# Colombia

## Bird Photo Tour

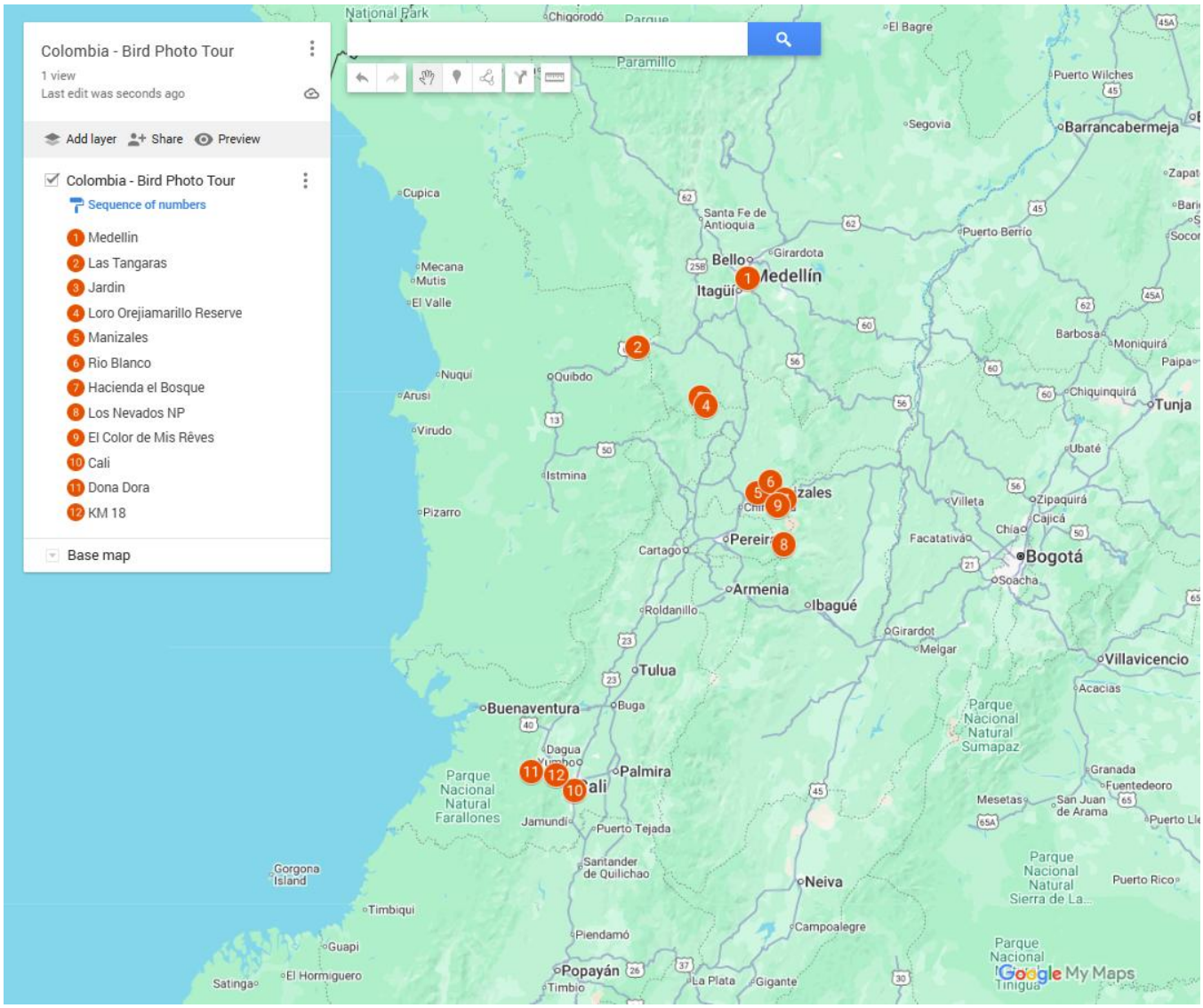


**Black-billed Mountain Toucan by Carlos Bocos.**

*Colombia needs no introduction in birding circles, home to over 1900 species, more than any other country. This huge diversity of species results from the equally diverse range of habitats: three Andean Cordilleras (Western, Central and Eastern Andes), two inter-Andean valleys (the Cauca and Magdalena Valleys), the lowland forests of the Amazon and Orinoco regions, the isolated snow-capped Santa Marta Mountains, the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, deserts and lakes, and the rich wet forests of the Chocó all help to make it one of the most exciting countries to bird on earth!*

