



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

COLOMBIA: THE CENTRAL & WESTERN ANDES HUMMINGBIRDS, ANTPITTAS, TANAGERS, & ANDEAN ENDEMIC

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Dawn on Cerro Tatamá, Western Andes © Steve Hilty

Colombia is often referred to as the ultimate birding destination, the “holy grail” for birders. There are two reasons for this; one being that more birds have been recorded in Colombia than in any other country on the planet—now over 1,950 species—and the second being that, for two decades, civil unrest had made visiting remote areas within the country almost impossible. During that time, birders had looked longingly at the illustrations in Steve Hilty’s 836-page Guide to the Birds of Colombia, (often referred to as the “bible” for Colombian birds), and longed for the chance to see some of these remarkable birds. And then that opportunity arrived in 2009 when VENT returned to Colombia (the first commercial company to do so). Additionally, there are now three new guides to Colombia’s immense avifauna, including Hilty’s new and highly recommended Birds of Colombia published (2021) by Lynx Editions. Colombia has changed dramatically in the past few years and birders worldwide are now flocking to this beautiful country in hopes of getting a look at some of the more than seventy endemic species found here.



*Colombia's diverse topography is indeed inspiring, with soaring mountains, snow-capped volcanoes, cloud-filled valleys, savannas and rainforests—and its magnificent birdlife ranges from tiny hummingbirds (there are more than 160 species!) to gaudy parrots, toucans, fruitcrows and an almost unbelievable palate of colorful tanagers. This trip is particularly good for hummingbirds, antpittas and tanagers, which are a hallmark of mid-elevations in the Andes. As an added bonus, one site now has three antpitta “feeding stations” where up to four species of antpittas come regularly and others occasionally, while another feeding site offers a good possibility of seeing the Crescent-faced Antpitta, a scarce and infrequently seen species. A different site offers an excellent possibility of seeing the rare Cauca Guan, a species once feared extinct. This area also boasts one of the highest known concentrations of Red-ruffed fruitcrows, a species that is typically scarce and hard to find elsewhere. At still another site, which has some of the most beautiful cloud forest in Colombia, our focus will be on rare *Bangsia* tanagers (Gold-ringed and Black-and-gold) and other infrequently-seen Pacific slope species. At three sites we will be searching for rare parrots and parakeets including the endemic Rufous-fronted Parakeet, near endemic Yellow-eared Parrot, and locally distributed Rusty-faced Parrot. Finally, there will be hummingbird feeders at seven of the ten or more major areas we visit, which are sure to produce a remarkable list of hummingbirds. At all sites we should have the opportunity to see plenty of other exciting highland birds.*

About this trip: Colombia's tourism infrastructure, we're happy to report, is improving rapidly, and now offers a great selection of lodges located in superb birding areas. However, Colombia's mountainous terrain and high rainfall, especially in the west, can complicate tour planning. Not surprisingly, landslides are frequent, although blocked roads are usually opened promptly. There also is on-going road construction almost everywhere and construction delays can thwart even the best-laid plans, so persons contemplating this trip should understand that minor itinerary changes might be necessary. Most sites on this trip are in cooler highland regions where temperatures are pleasant, and even in the Cauca Valley, where temperatures are warm, it is not likely to be excessively humid. On this tour most walking is

relatively easy and downhill as much as possible. However, at a few sites some slow-paced uphill walking is required, including one on a relatively narrow road where there is little or no traffic. At the Montezuma site (Cerro Tatamá National Park) in the Western Andes, walking distances will be longer, perhaps up to about five miles, mostly downhill, but on a rough road that is rocky and in places may also be slippery. Some participants may wish to use a walking stick here. In the past we have been able to use small 4x4 vehicles at Montezuma to reach the top of the mountain but the condition of the road varies and it is possible that we might have to walk up the final portion of the road if we wish to reach the top where, of course, several interesting birds occur. There also are some short but difficult trails at the Yellow-eared Parrot reserve and a steep hill (down, and then back up) to reach the Andean Cock-of-the-rock site near the city of Jardín.

In general, our birding at all sites will be along roadsides or on 4x4 vehicle tracks. We expect to use well-maintained but relatively short forest trails only at a couple of sites. Most mornings we will be up before dawn for early breakfasts (or coffee/tea and snacks to be followed by field breakfasts later). At three sites we will begin our birding right around our hotel or lodge. At other sites, travel time to reach our birding destinations will vary from as little as twenty minutes to about an hour and a half, and at one site it may take two hours to reach our birding site—but it is well worth the time. Most between-location travel will be in a comfortable bus and when we travel, we will make regular rest stops but have little time for birding. At several sites we will use 4x4 vehicles—some newer and comfortable, but at one or two places they may be older and noisy and harken from earlier decades—to reach our birding destinations.

Before determining if this trip is a proper match for you, please consider the following issues:

- There are some moderately long travel times between sites (up to three to four hours) which are in a comfortable, air-conditioned bus, but most drives are on curvy mountain roads and it may seem as if there are no straight roads at all in Colombia. We also will be using 4x4 vehicles at some sites (Anchicayá, Cerro Tatamá National Park, Yellow-eared Parrot reserve near Jardín, possibly for a short distance at Otún-Quimbaya) where roads may be muddy, bumpy, steep and poorly maintained. Occasionally the roads can even be dusty. Because of high rainfall in the Colombian Andes, landslides (and hence delays or detours) can be major and on-going issues. Truck traffic is particularly heavy on some major mountain roads and is often complicated by extensive road construction. Consequently, moving from site to site almost always takes longer than one anticipates, although occasionally we are pleasantly surprised. In some areas good birding sites are separated by a considerable distance from where we have to stay because of deforestation or habitat disturbance.
- Food is generally good and meals generous, often actually too large and with large portions of meat but fewer vegetables. We have had relatively few problems with health issues related to food and water but we recommend you take salads in moderation, at least at first. We also recommend that you use bottled water everywhere. If you enjoy spicy food, 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.
- You should be in reasonably good physical condition to enjoy this trip, and be able to walk both uphill and downhill for extended periods on roads or trails at elevations of 400-9,000 ft. or higher (briefly to 13,000 ft. at one site). On most days we will be able to return to a lodge, or at least a restaurant, for a mid-day meal, but on a few days we will, of necessity, be out all day on foot. There also will be few opportunities for mid-day siestas. Above all, you should bring a sense of adventure to this trip because unexpected detours or other events may necessitate some last-

minute rearrangement of the itinerary. Single rooms cannot be guaranteed at two sites where the number of rooms is limited, so some sharing (doubles) may be necessary.

