

Colombia: Birds & Nature in the Coffee Region | Jan. 22 – Feb. 2, 2024 | Trip Report | by Dave Mehlman



Guides: Manuel Espejo and Dave Mehlman with participants: Dina, Jay, John, Larry, Linda C., Linda L., Mike, and Phil



Mon., Jan. 22 Arrival in Pereira

Phil, Larry, and Linda C., along with Naturalist Journeys guide Dave, all arrived early the day before at various times and met for the item-packed buffet breakfast at the Sonesta Hotel in Pereira. We all introduced ourselves, had a taste of the interesting variety of breakfast foods available in Colombia, and then went for a several hour walk around the grounds of the hotel to see what birds were about. In addition to providing us an opportunity to “warm up” our Colombian bird ID, we enjoyed seeing a variety of species. These include widespread and familiar birds like Tropical Kingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Saffron Finch, plus some of the regularly-occurring birds of the Colombian Coffee Region such as Bar-crested Antshrike, Spectacled Parrotlet, Bare-faced Ibis, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Blue-necked Tanager. A surprise was a fly-over Scarlet Macaw, the only one of the tour, from the introduced population that occurs around Pereira.



The early group then had lunch together and had some time off until Dina, Jay, John, Linda L., and Mike all arrived (conveniently on the same flight!) in mid-afternoon. After the late group got checked in, we all met in the lobby for another walk around the grounds of the Sonesta Hotel to introduce our new friends to the birds we had found earlier and perhaps find some new ones. This walk was equally enjoyable as the one in the morning, especially since the heat had subsided (we soon learned after arrival that Colombia was in the grips of a very hard, El Niño-driven, drought which led to hot mid-days and very dry conditions for most of the tour). Highlights of the afternoon walk included a Tropical Gnatcatcher (the only one of the tour), 3 Grayish Piculets (a Colombian endemic only found in dry forests surrounding the Cauca River valley), Common Tody-Flycatcher, a Great Antshrike, Orange-chinned Parakeet (oddly, not seen again on the tour, until we heard some outside the Movich in Cali on the extension), Blue-headed Parrot, and Scarlet-fronted Parakeet.

We concluded the day by meeting Manuel Espejo, our local guide from in-country operator Manakin Tours, a tour briefing with introductions, and our first dinner of the tour at the Sonesta. It was then off to bed in preparation for our first full day in the field.

Tues., Jan. 23 Hacienda Venecia | Hacienda Santa Clara

We began today by opening the capacious breakfast buffet at the Sonesta, having already brought down our luggage to the lobby. After getting our fill of Colombian treats and plenty of coffee, we loaded up into our bus, driven by the very capable Darío, and headed off for our Colombian adventure. Our first stop for the day was to the north near the city of Manizales: Hacienda Venecia, one of the larger coffee fincas in the country, for birding and some education into the production of coffee from plant to cup. On arrival at the Hacienda, we were met by the owner, Juan Pablo Echeverry, got to use the bathrooms, and (of course!) enjoyed another cup of coffee!

After that we set out on a walk of the grounds and nearby roads of the Hacienda. Coffee plantations can be very rich in birdlife and, despite the incredibly dry conditions due to the drought, we saw many of the typical birds of Colombia's Coffee Region. Some highlights of this morning's walk included Thick-billed Euphonia, Black-throated Mango, Red-faced Spinetail, Canada Warbler (a North American migrant commonly found in the region), Crimson-backed Tanager, and Yellow-backed Oriole. We also spent some time watching the fruit and hummingbird feeders that were up and got great looks at Flame-rumped Tanager, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and Streaked Saltator.



In mid-morning, we were introduced to Gilbert, an employee of the Hacienda, for the coffee tour. He discussed the origin of coffee (from Africa) and the history of the industry in Colombia. We then walked through the coffee fields themselves, looking at the very healthy-looking plants with a mixture of flowers, green beans, and ripe “cherries.” We then walked to their processing facility, where a machine sorts the cherries into different color grades and then they are de-pulped, washed, and set out to dry. Finally, we entered the Hacienda’s bodega, where big bags of export-ready coffee are stored prior to shipping and learned about the different kinds of processing that the Hacienda performs for customers. After this educational morning, we were treated to cups of ice cream of various flavors derived from a variety of fruits, then adjourned to the nearby guest house for lunch on the porch. While eating, of course our group took many interruptions for birds, spotting White-necked Jacobin, Common Tody-Flycatcher, and an Olive-sided Flycatcher before finishing.

After lunch, we had a short presentation by Rocío Espinosa and Andrés López (long-time friends of Dave’s) and Juan Pablo on a fascinating on-going conservation project called “Coffee, Birds, and Forests in the Colombian Andes” (more info at [Coffee, Birds, and Forests in the Colombian Andes - American Bird Conservancy \(abcbirds.org\)](http://abcbirds.org)). This project is designed to help both people and birds in the Coffee Region by working with landowners to create better habitat on their coffee farms and improve habitat conditions in corridors connecting larger blocks of intact habitat. The work, being implemented by a group called Paisajes Sostenibles (Sustainable Landscapes) was quite inspiring and Rocío and Andrés brought along a young member (Jaider Andrés Ossa) of one of the local school birding groups who gave us his own perspective of the importance of birds to his community.

We ended our visit with Juan Pablo conducting a coffee-tasting oriented around the different types of coffee (based on processing method) that the Hacienda produces. We were all able to personally taste and smell the differences between the methods, which helped us greatly understand the intricacies of coffee. As our day ended, a few of us stopped at the Hacienda’s office to pick up a bag or two to take home and then we loaded in our bus and drove to the town of Santa Rosa, stopping at a Carulla Supermarket along the way for some lunch supplies and snacks. Arriving in late afternoon, we got settled in our rooms and enjoyed a bit of feeder watching at the Hacienda Santa Clara, our pleasant hotel on the outskirts of town, before having an early dinner, reviewing our daily bird list, and preparing for an early start the next day.



