

Colombia

THE CHOCÓ-PACIFIC LOWLANDS WESTERN ANDES, AND CENTRAL ANDES IN TOLIMA

June 26 – July 11, 2011

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This exciting new trip represents the third itinerary in our developing series of Colombia birding destinations. Our trips are designed with two goals in mind—to ensure utmost safety, and to maximize opportunities to see endemic birds. In Colombia the Andes split into three distinct cordilleras, each offering its own distinctive array of endemic and localized birds. In order to maximize coverage of this beautiful and remarkably complex region we've begun developing a series of trips, each focusing mainly on one of these mountain chains. The first itinerary, which we first offered in 2009, focuses primarily on the Magdalena Valley and Santa Marta area. Our second route, offered in 2010, is devoted largely to exploration of the Central Andes and the north end of Eastern Andes. This trip, the newest of the three, continues with extensive coverage of the Chocó-Pacific lowlands, the Western Andes and two sites at the south end of the Central Andes in Tolima. Although Colombia has only relatively recently emerged from a well-publicized era of political- and drug-motivated violence, large areas of the country are now safe and this change has not been lost on a birding community long denied the opportunity to visit this beautiful country. Brimming with green mountains, cloud-filled valleys and exciting birds, there are some seventy species of endemic birds, and almost as many more occurring only slightly beyond its borders, Colombia has long been a destination of interest.

This itinerary focuses on the fabled Chocó-Pacific region. The distributions of quite a few of these birds also extend north to the Panama border or southward into northwestern Ecuador and naturalists and, in the past, birders have had to focus on these counties in their attempts to see these marvelous endemics. Now visitors and birders can see these and more in Colombia. Examples of species only found only in Colombia's Chocó-Pacific include the rare Sooty-capped Puffbird, Black-and-gold Tanager, Gold-ringed Tanager, Crested Ant-Tanager; and Baudó Oropendola. Searching for them, as is true with birding almost anywhere, is partly a game of chance. Sometimes it involves a little luck. Some are relatively easy to find, others difficult, but the search is almost always interesting. This trip also brings back a few areas popular with birders in the 1970s and early 1980s, albeit with some updates, e.g. feeders for tanagers and hummingbirds, which now considerably enhance the experience. This route also features two important new areas—Bahía Solano and Cerro Tatamá—which few birders have visited, as well as some great areas in the nearby Central Andes. With the tremendous range of habitats on this trip this could be our most exciting route to date.

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Long regarded as one of the most endemic-rich avifaunas in the world the Chocó-Pacific is known for high rainfall, beautiful green mountains, spectacular waterfalls, ever changing panoramas of cloud-filled valleys, and spectacular tanager diversity. Expect exciting birding and some species previously seen by few others.

About this trip. Colombia lags behind other Latin American countries in tourism infrastructure although this is changing rapidly. Also, Colombia's extremely mountainous terrain and heavy rainfall complicated tour planning. On this tour there are no unusually long or difficult hikes but it is a fairly physical trip, in part because of frequent lengthy drives between sites and because almost all birding is done on foot and some of it on trails where the footing is very uneven and/or slippery. Before determining if this trip is the one for you, consider a few issues, among them, the long travel times (although these drives are generally in a comfortable, air-conditioned bus) between sites, and the fact that many of these drives are on curvy mountain roads (it may seem as if there are no straight roads at all). We also will be using 4x4 vehicles one (possibly two) site(s) and this entails riding in jeeps (uncomfortable at best) on bumpy and poorly maintained tracks. Because of high rainfall in the Colombian Andes, landslides (and hence delays or detours) can be major and on-going issues. Traffic is often heavy on the better roads, and travel times when moving from site to site often takes longer than one anticipates (although occasionally we are pleasantly surprised). Food is generally good and meals generous and we have had few problems with health issues related to food and water. In addition, Bogotá water is excellent (although we strongly recommend bottled water everywhere else). If you enjoy spicy foods bring your own hot sauce. Hotel breakfasts are usually light (as usual in pre-dawn hours) but we supplement them and also provide snacks for mid-morning breaks. Birding is on both roads and on trails and walking conditions vary greatly. Sometimes easy, sometimes involving detours around extensive landslides, and on steep, slippery mountain trails. You should be in reasonably good physical condition to enjoy this trip, be able to walk both uphill and downhill for extended periods on roads or trails at elevations from sea-level to about 9000 feet or higher. Above all, you should bring a sense of adventure to this trip because unexpected detours or other events may necessitate some rearrangement of the itinerary at the last moment. Security is fine in all of the sites that we visit on this trip and, while security issues do remain in remote areas, mostly along international borders, this should not be an issue on the present route. Finally, this trip does focus on Colombia's endemic species, some of which also are uncommon, endangered and difficult to find. We won't find them all, but we will find some of them and, in the process, we will see a good cross-section of Colombia's other Andean birds and wildlife. You also will see a wonderful sample of the beauty of Colombia's fabled Andes where all their delicious coffee is grown and so many beautiful birds occur.

