler, **Grey Kingbird**, Green Heron, **Limpkin** and Least Grebe. A good pool held a flock of Blue-winged Teals, and added a Spotted Sandpiper plus a small mixed group of Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. A large expanse of reedbeds with some open pools added Gull-billed Tern, and the very striking **Large-billed Tern** with its Sabine's Gull-like upperwing pattern. **Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture** was seen drifting across the area in typical fashion, and we had some more fantastic views of Snail Kite. After a top up on drinks and a sit down in the shade, we tried one more track and scored with excellent views of **Yellow-chinned Spinetail**, one of our targets for the area.

Moving on, we took the road across Isla de Salamanca, which opened out into saline pools and mangroves flanking the Caribbean Sea. We began to see Osprey, Brown Pelican and Magnificent Frigatebird along the roadside, and a **Savannah Hawk** was perched up in typical fashion on a

roadside cactus. We stopped to check the first of two good areas for shorebirds – the pools were thronged with every species on the wish list from back in the UK! Willet, Hudsonian Whimbrel, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover, Laughing Gull, American Royal Tern and an immature **Reddish Egret** were some of the highlights. Great Blue Heron and Wood Stork were also perched in the trees beyond. Further down at a second spot, police officers on a motorcycle weren't overly keen on our presence so we couldn't stop too long, but enough to get fantastic close range comparisons of Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers, and three fine **Stilt Sandpipers** to boot. We also picked out three large-billed **Wilson's Plovers** among the smaller Semipalmated.



Red-crowned Woodpecker – the commonest member of this family in Colombia

After a short stop in the edge of Santa Marta city to change some money, we continued for a further forty minutes up a winding mountain road into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. We arrived at our lodge in the town of Minca, and here a verandah with hummingbird feeders would entertain us for the first half of the afternoon! Four species were common here – White-necked Jacobin, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and White-vented Plumeleteer. An adult **King Vulture** over the valley was certainly a welcome bonus indeed. Around 4pm, we set off on foot for a short walk, picking up another barrage of new species – Boat-billed and Social Flycatchers, **Pale-fronted Thrush**, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Black-chested Jay and Buff-throated Saltator were just around the car park. Further on we enjoyed great views of Orange-chinned Parakeets, **Crested Oropendola** and Summer Tanager. Dusk was falling by the time we returned to the lodge, and it had been a full and exciting (if not a little hot!) first day.

FRIDAY 8TH NOVEMBER – Minca area

We rose early for a 5.30am start today, in order to head to a local spot where **Military Macaws** can be seen departing their overnight roost. Bumping up the track in our 4x4 vehicle, we were at the site within twenty minutes, and already we could hear and see our first Macaws gathering in the treetops on the ridge opposite having flown up from the valley below. Over the next half hour, numbers built gradually to at least 100 birds and we had fantastic views of them perched in the morning sunlight on the tops of the distant trees, before they all departed en masse and flew directly over our heads with a raucous chorus in the early morning light. Another key species we were hoping to connect with here was the **Black-backed Antshrike**, and we could hear two calling close to our watchpoint. A male eventually emerged into the open at the edge of a tangle of vines, and we had excellent views of this striking range-restricted species. The rest of the walk along the track for the most part was pretty quiet, but did begin to build gradually as the sun warmed the treetops. Red-eyed Vireo and American Redstart were both present, the former in good numbers, and we went on to add Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Blue-headed Parrot, Long-billed Gnatwren and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. A **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** was a highlight, close to the side of the trail and typically confiding as it perched in the open scanning for prey. After two hours in the field, we returned to the lodge for a welcome breakfast.



Military Macaws post-roost at dawn near Minca

Our second session of the morning saw us ascend the bumpy track up into the mountains – only really accessible with 4x4, though that wasn't stopping myriad motorcycles and heavy lorries from bouncing along it! Only a few minutes along the track, our driver knew a spot where **Black and White Owl** had been roosting recently, and sure enough we found the bird easily and had excellent views – what a beauty! A **Streak-headed Woodpecker** was also added here and a Whooping Motmot popped up beside the road, before we continued further on. Despite the disturbance, we enjoyed some superb birding here and got in amongst some of the Santa Marta range specialities. One

of these was the gorgeous **Scaled Piculet**, and we saw two or three roving among the vines and lianas. Good mixed feeding flocks contained Bay-headed and White-lined Tanagers, Rufous-breasted Wren, American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo, **Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant**, Rufous-capped Warbler and a brief **Rufous and White Wren**. Two more specialities then fell in quick succession – **Santa Marta Foliage-Gleaner** which was fortunately vocal close to the trail and allowed us to locate a confiding pair, and the stunning **Golden-winged Sparrow** which was furtive but eventually sat in the open for us. We ended the session with a flurry of flycatchers – Olive-sided, Dusky-capped and Willow Flycatchers all sharing the same tree. A **Gartered Trogon**, the only species of that family present here, added a further final bit of quality to the morning. It was then back to the lodge for another excellent lunch.



Steely-vented Hummingbird – common at the feeders at the lodge in Minca

After a bit of hammock time for a couple of hours during the heat of early afternoon, we ventured out again for the last hour or so of the day to the track we had visited in the morning. Unfortunately it was very quiet, and we struggled to find much at all. A **Cocoa Woodcreeper** was new, and we did see **Crimson-crested Woodpecker**, several more **Military Macaws** and a superb **Whooping Motmot** to end the day. Another early night was on the cards, ready to depart early and head higher into the Santa Marta mountains tomorrow.

