

Endemics and antpittas in the world's best birding country

Colombia is home to a staggering total of over 1,900 bird species – more than any other country on Earth – and the world's best birding country is once again safe and open for business. This tour, which has been specially designed to see as large a selection of species and as many endemics as possible, will begin at the legendary endemism hot-spot of Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, and then focus on the various cordillera of the central Colombian Andes. The wonderful birdlife, combined with friendly people, good food, quality accommodation, efficient infrastructure and varied geography, from the High Andes to the Caribbean coast, make Colombia arguably the number one birding destination anywhere in the world.

Day 1: Flight from London Heathrow to Bogotá, arriving in the evening. Transfer to a hotel in the north of the city for one night.

Day 2: Bogotá is located at an altitude of around 2,300m, nestled in a large plateau in the Eastern Cordillera of the Andes. We have an early start to visit La Florida, which holds three endemic birds: Bogotá Rail, Silvery-throated Spinetail and Apolinar's Wren. There is also a good chance of Subtropical Doradito, Noble Snipe, Rufous-browed Conebill and the local race of Least Bittern. We also become acquainted with widespread species such as Roadside Hawk, Blue-and-white and Southern Rough-winged Swallows, Great Kiskadee, Fork-tailed and Vermilion Flycatchers, Masked and Black-crowned Tityras, Buff-breasted Wren, Black-billed and Pale-breasted Thrushes, Saffron Finch, and wintering Blackburnian and Canada Warblers. We then catch a late morning flight from the nearby airport to the city of Riohacha, which is the setting for parts of several novels by Gabriel García Márquez, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The nearby Los Flamencos Sanctuary on the Guajira Peninsula is an important coastal wetland and dry forest reserve created to protect a large population of American Flamingos and numerous other birds including herons, waders, Wood Stork and Roseate Spoonbill. Scarlet Ibis can usually be found in the small flocks of White Ibis. Scattered trees and brush by the lagoons may produce Scaled Dove, Glaucous Tanager, Grey Kingbird and Yellow Oriole.

Dates

Saturday January 13th - Saturday
January 27th 2018

Leader: Simon Papps
and local leader

Group Size: 6

Species: 450-500 including
up to 42 endemics

Day 3: We spend the morning birding in the Guajira desert near Los Flamencos. Inland, xerophytic scrub dominates, which is very productive for Guajira specialties restricted to north-east Colombia and north-west Venezuela. These include Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Bare-eyed Pigeon, Buffy Hummingbird, Russet-throated Puffbird, Chestnut Piculet, White-whiskered Spinetail, Slender-billed Inezia, Orinocan Saltator, Pileated Finch, Tocuyo Sparrow and Vermillion Cardinal. We also search for Crested Bobwhite, Blue-crowned and Brown-throated Parakeets, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Black-crested Antshrike, White-fringed Antwren and Northern Scrub-Flycatcher. By around 11am the scorching desert sun is overpowering, so we head west, and ascend to the famous El Dorado reserve in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta for a three-night stay.

Days 4-5: The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is the jewel in the crown of Colombian birding and is home to no less than 19 endemic bird species, including the



Santa Marta Parakeets Photo: Simon Papps

recently described Santa Marta Screech Owl. Birding around the lodge is productive for Santa Marta Brush-Finch and Crested Oropendola. Hummingbirds include the uncommon endemics, Blossomcrown and Santa Marta Woodstar. Tanagers visit the feeding trays, with Black-capped Tanager and Blue-naped Chlorophonia being possible. The lodge clearing, with a view of the Caribbean below, is a good place for Scarlet-fronted Parakeets and White-rumped Hawks. Black-fronted Wood-Quail, Santa Marta Toucanet, White-tipped Quetzal, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Streak-capped Spinetail, Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, Santa Marta Antpitta, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Black-hooded Thrush and White-lored Warbler are present in forests adjacent to the lodge. Many of the endemics are found at higher elevations above the lodge, including Santa Marta Parakeet, White-tailed Starfrontlet, Rusty-headed Spinetail, the distinctive endemic subspecies of Rufous Antpitta, Brown-rumped Tapaculo, Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant, Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager, Yellow-crowned Whitestart and Santa Marta Warbler. The peaks of the sierra –

the highest in Colombia – are usually visible in the early morning. Watching the skies may reveal the presence of Scaly-naped Parrots and raptors including Andean Condor, Black-and-chestnut Eagle and Semi-collared Hawk.

Day 6: We bird down the road towards Minca this morning looking for species such as Black-backed Antshrike, Golden-winged Sparrow, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Coppery Emerald and Rosy Thrush-Tanager. The little known Santa Marta Sabrewing is occasionally seen here. We then take a flight from Santa Marta to Colombia's second largest city, Medellín, and from here head west crossing over the western Andes. The Chocó rainforest in western Colombia contains one of the highest concentrations of range-restricted biodiversity in the world, with many birds, plants and amphibians at risk of extinction. We will be based in the comfortable Las Tangaras lodge for the next three nights. The endemic Crested Ant-Tanager is regularly seen in the lodge garden.

Days 7-8: We will have two full days to

Colombia - Central Andes and Santa Marta

explore the reserve proper, where we will look for a number of endemics such as the Chocó Vireo, Gold-ringed Tanager, Black-and-gold Tanager, Chestnut Wood-Quail, Red-bellied Grackle and Alto de Pisones Tapaculo (a species not yet officially described!). Other specialty species of the area include Beautiful Jay, Black Solitaire, Fulvous-dotted Treerunner, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Toucan Barbet and White-headed Wren. We will also visit a hummingbird feeding station within the reserve where we will see Velvet-purple Coronet, Violet-tailed Sylph, White-tailed Hillstar, Empress Brilliant, Purple-throated Woodstar, and Tawny-bellied Hermit.