June 26, Day 1: International arrival in Bogotá, Colombia. Upon arrival today you will be met at the El Dorado International Airport and transferred to your hotel for the night. Please note that if you wish to exchange dollars you may want to do this at the airport upon arrival, however, smaller amounts of money can be exchanged at the hotel Dann. Bank exchange services are available on the left just before you exit immigration; there also are ATM machines near the hotel (slightly better exchange rate). Once at the hotel, instructions will be available for tomorrow's activities and flight schedule. Bottled water is available in your room at the hotel. Bogotá lies at an elevation of 2600 m (about 8600 ft) and has a pleasant, spring-like climate. Because there are so many things to do in Bogotá (both birding and cultural activities), you may wish to arrive a day or two early. If you provide your arrival time, you will be met and transferred to the hotel at whatever date you arrive (additional fees may apply). *For your local pre-trip activities (both birding and city tours) we recommend Diana Balcazar who is an English-speaking Bogotá native that conducts both birding trips and city tours.* You should contact her directly for these arrangements at diana.balcazar@etb.net.co or azulejo500@hotmail.com.

For assistance with reservations for early arrivals at hotels and airport to hotel transfers please contact the VENT office.

NIGHT: Hotel Dann Norte, Bogotá, department of Cundinamarca

June 27, Day 2: Fly to Bahía Solano on the Pacific coast of Chocó. We will depart fairly early this morning for the 35 minute flight to Medellín, with a spectacular continuing flight over the Western Andes (much lower in elevation than the Central and Eastern Andes) and down to the Pacific coast at Bahía Solano. Over the past decade or more the quiet little region of Bahía Solano and adjacent El Valle (where we will be staying) has been building its reputation as a resort. While investment has not been lavish, and facilities and services remain quite modest, there is now a nice beachfront hotel, good food and, best of all, access to good tropical wet forest, mangroves and coastal habitat nearby. In fact, there is great birding right behind the hotel where we will be staying. The rainy Chocó-Pacific region, which extends from near the Panama border south into northwestern Ecuador, is one of the world's biological hotspots for endemism. The number of species of birds (as well as for many other organisms) that occur here and nowhere else on earth is indeed remarkable. Bahía Solano/ El Valle, in fact, sits in the midst of this maelstrom of endemism and much of it will be right at our doorstep or can be seen nearby. We will begin birding right from the little airstrip at Bahía Solano, working our way southwestward along the 14 km stretch of road (partly forested) to the village of El Valle where our hotel is located.

NIGHT: El Almejal EcoLodge, El Valle, department of Chocó

June 28-30, Days 3-5: Birding the Bahía Solano-El Valle area. Along roads, trails and from boats, we'll be searching for as many Chocó-Pacific specialties as possible, although we could hardly hope to see all of them in one short visit. A sample of species (Chocó-Pacific species in boldface) we may see could include: Plumbeous Kite, Laughing Falcon, White-throated Crake, Purple Gallinule, **Rose-faced Parrot**, **Saffron-headed Parrot** (seasonal), Blue-headed Parrot, Mealy Parrot, Dusky Pigeon, Scaled Pigeon, Gray-chested Dove, **White-whiskered Hermit**, Bronzy Hermit, **Tooth-billed Hummingbird** (scarce), Blue-chested Hummingbird, **Purple-chested Hummingbird**, **Five-colored Barbet**, Spot-crowned Barbet, Collared (Stripe-billed) Aracari, Chestnut-mandibled and **Chocó Toucan**, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Cinnamon, Black-cheeked and Lineated woodpecker, **Chocó Trogon** (also known as White-eyed or Blue-tailed Trogon), Black-breasted, Pied, White-necked, and White-whiskered puffbird, Lanceolated Monklet, Slaty Spinetail, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Western Slaty-Antshrike, Russet Antshrike, **Pacific Antwren**, Dot-winged, White-flanked and Checker-throated antwren, Spot-crowned Antwren, Immaculate, Chestnut-backed, Spotted, Bicolored, and Ocellated antbird, **Black-headed Antthrush**, Thicket and Streak-chested antpitta, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, White-ringed Flycatcher, Cinnamon Becard, One-colored Becard, Masked, and Black-crowned tityra, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Golden-collared, Red-capped and Blue-crowned manakin **White (Black-tipped) Cotinga**, **Blue Cotinga**, Rufous Piha, **Slate-throated Gnatcatcher**, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Bay Wren, Plain-colored Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Rufous-winged Tanager, **Blue-whiskered Tanager**, **Gray-and-gold Tanager**, **Scarlet-and-white Tanager**, Tawny-crested Tanager, Scarlet-browed Tanager, **Lemon-spectacled Tanager**, Blue Dacnis, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Green, Red-legged, and Purple honeycreeper, Buff-throated Saltator, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, **Baudó Oropendola** (poorly known endemic that can be found in forest here), Orange-billed Sparrow, and Thick-billed and White-vented euphonia