- Security is fine in all of the sites that we will visit and, while security issues remain in remote areas (mostly along international borders), this should not be an issue on the present route.
- Finally, this trip will focus on Colombia's endemic and near-endemic species, especially those of the Chocó-Pacific region. Some of these species are uncommon, endangered and difficult to find although a few are relatively easy to see. We won't find them all, but we will find as many as we can, and in the process, we will see a splendid cross-section of Colombia's 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 where so many beautiful birds occur.

NOTE: In the itinerary that follows, endemic bird species (and some near-endemics) are noted in boldface type.

July 6, Day 1: Arrival in Medellín; Overnight near José María Córdoba International Airport. Participants may arrive at the Medellín International Airport (airport code MDE) at any time today. Given air schedules and security lines in airports, you might wish to consider arriving a day early to rest. Upon arrival you will be met and transferred to the Hotel Movich Las Lomas in Río Negro near the airport. We will meet for the first time as a group for an early breakfast on Day 2 at the hotel.

As an alternative, some participants may wish to arrive first in Bogotá, Colombia's bustling capital city of more than seven million. With its signature red-tile roofed buildings and mountains all around, many past participants have opted to arrive early and spend a day or two here before beginning our tour. The short flight from Bogotá to Medellín is about one hour. There are many activities in Bogotá including the Botero Museum, the stunning Gold Museum, which boasts an exquisite array of pre-Colombian gold artifacts in beautiful displays, numerous striking cathedrals, and nearby birding at sites such as Monserrate and the El Dorado Marshes, both within the city limits. The views of the imposing Eastern range of the Andes will be spectacular from almost anywhere in the city. Upon request the VENT office will be glad to assist with hotel reservations for early arrivals and local guide service.

NIGHT: Hotel Movich Las Lomas, Ríonegro, dept. Antioquia

July 7, Day 2: Early Departure for Day Trip in Search of Newly Rediscovered Antioquia Brushfinch; Afternoon Return to Medellín. We plan to leave immediately after breakfast at the Movich Las Lomas Hotel for the approximately two-to-two-and-a-half-hour drive north to the vicinity where there is a known population of the **Antioquia Brushfinch**. It was first described from three 20th century specimens, the most recent in 1971, and all three specimens were originally regarded as a race of Slaty Brushfinch but precise locations were unknown. Then in 2007 these specimens were elevated to full species status, but the species had not been reported since 1971. Finally, in 2017 a small surviving population was located north of Medellín, and since then a few others have been found. There also is a good possibility of adding a few other species today that we may not see elsewhere on this route, among them Yellow-breasted Brushfinch, and Black-throated Flowerpiercer (endemic subspecies) Please **note that we will be returning to a different hotel at the end of today's outing. This is because the Movich Las Lomas while very convenient for passengers arriving by air, is not convenient for our activities beginning tomorrow morning.**

NIGHT: (Hotel) Hacienda Extremadura, Medellín, dept. Antioquia

July 8, Day 3: Morning Visit to La Romera Park in Medellín Followed by Birding near Bolombolo; Afternoon Drive to Jardín. This morning we'll depart for the small, secluded park of La Romera where two much-sought endemics occur: the **Red-bellied Grackle** and **Yellow-headed Manakin**, and a third less charismatic endemic, the **Stiles Tapaculo**, can also be found. Unfortunately, the Stiles Tapaculo looks quite similar to almost every other species in its genus—there are now some 35 species in the genus—so seeing it is

much less informative than hearing its distinctive voice, but we may have time to look for it just the same. This also is a good place for an introduction to many common mid-elevation birds including a variety of species typical of forest borders and second growth woodland. A sampling could include: **Colombian Chachalaca** (endemic), Golden-olive Woodpecker, Azara's Spinetail, **Bar-crested Antshrike** (near endemic), Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Brown-capped Vireo, **Rufous-naped Greenlet**, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Three-striped Warbler, Common Chlorospingus (formerly Common Bush-Tanager), Scrub Tanager, Rusty Flowerpiercer, White-naped Brush-Finch, Yellow-backed Oriole, and Orange-bellied Euphonia. Typical North American migrants present during northern winter include Swainson's Thrush, Tennessee and Blackburnian warbler, American Redstart, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Summer Tanager. Later in the morning, we'll stop in a tropical dry forest zone where we hope to locate the recently described and endemic **Antioquia Wren**, as well as a number of species typical of drier lower elevations including **Grayish Piculet**, **Speckled Parrotlet**, and **Apical Flycatcher**; Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher; Streak-headed Woodcreeper; Yellow-bellied Elaenia; Streaked Flycatcher and Thick-billed Euphonia. We'll have lunch en route and continue our afternoon drive to the lovely city of Jardín, Antioquia with its colorful plaza.

NIGHT: Valdivia Plaza, dept. Antioquia



Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Jardín, Colombia © Steve Hilty

July 9, Day 4: Full Day in Vicinity of City of Jardín. We may visit a country home for breakfast this morning where we can enjoy a variety of hummingbirds and fruit-eating species at bird feeders. Later in the morning we'll spend a little time along a nearby forest road. In addition to numerous hummingbirds and tanagers we'll also be looking for the endemic **Parker's Antbird**, which occurs here. A sampling of species this morning could include Moustached Puffbird; White-winged Becard; Slaty-capped Flycatcher; Sooty-capped Tyrannulet; Mountain Elaenia; Golden-faced Tyrannulet; Black-chested Jay; Black-billed and Clay-colored thrushes; Green Honeycreeper; Scrub, White-lined, Flame-rumped, Crimson-backed, Blue-necked, Bay-headed, Palm and Blue-gray tanagers; Crested Oropendola; Yellow-backed Oriole; and **Red-bellied Grackle**.