Day 9: After a final morning's birding at Las Tangaras, we head back over the mountain pass to the pleasant colonial town of Jardin for a two-night stay, stopping en route to look for the endemic Greyish Piculet in some degraded forest fragments by the roadside.

Day 10: The reserve above Jardin is the best place to find the spectacular and critically endangered endemic Yellow-eared Parrot (c.350 birds). Munchique Wood-Wren has recently been discovered here and we have a good chance of seeing this critically endangered Colombian endemic. The forests are also home to the Colombian subspecies of Acorn Woodpecker, White-browed Spinetail, Chestnut-crowned Cotinga, Golden-faced Whitestart, Black-and-white Seed eater and



Blue-naped Chlorophonia
Photo: Simon Papps

Tanager Finch. Groups of White-capped Tanagers are occasionally found.

Day 11: The next morning we visit a forested valley for the endemic Red-bellied Grackle if we have missed it at Las Tangaras. Alternatively, we will visit a lek of Andean Cock-of-the-Rock which, incongruously, is situated just five minutes' walk from the town centre. In the afternoon, we drive down the Central Andes to the city of Manizales, in the so-called coffee zone (although in fact coffee is grown over much of the country), for a two-night stay.

Day 12: A full day in the hills above Manizales at the magical Rio Blanco reserve which is home to a large variety of endemics and specialties representative of the Central Cordillera. Cabins at the reserve entrance are festooned with hummingbird feeders and we expect to see up to ten species, including Tourmaline Sunangel and the diminutive White-bellied Woodstar. Birding activity is exceptionally good with large mixed-species flocks frequently encountered. Flocks contain an incredible diversity of furnarids, tanagers and flycatchers, including Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Dusky Piha, Handsome Flycatcher, Golden-faced Whitestart, Oleaginous Hemispingus, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager and Grass-green Tanager. Understory flocks in areas of bamboo are of particular interest and include Plushcap, Black-eared Hemispingus, Yellow-billed Cacique, Black-billed Peppershrike and Masked Saltator. Other highlights include the noisy Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Powerful Woodpecker, Northern Mountain-Cacique, Black-collared Jay and White-capped Tanager. This is also a good area for parrots, including Rusty-faced Parrot, Golden-plumed Parakeet and the endemic Rufous-fronted Parakeet. The skulking Ocellated, Blackish and Spillmann's Tapaculos and Chestnut-naped Antpitta can sometimes be tempted into view. Rio Blanco's highlight, however, is its antpitta feeding station. Chestnut-crowned and the endemic Brown-banded Antpittas are regular while Slate-crowned and the endemic Bicoloured Antpittas are occasional visitors. We have



Violet-capped Hummingbird

Photo: Simon Papps

dinner at the cabins and stay after dark for Rufous-banded Owl and White-throated Screech-Owl.

Day 13: An hour's drive from Manizales, the road up to Nevado de Ruiz National Park passes through elfin forest and paramo where we search for a very special high-elevation hummingbird – the remarkable Bearded Helmetcrest. Other species we may encounter are Viridian Metaltail, Tawny Antpitta, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Stout-billed Cinclodes and Glossy Flowerpiercer. Lower down, the road passes Laguna Negra, a glacial lake that is home to Andean Duck and Andean Teal. Golden-breasted Puffleg, Andean Tit-Spintail, White-chinned Thistletail, Black-backed Bush-Tanager and many others also occur. The park entrance road passes through elfin forest patches, home of the scarce and elusive endemic Rufous-fronted Parakeet. This forest also has Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Andean Pygmy-Owl, White-browed Spinetail, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Ocellated and Paramo Tapaculos, Golden-crowned Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager and Pale-naped Brush-Finch. In the afternoon, we drive to the La Suiza lodge in the Otun-Quimabya regional park, near the city of Pereira, for a two-night stay.

Day 14: Today we visit Otun-Quimbaya reserve, which holds the Cauca Valley and Central Cordilleran endemics Cauca Guan, Chestnut Wood-Quail, Multicoloured Tanager, Crested Ant-Tanager and Greyish Piculet. Other key species in the upper subtropical and montane forest include Moustached Puffbird, Bar-crested Antshrike, Moustached Antpitta, Chestnut-breasted Wren and Slate-coloured Seedeater. Two trails and a road passing through the forest are good for finding Highland Motmot, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. Mixed flocks may contain Moustached Puffbird, Streak-capped Treehunter, Bar-crested Antshrike, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher and Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet. The cabin area is good for Great Antshrike, Whiskered Wren, Golden-rumped Euphonia and Flame-rumped Tanager, while the river is home to Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper. The road continues to El Cedral where a mule trail leads up to cabins at La Pastora, an area for Dusky Piha, Flammulated Treehunter, Masked Saltator, Golden-fronted Whitestart, White-capped Tanager and Black-collared Jay.

Day 15: After another morning's birding at Otun-Quimbaya, we take a flight from Pereira to Bogotá and connect with a flight back to the UK. Arrival is on the following morning.

Prices

Ground Price: £4,195
Single room: £370
Deposit: £400
*Air Fare: £600

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature, fuel surcharges.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*