We also have a dream list—species we'd love to find here but let's be realistic—we'd be lucky to see even a few of these. Among them are **Berlepsch's Tinamou**, **Chocó Tinamou** (we've heard it in the forest near the airport), **Baudó Guan**, **Brown Wood-Rail** (a good shot at this one), **Great Green Macaw** (seasonal), **Litae Woodpecker** (we haven't found this one here yet), **Chocó Woodpecker**, **Sooty-capped Puffbird** (as yet unknown from the area but it should occur), **Stub-tailed Antbird** and **Rufous-crowned Antpitta**. Also high on our list of targets is the enigmatic **Sapayoa** (also known as Broad-billed Sapayoa) and we do have a realistic chance at this much-coveted species.

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We also will be visiting this area during the prime Humpback Whale viewing period (June to September) when the whales arrive to give birth to their calves. The whales can often be seen from the shore and numerous boats are available to ferry visitors out for a closer look.

NIGHTS: El Almejal EcoLodge, El Valle, department of Chocó

July 1, Day 6: Depart Bahía Solano (Chocó) to Medellín (Antioquia). Our activities today will depend largely upon air schedules but we hope to do some early morning birding in the tall forest near the airport prior to our mid-morning flight to Medellín. Medellín is a large, cosmopolitan city located in the Río Aburrá valley adjacent to the Cauca Valley. Known for its spring-like climate and pleasant temperatures (the elevation is about 5000 feet) this city of nearly three and a half million people has largely overcome a turbulent recent past and now has a strong industrial economy as well as a sense of culture and history. Medellín is justly famous for its orchids and annually celebrates a Festival of Flowers in August, one of its most important holidays. There is a nice little forested reserve close to Medellín where several interesting species can be seen including **Yellow-headed Manakin** (near endemic), **Red-bellied Grackle** (endemic), Rufous-tailed Tyrant and Spillman's Tapaculo among others and we should be able to visit this reserve in the afternoon.

NIGHT: Hotel Portón, Medellín, department of Antioquia

July 2, Day 7: Fly from Medellín to city of city of Pereira in Central Andean range and continue overland to vicinity of Cerro Tatamá National Park. Our destination today is a small lodge located close to the edge of beautiful Chocó-Pacific cloud forest. We will begin with a flight from Medellín to the city of Pereira. This will be followed by an overland drive, across the Cauca Valley (here rather narrow) and up the eastern flank of the Western Andes to near the crest of the cordillera. For the last forty-five minutes of the trip the road has some poorly-maintained stretches where 4-wheel drive vehicles will be needed. It will likely be late afternoon before we reach the lodge. The lodging is basic—essentially a small house—with shared bathroom facilities. The rooms, however, are very clean, the food excellent and the owner (a relatively young woman recently widowed) is extremely gracious and eager to please. We feel lucky to have located this site because, although the lodging facilities are small, the birding opportunities here are spectacular and we believe that the birding here far outweighs a few inconveniences. Birding trails are a ten-minute walk from the house. At about 4800 ft elevation (ca. 1450 m). The climate here will be cooler than our previous sites and decidedly more humid as this region receives high rainfall (close to 4000 mm) spread fairly evenly through the year.

NIGHT: Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma, Pueblo Rico, dept. of Risaralda