SATURDAY 9TH NOVEMBER – *Minca to El Dorado Lodge*

Today we departed the lodge straight after an early breakfast and set off up the mountain track towards El Dorado. This was the same road we had birded part of yesterday, so we made our way up

higher before making our first birding stop. We enjoyed some really fantastic birding here, starting with a pair of **Keel-billed Toucans** which encouraged us to stop in one particular spot. Mixed flocks brought many American migrants, with Red-eyed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and American Redstart again common, but now also joined by numerous **Blackburnian Warblers** and **Black and White Warbler**. A variety of flycatchers included new species such as Tropical Pewee and Olive-striped Flycatcher, and we had further views of the superb **Golden-winged Sparrow** which eventually showed really well in the open for us. **Swallow Tanager** was a species we had really hoped to see, and so we were really pleased to get a brilliant scope view of one – quite a bird! Masked Tityra, Lineated Woodpecker, Collared Aracari and Barred Antshrike were other new species for us. Raptors had not been a big feature of the last couple of days, but maybe we had been saving ourselves up as a pair of large eagles materialised overhead and we managed to get some good scope views. Their fairly plain black plumage, with single broad white band through the tail but black tail base pointed to only one possibility – they were **Solitary Eagles**! A chance encounter indeed.



Black and White Owl and Keel-billed Toucan near Minca

As we drove higher the track became progressively worse, with sections of deep wet mud and others with huge ruts and big boulders to negotiate. Our Toyota Landcruiser did an admirable job, but it was a tough two hour ride in total (though we broke this up with frequent good birding stops). At one point we reached a section where the 'road' was being repaired, and we had to change to another vehicle on the other side of the works. It was on this final 5km or so that we had some of the best birds of the day – the hyper-elusive **Santa Marta Tapaculo**, which showed briefly but well by the roadside, and also the endemic Santa Marta subspecies of Grey-breasted Wood-wren known as **Bank's Wren**. **White-lored Warbler**, another endemic, also gave a brief view, but we hoped for better. Two stops by small settlements (one of which provided us with very good coffee!) added many **Blue-naped Chlorophonias** bustling round some fruit feeders, and new hummingbirds in the form of Green Violet-ear and Violet-crowned Woodnymph. **Rusty Flowerpiercer** was also found here, but not yet the hoped for Santa Marta Woodstar. Our driver did know a place for the **Santa Marta Blossomcrown** though, and we took a small side trail to a place where it perches regularly. Thankfully, it was in situ, and we had superb views! Soon we reached the amazing El Dorado Lodge, where lunch was waiting for us. What a tremendous place, making such a remote location hospitable for birders. We enjoyed a great lunch, and then headed down to our rooms, adding two endemics on

the way – **Sierra Nevada Brush-finch** and **White-tailed Starfrontlet**! This stunning hummingbird was visiting the feeders giving point blank views, and was maybe the most dazzling hummer we had seen so far. Also en route to our rooms were a pair of **Black-fronted Wood-Quails** grubbing around under the feeder! We couldn't wait to get stuck into birding this place!



The dazzling Blue-naped Chlorophonia at Santa Marta

After a bit of a break, we reconvened by the hummingbird feeders where **Sparkling Violet-ear** was seen in abundance, and a superb **Lazuline Sabrewing** put in an appearance. **Sickle-winged Guan** and **Brown Violet-ear** were also seen, before we headed off for a walk up the track beyond the lodge. A number of **Band-tailed Guans** were in the trees here, and easy to observe at close quarters. Once we got a bit further uphill, we had great views of a singing **Yellow-legged Thrush**, and then located a loose mixed flock high in the canopy that contained **Golden-bellied Grosbeak** and **Black-capped Tanager**. These were not easy to observe though, as we already had 'rainforest neck' from our endeavours earlier in the day! Thankfully further up the trail, we found several excellent species low down by the track – **Blue-capped Tanager** and a pair of **Slate-throated Whitestarts** followed by much better views of **White-lored Warbler**. A chunkier bird dashed in over our heads and froze – thankfully we managed to get on it though as it was an absolutely stunning **Golden-breasted Fruit-eater**, a very smart member of the cotinga family. We thought this would be the last highlight of the day, but then our driver Carlos, who had been checking a nearby spot, called up the track to us that he had found a **White-tipped Quetzal**! We dashed down just in time to scope this gorgeous male bird before it flew and landed high above our heads. It then headed off into deep forest calling – a very fortunate end to what had been a quite breathtaking day. After dinner, three **Night-Monkeys** and a **Kinkajou** visited the fruit feeder outside the lodge, and a **Santa Marta Screech Owl** was calling nearby.