*This photographic tour focuses on the Pacific slope habitat of Las Tangaras, montane forests above Jardin, the famous antpittas of Rio Blanco, the high-altitude elfin forest and paramo of Los Nevados del Ruiz and finishes in the gorgeous southern city of Cali exploring the Chocó forests above the city.*

# *Itinerary & Map*

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| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Medellin** |
| **Day 2** | **La Romera, transfer to Las Tangaras** |
| **Days 3 & 4** | **Las Tangaras** |
| **Day 5** | **Las Tangaras to Jardin** |
| **Day 6** | **Jardin to Manizales via Loro Orejiamarillo Reserve** |
| **Day 7** | **Rio Blanco** |
| **Day 8** | **Hacienda el Bosque** |
| **Day 9** | **Los Nevado National Park & Termales Del Ruiz** |
| **Day 10** | **El Color de Mis Rêves** |
| **Day 11** | **Manizales to Cali via Valle de Cauca** |
| **Day 12** | **Dona Dora & Anchicaya** |
| **Day 13** | **KM 18 & Upper Anchicaya** |
| **Day 14** | **Final departure** |

## *Highlights*

- ***Andean Cock-of-the-rock Lek: A vivid spectacle of brightly colored displaying males.***
- ***Antpitta Feeding Stations at Rio Blanco: An excellent opportunity to photograph these normally secretive birds at close range.***
- ***Feeders of Finca Alejandria & Dona Dora: The sheer variety of hummingbirds, tanagers and close up opportunities for Toucan Barbet.***
- ***El Color de Mis Rêves, established primarily with photograph in mind.***
- ***Stunning alpine grasslands of Nevado del Ruiz, dotted with Espletia flowers and Buffy Helmetcrests.***