July 3-5, Days 8-10: Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma and Tatamá National Park. This small reserve (designed as such by the local community) lies adjacent to Cerro Tatamá National Park and much of our birding will be within Cerro Tatamá National Park itself. The park figures large in the history of Colombian ornithology because it was an early and important collecting site, with a long list of Chocó-Pacific birds first known from this area. This is a rainy region lying on the cusp of the famous super-wet Chocó-Pacific region, but mornings tend to be clear even here. On the first day we'll leave very early by horseback for the approximately two-hour ride to reach the upper zone of Cerro Montezuma at about 1800-2200 m elevation. There is a small house in this upper zone where we will begin our birding activities. We'll also explore the lower part of the reserve at ca. 1400-1600 m, which is in the vicinity of the house where we will be staying. And, at the house itself, we will be quite close to beautiful wet, mossy forest. The list of birds in these upper and lower zones is almost a complete list of montane Chocó-Pacific species including many that have been seen by only a small number of birders previously. Among them are two endemic *Bangsia* tanagers, the **Black-and-gold Tanager**, and **Gold-ringed Tanager**, as well as the endemic **Munchique Wood-Wren** (a species first discovered in southwestern Colombia by Hilty in the late 1970s but not described until 2003). And, another recently described species, the **Chocó Vireo** (near endemic) also occurs here but is scarce. A sample of species that have been found here (and who knows what else we might find) includes **Chestnut Wood-Quail** (endemic), Sickle-winged Guan, Blue-fronted Parrotlet, **Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl**, Western (West Andean) Emerald, Green-crowned Woodnymph,

Brown Inca (fairly common), White-tailed Hillstar, **Empress Brilliant** (near endemic), Greenish Puffleg, Long-tailed Sylph, Purple-throated Woodstar, Crested and Golden-headed Quetzal, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, **Fulvous-dotted Treerunner** (near endemic), Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Uniform Treehunter, Streak-capped Treehunter, Plain Antvireo, **Bicolored Antvireo** (locally fairly common), Spillman's Tapaculo, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Scaled Fruiteater Olivaceous Piha, Club-winged Manakin, **Beautiful Jay** (near endemic), **Black Solitaire** (near endemic), **Glistening-green Tanager** (near endemic), **Multicolored Tanager** (endemic), **Indigo Flowerpiercer** (near endemic), Golden Tanager, Saffron-crowned Tanager, Golden-naped Tanager, Black-capped Tanager, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Flame-faced Tanager, Rufous-throated Tanager, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Dusky Bush-Tanager, Yellow-throated Bush-Tanager, **Crested Ant-Tanager** (endemic and surprisingly common here), Tricolored Brush-Finch, Black-winged Saltator, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, and Thick-billed and Orange-bellied euphonia.

NIGHT: Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma (near Pueblo Rico), dept. of Risaralda

July 6, Day 11: Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma to “El 18” (above Cali). This will be primarily a travel day with a few brief opportunities for birding, mainly in the afternoon. We'll spend an hour or two birding as we depart the Cerro Montezuma area for the trip southward toward Cali. Most of the trip we will be driving southward up the broad, flat Río Cauca Valley which has been deforested for a long time now. Almost all of the natural vegetation of the valley has been replaced with agricultural crops including sugar cane, rice, cotton and other products. Because this is an area of considerable commerce the road should be mostly good although there will be traffic. We should have time for one important stop sometime this afternoon in the dry, rain-shadow valley of the Río Dagua. Here the vegetation changes dramatically, from humid forest at higher elevations to desert scrub within just a few kilometers. This happens because the valley makes an abrupt bend to the south and intervening high mountain ridges block the flow of warm, moist (east-flowing) Pacific coast air from reaching the valley which is lower in elevation and hotter than the ridges above. Consequently the cooled air passing over the ridges warms as it descends into the upper Dagua Valley and rarely reaches a temperature cool enough to cause precipitation. This local climatic system has persisted for thousands of years and a distinctive flora and fauna now occupies this unusual valley which is flanked, at higher elevations, both to the west and the east by cloud forest. We'll make a stop or two here in the upper part of the Dagua Valley where we should be able to add a few arid-country species, among them Common Ground-Dove (very common), **Bar-crested Antshrike** (near-endemic), Bran-colored Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Vermilion Flycatcher (common), **Apical Flycatcher** (endemic), **Dagua Thrush** (scarce), Ultramarine Grosbeak, Streaked Saltator, Scrub Tanager and possibly **Grayish Piculet** (endemic). We hope to arrive at our lovely and very comfortable country hotel (about 1850 m) a little before nightfall. Temperatures here are usually cool and pleasant.

NIGHT: Hotel Faro (near “El 18”), department of Valle del Cauca

July 7, Day 12: Early morning departure for day-long trip into the Río Anchicayá Valley with birding stops beginning along the lower portion of the road. Once regarded as one of the top birding roads in the world, this area has not been much visited by birders for nearly two decades. With security no longer an issue, birders are returning to this exciting area. We'll depart quite early because it is a fairly long drive and we'll need four-wheel drive vehicles for the lower portion of the road (although all of the upper section is now paved). We'll do most of our birding between ca. 300 and 550 m elevation, where we'll be looking for Chocó-Pacific species we may have missed earlier in the trip. A sampling of species here could include **Chocó Trogon**, Chocó Toucan, Spot-crowned Barbet (common), Broad-billed Motmot, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, **Pacific Flatbill**, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, **Lemon-browed Flycatcher**, **White-thighed Swallow**, **Slate-throated Gnatcatcher**, **Golden-bellied Warbler**, Tawny-crested, Dusky-faced, Golden-chested, and Scarlet-browed tanagers, and Black-winged Saltator. This also an excellent area for many species of smaller tanagers, including **Scarlet-and-white Tanager**, and Golden-hooded, Rufous-winged, **Blue-whiskered**, Silver-throated, **Gray-and-gold tanager**.