SUNDAY 10TH NOVEMBER – *San Lorenzo ridge*

It was a big day today, as we had an epic trip planned up the mountain beyond the lodge onto the San Lorenzo ridge, which gives access to most of the Santa Marta endemics. It required a 4am start, in order to arrive at the top of the ridge in time for sunrise. The route up is somewhat tortuous, and involves about 90 minutes of bouncing along the roughest track imaginable in a Toyota Landcruiser! We arrived shaken and stirred, but excited for the birding ahead as the light was just breaking and we could already see and hear birds whizzing around in the half light. Dawn breaks very fast here in the tropics, and by the time we had set our scopes up we could see well enough to bird, and immediately heard the screech of parrots – it was a flock of endemic **Santa Marta Parakeets**! This is one of the hardest of the endemics to see, often only encountered in flight. We were extremely lucky that the flock settled in a eucalyptus right beside us, and gave us half an hour of good views. Other birds were now waking up – **Santa Marta Warbler**, **Santa Marta Brush-finch** and **Sparkling Violetear** being the first birds of the day. Flocks of **Scaly-naped Parrots** were flying around, but unlike the parakeets, they did not settle. Taking a walk further along the ridge through the paramo type habitat, we found another endemic subspecies of the Grey-breasted Wood-wren, the so called ...Wren. A **Brown-rumped Tapaculo** tantalised us from beside the track with its loud call, but remained unseen, and a **Streak-capped Spinetail** gave some brief good views. This is one of two endemic spinetails on the ridge, and we soon saw the other too – **Rusty-headed Spinetail**. This one was much harder, and always remained well hidden among dense bamboo thickets. **Tyrian Metaltail** was the commonest hummingbird at this elevation, and we had good views of both males and females. Back at the truck, we enjoyed coffee and breakfast with the warmth of the rising sun on our backs, and soaked up the spectacular view to the highest of Colombia's peaks in the distance.



Santa Marta Mountain-tanager – one of several endemics to be had here

We then walked back along the road we had driven up and birded our way down with the truck catching us up at intervals to provide water, snacks and the occasional lift. The birding was good, with some lively mixed flocks adding **Santa Marta Mountain-tanager**, **Yellow-crowned Whitestart** (another endemic) and more views of **Santa Marta Warbler**. Blackburnian and Black and White Warblers were among the same flocks, and **Santa Marta Brush-finch** was common. With some careful sifting through one big flock, we had great views of **Montane Woodcreeper**, further **Streak-capped Spinetails**, **Blue-capped Tanager**, **Black-capped Tanager** and another **Golden-breasted Fruiteater**. Flycatchers featured too, with close views of **White-throated Tyrannulet**, and a delightful **Black-throated Tody-tyrant**. We heard the endemic **Santa Marta Bush-tyrant**, but sadly it always remained down the slope and we couldn't get at it. **Brown-rumped Tapaculo** called again though, and this time was glimpsed too! Towards the end of the walk, we found a **Yellow-bellied Chat-tyrant** – a skulking little flycatcher which almost eluded a decent view, but we persevered and eventually had it in the scope. Santa Marta Antpitta remained elusive for us today unfortunately – we tried for it a few times, but didn't hear one at any point along the walk. One for next time! Back at the lodge, we added a **Lined Quail-dove** at the compost heap, a superb new bird to round off a very, very long morning! Lunch was typically superb, and after a break to relax for a while we opted to head out again for the last part of the afternoon.

It was almost 4pm by the time we ventured out again, and headed down the hill to try for the missing Antpittas! As has often been the case on our afternoon sessions, we saw relatively little, but we did pick up **Montane Foliage-gleaner**, **White-lored Warbler**, **Bangs's Wren**, and a **Sickle-winged Guan** crossing the trail. We did, however, manage to hear at least three **Rusty-breasted Antpittas** – at one point we seemed to be surrounded by them! Alas, despite getting really close to one of them, we couldn't manage a sighting in the fading light. After dinner, the **Night-Monkeys** were around again, and the **Santa Marta Screech-Owl** was calling right by our rooms!

MONDAY 11TH NOVEMBER – *Santa Marta mountains to Taironaka*

We awoke to the haunting calls of a **Collared Forest-falcon** in the distance, and a **Bright-rumped Atilla** in the lodge grounds. There had been a powercut overnight (regular here!) so breakfast was by torchlight but still excellent! We departed the lodge around 0630, saying farewell to the **Band-tailed Guans** in the garden beforehand. The plan was to bird our way downhill towards Minca, trying for some species that we were missing – starting with that pesky antpitta from last night! The bird was reluctant to respond to playback at this time of day, but instead we had a **Yellow-billed Toucanet** (formerly of the Groove-billed group) and further good views of **Montane Foliage-gleaner** and **White-lored Warbler**. Trying a different spot for the **Rusty-breasted Antpitta**, we had more luck, with one coming in very close and being glimpsed briefly in the dense, dark understorey – not easy! A nice mixed flock here provided very good views of **Black-capped Tanager**, and a new bird in the form of **Golden-crowned Flycatcher**. Another highlight of the morning was another try at the **Santa Marta Blossomcrown**, which showed superbly in the same place as a few days ago.

