

CASA MARIA & HATO PIÑERO

**(INCLUDING AN EXTENSION TO THE
ANDES)**

FEBRUARY 1-9, 2011



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Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

Venezuela: Casa Maria and Hato Pinero

A Relaxed and Easy Tour

February 1-9, 2011

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Guides: Desiree Starke & Gertrudis Gamarra (Hato Piñero)

Norbert Flauger (Casa María)

The ever-singing Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl helped us to see many birds while we visited La Neblina farm.

Where can you expect to see a roost of Scarlet Ibis, dozens of Yellow-knobbed Curassows, more than 13 species of passerines eating the moths attracted by a light bulb, Black-and-white Owl, 25 species of tyrant-flycatchers, hummingbirds, tanagers, woodpeckers, wrens, warblers, and the Venezuelan Troupial—and still bird at a very slow pace? Our Relaxed and Easy Casa María & Hato Piñero tour is the answer!

On our first day those of you who arrived in Venezuela early in the morning joined me to bird Colonia Tovar. There, the diminutive Slaty-crowned Antpitta and the much larger Chestnut-crowned Antpitta danced around us while the endemic Caracas Tapaculo and Black-throated Spinetail were observed lurking out of the native bamboo. In the meantime, those who stayed at the hotel had views of Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Scarlet-fronted Parakeets, and a good array of tyrant-flycatchers.

The next day we drove to Casa Maria, near Bejuma in Carabobo. This little inn is without a doubt one of the best birding lodges in Venezuela. Here we enjoyed superb birding, incredible meals, delicious desserts, a 3D slide show, and amazing service. Prior to breakfast, we met at the insect-attracting light bulb to watch a feast of birds feeding on moths and other arthropods. Among the many species we observed were Black-banded Woodcreeper, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Boat-billed Flycatcher, and Crested Spinetail, as well as several colorful Thraupidae including Silver-beaked, White-lined, Gray-headed, Bay-headed, Blue-necked, and Burnished-buff tanagers. At night, a Black-and-white Owl was perched near the light bulb. While staying at Casa Maria, we also visited the cloud forest of La Neblina farm, as well as the entrance of the Palmichal Reserve. There we observed Painted Parakeet, White Hawk, Wire-tailed Manakin, Speckled Tanager, Rufous-and-white Wren, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, and Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle.

After a couple of mornings in Casa Maria and its surroundings, we left the Coastal Cordillera and moved south towards the vast and amazing plains of the Orinoco River. Our destination was the famed Hato Piñero, a 200,000-acre ranch that combines extensive cattle operations with habitat conservation. The ranch was founded more than 50 years ago by the Branger family, and concerns arose when it was sold less than a year ago to the government. Happily, I can report that the manager appointed by the government has not only preserved the natural habitats, but supports conservation, tourism, and research within the boundaries of the ranch. We hope it will continue that way!

Hato Piñero provided an impressive mix of birds, superb mammals and one of the best tracts of dry forest anywhere in the Neotropics. Here we observed 10 species of egrets and herons, 7 species of ibises, and 19 species of birds of prey (out of the 22 species observed for the whole trip!). Furthermore, one night we had dinner near the dry forest with Orion, Taurus, and other constellations above us, while Jupiter and its satellites were enjoyed through the scope. During the drive back to the lodge we had amazing views of an ocelot, a pair of Great Potoos, a male Spectacled Owl, and two species of nightjars.

The sunrise bird chorus at Hato Piñero was truly memorable. Every morning we were welcomed by an Aplomado Falcon, or a Yellow-crowned Parrot, or a dozen Yellow-knobbed Curassows, while flycatchers, thornbirds, and macaws called from different directions like members of an orchestra rehearsing with their instruments. The evenings were a time of silence, with silhouettes of Scarlet Ibises, Jabiru, and Turkey Vultures flying to their roosting sites.

This tour has been our most popular destination in Venezuela for the last three years. I hope you have come away from this trip with an appreciation for my country's flora, fauna, and natural beauty, which I have loved since childhood. Enclosed you will find the birdlist and the other species list. For some species you will find a link to the video taken during the tour. Click on the link and it will redirect your browser to the website where the videos have been posted.



An extension trip to the Andes, February 16–18, 2011 with David Ascanio

“Anyone here?” I shout. It is 5:00 AM and the hotel’s main door is locked. We can’t wait too long, as we have to be at the cock-of-the-rock site at the crack of dawn. For that, we will drive in my 26-year-old Toyota Land Cruiser for about 40 minutes and, once there, a steep trail is waiting for us. A site where males display in the presence of females is known as a lek, and in the San Isidro Mountains we have one of the many display arenas found in the Andes of Venezuela.



On the drive along the main road I notice some drops of rain. That’s really bad, I tell myself. This has been an atypical dry season. Rains remain in the Coastal Cordillera, thus reaching the Andes from time to time. We need to drive a zigzag road, and then out to a dirt road passing a quarry and beyond there, the steep trail reaching the lek. But, it is still raining.

Once we reach the quarry it rains harder. Therefore, we have to wait. While we wait in a shelter, a cacophony of cries of Band-tailed and Andean guans is followed by the sound produced with their clapping wings: they are displaying. Some distance away, a Band-tailed Nightjar sings as the light shines in the east, far away in the plains of Venezuela. Twenty minutes later, the rain ceases and we decide to move forward. This time we find the road across the quarry fairly accessible since the corporation managing this area has not been granted a permit to blow up more boulders. I’m glad, because this quarry is too close to a natural area, and the use of explosives surely affects the dynamics of many cloud forest species.