Wed., Jan. 24

Otún-Quimbaya Flora & Fauna Sanctuary | Hacienda Santa Clara

We were up early today to arrive at our destination for the day, the well-known Otún-Quimbaya Flora & Fauna Sanctuary, in time for the morning bird rush. Heading off in our bus, we arrived a bit later in the town of Florida, gateway to Otún-Quimbaya, where we transferred to four, 4-wheel drive jeeps which could navigate the rocky road into the Sanctuary better. Continuing through the reserve, we arrived at our starting point, the El Cedral sector of the park, which is pretty much as far as you can drive on the road. Much to our surprise, we were far from the only birding group there, with many other jeeps present and birders scrambling around. Unloading, we grabbed some breakfast snacks and commenced birding with Manuel ably leading the way.

Things started off fast and we were quickly spotting fun birds right in the parking area, scarcely moving more than a few meters. A pair of Sickle-winged Guans appeared in the trees as did a few Red-ruffed Fruitcrows. The latter species is one of the main highlights of birding in Otún-Quimbaya since, though it is uncommon and hard to find elsewhere in its range, it is “curiously numerous” (to quote *Birds of Colombia*) in Otún-Quimbaya and almost guaranteed there. Other fun birds were Slate-throated Redstart, Blackburnian and Cerulean Warbler, Barred Becard, Montane Foliage-Gleaner, and a Streaked Xenops. Some time spent on a small bridge over the river nearby resulted in a brief glimpse of a Torrent Duck for a lucky few and a pair of the aptly named Torrent Tyrannulet. A short walk down the entrance road yielded Orange-bellied Euphonia, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher (the only one of the tour), Ashy-throated Chlorospingus, and an adorable Moustached Puffbird. We continued birding in the morning, alternately walking along the entrance road and then being picked up by our jeep fleet to be driven a bit further down and walking again. This resulted in us getting great views of Colombian Red Howler monkeys scrambling in the treetops, several Cauca Guan (another specialty of Otún-Quimbaya, which is, in fact, the world’s last stronghold for this vulnerable species; see [Penelope perspicax \(Cauca Guan\)](https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/12231/12231) ([iucnredlist.org](https://www.iucnredlist.org)) for info on its conservation status), Tropical Parula, and Black-winged Saltator.

Reaching the entrance to the reserve around mid-day, we spent some time on the bridge across the river there, but had only brief glimpses of another Torrent Duck, as well as great views of Torrent Tyrannulets and Black Phoebe (here of the resident South American “White-winged” form, which is noticeably different from the North American subspecies). We then returned for lunch at a small inn in the town of Florida where we said good-bye to our jeep drivers and returned to our bus. After lunch, we quickly returned to the bridge we had previously visited in hopes the Torrent Duck would appear. Alas, it did not and we had to be consoled with a Golden Tanager appearance!



We then started our return trip, first stopping at another bridge across the river at El Porvenir. Much to everyone’s delight, we had Torrent Duck success with super views of a female (or young) bird perching and swimming in the river. This spot also proved to be quite birdy, with the group spotting Golden, Palm, Bay-headed, and Blue-gray Tanager; Grayish Piculet; Black-and-white Warbler; and Steely-vented Hummingbird. This proved to be a satisfying conclusion to our birding day and we returned to the Santa Clara, making a stop at a local grocery store to procure snacks and lunch supplies for the next day. Returning to the Santa Clara, we had a bit of time to rest before going over our bird list for the day and then ordering take-out pizza from town for dinner—great fun all around!

Thurs., Jan. 25 El Cortaderal | Termales San Vicente

We had another very early start today since we were headed to the higher elevations of the San Isabel Volcano on pretty rough roads. We again used the fleet of 4-wheel drive jeeps which appeared at the Santa Clara in the pre-dawn darkness to pick us up. Off we went, arriving after about an hour and 20 minutes at Finca El Cortaderal at an elevation of about 10,170 feet (3100 m). We were now in a very different habitat than where we had previously been, a mixture of cattle pasture (an unfortunate reality in many parts of the Colombian Andes) and High Andean Forest. We were at this specific spot and this specific time in hopes of finding the rarest bird of the tour: Indigo-Winged (or Fuertes’s) Parrot. This endangered species is only known from a very few locations in the Central Andes of Colombia and has a global population size estimated at 230-300 birds (see [Hapalopsittaca fuertesii \(Indigo-winged Parrot\) \(iucnredlist.org\)](https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/146920000/146920000) for more info on its conservation status). After arrival, we grabbed some breakfast snacks and commenced birding.

Although the parrot did not show, short walks from our parking spot yielded many new species for the tour. Highlights included Mountain Velvetbreast, Tyrian Metaltail, Tourmaline Sunangel, Scarlet-bellied and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Superciliaried Hemispingus, and Blue-and-black Tanager. Of course, the incredibly widespread Great Thrush also put in an appearance. Meanwhile, Brown-bellied Swallow, Scaly-naped Parrot, and Band-tailed Pigeon flew by overhead. Not finding the parrot, we got back in our jeeps and drove further on the mountain road to explore the habitat. Our next stop yielded some conveniently perching Red-crested Cotingas, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Smoky-brown Cotingas, incredible close views of a



pair of Bar-bellied Woodpeckers, a Black-billed Mountain-Toucan responding to its call, and an awesome view of a Grass (Paramo) Wren. Continuing, we made another stop at a point with a great view of the fuming Nevado del Ruíz volcano and took another short walk. This stop yielded more Red-crested Cotingas and Golden-plumed Parakeets, as well as Black-capped and White-throated Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Sylph, and Golden-fronted Whitestart (illustrating the confusion caused by English bird names, the latter species is often called Redstart, even though it has no red, and may be a future split from its counterpart in the Eastern Cordillera). An additional fun sighting here was a leucistic Great Thrush, seemingly out-of-place from its friends in the forest.

Deciding we had gone far enough, we turned the jeeps around and headed back to our first stopping point at Finca El Cortaderal for one, last parrot try. As fate would have it, as we watched the skies and trees, three Indigo-winged Parrots flew around and landed in a tree nearby! The bird gods had smiled upon us and everyone got great looks and photos of this extremely rare bird, including through our scopes. Wow! This concluded our great morning at the high elevations, so we continued down the road, making a final stop for the morning on the entrance road to the Terales de San Vicente. Here, we took a short walk on the road (at lower elevations), dodging the incoming and outgoing traffic for the hot springs. The birds did not disappoint, with the group finding Andean Motmot, low-flying White-collared Swifts, a pair of Green-and-black Fruiteaters, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Montane Woodcreeper, and Masked Flowerpiercer. We finished the morning by devouring the tasty sandwiches hand-made by Manuel with the supplies bought the previous day—a well-earned lunch by all!