Continuing with a hummingbird theme, the next stop was at the orange blossoms around the small settlement on the way down the mountain where we hoped to catch up with a missing endemic – the **Santa Marta Woodstar**. After a short wait, a stunning male appeared – there one minute, right before our eyes and seemingly settled at the blossoms, then as if at a given signal, off like an Exocet missile into the depths of the forest. An absolutely dazzling little hummer, and perhaps our favourite so far. Another really good one to get here was a **Coppery Emerald** – yet another rare and range restricted near-endemic. After this we continued downhill to the spot where the road was being fixed. The driver dropped us off, and took an hour long detour to reach the other side of the works, while we went on foot birding along the way. This was a really good area, with fantastic vistas across small coffee plantations to the forested hills beyond. We picked up **Lesser Elaenia**, **Gartered Trogon**, **Broad-winged Hawk**, **Buff-breasted Wren** and another **Lined Quail-Dove**, but best of all was an adult **Great Black Hawk** which circled up over the valley and then drifted over our heads. A key final target bird here was **Santa Marta Antbird**, but despite hearing it, we couldn't find one close enough

to the road to have a chance. **Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush** was similarly elusive and remained heard only. Just as we had almost given up Edwin tried one last spot for us on the way down for the Antbird and we got lucky – fantastic views of a pair in bamboo right beside the road and perhaps one of the best of all the Santa Marta endemics we had seen.



Golden-breasted Fruit-eater – a nice bonus at El Dorado

We wound our way downhill to Minca, enjoying a great lunch at the place we had stayed a few days ago. Then it was down to Santa Marta and onto the highway (a proper road!) for about a two hour trip along the Caribbean coast to Taironaka. Here we were into a different habitat again – humid lowland forest, and it was sultry to say the least! By the river, we found **Yellow-rumped Cacique**, **Northern Waterthrush** and **Streaked Flycatcher**, while our luggage went onto a boat and off up the river to the lodge. We opted to go on foot on the hiking trail, to see what we could find along the way. The walk took around an hour with birding, and we did really well – **Collared Aracari**, **Orange-crowned Oriole**, **Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet**, **Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher** and **White-necked Puffbird** being the highlights. A dazzling **Prothonotary Warbler** was our first of the trip, and then continuing our good fortune with raptors, we found a cracking adult **Black Hawk-eagle** perched in a tree on the far side of the river. We had a few decent views of it as it moved along from tree to tree before disappearing. We arrived at the lodge around 5pm, and it was clear this place was going to be alive with birds in the morning – an early night was on the cards! Our last bird of the day was a superb **Common Parakeet** by the restaurant during dinner, sat on the lawn next to our table!

TUESDAY 12TH NOVEMBER – *The dry Caribbean lowlands*

The next section of our trip was a little more condensed than our planned tour would be, as we had to fit our scouting trip into a certain number of days! This meant we decided to depart the lodge at dawn rather than bird here this morning (we had done well yesterday evening in any case) and so we took a boat at 6am back to the main road where our driver was waiting. We saw a few birds along the Rio Don Diego, including two Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and **Keel-billed Toucan**. Best was a small group of **Venezuelan Red Howler Monkeys** – we had heard them in several locations, but this was our first sighting. Hitting the road, we had a 90 minute drive to Camarones and the dry forest area on the Caribbean coast. This would bring a whole barrage of new birds for us, but first we scoped the saline lagoons by the beach where hundreds of Snowy and Great Egrets, Brown Pelicans, **Roseate Spoonbills** and **White Ibis** were feeding. We saw both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Magnificent Frigatebird, Osprey and large numbers of Laughing Gulls too, particularly along the beach. Here we also notched a couple of the impossibly colourful **Scarlet Ibis**, American Royal and Yellow-billed Terns and in the acacia scrub by the restaurant where we would have breakfast, a **Slender-billed Inezia** appeared. After a good breakfast, we drove a short distance and met with a local guide who would spend the day in the park with us. His intimate knowledge of the area and its birds proved invaluable for our success here today.



Lesser Yellowlegs in Flamenco National Park

Wandering to a small watering hole among the acacia scrub, we began to see good birds right away, with a **Pearly-vented Tody-tyrant** appearing at close range, quickly followed by another **Slender-billed Inezia** and **Pied Water-tyrant**. The guide began to play the call of the **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl**, a surefire trick in this habitat to draw in all manner of small birds – we were instantly bombarded with an incredible array which included **White-whiskered Spinetail**, **Pale-legged Hornero**, **Buffy Hummingbird**, **Blackpoll Warbler**, **Black-crested Antshrike** and **Orinoco Saltator**. This was quite a tree full of top drawer specialities! Around the pool, a **Black-crowned Night Heron** was sitting in the open, and we saw **Solitary Sandpiper**, **Black-necked Stilt** and **Blue-winged Teal**. **Grey Kingbird** replaced **Tropical** in this habitat and was really common, and both **Scaled Dove** and **Greyish Saltator** were frequent. Moving carefully around the edge of the pool to see what we could find, we stopped in our tracks as a flash of bright red caught our eye – **Vermillion Cardinal**! This was one of our top target birds for this region, and we spent the next half hour getting amazing close range views of a male feeding a fledged youngster – absolutely superb! Two **Crested Bobwhite** then appeared and ran behind the cardinals and a female **Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird** danced at some flowering acacia – this really was quite a place!



Male and juvenile Vermillion Cardinal 'showing well' at Flamencos

Continuing through the scrub to a small indigenous settlement, we had further excellent views of **White-whiskered Spinetail** and **Pale-legged Hornero**, while **Northern Scrub Flycatcher**, **Brown-crested Flycatcher**, **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**, **Black-faced Grassquit** and the stunning **Vermillion Flycatcher** were around the village. **Russet-throated Puffbird** was a species we had not seen since 'KM4' on the first day, and gave some really close views as it shared the shade beneath the trees with us and a **Blackpoll Warbler**! As we began to make our way back out to the main road, our final key target was met as we had excellent views of a **Chestnut Piculet** – what a gorgeous little bird!