Continuing our drive towards the lek, a Veery suddenly appears on a branch in front of the vehicle. We enjoy it for almost 40 seconds before it flies away. By ten after six we arrive at the entrance of the steep trail reaching the lek. I hear silence, only silence. As my concerns rise, I start hearing the awful song of the cocks-of-the-rock. They are still displaying! “Rush, rush!” I shout. Armed with telescope, camera, tape recorder, binoculars, and great expectation, we start the steep trail down to the lek. Mud has not given up here, and a polished ground makes it difficult to walk.

After forty precious minutes we reach the bottom of the trail. Once there, I point to a bend. "The lek is close," I say. In the meantime males continue to sing as we approach the site. Once we reach the display area a mild commotion is followed by dead silence. "The males are alert", I whisper. "Let's sit and wait until they get used to our presence." We remain silent, but start placing ourselves in an area with good light for photos. A few minutes later three males return and start singing. Later, more males join the party. Nevertheless, it is hard to get an angle with good light for photography or videos. As the morning progresses, the three males remain very active while the other seven keep coming and going. "Among these three males there might be the alpha male of the forthcoming breeding season," I comment. Although we are still far from the breeding season, it is clear to me that the selection party has begun. Only one male will mate with most of the females, and to be selected he has to last longer at the lek while displaying and singing continuously. My closing words were, "Because he expends so much energy and lacks the time to feed properly, I'm sure you can understand why an alpha male remains in such a position for no more than 2 to 3 years!"

By 9:00 AM I understand that the rain has helped us, since the cloudy morning has allowed more males' activity. The males come and go, but the three main competitors remain longer on their perches. Eventually they get used to us and ignore our presence. Now is the time when birding ends and learning from nature begins. Every twenty minutes or so most of the males reach the lek to call and display, while an alpha male candidate does not spend more than four minutes away from it. As we are distracted photographing and videotaping the alpha males, a dark shadow flies over my head. It's a female, I think, while a total commotion starts among the males at the lek. More red, glowing males appear from everywhere while a feast of guttural voices fills the air. Magic! For several minutes more than twelve males display with pendular movements, showing their three pairs of white feathers located on their lower backs. As our cameras click frenetically, the unsuspecting female observes the males while perched in the vicinity of the lek. Active males and passive females represent the quintessence of natural history: species driven by their hormones to multiply and perpetuate.

Once the female takes off, silence reaches the lek. Almost simultaneously the rain starts, calling an end to our day. Walking back to the vehicle, we get soaked. But who cares? We had experienced one of the most magical moments in nature, and only later, at dinner, were we able to digest everything we had learned. What a privilege. What a memory!

THE BIRDLIST

Tinamidae

Red-legged Tinamou. *Crypturellus erythropus*. An individual was heard twice in Hato Piñero.

Little Tinamou. *Crypturellus soui*. A single individual was heard near Casa Maria, in Bejuma.

Pelecanidae

Brown Pelican. *Pelecanus occidentalis*. Few were seen from the Hotel Olé Caribe.

Phalacrocoracidae

Neotropic Cormorant. *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*. We saw several individuals in Hato Piñero including several dozen roosting in puente Benjamín.

Anhimidae

Anhinga. *Anhinga anhinga*. Few pairs were seen in Hato Piñero.

Fregatidae

Magnificent Frigatebird. *Fregata magnificens*. Few individuals were observed from the Hotel Olé Caribe.

Ardeidae

Whistling Heron. *Syrigma sibilatrix*. We saw two pairs near El Banco, in Piñero. This one is certainly one of the most beautiful herons in Venezuela.

Cocoi Heron. *Ardea cocoi*. Daily views in Piñero.

Great Egret. *Ardea alba*. Daily views near Casa María and morte numerous in Hato Piñero.

Little Blue Heron. *Egretta caerulea*. 1 to 3 individuals were seen every day at Hato Piñero.

Snowy Egret. *Egretta thula*. We saw various individuals the east side of the ranch.

Cattle Egret. *Bubulcus ibis*. Several dozens were seen along the week.

Black-crowned Night-Heron. *Nycticorax nycticorax*. We enjoyed views of individuals in juvenile and adult plumage in Hato Piñero.

Rufescent Tiger Heron. *Tigrisoma lineatum*. We had superb views of juveniles and adults in Hato Piñero. It is fascinating to see how this species remains quiet over small wetlands when fishing thus waiting for the moment to hit the bill against the water and catch the prey!

Striated Heron. *Butorides striatus*. We enjoyed daily views in Hato Piñero.

Agami Heron. *Agamia agami*. We enjoyed great views of a single individual in Hato Piñero while doing the boat trip in San Gerónimo river.

Threskiornithidae

Hato Piñero is a superb place for enjoying and learning about the ibises. In the ranch we were able to observe all six species to occur in the country.

Buff-necked Ibis. *Theristicus caudatus*. Unlike most other ibises, this species avoids direct contact with water. We enjoyed close views of several individuals while they were searching for arthropods in the fields with native grasses.

Sharp-tailed Ibis. *Cercibis oxycerca*. Two pairs were seen at dawn flying out of the roost near the main house.

Green Ibis. *Mesembrinibis cayennensis*. This species remains lonely and prefer areas either inside or close to forest. Also, unlike the Buff-necked Ibis this species is usually close to water in wet grasslands or muddy grounds. Only 4 individuals were seen in Piñero.

Glossy Ibis. *Plegadis falcinellus*. Few individuals were observed south of the airstrip of Piñero.

Bare-faced Ibis. *Phimosus infuscatus*. The least conspicuous of the ibis given its dull plumage and pale face colors. We saw about 60 individuals in Piñero.

White Ibis. *Eudocimus albus*. Few individuals were seen mainly along the road to El Banco in Piñero.

Scarlet Ibis. *Eudocimus ruber*. We were rewarded one afternoon with great views of this astonishing species roosting in Puente Benjamín. We managed to count over 800 individuals!

Roseate Spoonbill. *Ajaia ajaja*. We observed loose groups or individuals in the small wetlands along the roads inside Hato Piñero.