We will devote this afternoon to visiting a nearby display of Andean Cocks-of-the-rock. These birds display in a secluded canyon just a few blocks from the central plaza in Jardín. We've also seen the endemic **Crested Ant-Tanager** here in the past.

NIGHT: Valdivia Plaza, Jardín, dept. Antioquia

July 10, Day 5: Full Day in Mountains Above Jardín, and in the Area of Reserva Natural Loro Orejiamarillo (Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve). This morning we'll depart quite early for the approximately one-and-a-half-hour trip via 4-wheel drive vehicles to this small but important reserve owned by the ProAves conservation organization. Established in 2006, this reserve of circa 300 hectares (741 acres) protects one of Colombia's rarest birds, the critically-endangered **Yellow-eared Parrot** (endemic). In most areas this species utilizes tall, high-elevation wax palms (*Ceroxylon* spp.) for roosting and for nest holes, although it has recently been found in one site without these palms. A combination of deforestation and palm cutting has deprived this species of much of its natural habitat and critical nest hole sites. Once common and widespread in the Colombian Andes, the population plummeted to perhaps a few hundred individuals a few decades ago. The establishment of protected reserves, public education programs and the construction of artificial nest boxes by dedicated

conservationists have helped to re-establish this species in several areas; the present population has climbed to an estimated 750-1,000 birds and recently heretofore unknown populations have been discovered in the Eastern Andes. Although formerly found in north central Ecuador, the species may no longer occur in that country and now survives only in Colombia.

The steep landscape surrounding Jardín and en route to the reserve is a mixture of pastures and patches of forest. The parrots—some 350, which represent a significant portion of the world's population—are found in this area, and often range widely over the reserve forest as well as surrounding semi-open areas, sometimes even to much lower elevation and close to the city of Jardín. While our goal will be to see these parrots, we will also continue a little further along to a new site, the Mirador El Roble (Oak Lookout) for breakfast where fruit and hummingbird feeders attract numerous species. Later we also may be able to visit two sites where there is the possibility of seeing Chestnut-naped Antpitta and the newly split, and now endemic **Chami Antpitta**.

A sample of species found here includes **Munchique Wood-Wren** (endemic), Emerald Toucanet, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Acorn Woodpecker (same species as in North America), Spillman's Tapaculo, Ocellated Tapaculo, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Chestnut-crested Cotinga (always scarce and local), Golden-faced Redstart, Citrine Warbler, Golden-crowned and White-capped tanager, and **Tanager-Finch**. Mixed species flocks in the reserve forest contain a variety of interesting furnariids, flycatchers, warblers and tanagers. Possible hummingbirds include Mountain Velvetbreast, Sword-billed



Chami Antpitta, Western Andes above Jardín, Colombia
© Steve Hilty

Hummingbird, White-bellied Woodstar, Buff-tailed Coronet and Sparkling Violetear among others. This afternoon we will continue on to the city of Manizales, taking lunch en route. This drive usually requires about four hours. Manizales is an attractive city located within the heart of Colombia's coffee belt. The elevation is about 1,500 m (4,921 ft.); it has a pleasant spring-like temperature.

NIGHT: Hotel Quo, Manizales, dept. Caldas

July 11, Day 6: Full Day at Río Blanco Reserve. This splendid reserve, located barely thirty minutes from the city of Manizales, is owned by Aguas de Manizales, a municipal water company. A guest house and visitor facilities are operated by the Fundación Gabriel Arango Restrepo (FUNDEGAR). The area features several excellent forest trails with good mixed species flocks and well-attended hummingbird feeders. At present two antpitta feeding sites are maintained and Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, **Brown-banded Antpitta** (endemic), Bicolored Antpitta and Slate-colored Antpitta may be possible. On previous visits we've usually seen two of these four species although we would have to be quite lucky to see all four in a single morning. Other species that sometimes visit the antpitta feeding sites (it is not just antpittas that like worms) include Ash-colored Tapaculo, Gray-browed Brush-Finch (formerly Stripe-headed Brush-Finch) and even Green-and-black Fruiteater. The reserve protects forest over a wide elevation range from 2,000 to 3,400 m. (circa 6,600-11,200 ft.) and is regarded as one of the top birding spots in the central Andes of Colombia. We'll be spending a full day here, generally at mid-elevations (2,200-2,600 m.; 7,218-8,530 ft.).

Antpittas, however, are only a part of the appeal of this reserve; many rare and other infrequently-seen species also occur here, including **Rusty-faced Parrot**, Golden-plumed Parakeet (rare), Black-collared Jay, Powerful Woodpecker, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Black-billed Peppershrike, Golden-faced Redstart, Plushcap, and two prize species, the Red-hooded Tanager and Masked Saltator. These last two are local in distribution and much sought by birders. The saltator is perhaps more easily seen here than anywhere else in its range but even here there are days when it is quiet and unresponsive and cannot be found. Other species, including a few that occur in low

density, include Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Montane and Lineated foliage-gleaner, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Pearled Treerunner, Dusky Piha, Oleaginous Hemispingus, Grass-green and White-capped tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, and (Northern) Mountain Cacique. Buff-tailed Coronets dominate the hummingbird feeders, but over ten species of hummers are regular attendees here including Green Violetear, Sparkling Violetear, Speckled Hummingbird, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Mountain Velvetbreast (seasonal), Bronzy Inca, Collared Inca, Tourmaline Sunangel, Long-tailed Sylph, and occasionally White-bellied Woodstar. Patches of bamboo above the guesthouse are frequented by Black-capped Tyrannulet; Sharpe's Wren; Citrine Warbler; Black-capped, Oleaginous, Superciliaried, and Black-eared hemispingus; and Yellow-billed Cacique

NIGHT: Hotel Quo, Manizales, dept. Caldas



Páramo vegetation on Nevado del Ruiz near Manizales, Colombia
© Steve Hilty

July 12, Day 7, Full Day at Nevado del Ruiz and Vicinity. This spectacular area is about an hour and a half from the city of Manizales and offers access to some of the most easily accessible páramo (a tropical alpine grassland above tree line) vegetation anywhere in Colombia. We'll likely have breakfast at a charming little high-elevation restaurant en route. Nevado del Ruiz, at 5,429 m. (17,788 ft.), is the northernmost volcano in the Andes and is glacier-covered but still active (although not since ca. 1985).

We plan to reach elevations of about 4,138 m. (13,655 ft.), the highest of the tour today, and most of the day will be spent between about 3,400-4,050 m. (11,155-13,287 ft.) At such elevations, temperatures can be cold,

especially during the early hours of the morning (although it is remarkably pleasant some mornings). We will go only as far as the national park entrance because all of the key high elevation specialists of the low, damp elfin woodland mixed with páramo can be found here and a little lower. Among them are the delightful little **Buff Helmetcrest** (formerly known as Bearded Helmetcrest prior to a four-way taxonomic split), **Stout-billed Cinclodes**, Tawny Antpitta, Andean Tit-Spintail, White-chinned Thistletail, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Páramo Tapaculo, Sedge Wren, Plain-colored Seedeater and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. All of these species usually can be found relatively easily along the last kilometer of road leading to the national park entrance. If the morning is clear and warm, there is a chance of seeing an Andean Condor here as well.

At slightly lower elevations, and in grassy areas, we'll be searching for the Many-colored Canastero (a strikingly colorful race here). Fog often determines the course of our activities on this mountain, but in general we'll continue birding downward in elevation through patches of montane forest, searching for such species as White-throated Tyrannulet, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager (often quite common), Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Blue-backed Conebill, Glossy Flowerpiercer and Páramo Seedeater. The endemic and highly localized **Rufous-fronted Parakeet** occur in this area but is erratic or unpredictable. A small lake, Laguna Negra, sometimes harbors Andean Teal and Andean (Ruddy) Ducks. Two other much-prized species in this area are Golden-crowned Tanager and Black-backed Bush-Tanager, and both usually require patience and some luck to find. We'll have lunch here in the mountains today, with access to hummingbird feeders that attract one of the most spectacular assemblages of hummingbirds to be found anywhere. With any luck we should be able



Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Nevado del Ruiz Steve Hilty

to see Great Sapphirewing, Viridian Metaltail, Shining Sunbeam, **Black-thighed Puffleg** (near endemic), Golden-breasted Puffleg, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Mountain Velvetbreast, and maybe even a Sword-billed Hummingbird. Late afternoon should find us back at our hotel for a much-needed rest after our busy day at these ultra-high elevations.

NIGHT: Hotel Quo, Manizales, dept. Caldas

July 13, Day 8: Morning at Hacienda El Bosque and Afternoon Drive to the City of Pereira. This exciting new site offers hummingbird feeders and two antpitta feeding sites with a chance for one of the cutest of all antpittas, the Crescent-faced Antpitta. In the surrounding mosaic of forested valleys there also is a good chance of seeing the spectacular Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan and Barred Fruiteater, as well as numerous tanagers and other highland species. Following the morning here, we will pass back through Manizales and continue directly on to Pereira, a city just over an hour to the south. The road between these cities is an ultra-modern multi-lane highway that passes through the heart of Colombia's coffee zone, much of which in this area is "sun" coffee, although some "shade" coffee plantations are still present.

NIGHT: Casa Hotel Kumanday, La Florida, Pereira, dept. Risaralda

July 14, Day 9: Morning at Otún-Quimbaya Reserve, Followed by Mid-afternoon Transfer to Montezuma Lodge near Tatamá National Park. We will have a full morning to enjoy this pleasant area, which is composed primarily of second-growth and plantation forests, much of which is Chinese Ash, as well as various conifers. Our focus here will be on two or three endemic species, in particular the **Cauca Guan** (endemic) and, if we have not already seen it, the **Crested Ant-Tanager** (endemic). The Cauca Guan, once feared extinct, is common here and usually easy to see. The Red-ruffed Fruitcrow also is much more common here than anywhere in its extensive range and we could see a dozen or more. Another spectacular species, the White-capped Tanager, also occurs here although groups of them wander widely and are unpredictable in occurrence. There are usually a number of tanagers and hummingbirds in fruiting and flowering trees.

A sampling of species in this reserve includes Collared Inca, Andean Motmot, Azara's Spinetail, Green Jay, Flame-rumped Tanager (here with scarlet rump) and Hepatic Tanager (highland form). Mixed species flocks may contain Masked and/or Collared trogon, Streaked Xenops, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Marble-faced and Variegated bristle-tyrant, Rufous-breasted Flycatcher, Plumbeous-crowned Tyrannulet, Pale-edged Flycatcher, Andean Solitaire, Golden-fronted Redstart, Orange-bellied Euphonia, and various *Tangara* tanagers including Golden, Bay-headed, Beryl-spangled and Black-capped (this latter species now in the genus *Stilpnia*). The rare Hooded Antpitta (near endemic) also is known from this reserve, although we would need some luck to see it. Reclusive Northern Chestnut-breasted Wrens (or Chestnut-breasted Wren) also are present but require patience to see. Although our stay is short, we are confident you will enjoy this pleasant area with its delightful spring-like temperatures.

This afternoon we will pack up, drive back through the city of Pereira and then continue south-westward toward the towns of La Virginia, Apía, and Pueblo Rico. From there we will transfer to 4x4 vehicles for the last 45 minutes to one hour drive to the Montezuma Lodge where we can settle in for three nights. The lodging is in two buildings, now with mostly private bathroom facilities. Upgrades to rooms are ongoing. The rooms are very clean, the food excellent (the best of the trip) and the owner (a widowed woman with five daughters) is extremely gracious and eager to please, and also a knowledgeable birder. The main birding road begins at the lodge at ca. 4,600 ft. elevation (ca. 1,400 m.) and hummingbird feeders and fruit feeders attract many birds right around the lodge building and dining area. The climate here is pleasant but decidedly humid as this region receives high rainfall (> 4,000 mm) spread fairly evenly through the year.

NIGHT: Montezuma Lodge, Tatamá National Park, dept. Risaralda



Montezuma Lodge, near Tatamá National Park © Steve Hilty

July 15-16, Days 10-11: Two Days in Reserva Natural Cerro Montezuma and Tatamá National Park. This reserve is located at the periphery of Cerro Tatamá National Park and almost all 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. Mornings tend to be clear here but weather can change quickly so we'll leave very early by 4x4 vehicles for the approximately one hour drive up to the end of the road where we will begin our birding activities. The road has deteriorated considerably in recent years and if we are unable to use a vehicle to gain the upper elevations of Cerro Montezuma, we may have to walk to reach higher elevations (ca. 2,400 m.; 7,874 ft.). Getting to the top is likely to be an adventure in any case, and there will certainly be birds along the way.

The second day we will likely focus on the lower and middle elevations of the reserve at ca. 1,350-1,650 m. (4,429-5,413 ft.). At the lodge itself, we will be quite close to beautiful wet, mossy forest and hummingbird feeders at our guest house usually attract several interesting species including Rufous-gaped Hillstar (formerly White-tailed Hillstar), Velvet-purple Coronet, Violet-tailed Sylph, and even Empress Brilliant. 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**. At the very highest elevations the **Munchique Wood-Wren** (endemic) also has been reported (a species first discovered in southwestern Colombia by Hilty in the late 1970s but not described until 2003) as well as the endemic **Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer**, a species heretofore known from only a handful of high elevation sites in the Western Andes.

Weather and logistics permitting, we will try to reach the mountaintop at least once where we have a good chance to see these rare species as well as others. The recently described **Chocó Vireo** (near endemic) also has been found along this road but is scarce and local. A sample of species that occur close to where we will stay, and higher, include: Barred Hawk, Sickle-winged Guan, **Cloud-forest Pygmy-Owl**, Western Emerald, Crowned Woodnymph, Brown Inca (fairly common seasonally), Greenish Puffleg, Violet-tailed Sylph, Crested and Golden-headed quetzal, Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, **Fulvous-dotted Treerunner** (near endemic), Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Uniform Treehunter, Plain Antvireo, **Bicolored Antvireo** (local),



Violet-tailed Sylph, Montezuma Lodge © Steve Hilty

Paramillo Tapaculo (endemic), Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Green-and-black Fruiteater, **Orange-breasted Fruiteater** (near endemic), Golden-breasted Fruiteater, Scaled Fruiteater (rare), Olivaceous Piha, **Beautiful Jay** (scarce, 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, Silver-throated Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Scrub Tanager, Blue-necked Tanager, Black-capped Tanager, Beryl-spangled Tanager, Flame-faced Tanager, Rufous-throated Tanager (this is an astonishing 11 species of tanagers, all formerly in the genus *Tangara*, found here!), Blue-winged and Black-chinned mountain-tanager, Dusky and Yellow-throated chlorospingus (formerly Bush-Tanager), **Crested Ant-Tanager** (endemic and surprisingly common here), Choco Brushfinch (also as Tricolored Brushfinch), Black-winged Saltator, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, and Thick-billed and Orange-bellied euphonia. This also may be one of the best places to see the remarkable Club-winged Manakin (dance/wing display video available on YouTube), a species we have seen on most of our visits here. There's a lot to look for but with two and a half days, we hope to see a good many of them.

NIGHTS: Montezuma Lodge, Tatamá National Park, dept. Risaralda

July 17, Day 12: Early Morning Near Montezuma Lodge; Balance of Day in Transit to Our Country Hotel

Some Distance Above the Small Town of Borrero Ayerbe. The balance of our morning will be spent retracing our route back to Pueblo Rico, then Apía and La Virginia, before turning southward to follow the Cauca River to the city of Buga. Here, depending upon our schedule, we may stop at Laguna de Sonso if time permits (but see final day for alternative). Much of the natural vegetation of this wide, flat section of the Cauca Valley has been replaced with agricultural crops including especially sugar cane, but also some rice, cotton and other products, so the Sonso area provides one of the few sites where good semi-natural habitat remains. It also is an important wetland. A sampling of species here includes Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-duck, numerous egrets and herons, Bare-faced and Green ibis, Snail Kite, Limpkin, Purple and Common gallinule, Striped Cuckoo, Dwarf Cuckoo, Little Cuckoo, **Spectacled Parrotlet** (near endemic), Steely-vented and Rufous-tailed hummingbird, Common Potoo, Crested and Yellow-headed caracara, **Grayish Piculet** (endemic), Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Jet Antbird, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Pied Water-Tyrant, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, **Apical Flycatcher** (endemic), Cinereous Becard, Great Antshrike, Bar-crested Antshrike, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Black-billed Thrush, Thick-billed Euphonia, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Saffron Finch, and Yellow Oriole. If time does not permit a stop today, we may have another opportunity the last day to visit this area.

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. Valle del Cauca

July 18, Day 13: Upper Section of the Old Buenaventura Road from near Queremal to the El Descanso

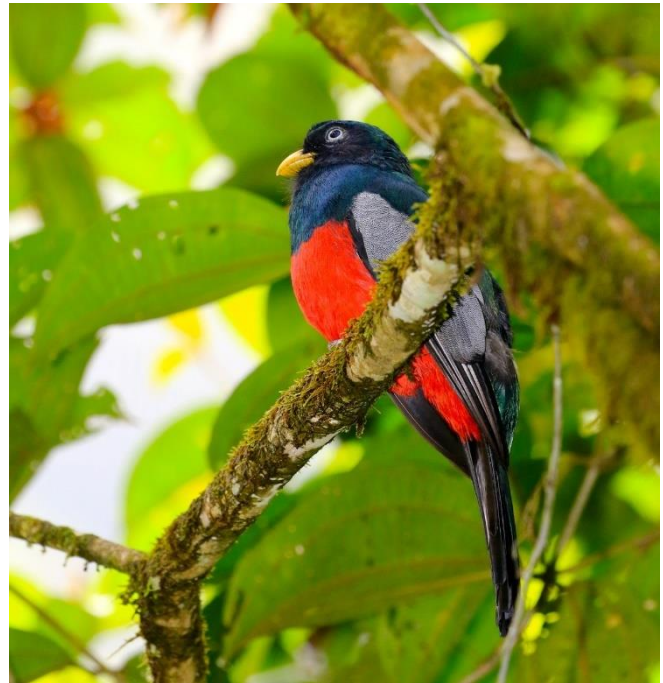
Restaurant. Often regarded as one of the top birding roads in the world, this road, like so many areas in Colombia, was seldom visited by birders from about 1986 to 2006, because of widespread internal conflict within the country. Now, for more than a decade, birders have been eagerly returning to this remarkable area (and a lower section of this road was, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the location of Hilty's research site). The upper area (elevations of

about 1,300-1,600 m), are closer and easier of access, and have become a favorite birding area, especially because of an enterprising lady (Doña Dora) who operates the El Descanso restaurant, and also maintains both fruit and nectar feeders for birds. A remarkable assortment of birds can be found at this site, and along portions of the Old Buenaventura Road above it. Some key species that are likely include Barred Hawk, **Toucan Barbet**, **White-whiskered Hermit**, **Empress Brilliant**, Green Thorntail, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, **Uniform Treehunter**, Red-faced Spinetail, White-lined Tanager, Golden Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager, **Rufous-throated Tanager**, and the much-sought **Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager**. Along the road and river above the restaurant **Crested Ant-Tanagers** can sometimes be seen near the river. Occasionally a Lyre-tailed Nightjar can be spotted sleeping on rocky road cuts in this area. Fruiting fig trees (*Ficus*) along the roadside may attract a variety of tanagers, saltators and euphonias, and such exciting species as **Golden-collared Chlorophonia** and even Golden-collared Honeycreeper.

NIGHT: Araucana Lodge, dept. Valle del Cauca

July 19, Days 14: Lowlands of San Cipriano, Western Base of Western Andes.

This regional reserve, located within a black community, was established originally as a watershed to supply drinking water to the port city of Buenaventura. It also has become popular as an outdoor recreational site (especially for people from Cali) and more recently also as an excellent birding area. At an elevation of only about 100 m, and located at the western base of the Western Andes, this region hosts practically all of the regional Choco-Pacific endemics and near-endemics in the lowlands and some also found in the foothills. A sampling of the many exciting possibilities includes: Blue-headed and **Rose-faced parrot** and less predictably Saffron-headed Parrot; **White-whiskered Hermit**; Rufous-breasted Hermit; **Tooth-billed Hummingbird**; Blue-chested and **Purple-chested hummingbird**; Purple-crowned Fairy; Black-breasted Puffbird; White-fronted Nunbird; Lanceolated Monklet (easily overlooked); **Blue-rumped (Chocó) Trogon**; **Chocó Toucan**; Yellow-throated Toucan; Spot-crowned Barbet (common); **Five-colored Barbet**; Chestnut-backed (Short-tailed) and Zeledon's antbird; **Stub-tailed Antbird**; **Esmeraldas Antbird**; Golden-collared Manakin; **Pacific Flatbill**; Cinnamon Becard; White-thighed Swallow; Bay Wren; Orange-billed Sparrow; and Tawny-crested, Scarlet-browed and **Scarlet-and-white tanager** (latter scarce). This also is an excellent area for many small *Tangara* tanagers (the genus now split into several genera including *Ixothraupis*, *Chalcothraupis*, *Poecilostreptus*, and *Stilpnia*, as well as *Tangara*). Included here are Blue-necked, Golden-hooded, Rufous-winged, Bay-headed, **Blue-whiskered**, and even **Gray-and-gold tanager**. Other interesting species include Long-tailed Tyrant, **Slate-colored Gnatcatcher**, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola among others.



Choco Trogon, Anchicayá Valley © Steve Hilty

NIGHTS: Araucana Lodge, dept. Valle del Cauca

July 20, Day 15: Cloud Forests Along the Crest of the Western Andes. We plan to spend the morning in the vicinity of “El 18,” a highland site at about 6,000 feet elevation (a little higher than our hotel) and located about 30 minutes to the east and along the watershed divide of the Western Andes. We will probably begin birding at a relatively new site, Finca La Florida, not far from “El 18,” and later, perhaps, include some birding along the forested road beyond the finca. These are, in general, incredible areas. Both **Chestnut Wood-Quail** (endemic) and White-throated Quail-Dove come to a feeding site here (both species are very difficult to see otherwise); also **Colombian Chachalaca** (endemic), Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Red-headed Barbet, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Uniform Antshrike, Montane Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Rusty-winged Barbtail (easily

overlooked), 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 tanagers (many formerly in genus *Tangara*) are apt to dominate whenever we encounter mixed species flocks and likely species include Saffron-crowned, Golden-naped, **Metallic-green** (near endemic), Golden, Bay-headed, Black-capped, and Beryl-spangled. Also regular at feeders are the incredible **Multicolored Tanager** (endemic), as well as Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and Andean Motmot.

We will spend the morning at Finca La Florida, and have lunch here or nearby. In addition to some spectacular tanagers, numerous hummingbirds also are usually present including White-necked Jacobin, Green Violetear, Black-throated Mango, Blue-headed Sapphire (rare and seasonal), Booted Racket-tail, Andean Emerald, Bronzy Inca, **Brown Inca** (seasonal), Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Buff-tailed Coronet, Long-tailed Sylph, and Purple-throated Woodstar. We also have seen Golden-headed Quetzal and Emerald Toucanet in this general area.



Golden-headed Quetzal, Western Andes © Steve Hilty

NIGHT: Hotel Movich Casa del Alferéz, Cali, dept. Valle de Cauca

July 21, Day 16: Morning Laguna de Sonso; Return to Cali. We will plan for a morning visit to Laguna de Sonso. Laguna de Sonso is an old oxbow wetland with an interesting selection of water birds and species typical of drier forest. In addition to waterbirds, a few key species here include Greater Ani, Striped Cuckoo, Dwarf Cuckoo (irregular), Dark-billed Cuckoo (irregular/seasonal?), **Spectacled Parrotlet** (near-endemic), **Grayish Piculet** (endemic), **Bar-crested Antshrike** (near-endemic), Jet Antbird, Cinereous Becard, Southern Beardless-Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, **Apical Flycatcher** (endemic), Yellow Oriole, and Masked Cardinal (possibly an escapee but now established). This will be followed by a return to Cali, arriving in time for international flights.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Steve Hilty and a local leader



Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and author of *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press, as well as the popular *Birds of Tropical America, A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, has described two species of birds new to science in Venezuela, and another, with a team of scientists, in Colombia. He also wrote the text and species accounts for the tanager family for the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. In a departure from ornithology, Steve also wrote *Dirt, Sweat, and Diesel: A Family Farm in the 21st Century*, a book focusing on a Midwestern farm family. However, he returned to birds with his recent (2021) *Birds of Colombia*, published by Lynx Editions of Barcelona, Spain. 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, and as a broker with Merrill

Lynch. He is currently a research associate in ornithology at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute. Since 1983 he has also worked for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, guiding trips throughout North and South America, and co-leading trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With more than five 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.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$8,290** per person in double occupancy from Medellín (tour ends in Cali). This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 16, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Medellín and return from Cali, 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 be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$700**. Single rooms cannot be guaranteed at Montezuma Reserve (Days 9, 10 & 11), and this is taken into account for the single supplement.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://www.ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (February 7, 2024).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** 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 between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:
180 days or more before departure date

Participant's refund will be:
Participant's deposit minus \$500*

179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less 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. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “*Force Majeure*” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

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.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium

is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

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 & 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.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE LIMITS: All tour participants are asked to limit their luggage to **a single bag of no more than about forty pounds and a single carry-on item such as a small backpack. Please pack in wheeled duffels** as these will fit better in our buses and in the 4x4 vehicles and will be easier to manage in the lodges where we stay (where space is often limited) than hard-sided suitcases. 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 major hotels. There will be no porter services at the lodges, e.g., Montezuma Lodge and possibly elsewhere. **When packing, we urge you to give thought to traveling lighter rather than heavier. We also recommend that you bring a few 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 elevations visited. However, almost all of the sites visited are in the highlands where temperatures are cool and pleasant. We will

visit one lower elevation site (Laguna de Sonso) where it will be warm but not excessively hot for a morning and we plan to spend a day at lower elevations (ca. 900 to 1,600 ft.) in the Anchicayá Valley where temperatures can be quite warm and humid. The Colombian Andes can be somewhat rainy at almost any time of the year so we advise you to **bring an umbrella and/or rain jacket. Rubber boots are not necessary** although you should have waterproof hiking boots because some trails may be muddy. Please be aware that, because Colombia sits so close to the equator, rainier and drier periods are not well-defined, and rain and wet and/or muddy conditions, and muddy and slippery trails can be encountered at any time of the year in the Colombian Andes. One morning at tree line on Nevado del Ruiz may be quite damp and cold (perhaps also some fog) and all visitors should bring a warm jacket that includes a fleece layer (or vest) underneath, a warm hat and gloves, and a rain jacket large enough to slip on over your jacket. Temperatures on Nevado del Ruiz may initially be in the mid- to high 30s to low 40s (F), although some mornings are considerably warmer. All other areas will be warmer, but nights can be cool and mornings at most sites will probably be cool enough to require a light jacket. You may want to have a light weight jacket with you during some day hikes as well.

CLOTHING: Medium weight field clothing will be fine for most of the trip. *Please do not wear white or brightly colored clothes*, including hats or raingear, as it makes movements more conspicuous to shy birds and animals. 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 at all sites as protection against insects and sun. A long, waterproof poncho or rain jacket, warm sweater or fleece jacket (or jacket and down vest combination in layers), warm hat, and gloves will be needed. Bring a broad-brimmed hat for sun protection and a good sunscreen. As noted above, rubber boots are not necessary but you should have a pair of Gore-Tex water-resistant/waterproof hiking boots (some trails may be muddy), and a second pair of sturdy walking shoes and/or sneakers. Expect some rain and muddy trails. Shower footwear (thongs) also will be useful at lodges.

LAUNDRY: **Laundry service is limited.** We recommend that you bring sufficient clothes to see you through at least half of the trip and, especially, bring items that can be washed easily and will dry quickly (i.e., COOLMAX® shirts, etc.).

NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR: Until recently, Colombia was rarely visited by birders. Tourism infrastructure has been limited but is developing rapidly and accommodations are generally comfortable (quite good in Medellín, Manizales, Jardín and Cali) and the food is good. There are some lengthy bus rides when moving between sites. The areas of Montezuma and Jardín require 4-wheel drive access on rough, winding roads. Birding will be mostly on country roads with little traffic, or occasionally on forest trails. Walking conditions vary, but will almost certainly include some hills and moderately strenuous walking at altitudes, mostly between ca. 4,000-8,500 ft. One day we will reach 13,000 ft. for an hour or two. Temperatures are generally cool and refreshing throughout. Expect some rain.

HEALTH: Malaria has been confirmed in Colombia, including the chloroquine-resistant strain in rural areas, but it is not expected to be a problem on this route. In general, this route is largely free of tropical diseases that concern people, because most of this trip takes place in higher, cooler elevations.

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. The vaccination is good for 10 years or more (recent information suggests a single vaccination may provide lifetime protection). Furthermore, yellow fever is transmitted by primates and is unlikely to be a risk except in the lowlands. People with compromised immune systems should consult with their personal physician before getting any vaccination. Your typhoid protection should be current. In all cases proper clothing and the use of insect repellent are generally your best protection against biting insects. Dengue fever also is very infrequent. It is transmitted by day-flying *Aedes* *egypti* mosquitoes. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection. Finally, the recent Zika virus outbreak is now present in Colombia. It also is transmitted by the same day-flying *Aedes* *egypti* mosquito that transmits Dengue. Again, proper clothing and use of some insect repellent, especially in lowland areas, is the best protection.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

INSECTS: Insects should not be a problem over most of our route (the highlands should be particularly free of biting insects), but depending on rain, 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 or similar insect repellents. We do not recommend wearing shorts at any of the sites we visit because of the potential for insect bites. Spraying shoes, socks and the lower portion of pants with insect repellent will help reduce problems with chiggers. Pants pretreated with permethrin are also helpful. We urge that you not bring very strong-scented “natural” repellents, if possible, because these often have strong unpleasant odors that are inappropriate in group situations.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF![®], Cutter[™], Ultrathon[™], etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone[®] (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield[®] technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.

- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permethrin is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

We recommend the use of Insect Shield® clothing. Insect Shield is a process by which clothing is treated with an EPA-approved formula of the insect repellent permethrin. Such clothing is highly repellent to insects and provides durable and long-lasting protection, even after dozens of washings. Outdoor wear with Insect Shield protection includes name brands such as Ex Officio and Tilley, and can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores such as REI and from a variety of online retailers. In lieu of Insect Shield clothing, you should consider treating your clothes with permethrin, which has the same effect, and that can be purchased at outdoor recreation stores and from a variety of online retailers.

CURRENCY: Colombian Peso. Currency exchange and ATMs are available in the Arrivals Hall at the Medellín airport. You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting “XE-The World’s Favorite Currency Site” at: <http://www.xe.com>.

DOCUMENTS: A valid passport is required for United States citizens, with one blank page for entry stamp. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure. A visa is not required for stays of less than 90 days. All non-US 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, a **reliable portable alarm clock**, a **day pack**, plastic bags for water-proofing gear in the field, plenty of snacks such as trail mix or dried fruit, and any personal medications. A **small, 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.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: There will be some 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 the current is usually 110 at the hotels and lodges where we will be staying; a surge protector also is recommended. 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. Other items should include 1) bird book(s), 2) checklist for recap in evening (provided by VENT); 3) small notebook, pens, etc., 4) a Colombian map, and other personal items. Guides will have telescopes but we encourage participants also to bring a scope if they wish.

INTERNET SERVICE: Internet (Wi-Fi) should be available in all hotels in Medellín, Jardín, Manizales and Cali, but not at Montezuma Lodge and Casa Hotel Kumanday. Cell phone service (local providers are Movistar and Claro) is available at all sites. Those that have an international phone connection (or a chip that permits connecting) will be able to access the internet with iPhones, Android phones, iPads, etc., virtually everywhere (note that local provider Claro has better service in remote areas). The other major telecommunication provider, MOVISTAR, is also available but their coverage in rural areas is not as complete as that of Claro. Cell phone access is now virtually country-wide in Colombia although a few sites located in deep valleys may not be able to receive signals (this is usually a local issue). ***Before leaving home, we suggest that you check with your personal service provider for roaming rates and coverage use areas pertaining to your personal calling plan.***

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides: **recommended

Hilty, S. L. 2021. *Birds of Colombia. This new guide is the recommended book*** for Colombia. Forward-looking taxonomy includes all species and subspecies groups (as in Clements checklist). Illustrations are from 16-vol. *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx) with many updates and additions. All species, as well as subspecies, and subspecies groups are illustrated and mapped. Unique for South America, this book contains a QR code for every species, which allows users to quickly link, via mobile phone, to Cornell's *Birds of the World* website and listen to vocalizations, view photos, and read an expanded text. Almost like having an App embedded in this book (and Colombia has remarkably good cellular coverage so this feature is usable almost everywhere). The flex-back edition is recommended for travel, although has been out of stock (at Lynx Edicions, Barcelona) for some time. The hardback version, however, is available through the publisher, Lynx Edicions and at a lower price than on Amazon (check around!).

Hilty, S. L. and W. L. Brown. 1986. ***A Guide to the Birds of Colombia***. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. A classic and still a good source for basic Colombian bird information on voice, behavior, breeding and status and habitat. but taxonomy is now very much outdated since the 1986 publication of this important work, and this book is no longer in print. We suggest you bring the much newer 2021 book (above).

McMullan, M., and M. Donegan. 2014. ***Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia (2nd Edition)***. McMullan, M. 2018. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Rey Naranjo Editores. 400 pages., softcover. Illustrates all species, with brief text and small map. Illustrations improved over earlier editions but some complex groups (flycatchers, hummingbirds etc.) still may present identification issues when using this book. Some taxonomy already has

changed since publication. That said, this book is small and compact and highly portable and is a useful supplement to newer Hilty book for those looking for a small field reference.

**Ayerbe-Quiñones, Fernando. 2019. *Birds of Colombia*. Wildlife Conservation Society. Small and compact book with fine, well-organized, computer-generated illustrations; a detailed map (with color-coded subsp. distributions) accompanies each species. There is no text accompanying each species but book does have comments pertaining to each genus. Lacks useful index (only Order, Family and genus but not English names). Small size and accurate illustrations make this book very useful in field but paper cover (as well as all inside pages) printed on low-quality paper easily damaged by contact with moisture (always carry it inside a plastic bag for protection and do not let water reach this book). Available in both an English or a Spanish-language edition (2018); although only in English on Amazon.

Natural History:

Hilty, Steven. 2005. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. University of Texas Press. Highly recommended for background information on how things work in bird communities in tropical latitudes. Includes chapters on diversity, speciation, hummingbird and antbird communities, mixed species flocks, fruit eating adaptations, flycatcher radiation, manakin displays, plumage color in the tropics, Amazonian River islands, cacique and oropendola breeding behavior, environmental constraints on bird song and more.

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

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

General Travel and Bird Finding:

Beckers, J. and P. Florez. 2013. *Birdwatching in Colombia*. Should be available through Amazon.com and perhaps other sources. Lots of details on sites in Colombia, including key birds. Focus is on budget birding travel within Colombia but almost any birder visiting Colombia will find much useful information here. Details 127 sites including maps, key species for each site, also a liberal scattering of photos of birds and some localities.

Porup, J, K. Raub, C. Soriano & R. Reid. Most recent edition. *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 should provide a richer travel experience for almost anyone. **Note that there are several other travel books available** (Rough Guide, etc.) and any of these may be equally good. See on www.amazon.com.

Recordings:

Alvarez, M., V. Caro, O. Laverde and A. M. Cuervo. 2007. *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. 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 (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, 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 tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “VENT”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar,

motorcoach, 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on September 12, 2023, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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