NIGHT: Hotel Faro (near “El 18”), department of Valle del Cauca

July 8, Day 13: Cloud forests along crest of Western Andes. We plan to spend the morning in the vicinity of our hotel (ca. 1850-1900 m el) and in nearby highland sites where there are good opportunities to see the endemic and much-sought **Multicolored Tanager** as well as many other species. We also will have access to hummingbird feeders (a house and later a restaurant) where several species of hummingbirds are sure to be present and some are so habituated to the presence of humans that they will alight on one's fingers to sip nectar. Examples of species in this area include Gray Tinamou (most likely only a voice), **Dark-backed Wood-Quail** (another voice), Colombian Chachalaca, (endemic if split from Spectacled Chachalaca of east of Andes), Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Barred Parakeet (seasonal), Red-headed Barbet, **Crimson-rumped Toucanet**, Uniform Antshrike, Montane Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Streak-capped Treehunter, Streaked Xenops, **Nariño Tapaculo**, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Marble-faced and Variegated bristle-tyrant, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Andean Solitaire (beautiful song), Three-striped Warbler (common), Rusty Flowerpiercer, and Orange-bellied Euphonia. Colorful *Tangara* tanagers are apt to dominate whenever we encounter mixed species flocks and likely species include Saffron-crowned, **Golden-naped, Metallic-green**, Golden, Bay-headed, Black-capped, and Beryl-spangled as well as Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and Dusky Bush-Tanager. Hummingbirds are star attractions at feeders and we may spend some time at two sites where the hummingbird show should be good. Some of the species possible in this area are White-necked Jacobin, Green Violetear, Brown Violetear, Black-throated Mango, **Blue-headed Sapphire** (seasonal), Booted Racket-tail, Speckled Hummingbird, Andean Emerald, Bronzy Inca, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Buff-tailed Coronet Long-tailed Sylph, and **Purple-throated Woodstar**. After lunch today we'll pack up and retrace a portion of route back down the Cauca Valley toward the city of Armenia where we'll begin the long climb upwards to the town of Cajamarca, located at about 6500 m (1950 m). We will continue on past Cajamarca for another hour to our hotel in Ibague but return very early tomorrow morning to Cajamarca where we will embark on a trip into the higher mountains in search of the rare Indigo-winged Parrot.

NIGHT: Estelar Altamira Hotel, Ibague, department of Tolima

July 9, Day 14: Drive from Cajamarca upwards to treeline. Afternoon return to Cajamarca and continue on to city of Ibague. We plan to leave quite early this morning because our first birding stop is at least two hours away. We'll be searching primarily for the endemic **Indigo-winged Parrot** (now classified as a critically endangered species). This species has an extremely small range, being found mainly on the west slope of the Central Andes near the borders of Quindío, Risaralda, and Tolima. The loss of forest habitat (even prior to the beginning of the last century) and loss of suitable large cavities for nesting has resulted in the drastic decline of this species, making it one of the rarest psittacines in Colombia. Remarkably, until as recently as 2002, the species was known only from the type series specimens (collected in 1911) from two sites known as Laguneta, and Santa Isabel. Recent searches turned up the species in the municipality of Génova in the department of Quindío with an estimated 60 birds. It has now been reported in a few other areas, mostly close to Los Nevados National Park but the total population may number less than 250 birds. The species has been reported between about 2600 and 3600 m elevation but mostly at or close to treeline at ca. 3300 m. The species nests during the first four or five months of the year but is believed to remain in these areas throughout the year. ProAves has purchased land and designated a small reserve very close to where we will be, and we may also walk the short distance up the reserve. Results from the erection of nesting boxes have been encouraging and recent nesting success, as a result of artificial nest boxes, has been high. We, of course, have no illusions about the difficulty of finding this species but if we are successful, a sighting of this species will certainly rank as one of rarest species we could find on this trip. Golden-plumed Parakeets also occur in this area. Other interesting species here include Variable Hawk (northern limit of range), Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Golden-breasted, and Black-thighed puffleg, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Viridian Metaltail, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Mountain Avocetbill (hummingbird), Purple-backed Thornbill (fairly common seasonally), Gray-breasted, and Black-billed mountain-toucan, Crimson-backed, and Bar-bellied woodpecker, Stout-billed Cinclodes, White-browed Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Undulated, Rufous, and Tawny antpitta, Agile Tit-Tyrant (near endemic), Golden-crowned Tanager, Hooded Mountain-Tanager, Black-chested Mountain-Tanager, Masked Mountain-Tanager, Black-backed Bush-Tanager, Black-headed Hemispingus, and Superciliaried Hemispingus. We plan to spend the entire day in this area and