## *Birding sites in detail*

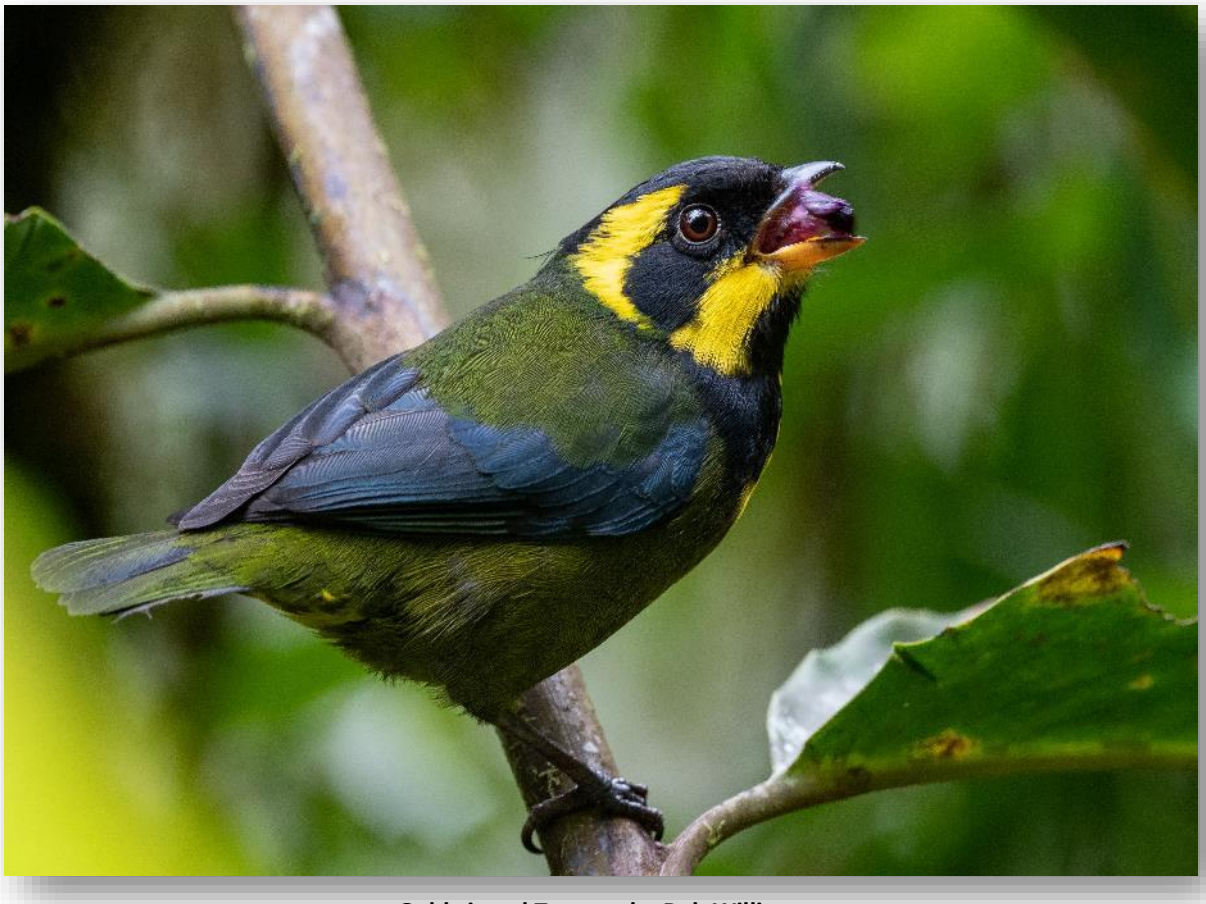
**La Romera Park.** The narrow watershed of La Romera Municipal Park protects an island of forest surrounded by farms and semi-rural homes. Birding from the road, we will watch for Andean Motmot, which can often be quite confiding compared to the undergrowth skulkers we will be searching for. Specifically, we will be targeting the endemic Stiles's Tapaculo that is found in the same dense undergrowth where Chestnut-capped Brushfinch also lurks. The shy Yellow-headed Manikin is also high up on our list of endemic targets, La Romera is perhaps the best-known site for it in Colombia. Bird flocks can be quite a spectacle in this area with a pleasant assortment of migrant warblers including Golden-winged, Tennessee, Canada, Black-and-white, Blackburnian and the



**Red-bellied Grackle by Carlos Bocos**

increasingly scarce Cerulean Warbler all possible. The gorgeous but elusive endemic, Red-bellied Grackle moves around in small flocks, uttering extraordinary shrieks as they search for fruits and invertebrates.

**Las Tangaras.** In this biodiverse Chocoan region, some 2,000m elevation on the Pacific Slope of the Andes, it seems that nature has decided to throw an additional splash of wild colour onto the palette, with the birds being as bright and colourful as the orchids, bromeliads, ferns and hanging epiphytes that cover every visible foot of branch, trunk, or root. Even the ground is a riot of blooming plants and moss.



**Gold-ringed Tanager by Rob Williams**

Las Tangaras is home to some of Colombia's best-known and most mythical birds. From the fantastic Gold-ringed and Black-and-gold Tanagers, known in bygone eras of Colombia's difficult past as the "guerrilla tanagers", to the recently described Tatama (Alto Pisones) Tapaculo, which proves there are yet species to be found in accessible areas. Las Tangaras and the road travelling down from the mountain village of El Carmen into the foothills and Choco rainforest will provide some of the most, if not the most, exciting birds and birding of the entire tour. Mixed flocks are nearly constant; bird song emanates from behind every leaf the day long. No amount of enthusiasm would oversell this memorable site, remote in the forests and pastures of the rural West Andes.