Ciconiidae

Wood Stork. *Mycteria americana*. 9 individuals were reported in the ponds along the road of the ranch.

Jabiru. *Jabiru mycteria*. 3 individuals were enjoyed including a single individual on a nest.

Anhimidae

Horned Screamer. *Anhima cornuta*. We enjoyed a view of two individuals of this weird species: the closest resemblance to a unicorn in the Americas!

Anatidae

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. *Dendrocygna autumnalis*. In 2009 we observed more than 400 individuals flying around laguna Los Cerritos in Piñero. In contrast, in 2010 only 14 individuals were observed in the same location. This year more than 500 individuals were counted!

Muscovy Duck. *Cairina moschata*. We enjoyed a couple of groups of 6 individuals in Hato Piñero.

Cathartidae

Black Vulture. *Coragyps atratus*. Daily views.

Turkey Vulture. *Cathartes aura*. Most sights were of individuals of the North America race (*septentrionalis*) while only one individual of the resident race *ruficollis* was seen near the biological station of Hato Piñero.

King Vulture. *Sarcoramphus papa*. We enjoyed views of 1 adult flying over the lodge in Piñero.

Accipitridae

Osprey. *Pandion haliaetus*. We observed 2 individuals in a wetland along the road to the ranch.

Gray-headed Kite. *Leptodon cayanensis*. A pair was nicely seen at the Caño San Geronimo in Hato Piñero.

Pearl Kite. *Gampsonyx swainsonii*. A single individual was seen in Hotel Olé Caribe.

White-tailed Kite. *Elanus leucurus*. This species was observed various times. First, a single individual was seen in Hotel Olé Caribe. Then in Casa Maria and a third pair in Hato Piñero.

Crane Hawk. *Geranospiza caerulescens*. This species was observed twisting the tarsi between cracks and inspecting holes on the wall near the main house as it was searching for bats and other prey.

Great Black-Hawk. *Buteogallus urubitinga*. A single individual was observed soaring over Casa Maria and more individuals were seen in Hato Piñero.

Savanna Hawk. *Buteogallus meridionalis*. Several individuals were observed inside Hato Piñero.

Black-collared Hawk. *Busarellus nigricollis*. A pair was enjoyed along the west road of the ranch.

White Hawk. *Leucopternis albicollis*. We had great views of this wide-wings hawk soaring over Casa Maria.

Roadside Hawk. *Buteo magnirostris*. Daily views. This is arguably the most common and widespread bird of prey in northern Venezuela.

White-tailed Hawk. *Buteo albicaudatus*. A single individual was seen in Hato Piñero.

Zone-tailed Hawk. *Buteo albonotatus*. An individual was observed soaring over the guest house in Hato Piñero.

Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle. *Spizaetus melanoleucus*. A single individual was seen near the Palmichal reserve, Carabobo. We enjoyed great studies of it!

Ornate Hawk-Eagle. *Spizaetus ornatus*. This species was seen soaring and calling over Casa Maria.

Falconidae

Crested Caracara. *Caracara cheriway*. This species was seen almost daily.

Yellow-headed Caracara. *Milvago chimachima*. This species is as common as the previous one but usually more numerous.

Laughing Falcon. *Herpetotheres cachinnans*. A pair was seen in Hato Piñero.

American Kestrel. *Falco sparverius*. Seen near the main house in Piñero.

Apomado Falcon. *Falco femoralis*. Hato Piñero is probably the best location to see this falcon in Venezuela. Every morning we enjoyed views of an adult pulling bats beneath the tiles at the roof of the main house.

Cracidae

Rufous-vented Chachalaca. *Ortalis ruficauda*. Daily views in both locations: Casa Maria and Hato Piñero.

Yellow-knobbed Curassow. *Crax daubentoni*. We had daily views of this almost extinct species elsewhere outside Piñero. We reported more than 50 individuals each day.

Opisthocomidae

Hoatzin. *Opisthocomus hoazin*. While observing this species we learned aspects of the natural history of one of the most fascinating bird species in our planet. The Hoatzin is an herbivorous species having a long crop that function as a rumen to allow digest its diet. It was thought to be related with the Tinamidae, Cracidae, Rallidae, Otidae, Pteroclididae, Columbidae, Colidae, Cariamidae, Cracidae and Cuculidae. It is now believed to be a very ancient species with a long lonely evolutionary history with no close living relatives. Its taxonomical position has been greatly debated and is still unclear.

Aramidae

Limpkin. *Aramus guarauna*. The melancholic calls of this species were heard at Piñero. We saw a pair feeding on *Pomacea* snails in a small pond near the road.

Rallidae

Gray-necked Wood-Rail. *Aramides cajanea*. Many individuals were seen along crossing the roads of the ranch.

Eurypygidae

Sunbittern. *Eurypyga helias*. We enjoyed it for two consecutive days at Piñero. The elegant plumage of the Sunbittern was enjoyed through the scope. Definitive a favorite among the birders visiting the ranch!

Jacanidae

Wattled Jacana. *Jacana jacana*. We had daily views in the wetlands of Hato Piñero.

Recurvirostridae

Black-necked Stilt. *Himantopus mexicanus*. 3 individuals were seen in Los Cerritos wetland.

Burhunidae

Double-striped Thick-Knee. *Burhinus bistriatus*. We enjoyed great views of 6 individuals hiding at the shade of the scrubby vegetation of the ranch.

Charadriidae

Southern Lapwing. *Vanellus chilensis*. Daily views.

Scolopacidae

Spotted Sandpiper. *Actitis macularia*. We observed 3 individuals in Laguna Los Cerritos, Piñero.

Solitary Sandpiper. *Tringa solitaria*. A single individual was seen in Laguna Los Cerritos, Piñero.

South American Snipe. *Gallinago paraguaiiae*. We enjoyed scope views of this one when stopped along the road to enjoy Scarlet Ibis. A bonus for the trip!

Columbidae

Rock Pigeon. *Columba livia*. Several were observed near the airport and in the surroundings of Hotel Olé Caribe.

Pale-vented Pigeon. *Patagioenas (Columba) cayennensis*. Daily views of individuals perched and flying in forested areas inside the ranch and around Casa Maria.

Eared Dove. *Zenaida auriculata*. Once heavily hunted by sport hunters this species has recovered in the last 20 years and in Piñero we observed several dozens of it.

Common Ground-Dove. *Columbina passerina*. This is a common species in forest edge and scrubby vegetation. It was seen along the highway to Casa Maria and in Hato Piñero.

Ruddy Ground-Dove. *Columbina talpacoti*. This species was common and widespread in Casa Maria and in Hato Piñero.

Scaled Dove. *Scardafella squammata*. This is a common and widespread species in northern Venezuela. Seen daily in both locations.

Blue Ground-Dove. *Claravis pretiosa*. A male was flushed while driving across Puente Benjamín in Piñero.

White-tipped Dove. *Leptotila verreauxi*. Only a pair was observed in Piñero.

Psittacidae

Scarlet Macaw. *Ara macao*. We enjoyed great views of several pairs and individuals in Hato Piñero. Having these wonderful macaws flying virtually everywhere while we were inside the ranch explains why is so important the conservation of large tracks of dry forest in the plains of Venezuela.

Chestnut-fronted Macaw. *Ara severa*. Only three pairs were seen on route to Casa Maria.

Scarlet-fronted Parakeet. *Aratinga wagleri*. We saw a pair flying over Casa Maria in the first morning.

Brown-throated Parakeet. *Aratinga pertinax*. This is a common species in the lowlands of Venezuela. We saw it almost every day in Piñero.

Painted (Venezuelan) Parakeet. *Pyrrhura picta (emma)*. A nice group of about 9 individuals was enjoyed and scope above Casa Maria. This species has an interesting taxonomic history. First described as a full species (*P. emma*) it was later considered to be a race of Maroon-faced Parakeet (*P. leucotis*). More recently, various authors re-elevated it to species rank and named it Venezuelan Parakeet (*P. emma*). Later, in 2007 Stotz recommended to remove the race *emma* from *leucotis* meaning that it was not related to Maroon-faced Parakeet but to Painted Parakeet. That last suggestion passed in the SACC with some interesting observations as members of the committee suggested to consider *emma* species rank. So, for now, let's call it Painted Parakeet, but bear in mind that in the short term this whole group might be reshuffled again. (<http://www.museum.lsu.edu/~Remsen/SACCprop306.html>)

Green-rumped Parrotlet. *Forpus passerinus*. Heard only in Piñero.

Orange-chinned Parakeet. *Brotogeris jugularis*. This species is apparently declining in the Llanos and one of the reasons is the egg-eating behavior by the Capuchin Monkeys. In this trip we saw 6 individuals.

Blue-headed Parrot. *Pionus menstruus*. We observed three pairs flying over Casa Maria on the last morning.

Yellow-crowned Parrot. *Amazona ochrocephala*. A common species in Hato Piñero.

Orange-winged Parrot. *Amazona amazonica*. This species radiates across the Andes and the coastal cordillera in Venezuela. Various pairs were observed flying over Casa María.

Cuculidae

Squirrel Cuckoo. *Piaya cayana*. One pair was observed in Casa María.

Groove-billed Ani. *Crotophaga sulcirostris*. Found in scrubby vegetation and dry forest edge. A small family group was seen in Piñero.

Strigidae

Tropical Screech-Owl. *Otus choliba*. Heard only in Casa Maria.

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. *Glaucidium brasilianum*. Nice views of an individual in Casa Maria.

Spectacled Owl. *Pulsatrix perspicillata*. We had great views of an individual in Hato Piñero.

Great-horned Owl. *Bubo virginianus*. Various individuals were seen in the optional night outing in Hato Piñero.

Black-and-white Owl. *Ciccaba nigrolineata*. A big thank you to Norbert for keeping an eye on this incredible owl and for calling us at the dining room to enjoy it while perched near the light bulb.

Nyctibidae

Great Potoo. *Nyctibius grandis*. One individual was scoped in Hato Piñero.

Caprimulgidae

Pauraque. *Nyctidromus albicollis*. Various individuals were seen in the optional night outing in Hato Piñero.

White-tailed Nightjar. *Caprimulgus cayennensis*. This species is less numerous than the previous one. A pair was seen in the optional night outing in Hato Piñero.

Nyctibidae

Great Potoo. *Nyctibius grandis*. This amazing night bird was seen twice in the optional night outing in Hato Piñero.

Apodidae

Gray-rumped Swift. *Chaetura cinereiventris*. Four individuals were identified flying over Palmichal.

Vaux's Swift. *Chaetura vauxi*. This species was the commonest in Casa Maria. More than 7 individuals were observed soaring mainly at dawn and dusk.

Trochilidae

Rufous-breasted Hermit. *Phaethornis hirsutus*. One individual visited the flowers in Casa Maria in both mornings.

Sooty-capped Hermit. *Phaethornis augusti*. This was the commonest hermit along the road between Casa María and Palmichal. Since this species also gleans in spider webs in walls of houses it is locally known as *Limpiacasa* (House cleaner).

Ruby Topaz. *Chrysolampis mosquitus*. Four males were seen in flowering *Msaguaro* tree.

Violet-headed Hummingbird. *Klais guimeti*. This diminutive hummingbird was seen briefly in La Neblina farm foraging at a flowering tree.

Blue-tailed Emerald. *Chlorostilbon mellisugus*. A male was seen twice in Hato Piñero in scrubby vegetation.

Golden-tailed Sapphire. *Chrysuronia oenone*. Three individuals were enjoyed in the surroundings of Casa Maria.

Glittering-throated Emerald. *Amazilia fimbriata*. We had daily views in Casa Maria and in Hato Piñero.

White-vented Plumeleteer. *Chalybura buffonii*. A male visited Casa María in both mornings. We managed to get great photos of it!

Violet-fronted Brilliant. *Heliodoxa leadbeateri*. A male was seen at the entrance of La Neblina farm.

Trogonidae

Collared Trogon. *Trogon collaris*. This beautiful trogon was scoped above Casa Maria.

Cerylidae

Ringed Kingfisher. *Megaceryle torquata*. Few individuals were observed in Hato Piñero. This is the largest kingfisher in Venezuela.

Amazon Kingfisher. *Chloroceryle amazona*. A single individual was observed in Hato Piñero.

Green Kingfisher. *Chloroceryle americana*. As well as with the previous species, a single individual was also observed in Hato Piñero.

Galbulidae

The jacamars are insectivorous species restricted to the neotropic. They are usually found in pairs or loose groups. In appearance they show resemblances with the old world bee-eaters but are not related with it. That represents a good example of convergent evolution where two unrelated species acquire similar biological traits.

Rufous-tailed Jacamar. *Galbula ruficauda*. This is a never-to-forget species. We all enjoyed pairs near Casa Maria and along the road above it.

Bucconidae

Russet-throated Puffbird. *Hypnelus ruficollis*. We observed three pairs in Hato Piñero. The heavy bill of this puffbird is to catch large insects and to break the shell of it. This puffbird will be split in two species (Russet-throated Puffbird and Two-banded Puffbird) so keep an eye on it!

Picidae

Scaled Piculet. *Picumnus squammulatus*. Heard in Casa Maria.

Red-crowned Woodpecker. *Melanerpes rubricapillus*. This is the commonest woodpecker in urban areas in Venezuela. Many individuals were seen in both locations.

Golden-olive Woodpecker. *Colaptes rubiginosus*. A single male was observed above Casa Maria.

Red-rumped Woodpecker. *Veniliornis kirkii*. An individual was nicely observed in Hato Piñero.

Lineated Woodpecker. *Dryocopus lineatus*. Four individuals were observed in Hato Piñero.

Crimson-crested Woodpecker. *Campephilus melanoleucos*. A pair was observed the last night in Hato Piñero.

Furnariidae

What is known today as the *Furnariidae* formerly involved two families: The Ovenbirds (*Furnariidae*) and the woodcreepers (*Dendrocolaptidae*). Although there have been a historic controversy (for almost 100 years!) whether they should be treated as one or two separate families. The DNA sequence published in 2002 have revealed that both must be considered as one family thus reverting all the species into the *Furnariidae*. The proposal for this change was made in September 2004 and was accepted by the SACC committee.

- Pale-breasted Spinetail.** *Synallaxis albescens*. One individual was seen pretty well along the road from la Neblina to Casa Maria.
- Crested Spinetail.** *Cranioleuca subcristata*. Two pairs were nesting in Casa María. Unlike the previous species, this is an arboreal one.
- Rusty-backed Spinetail.** *Cranioleuca vulpina*. A pair was observed at the riverine forest in Caño San Gerónimo in Hato Piñero.
- Yellow-chinned Spinetail.** *Certhiaxis cinnamomea*. A pair was observed in a wetland near the main house.
- Plain Thornbird.** *Phacellodomus inornatus*. Few individuals were observed searching for arthropods on the ground and on branches of the Saman tree. This is the species that builds the large hanging nests found in posts and hanging from branches of the *Saman* trees. These nests are also used as breeding site by some seedeaters and by the national bird of Venezuela, the Venezuelan Troupial.
- Plain Xenops.** *Xenops minutus*. One individual was photographed by Jim in Casa Maria.
- Plain-brown Woodcreeper.** *Dendrocincla fuliginosa*. We had superb views of a single individual visiting Casa María to feed on moths and insects attracted by the night light bulb.
- Olivaceous Woodcreeper.** *Sittasomus griseicapillus*. This interesting species was seen twice in Casa Maria. It is likely to be split into two or three species and the one we saw will be placed with the population occurring in Central America and northern Venezuela.
- Black-banded Woodcreeper.** *Dendrocolaptes picumnus*. We had great studies of a single individual visiting the light bulb in Casa Maria.
- Cocoa Woodcreeper.** *Xiphorhynchus susurrans*. An individual was seen in the farm above Casa Maria. This species was formerly a race of Buff-throated Woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus guttatus*.
- Straight-billed Woodcreeper.** *Dendroplex (Xiphorhynchus) picus*. A single individual was observed in Mata Carmelera, in Hato Piñero. The race *phalaris* might be treated as a separate species in the future.
- Streak-headed Woodcreeper.** *Lepidocolaptes souleyetii*. A single individual was seen while in Casa María area. The distinctive field mark for field identification is the slightly curved bill.

Thamnophilidae

Thamnophilidae, along with *Formicariidae* and *Grallaridae* were treated as one family in the past. Nowadays, *Thamnophilidae* comprises the small passerine, most with rounded wings and strong legs while the other two families comprise the antthrushes and the antpittas.

Great Antshrike. *Taraba major*. Seen in Casa María. This skulky species was observed well by all tour participants when it hopped towards the screen of the light bulb to feed on the moths attached to it.

(Northern) White-fringed Antwren. *Formicivora intermedia*. A male was enjoyed in scrubby vegetation in Hato Piñero. Although Hilty (2003) followed Ridgely (in *Birds of South America*) in treating this as a separate species (calling it Northern White-fringed Antwren) the SAAC has not formally accepted it. Vocal differences between the populations E and W of the Essequibo suggest that the taxonomic division proposed by Ridgely might be accepted in the near future.

Pipridae

Manakins are the quintessence of neotropical birds. Arranged with wonderful plumages, several males of this family display in selected arenas (technically named *lek*) to attract the females, which usually have duller plumage.

Wire-tailed Manakin. *Pipra filicauda*. We were astonished when a male was observed 4 km above Casa Maria.

Tyrannidae

The Tyrant-Flycatchers are one of the best representatives of speciation in the neotropics. For the visitor to Venezuela it can be both frustrating and exciting to see a number of these species coming after the whistle of the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. In our tour we managed to see and learn how to identify 29 species as Casa María and Hato Pinero are without a doubt one of the best places in northern Venezuela to learn about this confusing family.

Sooty-headed Tyrannulet. *Phyllomyias griseiceps*. Three individuals were observed several times in Casa Maria. The short bill is a diagnostic field mark.

Forest Elaenia. *Myiopagis gaimardii*. One individual was seen near Casa Maria. This is one of the hardest-to-identify *Tyrannidae* in Venezuela due to the lack of a contrasting plumage.

Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet. *Camptostoma obsoletum*. This is the little one to tell the other birds when a pygmy owl is in the vicinity. I usually nickname it *Mr. hyperactive!* Many were seen well in both locations.

Mouse-colored Tyrannulet. *Phaeomyias murina*. This is another species easy to misidentify due to the lack of strong plumage contrasts. The distinctive eyebrow is one of the best ways to tell it apart from other species. A pair was seen in Hato Piñero.

Olive-striped Flycatcher. *Mionectes olivaceus*. A single individual was observed in Finca La Neblina.

Slaty-capped Flycatcher. *Leptopogon superciliaris*. We observed one individual around the gardens of Casa Maria. The ear patch is the distinctive field mark.

Northern Scrub-Flycatcher. *Sublegatus arenarum*. The resemblance of this species with the *Myiarchus* flycatchers usually drive it to an erroneous identification. Two pairs were seen in Hato Piñero. All the tour participants noticed the distinctive short bill in comparison with the *Myiarchus* flycatcher bill size.

Lesser Elaenia. *Elaenia chiriquensis*. This little known and plain looking elaenia was observed in Hato Piñero.

Pale-tipped Tyrannulet (Inezia). *Inezia caudata*. We enjoyed great sights of various individuals in Hato Piñero. The common name *Inezia* is waiting for formal proposal to be recognized by the SACC.

Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant. *Lophotriccus pilaris*. Heard in Hato Piñero.

Common Tody-Flycatcher. *Todirostrum cinereum*. This species was seen several times in Casa Maria and Hato Piñero. This diminutive tody-flycatcher has a conspicuous voice despite its small size.

Tropical Pewee. *Contopus cinereus*. A single individual was seen perched atop a dead branch near Casa Maria.

Vermilion Flycatcher. *Pyrocephalus rubinus*. This one is a conspicuous and easy to identify bird. A pair was seen in Hato Piñero.

Pied Water-Tyrant. *Fluvicola pica*. Daily encounters around the main house in Hato Piñero. This species is fond to areas close to water and visits gardens of houses with ditches.

White-headed Marsh-Tyrant. *Arundinicola leucocephala*. A single individual was seen in Piñero. Like the previous species, fond to areas with water and floating vegetation.

Cattle Tyrant. *Machetornis rixosus*. A pair was observed in grassland in the vicinity of the biological station.

The genus *Myiarchus* comprises one of the most difficult-to-identify in the field. We were able to learn the field marks and voice of three species, out of a genus containing of 22 species!

Dusky-capped Flycatcher. *Myiarchus tuberculifer*. A pair was seen the last morning in Hato Piñero.

Short-crested Flycatcher. *Myiarchus ferox*. An individual was observed near the biological station in Hato Piñero.

Brown-crested Flycatcher. *Myiarchus tyrannulus*. A pair was seen and heard in Hato Piñero. It is similar to the previous species but overall larger and with rufous edges at the tail.

The following seven species have been considered by some taxonomists to be an example of adaptive radiation, meaning the rapidly multiplying lineage from a single recent ancestor.

Rusty-margined Flycatcher. *Myiozetetes cayanensis*. This one was regularly seen in Casa Maria and Hato Piñero. The *yellow-breasted* flycatchers are hard to tell apart unless habitat, habits and song are known. In the case of this species the mournful and melancholic whistle is one of the key field marks.

Social Flycatcher. *Myiozetetes similis*. Many pairs were observed in Casa Maria and in Hato Piñero. This one looks like a *bleached out* in comparison with Rusty-margined Flycatcher. The voice also differs, being sharp and short.

White-bearded Flycatcher. *Phelpsia inornata*. After a good search we located three individuals near the biological station. This is a near-endemic species of Venezuela. The short bill and the prominent and immaculate white beard and eyebrow tell it apart from other similar species.

Great Kiskadee. *Pitangus sulphuratus*. This one was common and widespread in both locations.

Several were seen throughout the trip. The prominent bill and the reddish wings are diagnostic.

Lesser Kiskadee. *Pitangus (Philohydor) lictor*. Basically a miniature of Great Kiskadee but has a thinner bill and preferring areas near water. A pair was seen twice in the ponds near the biological station of Hato Piñero.

Streaked Flycatcher. *Myiodynastes maculatus*. A single individual was seen repeated times in Casa Maria. The bird observed was of the resident race *difficilis*.

Boat-billed Flycatcher. *Megarynchus pitangua*. This one was conspicuous in Casa Maria where we saw about 6 individuals. It seems like a bird attached to a huge bill!

Tropical Kingbird. *Tyrannus melancholicus*. It was common and widespread as it was seen daily.

Further studies are needed to determine the local migration pattern of this species.

Gray Kingbird. *Tyrannus dominicensis*. Few pairs were seen in Piñero. Unmistakable.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher. *Tyrannus savana*. The breeding behavior of this flycatcher in Venezuela is still a mystery as no nesting have been reported in the llanos but there are sight records for all year round! About 5 individuals were seen and heard in Hato Piñero.

Tityridae

Studies published in 1989 and 1990 concluded that *Tityra*, *Schiffornis* and *Pchyrampus* formed a distinct group, separated from the rest of *Tyrannidae*. In September 2007 Prum proposed to adopt the family *Tityridae*, being accepted by the SACC. In Hilty's field guide these species were treated as *incerta sedis*, meaning that they appeared to be related with the tyrant flycatchers but of uncertain affinity.

Chestnut-crowned Becard. *Pachyramphus castaneus*. A pair giving its sad and soft whistle was heard around Casa Maria.

Hirundidae

Gray-breasted Martin. *Progne chalybea*. Several individuals were observed on route to Casa Maria and in Hato Piñero. This is quite a contrast as in the last year only a pair was observed.

Southern Rough-winged Swallow. *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*. We enjoyed few individuals on the road above Casa Maria. In the mountains this species have a preference to feed in the vicinity of mountain streams.

White-winged Swallow. *Tachycineta albiventer*. A single individual was observed in Laguna Los Cerritos.

Barn Swallow. *Hirundo rustica*. Only one individual was observed flying over open grasslands in Hato Piñero.

Troglodytidae

Stripe-backed Wren. *Campylorhynchus nuchalis*. A couple of pairs were seen near the biological station of Piñero. Also, three additional individuals were observed along the road south to El Banco.

Whiskered Wren. *Thryothorus mystacalis*. This species was formerly as a race of Moustached Wren (*Thryothorus genibarbis*). We heard one pair in the San Isidro forest, above Casa Maria.

Rufous-and-white Wren. *Thryothorus rufalbus*. Three individuals were seen near Casa Maria. This species has a diagnostic soft and suit song.

House Wren. *Troglodytes aedon*. This one was common in populated areas and in scrubby vegetation. It was seen in both locations.

Scaly-breasted Wren (Southern Nightingale Wren). *Microcerculus marginatus*. A single individual was observed near Casa Maria. This is one of the most difficult-to-see wrens in Venezuela given its skulky behavior.

Poliophtilidae

Tropical Gnatcatcher. *Poliophtila plumbea*. Three pairs were seen in Hato Piñero. Despite its small size, this species is conspicuous as it perches in open areas, calling regularly while wagging the tail.

Turdidae

Pale-breasted Thrush. *Turdus leucomelas*. Pairs or trios were seen regularly in Casa Maria. Also seen (less numerous) in Hato Piñero.

Spectacled (Bare-eyed) Thrush. *Turdus nudigenis*. A pair was seen in Casa María.

Mimidae

Tropical Mockingbird. *Mimus gilvus*. Various pairs were observed in Hato Piñero. Although the North American relative of this species is known for its capacity to mimic other species song the Tropical Mockingbird is not the equivalent of it in the neotropics. Look at the end of this birdlist to find more out about the Northern Mockingbird equivalent in northern South America!

Vireonidae

Brown-capped Vireo. *Vireo leucophrys*. An individual was seen in La Neblina farm.

Red-eyed Vireo. *Vireo olivaceus*. The individual seen in Casa María is presumably of the North American (migrant) race *olivaceus*.

Golden-fronted Greenlet. *Hylophilus aurantiifrons*. A pair was seen near Casa María. In the mountains this species likes to follow feeding flocks as they search for insects from the mid-story to sub-canopy.

Rufous-browed Peppershrike. *Cyclarhis gujanensis*. We all enjoyed a great view of an individual coming to feed on moths in Casa Maria bulb light.

Thraupidae

Chestnut-vented Conebill. *Conirostrum speciosum*. We saw two pairs in Hato Piñero, but what a view! This species is usually found in pairs or small groups and this time it was located in a flowering tree along the access road of the ranch.

Guira Tanager. *Hemithraupis guira*. Two pairs were seen in Casa Maria.

Gray-headed Tanager. *Eucometis penicillata*. This is an army ant specialist, meaning that feeds almost exclusively on arthropods chased by army ants. Every morning we had a pair coming to the light bulb of Casa María to feed on small moth.

White-lined Tanager. *Tachyphonus rufus*. This one was a common species in Casa María. It is so dimorphic that it was once believed to be two separate species!

Summer Tanager. *Piranga rubra*. A pair was seen in Casa María. The pale bill and the crested-shaped nape were distinctive field marks.

Silver-beaked Tanager. *Ramphocelus carbo*. This species was common in Casa María.

Blue-gray Tanager. *Thraupis episcopus*. This one was common and widespread and numerous in both locations.

Glaucous Tanager. *Thraupis glaucocolpa*. This species can be easily confused with the previous species. One individual was observed near El Banco, in Piñero.

Palm Tanager. *Thraupis palmarum*. Daily views although not numerous. Seen in Casa María and Piñero.

Speckled Tanager. *Tangara guttata*. A pair was seen along the road between Casa María and Palmichal.

Bay-headed Tanager. *Tangara gyrola*. About 4 individuals were seen around Casa María.

Burnished-buff Tanager. *Tangara cayana*. This is probably the most widespread *Tangara* in the lowlands in northern Venezuela. We had views in Casa María and in Hato Piñero.

Blue-necked Tanager. *Tangara cyanicollis*. What a beauty! Seen twice near Casa María coming to the light-bulb.

Black-headed Tanager. *Tangara cyanoptera*. A pair was seen in the farm above Casa María. Keep an eye of this species, as the race occurring in the Andes and northern Venezuela (*cyanoptera*) might be treated as a separate species in the near future.

Incertae sedis

Species with an uncertain taxonomic position and sharing a historic controversy whether they should be treated as a *Thraupidae* or to *Emberizidae*.

Red-capped Cardinal. *Paroaria gularis*. (Named **Masked Cardinal** *Paroaria nigrocincta* in *Birds of Northern South America* Restall et al). A pair was seen in Hato Piñero. The race to occur in the Orinoco is proposed to be treated as a separate species but for the moment it remains as a race of Red-capped Cardinal.

Bananaquit. *Coereba flaveola*. We enjoyed daily views of individuals feeding on fruit and nectar. This conspicuous species may well be split in more than 3 species sometime in the future!

Emberizidae

(Southern) Grayish Saltator. *Saltator coerulescens*. A pair was observed at the Saman tree in Hato Piñero. Not seen in Casa Maria, although it was common there in the 2009 tour.

Buff-throated Saltator. *Saltator maximus*. A single individual was observed in Casa Maria.

Saffron Finch. *Sicalis flaveola*. This is a common species in Hato Piñero. Several adult and juveniles were seen at the ranch.

Pileated Finch. *Coryphospingus pileatus*. We enjoyed a pair foraging in the northern scrubby vegetation of Hato Piñero. This species is named Gray Pileated Finch in Hilty (2003).

Blue-black Grassquit. *Volatinia jacarina*. 2 adult and 2 sub-adult individuals were seen in Hato Piñero.

Gray Seedeater. *Sporophila intermedia*. This is a fairly common species in Hato Piñero. Some of these individuals were of the race *insularis*, treated as a separate species in *Birds of Northern South America* as **Ring-necked Seedeater**, *Sporophila insularis*.

Cardinalidae

Summer Tanager. *Piranga rubra*. Heard in Casa Maria.

Parulidae

Tennessee Warbler. *Vermivora peregrina*. An individual was seen in Casa Maria.

Tropical Parula. *Parula pitiayumi*. This species was fairly common in 2009. In 2010 and this year we observed only one individual in Casa Maria.

Yellow Warbler. *Dendroica aestiva*. Various sights. Various individuals were observed in Hato Piñero.

American Redstart. *Setophaga ruticilla*. Two pairs were seen around Casa Maria.

Northern Waterthrush. *Seiurus noveboracensis*. More than five individuals were seen in Caño San Gerónimo as well.

Slate-throated Whitestart (Redstart). *Myioborus miniatus*. A very active individual was enjoyed foraging with the mixed species feeding flock in the cloud forest above Casa Maria.

Golden-crowned Warbler. *Basileuterus culicivorus*. Various pairs were seen around Casa María.

Icteridae

Carib Grackle. *Quiscalus lugubris*. This species was observed repeated times every day.

Giant Cowbird. *Molothrus oryzivora*. We observed a single individual individuals flying before dusk above Casa María.

Yellow Oriole. *Icterus nigrogularis*. A pair was observed in Hato Piñero.

Venezuelan Troupial. *Icterus icterus*. We had daily views in Hato Piñero. This is the national bird of Venezuela.

Yellow-rumped Cacique. *Cacicus cela*. Various groups were seen in Hato Piñero. This is the one that replaces the Northern Mockingbird habits to imitate other bird songs in Venezuela. By listening to a male in a nesting colony we could perceive the voices of Lineated Woodpecker and Gray-necked Wood-Rail as part of the repertoire of it!

Crested Oropendola. *Psarocolius decumanus*. This one is commoner than the next species as it tolerates more open areas. Many were seen in Casa Maria and although the large flock we see every year in Piñero wasn't observed we enjoyed view of up to six individuals.

Russet-backed Oropendola. *Psarocolius angustifrons*. Seen in La Neblina farm, above Casa Maria. This species prefers more forested areas than the previous species.

Fringillidae

Lesser Goldfinch. *Carduelis psaltria*. About 4 individuals were seen along the road between Casa Maria and Palmichal.

Trinidad Euphonia. *Euphonia trinitatis*. Two males were spotted in Hato Piñero. The validity of this species maybe questioned in the future because of its resemblance with the widespread amazonian species Purple-throated Euphonia, *Euphonia chlorotica*.

Thick-billed Euphonia. *Euphonia laniirostris*. A female was seen in Casa Maria. The thick bill is the main field mark.

Other species list.

Ocelot. *Leopardus pardalis*. Seen in Hato Piñero.

Three-toed Sloth. *Bradypus trydactyla*. Casa Maria.

Red-tailed Squirrel. *Sciurus granatensis*. Hato Piñero.

Crab-eating Fox (Common Zorro). *Cerdocyon thous*. Hato Piñero.

Red-rumped Agouti. *Agouti paca*. Hato Piñero.

Little Brown Bat. (Molossidae). Hato Piñero, a common species around the main house.

Capybara. *Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris*. Hato Piñero.

White-tailed Deer. *Odocoileus virginianus*. Hato Piñero.

Weeping Capuchin Monkey. *Cebus olivaceus*. Hato Piñero.

Red-howler Monkey. *Alouatta seniculus*. Hato Piñero. Only heard.

Brazilian Rabbit. *Sylvilagus brasiliensis*. Hato Piñero.

Striped Hog-nosed Skunk. *Conepatus semistriatus*. Hato Piñero.

Green Iguana. *Iguana iguana*. Hato Piñero.

Ferdelance. *Bothrops sp.* Near Casa Maria.

Spectacled Cayman. *Cayman crocodilus*. Hato Piñero.

Llanos Side-necked Turtle. *Podocemis vogli*. Hato Piñero.

Common House Geckoo. *Hemidactylus frenatus*. Hato Piñero.

3 species of unidentified snakes near Casa Maria.