regardless of our success, the area is absolutely beautiful to see, with stunning forests of wax palms (*Ceroxylon*), nice patches of wet upper montane forest, and beautiful páramo. Some rain and/or clouds and fog also are likely in this region of high rainfall. On our return, if possible, we'll mount a search for the endemic Blossomcrown (at lower elevation assuming we can locate suitable flowers along the roadside).

NIGHT: Estelar Altamira Hotel, Ibagué, department of Tolima

July 10, Day 15: Ibagué area. We will have a morning to spend at one or more sites near Ibagué where our search for a few more endemic species will continue. Species we'll be looking for here include principally the **Blossomcrown** (Hummingbird), **Tolima Dove** and **Yellow-headed Brush-Finch**, all of them endemic to Colombia. Also possible here is **Yellow-headed Manakin** (also a near endemic). Other interesting species here, mostly at elevations much higher than we will have time to visit, include Brown-banded Antpitta and Masked Saltator. Early this afternoon we will depart Ibagué for the approximately five hour drive back to Bogotá.

NIGHT: Hotel Dann North, city of Bogotá, department of Cundinamarca

July 11, Day 16: International flight departures. This morning there will be transfers to El Dorado international airport in Bogotá (about 20-40 minutes depending upon traffic) for homeward departures.

Hotels and lodges range from quite good (most sites) to basic at one site which has shared bathroom and also quite basic at one hotel; good food (excellent at the Montezuma site); flat to fairly steep trails and terrain; temperatures hot and humid at first site, cool and pleasant at all others; expect rain (rainy year-round); moderate to brisk pace but with midday breaks at a few sites; one site will be accessed by horseback. Some good photographic opportunities.

TOUR SIZE: Limited to 8 participants

TOUR LEADERS: Steve Hilty and Colombia birding guide, Luis Eduardo Ureña

Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and the recently published *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press. Other credits include *Birds of Tropical America*, *A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*, which has just been republished by the University of Texas Press. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, and is presently preparing the text and species accounts for the tanagers for a forthcoming volume of the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has worked at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, as a consultant to The Nature Conservancy, and as a stockbroker. He is currently a research associate at the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History. Since 1975, he has led tours throughout North and South America, and co-led trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With three decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two daughters now graduated from college and working.

Luis Eduardo Ureña is a young biologist from Tolima University in the state of Tolima, Colombia. He started his work in ornithology nine years ago, and was the director of the Blue-billed Curassow conservation program for four years for the ProAves Foundation in Colombia. He and his fiancé, Andrea, also a biologist, are active in various conservation projects. Luis combines excellent field skills with an eagerness to please and enjoys showing people the birds of his country. Luis and his fiancé also own and operate Manakin Nature Tours, a new company dedicated to providing services for birders in Colombia. He also guides for EcoTurs, the tour and travel branch of ProAves in Bogotá.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$6,500** per person in double occupancy from Bogotá. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to dinner on Day 15, accommodations as stated in the

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itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, the flight from Bogotá to Medellín (Day 2) and round-trip flight from Medellín to Bahía Solano (on Day 2 and return on Day 6) and the flight from Medellín to Pereira on Day 7, as well as gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Bogotá, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$225**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Please note that on Day 7 through 10 (4 nights) single rooms will not be available.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after**

registering. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are required to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see below).

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making International air arrangements. **Please Note: Requests for International airline ticket assistance must be received by VENT no later than 90 days prior to departure. Within 90 days, participants must make their own arrangements.** Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility.