We then returned to the Santa Clara for a rest before the checklist and dinner, with many in the group enjoying the opportunity to sit and watch the feeder traffic. In addition to the normal birds coming and going (e.g., Saffron Finch, Summer Tanager, Black-billed Thrush), a pair of Black-capped Tanagers periodically came to visit and a Merlin flew in and perched in a nearby tree. After dinner, we all headed to bed after a very satisfying day.

Fri., Jan. 26 **UTP Botanical Garden**

Today was a bit of a break day as compared to the two previous days. A few that were up early, however, got to hear a Tropical Screech-Owl calling in trees around the Santa Clara. After loading and departing around 6:00 AM, we drove into Pereira and stopped at an Oxxo store for a quick breakfast of coffee and pastries (and anything else anyone wanted). While eating our food at the small tables outside, we were amused by a Cattle Tyrant that literally wandered in looking for handouts! After finishing up, we drove through town to the nearby Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira (UTP) for some birding on the campus and in the Botanical Garden. Upon arrival, we met Santiago, a student at UTP who would be our local guide.



The campus was quite delightful with large trees spread out everywhere and it proved to have some great birding. Highlights included Golden-faced Tyrannulet, another Cerulean Warbler, Blue-headed Parrot, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts overhead (the only ones found on the tour), a Buff-necked Ibis glimpsed flying (also the only one on the tour), and a pair of Chestnut-fronted Macaws (again, the only ones found by the group on the tour). About mid-morning, we moved into the actual Botanical Garden to take a short walk on its forested trails. We found a few very interesting species in there, including a female Parker's Antbird, Cocoa Woodcreeper, and a pair of Plain Antvireos. Returning to campus, we concentrated our time, however, on a large fruiting *Coussapoa villosa* tree, which Manuel knew tended to attract many birds. After what seemed like a long wait, we finally got looks at male and female Turquoise Dacnis (another vulnerable species endemic to the Central Andes, see [Dacnis hartlaubi](https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/12231/12231) (Turquoise Dacnis) ([iucnredlist.org](https://www.iucnredlist.org))), working hard until everyone in the group had a decent look at both sexes. While waiting, we were entertained by a Yellow-bellied Siskin female that came to bathe in a nearby bird bath.

Finishing here, we had lunch at the lovely Ambar Restaurant in Pereira, then returned to the Santa Clara for a free afternoon with feeder-watching as desired. We reconvened late in the day to get on the bus and go into nearby Santa Rosa for dinner at Choripaco, a local restaurant chain that features the famous Santa Rosa chorizo sausage for its meals. We then returned to the Santa Clara for the night.

Sat., Jan. 27 Sancocho | Tinamú Birding Lodge

Today was a leisurely day to provide a bit of a break and a Colombian cultural experience. We began the day with feeder-watching at the fruit feeders at Hacienda Santa Clara. Although by now getting a bit familiar, we enjoyed the continual visits of Scrub, Golden, Black-capped, Bay-headed, Summer, and Blue-necked Tanagers; Andean Motmots; and Orange-bellied Euphonias to the fruit while Blackburnian Warbler and Golden-faced Tyrannulets gamboled about the trees. However, the morning's true highlight was when Jay spotted a hawk fly in with a bird and land in a tree! With some diligent spotting through the branches and some work with the scope, we could clearly see a Sharp-shinned (Plain-breasted) Hawk sitting on a branch with a bright yellow Saffron Finch in its talons. With the scope, we could clearly see the reddish breast without bars, which definitively indicated this was a bird of the resident *ventralis* subspecies, which is considered a full species by some authorities. All this action whetted our appetites so we then sat down and enjoyed a nice patio breakfast as we continued to watch birds.



After this, it was time for a trip to the traditional Colombian City Market at the heart of Santa Rosa and acquire ingredients for our lunch we were to make: a traditional sancocho de gallina. We got off our bus in front of the market on a very busy market Saturday, admiring the huge number of jeeps (or, more correctly, jeep knock-offs) parked along the curb. Into the market we went, winding our way among the various stalls as we explored all the offerings and bought what was needed. The market seemed to have everything: fruits, vegetables, meats, household goods, herbs, love potions; I would venture to guess that if you could not find it in the market, you probably do not need it! Returning to the Santa Clara, several of us donned head-nets and aprons and set to work prepping ingredients with the aid of the kitchen staff. After all was prepared, it went into a large pot which cooked the sancocho for a few hours over a wood fire in the traditional manner.

Finally, our feast was ready and we sat down and dug into this very tasty, home-made meal—a true Colombian classic (here's a link to one recipe if you are curious: [Sancocho de Gallina \(Chicken or Hen Sancocho\) - My Colombian Recipes](#)). After we finished our feast, we loaded our bus and hit the road to our next destination, the Tinamú Birding Lodge outside Manizales. Arriving there in late afternoon, we found our rooms and most assembled soon after for a short bird walk on the grounds around the lodge with Fernando, the local guide. The grounds and the lodge's feeders were full of birds and we noted Spot-breasted Woodpecker, White-vented Plumeleteer, and Rusty-margined Flycatcher among the many more familiar species. After our walk, we gathered for our daily bird list and review of plans for the following day and then had an excellent dinner while a Common Pauraque serenaded us in the twilight. A great way to end a nice and relaxing day!

Sun., Jan. 28 Rio Blanco Nature Reserve

We were up reasonably early today for breakfast at Tinamú before boarding the bus to spend the day at one of the best-known birding hotspots in Colombia: Rio Blanco Nature Reserve. One unique feature of birding trips there are the antpitta feeding stations. Rio Blanco has 4 separate stations, each one featuring a different antpitta species at a different time of the day—and you must be present at that time or you don't get to see the bird! Therefore, we were under a fairly tight schedule throughout the day in order to arrive at all the stations at the correct time.

Leaving Tinamú, we climbed up the mountains and slowly made our way through Manizales, dodging morning rush hour traffic on the way. Arriving at Rio Blanco, we made our way further up to the visitor center, arriving just in time for the feeding at the first antpitta station, this one for Bicolored Antpitta. Alas, even though we

waited almost 30 minutes and the local guide called, talked, and sang to the bird with his sweet tones, the antpitta did not appear. Fortunately, the station was a very short walk from the visitor center, so we returned there to use bathrooms, get a drink, and watch the fun action at the hummingbird feeders. On our return, Manuel pointed out an injured Western Mountain Coati lying in the grasses near the center (he called the local wildlife veterinarian who came and picked it up for rehabilitation). As usual at Rio Blanco, there was plenty of hummer traffic, with Buff-tailed Coronets being the most common and aggressive, and plenty of Sparkling and Lesser Violetears, Tourmaline Sunangel, Collared Inca, Long-tailed Sylph, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Green-fronted Lancebill and White-bellied Woodstar all putting in appearances.

We then got back in the bus and drove a short way up the mountain above the visitor center for some road birding and to get in position for our second antpitta feeding. Although activity was a bit slow, we spotted plenty of goodies including the seemingly-everywhere Blackburnian Warbler, Blue-capped and Beryl-spangled Tanager, and some difficult-to-see-well Rufous-crowned Tody-Tyrants. We also encountered Raúl, the friendly male Green-and-black Fruiteater who was induced to perch on a stick held by local guide Carlos Mario! At that point, it was time for the next feeding, so we walked down a short trail to the feeding area and Carlos Mario commenced calling and worm-flinging. Very soon, in fact, the obliging Pancho, a Chestnut-crowned Antpitta appeared and came to feed and generally show off for all of us—fantastic views! Also coming to visit were Raúl and his apparent esposa, both knowing a good thing when they saw it (personally, I get it; a worm in the mouth is better than a caterpillar in the bush, I always say).

Finishing the feeding performance, we continued in the bus a bit higher in the reserve, parked, and got out for another road walk at the Vereda Las Palomas entrance. This walk yielded some new birds for us, including Pale-edged Flycatcher, Mountain Elaenia, Roadside Hawk, and Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant. However, it was soon time for our third antpitta feeding of the morning and we arrived at the feeding station and got seated. After a bit of calling and chanting by Carlos Mario, the very cute Nana appeared, a Slate-crowned Antpitta, hungrily chowing down on the worm offerings and allowing great views and photos. Now 2 out of 3 on the antpitta scale, we turned around and walked back down to the van and a little bit past it on another road, birding along the way.

Toward late morning, we finally stumbled across a large mixed-species flock, providing great, if not overwhelming, birding. In the flock at various heights were many goodies, such as Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Southern Emerald Toucanet, Montane Woodcreeper, Pearled Treerunner, Sharpe's Wren, Plushcap, Grass-green Tanager, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Slaty Brushfinch, and a spectacular Crimson-mantled Woodpecker. A very lucky few in the group saw a Yellow-billed Cacique that Manuel picked out deep in the bamboo thickets. Both exhausted and exhilarated by this birding outbreak, we returned to the bus and drove back down to the visitor center for a bathroom and feeder break. The usual crowd at the feeders was joined this time by a Bronzy Inca, making a total of 11 species for the group at Rio Blanco!

After this brief break, it was time for our fourth and final antpitta feeding, this time a very short walk away from the visitor center. We gathered in the viewing "arena" and Carlos Mario began the usual chanting and calling. After a brief wait, Pollo the Brown-banded Antpitta appeared in the back, darted out to grab worms, and then hastily flew off. By far the shyest of the four possible species, Pollo provided good glimpses and photos only if everyone was ready and had their bins and cameras trained on the exact spot where it would land. With this siting, we were 3 for 4 on antpittas at Rio Blanco—not bad for a morning's work. We then walked the short distance back to the visitor center and enjoyed our hand-made sandwiches carefully crafted by Manuel as we admired the continuing feeder traffic.



After lunch, we got in the van to head back up the mountain for a bit more birding on the roads of the reserve. This proved to be fruitful, as during our walk up and then all the way back down to the visitor center we picked up some new birds such as Canada Warbler, Band-tailed Pigeon, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Mountain Wren, Gray-browed Brushfinch, Blue-and-black Tanager, and Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager. We then said goodbye to the local guide and headed down the mountain for a stop at the entrance gate for some final birding at Rio Blanco.

The flowers around the entrance gate are a major attraction for one species in particular: White-throated (Choco) Daggerbill. However, despite some teasing brief glimpses, we did not have a satisfactory appearance of this species enough to count it. Other species present, though, were Green-fronted Lancebill, Speckled Hummingbird, and some poorly seen Chestnut-bellied Chat-Tyrants along the stream. Finishing here, Darío drove us skillfully through the afternoon Manizales traffic back to Tinamú, where we finished the day with our bird list and dinner, again serenaded by a Common Pauraque.

Mon., Jan. 29 Finca La Romelia

We started the day with coffee while a few of us spotted a Central American Agouti running across the lawn. After coffee, it was back in the van for our day trip to Finca La Romelia, a private house at a bit lower elevation. We arrived at the Finca and parked the bus at the top of the hill due to the very steep driveway down to the main house. At the upper house, we were welcomed with bananas, coffee, and a bathroom opportunity. As we chatted and met the owner (Chorizo, as he is known to all), a variety of birds made an appearance including several Colombian Chachalacas eating plantains, Streaked Flycatcher, Blue-headed Parrot, Rufous-naped Greenlet, Large-billed Seed-Finch, and Lineated Woodpecker. A few North American migrants were also spotted, such as Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Tennessee Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and Eastern Wood-Pewee.

We then got into the two cars available and drove a bit further down the entrance grove, stopping by a large bamboo thicket. We walked a short distance on a trail through the bamboo to find a big breakfast spread laid out for us! Hungrily chowing down on the great food and enjoying coffee and hot chocolate, we also kept an eye peeled for birds in the area, spotting White-vented Plumeleteer, Yellow Warbler, and Thick-billed Euphonia. Hearing a song, Manuel and the local guide led us back into the bamboo where we had repeated glimpses of a Jet Antbird moving back and forth above our heads. We then continued down the hill on the road until we arrived at the lovely main house where we were met again by Chorizo, his wife, and their small dog.



We spent a little time monitoring the bird feeder traffic here, admiring Andean Motmots and Thick-billed Euphonias on the fruit and White-necked Jacobins fighting over the hummingbird feeders. We then had a tour of Chorizo's very impressive "orchidarium" admiring his collection of orchids from all over the world—in fact, he is a world-renowned orchid breeder and orchid aficionados come to this house from all over the world to give and receive advice. After lunch, we had a delightful lunch prepared in the home kitchen on the patio, all the while watching the comings and goings of Spectacled Parrotlets, Scrub Tanagers, Saffron Finches, and both Black-billed and Clay-colored Thrush. Finishing lunch, we drove in the cars all the way back up to the top of the driveway, got in our bus, and returned to Tinamú for the rest of the day. After a short break to let the heat diminish, we went for a short walk on the Lodge's trails. Activity was limited, but we were able to find Green Hermit and Black-chested Jay, in addition to hearing the plaintive whistling song of the Scaly-breasted Wren. We then came back, met later for our bird checklist, had dinner, and then called it a night.

Tues., Jan. 30 Hotel Termales del Ruíz

Those up very early today were rewarded with the calls of both Common Pauraque and Common Potoo to start an exciting day. After our final breakfast at Tinamú, we went out for a long walk on the trails and surrounding roads with Manuel and Fernando—our first chance to really do so since arrival. As usual, the singing birds were heard and frustratingly reluctant to be drawn in! These included Buff-rumped Warbler, Striped Cuckoo, Scaly-breasted Wren, and Blue-lored Antbird. However, we were able to see some nice birds with some effort. Highlights included several lekking male Golden-collared Manakins, Moustached Puffbird, Acadian Flycatcher, Long-billed Starthroat, Mourning and Canada Warbler, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, and Brown-throated Parakeet. After this last outing here, we enjoyed our final lunch, loaded all our gear into the bus, and headed for the Nevado del Ruíz, making a stop at a grocery store in Manizales on the way for snacks.

After leaving Manizales, we slowly climbed up the windy road high onto the slopes of the Nevado, passing through higher and higher elevation forest types, eventually getting high enough to see patches of the above-treeline paramo habitat with its distinctive frailejón plants (composite plants in the genus *Espeletia*; see [Espeletia - Wikipedia](#)). We stopped along the road at Laguna Negra and those who wanted enjoyed a small cup of coca tea from the shop across the road. We also took a moment to do some birding at this site, about 12,660 feet (3859 m) up. The lake itself had a few Andean Ducks swimming and diving in it, while the surrounding scrubby vegetation yielded Plain-colored Seedeater, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch, and Andean Tit-Spinetail, all new for us on the tour. In the distance, we heard Tawny Antpitta and Grass (Paramo) Wren singing, but neither



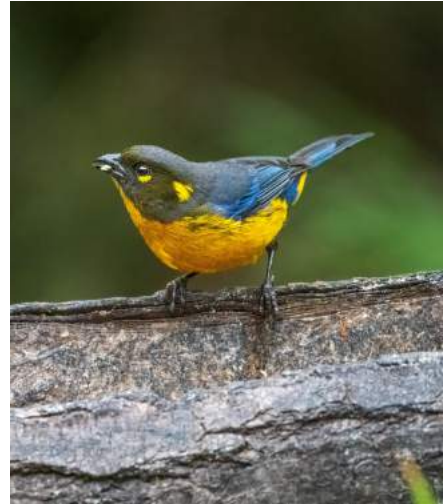
would approach very close. Continuing, we turned off the main road and began our descent into the small basin where the Termales del Ruíz hotel sits, arriving there in late afternoon. We all found our rooms and had time to unpack a bit before meeting again late in the day in the dining room for our bird list, dinner, and discussion of plans for the following day.

Wed., Jan. 31 Los Nevados del Ruíz National Natural Park

We began the day with a walk along the roads near the Termales to better explore this habitat. Although it was cloudy and the birding action a bit slow, we found Andean Guan, White-throated Tyrannulet, Pale-naped Brushfinch, and Buff-winged Starfrontlet. As usual in this habitat, other intriguing species were heard, but refused to come out for viewing. These included Ocellated and Paramo Tapaculo, Black-crested Warbler, and Equatorial Antpitta. Having “warmed up” like this, we went back to the Termales for breakfast in their pleasant dining room, enjoying a perching Rainbow-bearded Thornbill outside the windows as we ate.

As we reconvened in front of the hotel to prepare to board the van, we noticed quite a bit of bird activity on the sunlit hillside opposite the lobby and we began to investigate. Soon, we turned up a small flock of three Golden-crowned Tanagers, which allowed very close views—a truly marvelous bird. Accompanying them were Glossy Flowerpiercer and Lacrimose and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers. Not to be left out, hummingbirds like Shining Sunbeam and Great Sapphirewing joined the show to provide us a great send off for the day!

After this “delay,” we climbed in the bus to begin our exploration of the higher elevations of the Nevado del Ruíz. After climbing back up to the main park road, we continued up to the Brisas Visitor Center of the National Park where those who needed it could use the bathroom or get a cup of coffee. This was by far the highest point reached on the tour: 13,510 feet (4,115 meters). We spent a relatively short time birding the immediate area of the visitor center, though the clouds limited visibility. However, as luck would have it, our primary target of the trip soon appeared: a Buffy Helmetcrest foraging in the shrubs at very close range! This extremely restricted-range species is only found on the Nevado del Ruíz and its surrounding paramo and we had amazingly good views of this unique hummingbird. Outside of that sighting, however, we could only find a perching Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant and a pair of Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles flying overhead. Another stop by the side of the road yielded only Plumbeous Sierra-Finch and the ubiquitous Rufous-collared Sparrow. At that point, given the



cloudy weather and lack of bird activity, we decided to return to the Termales for a round of feeder-watching there before lunch.

Arriving back at Termales, we walked the short trail up to the feeding area, which is well-stocked with hummingbird feeders and some fruit stations. The Shining Sunbeams were putting on a show, apparently regarding the whole area as their property! In between their coming and going, we were also able to pick out Great Sapphirewing, Golden-breasted Puffleg, and Viridian Metaltail. The fruits attracted attention, too, with Scarlet-bellied and Lacrimose Mountain-Tanagers the most frequent, supplemented by Glossy and Masked Flowerpiercer, Great Thrush, and Pale-naped Brushfinch. After this fun bit of birding, we reconvened in the hotel dining room for lunch.