The total bird list here seems more akin in quantity to a list from humid lowland rainforest, rather than a mountain slope. However, the mystique of the endemic habitats and species that populate Las Tangaras is given away by the high-quality endemic and range-restricted species present on the list.

Tantalising species we will search for along the car tracks and trails include Cloud Forest Pygmy Owl, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Golden-headed Quetzal, Toucan Barbet, Yellow-vented, Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Uniform Treehunter, Star-chested Treerunner, Bicolored Antvireo, Yellow-breasted Antpitta,

Rufous-breasted Antthrush, Tatama and Narino Tapaculos, Handsome Flycatcher, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Choco Vireo, Beautiful Jay, Chestnut-breasted and White-headed Wren, Black Solitaire, Black-chinned Mountain Tanager, Purplish-mantled, Glistening-green, Rufous-throated and Flame-faced Tanagers, Indigo Flowerpiercer, and both Chestnut-breasted and Yellow-collared Chlorophonias – to name just some of the potential highlights!

We'll also spend some time birding at the upper hummingbird feeders. Some of the dazzling and bright species that visit the feeders include Violet-tailed Sylph, the eye-searing Velvet-purple Coronet, scarce Empress Brilliant, Greenish Puffleg and Purple-bibbed Whitetip. The banana feeders at the lodge attract stunners like Flame-rumped and Silver-throated Tanagers whilst the hummingbird feeders attract a different set of gems including Steely-vented Hummingbird and Andean Emerald.



**Andean Cock-of-the-rock by Bobby Wilcox**

**El Carmen del Atrato.** There are few places to access the high-elevation temperate forests that rim the upper ridges of the West Andes. One of the best places is above the village of El Carmen del Atrato. With luck we will find all the high-elevation specials we are searching for, with the most notable of these being the vociferous and endemic Munchique Wood Wren, skulking Tanager Finch, and the bulky, glowing White-capped Tanager.

**Jardin.** The town of Jardin has one of the most accessible Andean Cock-of-the-rock lekking sites on earth. This can be an overwhelming frenzy of more than twenty eye-searing males in full raspy song and ostentatious display, while we marvel from only a few feet away! If lucky, the endemic Red-bellied Grackle might also show up. In the river below, we will scan for White-capped Dipper feeding along the rocks, plus several possible tanagers including the boldly pattered Saffron-crowned, and near-endemic Flame-rumped.

**Loro Orejiamarillo.** Setting out this morning with 4x4 jeeps along a dirt road, we will enter the highland reserve of Loro Orejiamarillo above Jardin, also known as Las Ventanas. This ProAves owned reserve is frequented by nearly 600 Yellow-eared Parrots, a vulnerable species that use the higher montane forest with tall wax palms for roosting, feeding, and nesting. Obtaining views of this diagnostically green and yellow patterned parrot will be our primary target early this morning before we continue birding along the little-travelled road through the reserve.



**Tanager Finch by Bobby Wilcox**

Here Black-billed Mountain Toucan, the near-endemic monotypic Tanager Finch and bands of Black-collared Jay are all possible, along with a superb selection of montane specialities that include White-browed Spinetail, Rufous-headed Pygmy Tyrant, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Yellow-vented Woodpecker, the radiant Tourmaline Sunangel and Strong-billed Woodcreeper. Although rare throughout its range, this forest also supports a small population of the arboreal Chestnut-crested Cotinga and we will keep an eye peeled for this highly sought-after species. At Mirador El Roble we have possibilities to visit a feeding station for both Chestnut-naped and Chami Antpitta.

**Rio Blanco.** This beautiful reserve is situated above the city of Manizales. Here there are over a dozen active hummingbird feeders along a wooden balcony that is lined with flowers, and these glitter with hummingbirds that include gems such as Long-tailed Sylph, Buff-tailed Coronet, Speckled Hummingbird, the boldly patterned Collared Inca and Tourmaline Sunangel. Finding an Andean Guan or even the oversized monotypic White-capped Tanager that can sometimes be seen from the balcony of the lodge would be a typical way to start the morning in Rio Blanco.