BAGGAGE LIMITS: All tour participants are asked to limit their baggage to **a single bag of no more than 44 pounds (20 kilos) and a single carry-on item such as a small backpack. Checked luggage is strictly limited to 15 kilos (33 lbs) on the flight from Bogotá to Medellín, and the round-trip flight from Medellín to Bahía Solano and return. However, you may leave luggage at the hotel in Bogotá (before departure on Day 2) and our driver will bring all stored luggage to us on Day 7 (when we meet in the city of Pereira).** Therefore, **we suggest that all participants bring a small extra duffel** so that items can be left in Bogotá. **Please pack in duffels if possible** as these will fit better in our buses and will be more useful in the lodges where we stay, which are relatively small. In general, this is a fairly vigorous trip and amenities at the lodges where we stay vary (but should include the transport and movement of luggage from buses to lodges, etc in all but the Cerro Montezuma and Cajamarca areas). **When packing, we urge you to give considerable thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring plastic bags large enough to protect your clothing and/or luggage in case of rain.**

CLIMATE: Weather conditions can be somewhat variable on this trip due to the range of habitats and elevations visited. However, most of the sites visited on this trip are in the highlands at moderate elevations where temperatures are relatively cool and pleasant. Note that the first area we visit (Bahía Solano) will be hot and humid as it is coastal in location and apt to have high humidity. Both the Colombian Andes and the lowlands can be somewhat rainy at almost any time of the year and this is particularly true on this trip where rainfalls is generally high throughout the year. We suggest that you to **bring an umbrella and/or rain jacket (or poncho as we will have two boat trips in Bahía Solano).** We also strongly advise bringing rubber boots as some trails, especially in the Bahía Solano area during the first few days of our trip will almost certainly be very muddy and may even have standing water. Your footwear also should include gore-tex water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots and a second pair of sturdy walking shoes and/or sneakers. During at least one day we will be at high elevation (close to treeline) and you will need a warm jacket (or layered vest and fleece) and perhaps also gloves. Temperatures, however, will not be below freezing and are generally chilly only for an hour or two early in the morning but high elevations in Colombia often are very damp, making temperatures seem cold. You may want to have a lightweight jacket with you during day hikes in some other sites as well. Rain protection (umbrella, etc.) will be essential every day.

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CLOTHING: Light to medium weight field clothing will be fine for most of the trip with lighter weight clothing especially for the first ~~two~~ four days. Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes, including hats or raingear, as it makes our movements more conspicuous to shy birds and animals, especially when we are inside the forest. We suggest loose-fitting khaki clothing or other cotton clothing in a dark green, dark blue, tan or brown shade. Military camouflage clothing should not be worn as it conveys an inappropriate image to police and military personnel, whom we are likely to encounter at various highway checkpoints. Also, please avoid nylon or plastic jackets and/or rainwear of similar materials as noisy clothing may frighten birds and animals. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended as protection against insects. A long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket and sweater and/or medium-weight jacket should see you through the trip. There will be cool and damp conditions, however. Rubber boots (noted above) are essential. Shower thongs also will be useful. Expect both roadside birding and trail birding. We recommend a broad-brimmed hat (preferably not white or very light in color) for sun protection and use of a good sunscreen.

LAUNDRY: **Laundry service will not be available on this trip except at the first site in Bahía Solano.** We recommend that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through all or most of the trip and, especially, bring items that can be washed easily and will dry (i.e. cool-max shirts etc) in your rooms.

NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR: Until recently, Colombia was rarely visited by birders. Tourism infrastructure is still limited but developing rapidly. Accommodations are surprisingly comfortable, although our lodging near Cerro Tatamá is quite basic but the food is good. The hotel at Cajamarca, also, is poor but the only one available. There are some lengthy bus rides when moving between sites. Also, **we will use 4-wheel drives to access Montezuma, Anchicavá, and the Cajamarca area** and the vehicles, while sturdy, are generally not designed with the utmost comfort in mind. Birding will be on forest trails and on country roads with little traffic. Trail conditions will vary, but may include some steep hills and moderately strenuous walking including one hike (El Valle/Bahía Solano) of up to ca. five miles on a trail that is often muddy and wet. Temperatures are generally cool and refreshing in the mountains but will be hot and humid the first four days. Expect some rain.

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS: **Malaria** has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas. It is not expected to be a problem on this route [but we cannot verify this for sure]. There are two malaria prophylaxis recommended in areas where chloroquine-resistant malaria is present: Mefloquine (Lariam) and Malarone. For travelers who are unable to take either Malarone or Mefloquine, the CDC recommends the drug Doxycycline as an alternative. Please consult with your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations.

Hepatitis A vaccination (two series shot – costing about **\$100**) is strongly recommended as a precaution.

While not a requirement for entry into Colombia (unless you are arriving from an infected area in another country), a **Yellow Fever** vaccination is a good idea for most people traveling to third world, tropical countries, and the vaccination is good for 10 years. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination. Your polio, tetanus, and typhoid protection should be current. Leishmaniasis is a disease transmitted by a small fly that is mainly active at dusk or during the night. It is not a common insect and only a few of the flies are disease carriers, proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are the best protection. Dengue fever also is very infrequent and is transmitted by day-flying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection. You may check with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta at 877-FYI-TRIP or www.cdc.gov/ for further health information.

INSECTS: Insects should not be a problem over most of our route (the highlands should be particularly free of biting insects), but we could encounter some biting insects, as well as chiggers, in the lowland sites. Wear loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and bring bottles or roll-on sticks of Cutter's or similar insect repellents. Spraying shoes, socks and lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful.

CURRENCY: Colombian Peso: as of January 5, 2010: \$1.00 USD = 1800-1900.00 pesos.

DOCUMENTS: For U.S citizens, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required. A visa is not required for stays of less than 60 days. A tourist card will be issued by your airline. All non-United States citizens should check with their local Colombian consulate or embassy.

EQUIPMENT: We strongly recommend that participants **bring a wide-mouth water bottle** that can be easily refilled from a large water container, and a **portable alarm clock**; a **day pack**; plenty of plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field; plenty of snacks such as trail mix or dried fruit, and any personal medications. A **compact umbrella** is highly recommended, and **raingear** (rain jacket or poncho) is necessary. Earplugs may come in handy at a couple of the lodges or hotels. The sites where we stay are generally quite clean (although basic at two sites, as noted above) but if you would feel more comfortable using a sleeping sac, then by all means bring one as they are generally very light in weight.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: There will be opportunities to recharge batteries for electronic equipment at most sites but participants should bring enough spare batteries to last several days between charges. Electrical plug-ins in Colombia are two flat-pin type (same as in USA) and electric current is generally 110 (rarely 220/240 volts) but it wouldn't hurt to bring an appropriate converters just in case; a surge protector also may be used (110 volt protection) if you plan on using a small laptop. Because much of this route traverses relatively remote regions where the variety (although not quantity) of food may be limited, we recommend that everyone, including especially those persons with dietary restrictions or other dietary requirements, bring at least some trail snacks and other emergency food items that are portable. Internet access may be available at some hotels (i.e. Medellín, El 18, Ibagué, Bogotá). Other items should include 1) bird book, 2) field checklist for re-cap's in evening (provided by VENT); 3) small notebook, pens, etc. and other personal items. Both guides will have telescopes but we encourage participants also to bring a scope if they wish and especially if they wish to do a lot of digiscoping.

INTERNET: Internet service is available in the hotel in Bogotá, in Medellín and above Cali (El Faro) and in Ibagué (limited to 1 computer at present). Wi-Fi should be available in the Hotel Dann in Bogotá. There is no public internet service available at our hotel in Bahía Solano nor at the Montezuma Reserve site near Tatamá National Park.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from our store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. *Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1986. Now a classic and your best source for Colombia bird identification. Fine source of information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat, range maps for almost all species. Plates excellent but taxonomy now somewhat dated. A new book is in preparation.

McMullan, T. Donegan, and A. Quevedo. 2010. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. ProAves Colombia. New "pocket-sized" guide illustrating all of Colombia's birds. Just published July 2010 this is likely to be the book of choice to carry in the field, if for no other reason than it is so compact and light in weight. Pictures are small and there is essentially no text, but up-to-date taxonomy and maps will be helpful. Available through ProAves, Colombia, (www.proaves.org/guide) and now also in USA (Buteo Books).

Restall, R., C. Rodner, and M. Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America*. Vol. 2. Plates and maps. Christopher Helm, London. Also has up-to-date taxonomy. Very different color plate style (useful for some groups; not

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helpful for difficult groups like flycatchers); similar in size and weight, to the Hilty & Brown book. Covers seven countries (over 7000 images) which complicates field use because of large number of illustrations. Maps are tiny and lack detail. An additional limitation is that all text is in a separate volume.

Natural History:

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity.* University of Texas Press, 2005. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes; topics include diversity of birds, hummingbird communities; mixed species flocks; antbirds and army ants; colorfulness, song structure in relation to environments, and much more.

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Excellent broad-based resource on just about everything from plants and birds to insects, herps and mammals in the Neotropics. Excellent pre-trip reading.

Snow, David. *The Web of Adaptation: Bird Studies in the American Tropics.* Quadrangle, New York Times Book Co.: Demeter Press, 1976. A classic. Deals with fruit-eating birds and their adaptations in the American tropics.

General Travel:

Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid. 2009. *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia.* A good introduction to Colombia life, culture and just getting around the country. A little time with this or a similar book (there are several other guide books, i.e. Rough Guide, Viva, etc) and each has strengths and weaknesses) should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone.

Recordings:

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

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motor coach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect October 14, 2010, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour.

Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.