After a short break, we met back in the parking lot for an afternoon birding trip back up on the slopes of the Nevado in search of new species. We drove up to the main park road and then made several stops as we went down the mountain, ending at the site known as Birder's Alley (callejón pajarero). These stops yielded some excellent species, including a pair of Carunculated Caracara, a superb view of a Grass (Paramo) Wren, Mountain Wren, White-throated Tyrannulet, and a small group of Black-backed Bush-Tanagers. Manuel pointed out that both the Caracara and Bush-Tanager were great finds, as they are not always seen. We finished the afternoon by stopping at Laguna Negra again and doing some birding around the site. Some work with the scopes revealed that in addition to the Andean Ducks, there was an Andean Teal in the far back part of the Laguna, adding another duck species to our list. We also had decent views of a Stout-billed Cinclodes that hopped around on the ground and fence posts by the shop across the street. As we watched, a pair of Andean Lapwings flew over our heads, a really hard species to find in this area. However, the great highlight was when Manuel had us all line up along the road in front of a grassy, wet patch, while he carefully walked towards us. Sure enough, as he had hoped, suddenly a Noble Snipe blasted out of the grass and flew over our heads providing a great closing (and lifer) bird for the day! We then returned to the Termales, had a brief rest, then met for dinner, checklist review, and discussion of plans for the following day.

Thurs., Feb. 1 Hacienda El Bosque | Pereira

We started the day with breakfast in the hotel dining room and then a quick walk on the hotel grounds for any wrap-up species before departing. The decent weather led to lots of Brown-bellied Swallows flying about after having roosted on the hotel the night before. Many of the usual suspects (Shining Sunbeam, Rainbow-bearded



Thornbill, Great Sapphirewing) showed themselves while Paramo Tapaculo and Tawny Antpitta sang from the underbrush. A nice close-out to our short stay at Termales!

Having loaded our bags in the bus, we then departed to head back down the mountain and eventually back to Pereira. Our first stop on the way down, though, was the Hacienda El Bosque, a private farm that is an up-and-coming birding and ecotourism destination. Arriving at the first of the Hacienda's 2 feeding stations, we met the owner, Juan Martin Guerra, and settled down into the chairs by the hummingbird feeders. The species mix was similar to, but slightly different from, the feeders at the Termales. Frequent visitors included Shining Sunbeam, Tyrian Metaltail, Sparkling Violetear, Tourmaline Sunangel, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, and the incredibly unique Sword-billed Hummingbird. As we watched the action, other birds appeared such as Masked and Black Flowerpiercer, Blue-and-black Tanager, Mountain Elaenia, and Paramo Seedeater. As mid-morning approached, it came time to move to our final antpitta feeding of the tour at the station next door.

We all moved carefully into position, especially so since we were joined by another group of equal size! Amazingly enough, everyone seemed to pack into the small viewing space, with some sitting and others standing in the back. With everyone set, the local guide commenced calling and putting out some worms. At first, all that were present were the "freeloaders" that came to feed on the worms. These birds included a pair of Mountain Wrens, several Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrants, and some Barred Fruiteaters (what a cast of freeloaders!). At the same time, a Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan appeared in the back trees allowing brief views of it (this is not a species that eats worms). Finally, after much anticipation, the stars of the show appeared: a pair of Crescent-faced Antpittas! These remarkably charismatic and cute birds spent quite a bit of time feeding on worms and chasing off interlopers as best they could—this is an exceedingly difficult species to find in the wild and Hacienda El Bosque is the most reliable place in the world, at the moment, to find this species.

Upon conclusion of the feeding, all of us happy observers walked a short distance down the road to the second of Hacienda El Bosque's feeding stations, this one mostly featuring fruit and seeds. The main viewing target here was Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, which especially likes the tasty grapes that are put out for it. Unfortunately, the toucan did not immediately show itself, so we had to "console" ourselves with other birds in and around the feeders as they came and went. In the 2 hours we spent here, the highlights included Slaty and Gray-browed Brushfinch, White-throated Quail-Dove, a large group of Rufous Wrens, several Blue-backed



Conebills, Black-capped and Superciliaried Hemispingus, White-banded Tyrannulet, and Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant; many of these were new to our bird list for the tour. The hummingbird feeders attracted a Sword-billed Hummingbird regularly as well as Mountain Velvetbreast. As the morning came to an end, we got back in our bus and continued our journey back to Pereira.

Descending from the mountain and passing through Manizales, we arrived at much lower elevations and stopped at a classic Colombian roadside-restaurant for lunch: the Ranchero Rustica Paisa in Chinchiná. After enjoying our classic lunches in the patio dining room we took a moment to note the Carib Grackles calling loudly outside the eating area. This species has been rapidly expanding south in the Cauca Valley from its traditional range in northern Colombia—probably not good news for most of the small songbirds. Some of the group also bought the attractively packaged coffee dedicated to the Women Coffee Producers of Colombia that were for sale. Continuing our travels south, we soon arrived in Pereira and stopped downtown at the Pereira Plaza shopping mall for a visit to a local crafts store and for some to use ATMs. Finally arriving back at the Sonesta in late afternoon, we checked into our rooms, organized ourselves, and then met for our final checklist and dinner of the main tour in the dining room.

Fri., Feb. 2 Departures

This morning, Linda L. and Mike left us (or attempted to leave!) for a post-tour visit to Cartagena, while the remainder of the group continued on the extension to Cali.

Cali Post-Tour Extension

Fri., Feb. 2 Pereira | Parque Nacional de la Uva | Cali

Up early, the “extensionistas” opened the Sonesta breakfast buffet at 6:00am and then prepared to depart for our drive further south. As we waited to leave, a few in the group engaged in some birding around the hotel, getting great views of a lovely male Yellow-bellied Siskin and a Cattle Tyrant right outside the hotel front door. After that, we boarded the bus and hit the road south. Our destination for the morning was the Parque de la Uva, a convenient stop on the way south and a great birding location. On our way to the parque, we spotted a



Black-bellied Whistling-Duck sitting in the top of a dead palm in the town of La Victoria. Despite the odd location, that was the only sighting of this species on the tour.

Arriving at Parque de la Uva, we first visited the bathrooms and then got our packs on for a walk through the grape fields, flowering aloes, and adjacent patches of dry forest. The primary item of avian interest here was Ruby-topaz Hummingbird which regularly comes to feed on the aloes and is hard to find elsewhere in Colombia. The short walk to the aloe fields turned up familiar species, such as many, many Bare-faced Ibis, but also some new things such as a Limpkin and some Yellow Orioles. Arriving at the flowering aloe patch, we kept a close watch and soon found at least 2 male and 1 female Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds foraging for nectar, along with some Rufous-tailed and Steely-vented Hummingbirds. Continuing walking and searching, particularly in the patches of dry forest along the edge of the parque, yielded great views of many interesting birds including Ringed Kingfisher, Roadside Hawk, Jet Antbird, Blue-black Grassquit, Streaked Saltator, a pair of Red-rumped Woodpeckers, a male Great Antshrike, and an Apical Flycatcher.

Finishing our walk here in late morning, we got back on the bus and continued south through the relatively flat and low-lying Cauca Valley, surrounded by mostly sugarcane fields, before arriving in Salerno (not too far from Cali) for lunch at Pizzeria Ristorante. En-route we glimpsed a few Ospreys soaring overhead from the bus as we passed some large ponds near Tuluá.

We finally arrived at our destination, the elegant Movich Casa de Alférez Hotel, set in a quiet, wooded area of Cali against the foothills in mid-afternoon. The afternoon was free to unpack and get settled in and we met in the downstairs dining room at the end of the day for our checklist, dinner, and review of plans for the next day.

Sat., Feb. 3 Avistamiento de Aves Doña Dora | Cali

Due to the anticipated heavy traffic on the road into the Western Cordillera on a Saturday morning, we were up early for coffee in the lobby and in the van and underway by 6:00 AM. Despite our efforts, the traffic was bad given the huge number of bicyclists also getting an early start and the overall traffic of people either heading to their mountain homes or to the port of Buenaventura on the Pacific Coast. But, Darío ably got us through it all and we arrived at our fantastic birding destination for the day: Avistamiento de Aves Doña Dora, now a legendary and established birding destination outside Cali. Our first item of business was breakfast with the



birds right on the back porch! And what a feast it was, for the stomach and eyes, with birds coming and going about as fast as one could keep up.

Given our location on the Chocó side of the Western Cordillera, many species were new to us, both hummers and other species. The hummingbirds were hard to beat anywhere else on the trip, with species including Crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Green Thorntail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Brown Violetear, and Empress Brilliant around nearly constantly. Ducking in between were slightly less frequent species which could be picked out with practice: Velvet-purple Coronet, White-whiskered Hermit, and Green-crowned Brilliant to name a few. The fruit feeders (the avian ones, that is!) were equally hopping with traffic including Silver-throated, Rufous-throated, Golden, Glistening-green, White-lined, and Flame-rumped (of the Lemon-rumped race) Tanager; Orange-bellied Euphonia; Green Honeycreeper, and Black-billed Thrush visiting constantly.

In mid-morning, we took a bit of a break and walked up the road from Doña Dora's a short distance to look for birds less associated with the feeders. This turned up some great birds; perhaps the highlight was 2 Gray-and-gold Tanagers, an unusual tanager restricted to a narrow belt of Chocó rainforest from Panama to northern Ecuador. We also found Tricolored (Choco) Brushfinch, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-throated Chlorospingus, and Ornate Flycatcher. An unexpected surprise was a female Lyre-tailed Nightjar on its nest on a rock face right next to the road—it took a while to spot it without help even though we were standing right in front of it!

We then returned to Doña Dora for more feeder-watching along with lunch with the birds—we were not sure if life could be any better or not! Enjoying lots more of the same stuff, everyone was able to polish their ID skills to a T and get lots of photos. After a bit, several of the real stars of the area appeared: a couple of Toucan Barbets, one of the coolest birds on the planet, IMHO. They spent a lot of time in the area, sometimes eating fruit, often just perching. With the aid of a scope view, it was even possible to see the “prongs” or teeth on their upper and lower mandibles which give the name prong-billed barbets to the family Semnornithidae. To add to the show, a pair of very nice-looking Spot-crowned Barbets came in to check out the action and show off for us.



Alas, all good things must end, so in mid-afternoon we reluctantly pulled up stakes and started our return trip home, making one quick stop by the river along the road to try to find a dipper. Alas, no dipper was present, but a few Black Phoebes were flitting about their watery home. On, we arrived back at the Movich for a short rest, followed by our checklist, dinner, and discussion of plans for the following day.

Sun., Feb. 4 **La Minga Ecolodge | La Florida Bosque de las Aves | Cali**

We began the day with another early departure to try to beat the mountain traffic and stopped again at an Oxxo in Cali for coffee and breakfast snacks. We then headed up into the Western Cordillera and arrived at our first destination for the day, the lovely and quiet La Minga Ecolodge. Upon arrival, we hustled onto the patio to escape the light rain that was falling and enjoyed the available coffee and bathrooms. Despite the rain, there was a lot of activity at the fruit and hummingbird feeders, a mixture of things we had seen before and some new ones. Hummer attendance here at La Minga included Speckled Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, White-booted Racket-tail, Bronzy Inca, Long-tailed Sylph, Crowned Woodnymph, Brown Violetear, and Fawn-breasted Brilliant. Fruit feeder traffic included Golden, Golden-naped, Saffron-crowned, Blue-gray, and Multicolored Tanager; Red-headed Barbet; and many Bananaquits. A fruiting tree nearby attracted a Black-winged Saltator, a hard to see female Golden-winged Manakin, and Metallic-green and Beryl-spangled Tanagers. In the trees and overhead were Scarlet-fronted Parakeets, Colombian Chachalacas, Sickle-winged Guans, and Ashy-throated Chlorospingus. Not bad for a rainy morning in the Western Cordillera!

Finishing up our feeder-watching, we drove out the entrance road a short distance, parked, and then the group walked a stretch of road to try for more birds. Right at the start, Manuel heard a Golden-headed Quetzal calling and one flew in briefly for short, but good views! Other nice things found during the walk included Smoke-colored Pewee, Canada Warbler, several Three-striped Warblers, and another Ashy-throated Chlorospingus. Calling in the forest, but refusing to come out, were Gray-breasted Wood-Wrens and a Pale-eyed Thrush. Manuel also spent some time looking for orchids and soon found a few blooming individuals of the genus *Lepanthes*, one of his favorites, which have flowers only a few millimeters wide and tall. Arriving at the entrance road gates, we climbed back in our bus and then drove a windy back road to get to the main highway between Cali and Buenaventura. We then climbed back up and over the top of the mountain and drove a short way down to La Cabaña, where we enjoyed a tasty classic Colombian lunch, which included ajiaco ([Ajiaco - Wikipedia](#)) for many.



After lunch, we drove the short distance up to the roadside community known as Km 18, where we turned off and drove a gravel road to our afternoon’s destination: La Florida, Bosque de las Aves. This delightful destination also did not disappoint, though there was a large crew of photographers present to complicate some of our viewing options. The hummingbird feeders attracted some new species for us, including Purple-throated Woodstar (of both sexes), Tawny-bellied Hermit, and Greenish Puffleg, as well as others we had seen before such as White-booted Racket-tail, Speckled Hummingbird, Bronzy Inca, and Brown Violetear. Coming to visit the fruit feeder were both sexes of Red-headed Barbet; Black-capped, Flame-rumped, Golden-naped, Multicolored, and Golden Tanager; and more of the ubiquitous Black-billed Thrush. Shortly after arrival, we were offered the chance for a short hike to see a Common Potoo, which we took advantage of to see this interesting bird at its daytime roost—always a treat to see one of these! Toward the end of the afternoon, a tinamou-feeding session was held at the viewing area right next door to the feeders, so we all hustled into position and waited. At first, all that came to eat the cracked corn were a couple of Chestnut-capped Brushfinches as our local guide called and played recordings. After a wait, however, first one and then another Little Tinamou appeared walking out of the forest and proceeded to gobble down feed right in front of the viewing area! Remarkably good views of our first (and only) tinamou species of the tour allowing for great views, photos, and videos.

Regretfully, our afternoon at La Florida came to an end, so we walked back to the bus, happily noting a few Central American Agoutis scampering across the lawn and a White-naped Brushfinch putting in a quick, last-minute appearance. We headed back down the mountain only to find a monstrous traffic jam on the road, with the downhill lane completely at a crawl and the uphill lane clogged with both vehicles coming up and going down! A true nightmare, it took almost 4 hours for us to return to the hotel (it is normally less than an hour trip) apparently due to a combination of heavy traffic, police inspections, and rude drivers going the wrong way. So, we did not arrive back at the Movich until after 9:00pm and hopes of a nice farewell dinner quickly evaporated. Those who were up for it hustled down to the dining area and grabbed a late dinner; we also did our final group checklist and discussed plans for the following day, a combination of departures and birding.

Mon., Feb. 5 La Florida Bosque de las Aves | Departures

Today, our tour (or, rather, the extension to the tour) gradually wound to an end with various people leaving at different times. Jay and Dina headed out very early with their own transportation to the airport followed by John, who left in late morning. The remaining folks either had flights later in the day (Linda, Larry, Dave) or were staying an extra night (Phil) so we took advantage of the time for a return trip to La Florida! Once again, it was a

rainy morning, but the traffic jam was gone and the weekday traffic was much less, so after breakfast, we loaded into the bus and arrived back at La Florida by 8:00am.

We all enjoyed our second shot, so to speak, at this lovely place (which had a small shop with the best and widest selection of merch of any of the places visited on the whole tour) and had great looks at many of the species from the day before, despite the ongoing light rain. New things turned up during our stay here included White-sided Flowerpiercer, Slate-throated Redstart, Streak-capped Treehunter, Western Emerald, Russet-crowned Warbler, Tropical Parula, and White-naped Brushfinch (here of the Yellow-throated race). The highlight of the morning, however, was when the local guide put out some more cracked corn in the feeding area and we all went over to watch an entire covey of Chestnut Wood-Quail come by and feed on it! This beautiful forest quail is hard to see outside of feeding stations and we had stunning looks at adults and chicks—what a fun way to end our tour with this dramatic bird!

The morning coming to an end, we got back on the bus, drove back down to the hotel in town (no delays this time), and those departing had a late check-out providing a chance to clean up and put on fresh clothes. We then met for our final lunch together on the Movich's patio (serenaded by Orange-chinned Parakeets!) and then all climbed on the bus with our gear one last time. We then took the long drive out to Cali's airport and said farewell, leaving Colombia with fond memories of great birds, wonderful people, and spectacular countrysides.

Photos: Group Photo (David Mehlman - DM), Chestnut-crowned Antpitta (JE), Long-tailed Sylph (Linda Lee - LL), Multicolored Tanager (JE), Toucan Barbet (DM), Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager (Jay Eisenberg - JE), Buff-tailed Coronet (JE), Thick-billed Euphonia (JE), Group birding (DM), Spectacled Parrotlet (JE), Palicourea guianensis (DM), Common Tody-Flycatcher (JE), Dining in the garden at Finca la Romelia (John Trezise - JT), Green Iguana (JE), Red Howler Monkey (JE), Río Otún (JT), Black-billed Mountain-Toucan (JE), Indigo-winged Parrot (JE), Lasiophila circe (DM), Red-crested Cotinga (DM), Yellow-headed Caracara (JE), Plain-breasted (Sharp-shinned) Hawk (JE), Buff-tailed Coronet (JE), Sancocho de gallina (DM), Manizales scenic (JT), Slate-crowned Antpitta (JE), Group with horses (JT), Masked Trogon (LL), Central Andes scenic (JT), Pale-naped Brushfinch (JE), Farailejones (JE), Masked Flowerpiercer (JE), Rainbow-bearded Thornbill (JE), Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager (JE), Termales del Ruiz (DM), Sword-billed Hummingbird (JE), Tawny Antpitta (JE), Barred Fruiteater (LL), Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan (LL), Southern Lapwing (DM), Parque de la Uva (DM), Sparkling Violetear (LL), Bandeja Paisa (DM), porch at Doña Dora (JT), Lyre-tailed Nightjar (DM), Purple-bibbed Whitetip (DM), Rufous-gaped Hillstar (DM), Glistening-green Tanager (DM), Saffron-crowned Tanager (DM), Common Potoo (JE), Multicolored Tanager (JE), Red-headed Barbet female (JE), photographers at La Florida (JT), Red-headed Barbet male (JE), White-booted Racket-tail female (DM), Acorn Woodpecker (DM), Andean Motmot (DM)

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