Our main quest for the day, however – and certainly one of the highlights of the entire trip – will be the rarely-seen antpittas, which have been patiently habituated to come to earthworm feeding stations that are active

very early in the morning. The reserve features several of these 'antpitta feeders' where worms are placed out every day to attract these secretive birds, and here we have a chance to marvel at these fascinating but normally extremely difficult understory dwellers – sometimes only at an arms-length away! Ornately patterned Chestnut-crowned Antpitta and the endemic Brown-banded Antpitta are usually present, but we might also have a visit from the tiny vine-loving Slaty-crowned Antpitta, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, and occasionally even the vocal but sneaky near-endemic Bicolored Antpitta. As these special birds are accustomed to a human presence at these sites, we often obtain exceptional studies (and photographs!) not just of the antpittas themselves, but also of their interesting behaviour as they stuff their bills with worms to feed hungry chicks or sometimes even hop across our feet! Other species that regularly visit the antpitta feeders include Grey-browed Brushfinch, the beautiful Green-and-black Fruiteater and Great Thrush.



**Golden-crowned Tanager by Bobby Wilcox**

The wide pathways within the reserve offer excellent access to the pristine cloud forest, where we will watch for the secretive Tawny-breasted Tinamou crossing the track, Golden-headed Quetzal perched motionlessly on a fern-covered branch, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker (arguably the world's most beautiful woodpecker!), and peer into the undergrowth for skulking Blackish, Spillmann's and Ash-colored Tapaculos.

We might also locate a fruiting tree where several species of parrots could be in attendance, including the scarce Golden-plumed Parakeet, Scaly-naped Amazon and the endangered Rusty-faced Parrot (this being its type location where it was first discovered). Mixed flocks here are sometimes composed of fifty plus species all swarming together in excited movements with intense sound at all levels of the mossy forest and have the potential to leave us dizzy! Just a few of the possibilities include Buff-breasted and Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers, Yellow-billed Cacique, Pearled Treerunner, Black-eared Hemispingus, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Dusky Piha, Smoke-colored Pewee, the bright Plushcap that prefers dense bamboo, Grey-hooded Bush Tanager, Smoky Bush Tyrant, White-banded and White-tailed Tyrannulets, the white capped form

of Capped Conebill, bright Blue-and-black Tanager, Sepia-browed Wren creeping through the vines, Streaked Xenops, Slaty-backed and Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrants, and a wide range of other warblers, tyrants, spinetails, and tanagers.

Continued birding inside this fantastic reserve throughout the day could produce specialities such as the tiny but colourful Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Mountain Wren, Powerful Woodpecker (giving its distinctive double tap), and colourful Masked Trogon. Although we will need considerable luck on our side, we also have possibilities for rarities such as Masked Saltator.



**Buffy Helmetcrest by Stephan Lorenz**

**Hacienda El Bosque.** This cattle ranch has two tricky *Grallaridae* to find, in the form of Equatorial and Crescent-faced Antpittas. As we head into the forest, we'll also be keeping our eyes open for other desirable species such as Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan, Barred Fruiteater, Grey-browed Brushfinch, Yellow-bellied Chat Tyrant, Black-thighed Puffleg and Sword-billed Hummingbird.

**Los Nevados National Park.** The snow-covered Ruiz Volcano and Los Nevados National Park give us access to pristine, stunted elfin forest and flowering Paramo scrub situated well above 13 000 feet. Whilst being spoilt by the spectacular scenery, we will seek our primary target at this high elevation, the unique range-restricted Buffy Helmetcrest (split from Bearded). This spectacular hummingbird 'trap lines', which means that it visits the same flowers at regular intervals on its circuit, and we will carefully watch the known areas of its territory. Tawny Antpittas can sometimes be ridiculously tame here, while other specialities we will be searching for include Paramo Tapaculo, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Grass Wren, Plain-colored Seedeater and Many-striped Canastero.