After a short stop in the town to replenish water supplies, we headed back towards the coast where we had stopped for breakfast. **Yellow-hooded Blackbird** was noted on the way, and the lagoons behind the beach now held hundreds of Black Skimmers and Royal Terns. Among this throng we saw Common and Sandwich Terns, many Laughing Gulls, Brown Pelicans and Gull-billed Tern. Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers were also on show and **Green-rumped Parrotlet** was a lovely addition in the surrounding trees. We had lunch back at the same restaurant, and then headed back into the scrub for one last go.



Black-crested Antshrike – one of many dazzling birds seen in the dry scrub at Flamencos

Earlier in the day, we had heard the **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl** calling in response to our playback, but we had not pursued it. We returned to the area and tried for it again and it duly responded, bringing with it all manner of small birds. Not only did we have great views of the owl, but we also saw many of the species again from the morning including **White-fringed Antwren**, a stunning male of the **Black-crested Antshrike**, several Tropical Gnatcatchers, another **Vermillion Cardinal** and Tropical Mockingbird. A nearby small pond attracted a dazzling male **Vermillion Flycatcher**, another **Orinoco Saltator** and further views of Blackpoll Warbler and **Buffy Hummingbird**. From here it was back to the van, and half an hours drive on to Riohacha where we would be staying tonight. A breathless, and hot, but exhilarating days birding.

WEDNESDAY 13TH NOVEMBER – *Riohacha to Perija.*

Today was our longest day of travelling. Because this was a scouting trip, we wanted to make sure we squeezed in a visit to Perija, another superb area for endemics and range-restricted species served by

a ProAves lodge. Originally we were meant to sleep tonight in Valledupar and head on to Perija the next day for a quick one night stop, but we really wanted to give ourselves more time there and make it a two night stop. That meant we had to get all the way there today, and that meant around an 8 hour drive. We departed around 0715, and made a short stop in the dry forest habitat similar to where we had birded yesterday. This was productive, as whistling the owl call brought a wide range of species into one group of bushes – Yellow and Prothonotary Warblers, **Black-crested Antshrike**, **Slender-billed Inezia**, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Tropical Gnatcatcher, **Russet-throated Puffbird** and Tropical Mockingbird all appeared from nowhere. These were supplemented by two new trip birds – **Pileated Finch** and **Glaucous Tanager**, which we had missed yesterday. **Bare-eyed Pigeon** flying over was also an addition.



Prothonotary Warbler – one of several gorgeous New World warblers on their wintering grounds

We ploughed on, negotiating horribly pot-holed roads – it was not a relaxing journey by any stretch! Before lunch, another short dry forest stop produced another **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**, **Pale-legged Hornero**, Grey Kingbird, Social Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Ruddy Ground-dove and Boat-billed Flycatcher. Another 90 minutes and we arrived at our lunch spot – a shady location with Carib Grackle, Blue-grey Tanager and **Bicoloured Wren** in the garden. Here we swapped from minibus to 4x4, and made the final two hour climb up to Perija. The road was being upgraded here, so we had to negotiate works on the first section, but hopefully it should be mainly a concrete road by the time we return in 2021! Actually a stop at the roadworks was fortuitous, as we found the endemic **Perija Brush-finch** by the side of the road. Further on we saw **Green Jay** and **Chestnut-bellied Thrush**, before we made a birding stop proper in the cloud forest. Here an entertaining mixed flock held **Beryl-spangled Tanager**, Slate-throated Whitestart, **Common Chlorospingus**, Swainson's Thrush, Black and White Warbler, Blue-capped Tanager and Yellow-

throated Brush-finch. Two Band-tailed Guans also showed well and Great Thrush was seen well. For the first time on the whole trip, it began to rain heavily, and the last part of the ascent to the lodge was in pretty grim weather. On arrival, we had about half an hour of birdable light before dusk – long enough to add Andean Guan, Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Mountain Velvetbreast, Lacrimose Mountain-tanager, Rufous-collared Sparrow and Slaty Brush-finch in the garden!! Perija is a small lodge, and pretty basic, but as usual here in Colombia we found organisation to be good, everything to be clean and the food good. There was even hot water in the shower and electricity!

THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER – Perija

We awoke to a beautiful clear and crisp morning, with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains. A Band-winged Nightjar was around the garden in the half light, and a Buff-throated Mountain-Tanager appeared by the feeders as dawn broke. We breakfasted early, then set off by 4x4 up the hillside behind the lodge, to the paramo at around 3100m elevation. The journey up took around 45 minutes, but with some excellent birds on the way including a perched Red-crested Cotinga catching the early morning sun, and a pair of Southern Emerald Toucanets right beside the track. A Streak-throated Bush-tyrant perched up briefly, and we saw our first Black Flowerpiercer – a species which would be common for the remainder of the morning. Reaching the top of the ridge, we had three specialities to find, and the first of them – Streak-backed Canastero – was calling close by. We soon had good scope views of two birds quite briefly (they look a bit like a Grasshopper Warbler!) before they returned to cover and fell silent. Next up was the endemic Perija Thistletail, and on this we were extremely lucky – one was found foraging close to the path and gave some point blank views in the open, quite uncharacteristically. Back at the vehicle, we waited by two large pines with the sun now warming us up nicely, in the hope of seeing Perija Metaltail. The hummingbird obliged, first visiting flowering shrubs beside the track and then choosing an open perch in the pines. Overhead, a large raptor with distinctive broad-winged but short-tailed silhouette appeared – a subadult Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. Continuing down the slope, we ran into a nice mixed group with White-throated Tyrannulet and a delightful Rufous-breasted Chat-tyrant. Rufous Spinetail gave some tantalising views, as is typical for this group, but an absolutely stunning Crimson-mantled Woodpecker stole the show, feeding among the mossy branches of one of the few larger trees.



Perija Spinetail – a difficult skulker which is often difficult to see this well!

Our tactic for the remainder of the morning was to walk downhill with the car following us for period lifts. We saw Slate-throated Whitestart, **Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager**, **Red-crested Cotinga** and a delightful **Black-crested Warbler**. We then tried a spot for Rufous Antpitta, but got no response. A Perija Tapaculo called from the dense bamboo, but remained unseen. Just as we were getting a bit frustrated with these difficult ones, we looked up and saw a very large bird coming straight towards us. Its massive size, broad wings and white neck ruff became clear as it drifted closer, passing right overhead – **Andean Condor!!!** This was a species we knew we had a very slim chance with, but to see one so close, albeit briefly, was a trip highlight for sure. As if our luck changed in that instant, we then located a **Rufous Antpitta** lower down the track, and saw it really well perched in a little window in amongst the dense, dark tangles of bamboo. Behind us, the **Perija Tapaculo** began calling and also popped into the open for us a few times, giving our best tapaculo views so far this trip – a mad half hour! The remainder of the walk was tame by comparison, but we had another view of **Rufous Spinetail** and consolidated many of the species seen earlier in the morning with more views. We returned to the lodge, and its busy hummingbird feeders, just before lunch.



Perija Metaltail – good views of a female at the top of the ridge

In the afternoon, we set out around 2pm to venture downhill – but the heavens absolutely opened on us and for the first time on the trip we got very wet! We had to return to the lodge, put on dry gear and have a hot drink and wait for the weather to clear. Eventually it did brighten and we drove downhill somehow, stopping when we heard a **Black-mandibled Toucan** calling in the distance. We didn't see the toucan, but spotted a **White-tailed Kite** perched on a dead tree at the far side of the clearing. A little sun was catching the canopy of the adjacent forest edge, and here we found a mixed

flock feeding including both Beryl-spangled and the gorgeous **Saffron-headed Tanager**. **Smoky-coloured Pewee** and **Cinnamon Flycatcher** were also present, along with Blackburnian and Black and White Warblers. This was pretty much our last action of the day, and we returned to the lodge as dusk fell. The **Band-winged Nightjar** from the morning was present in the same spot again and showed well, and a **Collared Forest-falcon** was calling incessantly before darkness fully descended and other nocturnal species came to life. First was a distant **White-throated Screech-owl**, which we headed off in pursuit of. We heard the bird a few times, but it didn't come into playback. We also heard **Rufous-banded Owl** quite close by, but again weren't lucky with a sighting.

FRIDAY 15TH NOVEMBER – *Return to Bogota*

While predominantly a travelling day, we actually managed to squeeze in a bit of birding on our way down from Perija lodge, and saw some superb final additions to the trip list! The first of these was a splendid pair of **Golden-headed Quetzals**, which we found at a spot our driver knew was a good location for them. We had superb scope views of both birds at quite close range, a real treat indeed. Further downhill, we found a really excellent mixed feeding flock, with **Groove-billed Toucanet** (red-billed race), **Blue-capped Tanager**, **Common Chlorospingus**, **Mountain Elaenia**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker** and two gaudy new tanagers – **Black-headed Tanager** and **Fulvous-headed Tanager**. A flock of gorgeous **Lilac-tailed Parrotlets** were our final new birds, and a great way to sign off the trip. We then had about another hour to drive to reach the city of Valledupar, from where we took an internal flight (around one hour) back to Bogota for our onward connection later that evening back to London.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Black-bellied Whistling Duck
2. Blue-winged Teal
3. Sickie-winged Guan
4. Band-tailed Guan
5. Andean Guan
6. Chestnut-winged Chachalaca (E)
7. Crested Bobwhite *cristatus*
8. Black-fronted Wood-Quail *atrifrons*
9. Least Grebe
10. Scaled Pigeon
11. Bare-eyed Pigeon
12. Band-tailed Pigeon
13. White-tipped Dove
14. Lined Quail-dove *infusca*
15. Eared Dove *stenora*
16. Common Ground-dove *albivitta*
17. Ruddy Ground-dove *rufipennis*
18. Scaled Dove *ridgwayi*
19. Greater Ani
20. Smooth-billed Ani
21. Groove-billed Ani
22. Dwarf Cuckoo
23. Squirrel Cuckoo *mehleri*
24. Lesser Nighthawk
25. Common Parakeet *gilvus*
26. Band-winged Nightjar

27. Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift
28. White-necked Jacobin
29. Long-billed Hermit *susurrus*
30. Brown Violet-ear
31. Green Violet-ear
32. Sparkling Violet-ear
33. Ruby-topaz Hummingbird
34. Black-throated Mango
35. Longuemare's Sunangel *violiceps*
36. Santa Marta Blossomcrown (E)
37. Tyrian Metaltail
38. Perija Metaltail
39. White-tailed Starfrontlet (E)
40. Mountain Velvetbreast
41. Santa Marta Woodstar (E)
42. Red-billed Emerald
43. Coppery Emerald
44. Lazuline Sabrewing
45. White-vented Plumeleteer
46. Crowned Woodnymph
47. Buffy Hummingbird
48. Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
49. Steely-vented Hummingbird *warscewiczii*
50. Limpkin
51. White-throated Crake (H)
52. American Purple Gallinule
53. Common Gallinule
54. Southern Lapwing
55. Grey Plover
56. Semipalmated Plover
57. Wilson's Plover
58. Black-necked Stilt
59. Whimbrel *hudsonicus*
60. Ruddy Turnstone
61. Stilt Sandpiper
62. Sanderling
63. Least Sandpiper
64. Semipalmated Sandpiper
65. Western Sandpiper
66. Short-billed Dowitcher
67. Spotted Sandpiper
68. Solitary Sandpiper
69. Greater Yellowlegs
70. Willet
71. Lesser Yellowlegs
72. Wattled Jacana
73. Laughing Gull
74. Yellow-billed Tern
75. Large-billed Tern
76. Gull-billed Tern

77. Caspian Tern
78. Common Tern
79. Sandwich Tern
80. American Royal Tern
81. Black Skimmer
82. Wood Stork
83. Magnificent Frigatebird
84. Neotropic Cormorant
85. Brown Pelican
86. Black-crowned Night-heron
87. Green Heron
88. Striated Heron
89. Cattle Egret
90. Great Egret
91. Great Blue Heron
92. Cocoi Heron
93. Tricoloured Heron
94. Reddish Egret
95. Snowy Egret
96. Little Blue Heron
97. White Ibis
98. Scarlet Ibis
99. Glossy Ibis
100. Bare-faced Ibis
101. Roseate Spoonbill
102. Turkey Vulture
103. Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture *burrovianus*
104. Black Vulture
105. King Vulture
106. Andean Condor
107. White-tailed Kite
108. Osprey
109. Black Hawk-eagle
110. Snail Kite
111. Savannah Hawk
112. Great Black Hawk
113. Black-chested Buzzard-eagle
114. Solitary Eagle
115. Roadside Hawk
116. Short-tailed Hawk
117. Broad-winged Hawk
118. Zone-tailed Hawk
119. Santa Marta Screech Owl (H, E)
120. White-throated Screech-owl (H)
121. Rufous-banded Owl (H)
122. Spectacled Owl (H)
123. Black and White Owl
124. Ferruginous Pygmy-owl *medianum*
125. White-tipped Quetzal
126. Golden-headed Quetzal

127. Gartered Trogon *caligatus*
128. Ringed Kingfisher
129. Belted Kingfisher
130. Amazon Kingfisher
131. Green Kingfisher
132. Whooping Motmot *subrufescens*
133. Rufous-tailed Jacamar
134. White-necked Puffbird
135. Pied Puffbird
136. Russet-throated Puffbird
137. Yellow-throated Toucan (H) *abbreviatus*
138. Keel-billed Toucan
139. Groove-billed Toucanet
140. Southern Emerald Toucanet
141. Collared Aracari *nuchalis*
142. Scaled Piculet *lovejoyi*
143. Chestnut Piculet
144. Red-crowned Woodpecker
145. Golden-olive Woodpecker
146. Spot-breasted Woodpecker *ujhelyii*
147. Lineated Woodpecker
148. Crimson-crested Woodpecker
149. Crested Caracara
150. Yellow-headed Caracara
151. American Kestrel
152. Peregrine
153. Orange-chinned Parakeet
154. Yellow-crowned Parrot
155. Scaly-naped Parrot
156. Green-rumped Parrotlet
157. Lilac-tailed Parrotlet
158. Santa Marta Parakeet (E)
159. Brown-throated Parakeet *aeruginosa*
160. Scarlet-fronted Parakeet
161. Military Macaw
162. Black-crested Antshrike
163. Barred Antshrike
164. Black-backed Antshrike
165. White-fringed Antwren *intermedia*
166. Santa Marta Antbird (E)
167. Rusty-breasted Antpitta
168. Rufous Antpitta
169. Santa Marta Tapaculo (E)
170. Brown-rumped Tapaculo
171. Perija Tapaculo (E)
172. Cocoa Woodcreeper
173. Straight-billed Woodcreeper *picrostris*
174. Streak-headed Woodcreeper *littoralis*
175. Montane Woodcreeper *sanctaemartae*
176. Pale-legged Hornero *longirostris*

177. Montane Foliage-gleaner *anxia*
178. Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner (E)
179. Streak-backed Canastero *phelpsi*
180. Perija Thistletail (E)
181. Yellow-chinned Spinetail
182. Streak-capped Spinetail
183. Rusty-headed Spinetail (E)
184. White-whiskered Spinetail
185. Rufous Spinetail *munoztebari*
186. Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet
187. Lesser Elaenia
188. White-throated Tyrannulet *nigriceps* & *setophagoides*
189. Southern Beardless Tyrannulet
190. Paltry Tyrannulet *tamae*
191. Olive-striped Flycatcher
192. Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
193. Northern Scrub Flycatcher *atrirostris*
194. Slender-billed Inezia
195. Southern Bentbill
196. Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant
197. Pearly-vented Tody-tyrant *impiger*
198. Black-throated Tody-tyrant *lehmanni*
199. Black-headed Tody-flycatcher
200. Yellow-olive Flycatcher
201. Cinammon Flycatcher *assimilis*
202. Willow Flycatcher
203. Olive-sided Flycatcher
204. Tropical Pewee
205. Smoke-coloured Pewee
206. Vermillion Flycatcher
207. Streak-throated Bush-tyrant
208. Santa Marta Bush-tyrant (H, E)
209. Pied Water-tyrant
210. White-headed Marsh-tyrant
211. Yellow-bellied Chat-tyrant
212. Rufous-breasted Chat-tyrant *rubicundula*
213. Cattle Tyrant
214. Social Flycatcher
215. Great Kiskadee *rufipennis*
216. Golden-crowned Flycatcher
217. Streaked Flycatcher
218. Boat-billed Flycatcher
219. Tropical Kingbird
220. Grey Kingbird
221. Fork-tailed Flycatcher
222. Dusky-capped Flycatcher
223. Great Crested Flycatcher
224. Brown-crested Flycatcher
225. Bright-rumped Atilla (H)
226. Golden-breasted Fruiteater *decora*

227. Red-crested Cotinga
228. Lance-tailed Manakin (H)
229. White-bearded Manakin *abditivus*
230. Masked Tityra *columbiana*
231. Cinerous Becard
232. Rufous-browed Peppershrike
233. Golden-fronted Greenlet
234. Red-eyed Vireo
235. Green Jay
236. Southern Rough-winged Swallow
237. Barn Swallow
238. House Wren
239. Stripe-backed Wren *pardus*
240. Bicoloured Wren *albicilius*
241. Rufous-breasted Wren *laetus*
242. Rufous and White Wren *cumanensis*
243. Buff-breasted Wren *venezuelanus*
244. Grey-breasted Wood-wren *bangsi*
245. Santa Marta (Hermit) Wood-wren (E)
246. Tropical Gnatcatcher
247. Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush (H) *sierrae*
248. Swainson's Thrush
249. Yellow-legged Thrush
250. Pale-breasted Thrush
251. Chestnut-bellied Thrush
252. Great Thrush *cacozelus* & *clarus*
253. Tropical Mockingbird
254. Saffron Finch *flaviola*
255. Blue-black Grassquit
256. Black Flowerpiercer
257. White-sided Flowerpiercer
258. Rusty Flowerpiercer *hyperythra*
259. White-lined Tanager
260. Crimson-backed Tanager
261. Purple Honeycreeper *microrhynchus*
262. Red-legged Honeycreeper *eximius*
263. Swallow Tanager *grisescens*
264. Pileated Finch
265. Thick-billed Seed-finch
266. Yellow-bellied Seedeater
267. Buff-throated Saltator *maximus*
268. Orinocan Saltator *rufescens*
269. Greyish Saltator *plumbeous*
270. Streaked Saltator *perstriatus*
271. Bananaquit
272. Black-faced Grassquit *omissus*
273. Buff-breasted Mountain-tanager
274. Lacrimose Mountain-tanager *pallididorsalis*
275. Black-capped Tanager
276. Beryl-spangled Tanager *lozanoana*

277. Black-headed Tanager
278. Fulvous-headed Tanager
279. Santa Marta Mountain-tanager (E)
280. Bay-headed Tanager *toddi*
281. Saffron-crowned Tanager
282. Blue-capped Tanager *margeritae* & *auricrissa*
283. Blue-grey Tanager
284. Glaucous Tanager
285. Palm Tanager
286. Rosy Thrush-tanager (H)
287. Common Chlorospingus
288. Sierra Nevada Brush-finch
289. Perija Brush-finch
290. Golden-winged Sparrow
291. Santa Marta Brush-finch (E)
292. Slaty Brush-finch
293. Yellow-breasted Brush-finch *nigrifrons*
294. Summer Tanager
295. Golden Grosbeak *laubmanni*
296. Rose-breasted Grosbeak
297. Vermillion Cardinal
298. Northern Waterthrush
299. Black and White Warbler
300. Prothonotary Warbler
301. Tennessee Warbler
302. American Redstart
303. Blackburnian Warbler
304. Yellow Warbler
305. Blackpoll Warbler
306. Santa Marta Warbler (E)
307. Black-crested Warbler
308. White-lored Warbler (E)
309. Rufous-capped Warbler
310. Slate-throated Redstart
311. Yellow-crowned Redstart (E)
312. Crested Oropendola
313. Yellow-rumped Cacique *cela*
314. Yellow Oriole
315. Orange-crowned Oriole
316. Carib Grackle
317. Great-tailed Grackle
318. Lesser Goldfinch
319. Thick-billed Euphonia *crassirostris*
320. Blue-naped Chlorophonia
321. House Sparrow

19 endemics (2 heard only)