Once above the treeline, in the alpine grasslands dotted with Espletia Sunflowers (known locally as *frailejones*) and Puya Yuccas, Andean Condors and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles soar overhead, the delightful Buffy Helmetcrest flits from flower to flower, and various skulkers like Stout-billed Cinclodes, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero and Tawny Antpitta call from the scrub. It will be a unique experience to walk this high, over 12 000ft in elevation, amongst the highest peaks and volcanoes in the country. We'll ward off the typically cold outside temperatures with a cup of Coca tea or a hot Sugar Cane drink.

**Termales del Ruiz road.** Time permitting, we may spend a few hours birding the lower sections of the Termales del Ruiz road. Here we will search for usually difficult species such as Golden-breasted and Black-thighed Pufflegs, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Viridian Metaltail, as well as commoner species such as Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet and Shining Sunbeam. If lucky, we might run into a flock of the endemic Rufous-fronted Parakeet.



**Crested Ant Tanager by Bobby Wilcox**

**El Color de Mis Rêves.** This enchanting cloud forest reserve boasts an impressive collection of captivating species, many of which have grown accustomed to human presence. We'll have the unique opportunity to observe and capture stunning photographs of several species at designated feeding stations and within the verdant forest.

Highlights are likely to include the searing Purple-backed Thornbill, Grey-browed Brushfinch, Torumaline Sunangel, Ocellated Tapaculo, several tanagers such as Fawn-breasted, Hooded, Scarlet-bellied Mountain, Blue-winged Mountain and Lacrimose Mountain, whilst Black-billed Mountain Tanager, Green-and-black Fruiteater and Black-collared Jay may also put in an appearance.

**Laguna del Sonso.** This was a well-known hangout of Horned Screamer, though due to recent changes in water level maintenance, viewing this bizarre creature has become more difficult. Nevertheless, with dozens of

hovering Snail Kite, roosting Common Potoo, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Yellow Oriole, Dwarf Cuckoo and several other great species are possible at this interesting site.

**Dona Dora & Upper Anchicaya.** We will bird the upper elevations of the Anchicaya Valley, including a trip to the famous Dona Dora's. Originally established as a little cafe and restaurant for passing truck drivers en route to the Pacific port city of Buenaventura, the presence of a large, bird attracting ficus tree stimulated an interest in birds which, little by little, has evolved to the stunning location it is today. It is this ficus tree that is home to a resident family of Toucan Barbets, which often allow for incredibly close photographic opportunities.



**Toucan Barbet by Dušan Brinkhuizen**

The fruit feeders attract Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Black-chinned Mountain Tanager, Rufous-throated and Silver-throated Tanagers, Black-headed Brushfinch, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, and Sickle-winged Guan. Hummingbirds are a major attraction with many species possible such as Green Thorntail, Empress Brilliant, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Crowned Woodnymph, Brown Violetear, and Andean Emerald.

**KM 18 & Upper Anchicaya.** We shall drive into the mountains west of the metropolis to the famed Bosque San Antonio, also known as KM 18, and other spots nearby. This is the area where many well-known Choco endemic species were first described to science! Superb forest still exists here, despite recent expansion into the area, and we will spend the day birding a few choice sites. The list of possible species is huge, some 300+ (!), so we will focus on photographic opportunities as they present themselves as well as search for specialities such as Colombian Chachalaca, Chestnut Wood Quail, Grey-headed Dove, Scaled Fruiteater, Chestnut-breasted Wren, and both Purplish-mantled and the mind-blowing Multicolored Tanagers, among many others.

The Finca Alejandria area is one of the best feeding station and setup in the country, and as impressive as any place, anywhere, on Earth. With just a couple hours' time at the hummingbird feeders we are likely to see and

photograph Green and Tawny-bellied Hermits, the stunning Long-tailed Sylph, Greenish Puffleg, Bronzy Inca, Buff-tailed Coronet, adorable White-booted Racket-tail, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Purple-throated Woodstar, Western and Andean Emeralds, Crowned Woodnymph, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and the scarce stunner Blue-headed Sapphire. That's just the hummingbirds! Several species feed on the fruit laid out on trays, and even more come through regularly in massive mixed flocks! Of particular interest we might get views of Golden-headed Quetzal, Andean Motmot, Red-headed Barbet, White-throated and Crimson-rumped Toucanets, Uniform Antshrike, Plain Antvireo, Slaty Antwren, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Streaked Xenops, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Lineated Foliage-Gleaner, Streak-capped Treehunter, Variegated Bristle-Tyrant, Barred Becard, Andean Solitaire, Ashy-throated Chlorospingus, White-naped Brushfinch, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-capped, Golden-naped, Black-capped, Scrub, Beryl-spangled, Metallic-green, Saffron-crowned, and Golden Tanagers all. An amazing opportunity this morning to enjoy some productive, easy birding netting some wonderful species.

There are several nooks and crannies en route to Anchicaya, and we will make a few stops gleaning some species less likely encountered at the lower elevations of Anchicaya. These include Pacific Tuftedcheek, Narino and Choco Tapaculos, Olivaceous Piha, Black-billed Peppershrike, and both Glistening-green and Crested Ant Tanagers, all of which are species endemic to the Choco bioregion!

Aside from the fabulous birding (including the occasionally mind-numbing mixed flock that defies reason), the scenery here is stunning, and the privilege of birding such an ornithologically famous area is undeniable. Due to a recent invasion of wealthy landowners from Cali constructing their mansions in the vicinity of KM 18, after we turn onto the Old Buenaventura Road and continue some 40kms we will enter some of the best birding in the region.

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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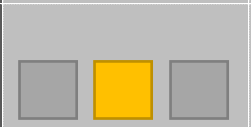
| **Photography** |  | Good to good+. Typical forest lighting difficulties. Several feeders. |
| **Overall Ease** |  | Moderate, some long drives & days. Variances in weather conditions & altitudes. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Comfortable, some lodgings are simple/basic. |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Moderate, mostly on flat ground with variable substrate. High altitude walking is mostly downhill or kept to short distances. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | Several drives, some long or impacted by heavy city traffic. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas. Mountain passes & eroded dirt roads can be bumpy. Risk of landslides & road closures. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Moderate. Several skulkers & some low-density targets. |
| **Annoyances** |  | Occasional landslide interruptions, small biting insects. Temperatures vary from hot & humid, to cold at altitude. Rain is to be expected. |

# *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 14;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation (including boat transfers);
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services.)

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- This tour involves some moderate walking and hiking. We will be at high. Guests should be in good health and reasonable fitness to undertake these tours.
- If you have any physical limitations or medical conditions of any sort, please let the Rockjumper office know in advance of the tour.
- The hotels are of comfortable, yet sometimes basic/simple standard.
- Transport is by small coach or minibus, and the roads are mostly in good condition. However, due to the nature of the topography, there is the possibility of landslides interfering with our trip, though we have minimised this risk by undertaking the tour during the drier season.
- There will be times where we switch to smaller 4x4 vehicles where necessary.
- Traffic in and around the large city of Medellin can be heavy, which impacts our time in vehicles.
- We expect the weather to be mostly dry and often sunny; it can be hot and occasionally humid in the lowlands.

- At higher elevations, it can be quite cold, especially at night. There is likely to be some rain, which can be heavy.
- Our guides are experienced Neotropical birders who have led numerous tours to Latin America.

## *Bird Photo Tours*

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The tour will begin in Medellin on Day 1, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast of day 14 at Cali airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

José María Córdova International Airport, Medellin (IATA: MDE) and Alfonso Bonilla Aragón International Airport, Cali (IATA: CLO) are the main ports of arrival and departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour**