

TRIP REPORT

of a recce tour

Colombia – the number one birding destination,
18 days, 28. March -14. April 2013

**Western & Central Cordilleras, Cauca Valley & Choco region
with extension to Santa Marta Mts. & Tayrona National Park**

Birds at lush cloud forests, wetlands, coasts, valleys & high mountains



After our extremely busy birding and butterfly tour season in Latin America from November till March we decided to go and discover the top birding destination: Colombia!

We visited some of the best birding areas of Colombia with various habitats. Breathtaking hills, lush cloud forests with incredibly rich flora and fauna awaited us you including a long list of birds. **Colombia is simply the number one birding destination** with its close to 2000 species including a long list of endemic and near endemic birds!

Fact File

- 16 birding days in Colombia visiting world-famous National Parks and nature reserves
- In Colombia we started/finished in Medellin (arrived from Cancun Mexico, also finished there)
- used various accommodation at different habitats, most of them offered great on site birding
- some days we had long drives, which of course we would do differently with a group
- **the main goal was to visit and compare** different areas: **Western-, Central and Eastern Andes, plus the Caribbean Region with Santa Marta Hills**

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Highlights

-We visited several top ProAves and other reserves:

-Northern Central Andes: Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve,

-Western Andes: Tangaras Reserve

-Highlands of the Central Andes: Rio Blanco Reserve, Otun Quimbaya Sanctuary

-Northern Caribbean Region: Minca & El Dorado Reserve in the Santa Marta Mountain, plus Tayrona National Park

- wide variety of birds including lots of endemics, a few mammals & reptiles, but huge variety of butterflies, moths, other insects at different habitats

Accommodation

3 nights at **Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve,**

3 nights at **Tangaras Reserve,**

1 night at **Otun Quimbaya Sanctuary,**

2 nights at **Rio Blanco Reserve,**

2 nights at **Minca,** foot of the **Santa Marta Hills**

3 nights at **El Dorado Reserve, Santa Marta Hills**

2 nights at **Tayrona National Park,**

1 night Bogota

Activity level

Easy to moderate walks with some demanding hikes, which we would not repeat with groups;

some areas are really hot and humid; rain is possible

All pics in this material were made during this tour by Gabor Orban & Andrea Katona



Highland Motmot

Itinerary

Day 1 -27th-28th March, 2013

From Cancun we started on the 27th March at midnight and arrived on the 28th morning at around 8.00 to Medellin by Aeromexico with one stop at Bogota El Dorado airport. We rented a car and from Medellin first we travelled for about 5hours North East to the **Northern-Central Andes to the Chestnut-Capped Piha Reserve**, where we arrived in the afternoon, finally!:-) Got our quite simple room and after that we had our late lunch. As soon as we could get ready we went out to look for the first birds and to discover the surrounding area.

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This day we had: **Black-faced/Yellow-tufted Dacnis**, **Blue-necked Tanager**, **Green-and-Black Fruit-eater**, **Yellow-margined/Zimmer's Flycatcher**, **Cinnamon Becard** and a female **Bay-breasted Warbler**.



Black-faced or Yellow-tufted Dacnis



Cinnamon Becard

We also saw an **Olive-Backed Woodcreeper**, **Crimson-backed Tanager**, a female **Spectacled Parotlet** and **Streak-headed Woodcreeper**. We found also a **Speckle-breasted Wren** which is quite uncommon bird and usually it is not easy to see at all.

What is more it turned out that the feeder is frequently visited by a **Colombian Chachalaca**, which is a **vulnerable endemic!**:-) Great, we had our first Colombian endemic and we hoped that this was just the first from a long list!

Unfortunately it started to get dark soon, but anyway we were extremely tired from the long travel before, so we finished the day relatively early. We had a family style dinner and soon we went to bed to have a good-night sleep, what we really needed.



Olive-backed Woodcreeper



Streak-headed Woodcreeper

Day 2-4 - 29th-31st March, 2013

During the mornings at this reserve usually the first birds we saw were hummingbirds, which visited both the feeders and the flowery bushes around. Species included **Andean Emerald**, **Green-crowned Brilliant**, **Booted Rocket-tail**, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **Violet-bellied Hummingbird** and **White-necked Jacobin**.

We also saw at the feeder on the top of a banana a female **Bronze-green Euphonia**, which is quite uncommon and localized bird on the East slope.

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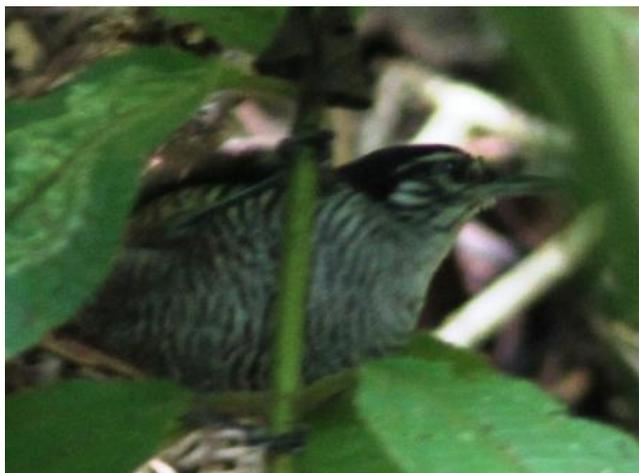
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Another morning we could add some additional species, apart from the ones we saw before such as **Red-bellied Emerald, Western Emerald, Brown Violetear, Violet-headed Hummingbird** and a nice **Purple-crowned Fairy**.



Speckle-breasted Wren



Spectacled Parrotlet female

During the days our daily routine was to go out after breakfast and then turn back for lunch and after a bit of relax going out in the afternoons as well. We went on trails and also alongside the so called main road on foot.

On one of the trails we saw **Scrub Tanager, Great Trush**, plus **Golden-rumped** and **Orange-bellied Euphonias** and a lovely **Ornate-Flycatcher**. We also saw a wintering **Tennessee Warbler**.

We found **Slate-throated Whitestart, Black-capped Tanager** and Andrea found a bird, which turned out to be the **Chestnut-capped Piha**, after which the reserve was named!!:-) Although it is an interesting bird we surely would not call it one of the most colorful ones! ☺ But it was of course one of our target birds here, so we were quite happy with it...:-)

At a forest clearing we could check the sky and we saw **Swallow-tailed Kite, Road-side Hawk** and **Short-tailed Hawk**.

In the bushes we found **White-naped Brushfinch** and **Southern House Wren** as well. It was interesting to find a **Lemon-rumped Tanager**, which is actually the subspecies of the more widespread Flame-rumped Tanager.

As we walked around the main road we heard the distinct calls of **Red-throated Caracaras**. Hoping, that we can take a good shot of them we went closer. Although we saw them very well they moved to much for a good photo or sat among branches. But we had a nice view of a **White-throated Toucan, Black-faced Tanager** and **Buff-throated Saltator**.

During the lunch-break we had again a long list of hummingbirds-just to mention the new ones: **Black-throated Mango, Greenish Puffleg, Gloving Puffleg, Black-throated Brilliant, Purple-throated** and **White-bellied Woodstar, Rufous-tailed** and **Blue-chested Hummingbirds**

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Bronze-green Euphonia female Euphonia



Violet-headed Hummingbird female



2 great endemics: Chestnut-capped Piha



Red-bellied Grackle

Later on during another outing we found **Black-striped Sparrow**, which is fairly common, but we also found a very localized and skulking bird, a **Black-headed Brushfinch**, **White-mantled Barbet** and a bit further on a **White-naped Brushfinch**.

Other species to mention were **Scale-crested Tyrannulet**, **Mourning Warbler**, **Blackburnian Warbler** and a juvenile **Grey-cheeked Trush**. When we checked the photos in the evening it turned out that the Blackburnian was actually ringed!!



Swallow-tailed Kite



Ornate Flycatcher

Some of the colorful tanagers we saw here were **Bay-headed**, **Blue-necked**, **Black-faced** and **Beryl-spangled Tanagers**. We also admired a beautiful male **Collared Trogon**. For a few seconds we also had a glimpse of a disappearing **Chestnut Wood-Quail**.

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Scrub Tanager



Violet-headed Hummingbird male



White-naped Brushfinch



Lemon-rumped Tanager male

There were also 2 new raptor species to add to the list: an adult **King Vulture** and a **White-rumped Hawk**. One of the highlights were during an afternoon walk on a trail, that we found the **Red-bellied Grackles** which were feeding on a tree, so we could observe them very well. This was also good finding, because this bird is another attractive endemic species.

During these 2 days we saw close to 100species, out of these some really good ones!:-)



Orange-bellied Euphonia male



Red-throated Caracara

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This area was surely a Butterfly heaven, we have seen and photographed dozens of species without any serious effort to find anything. They were all around, so sometimes we just could not resist.

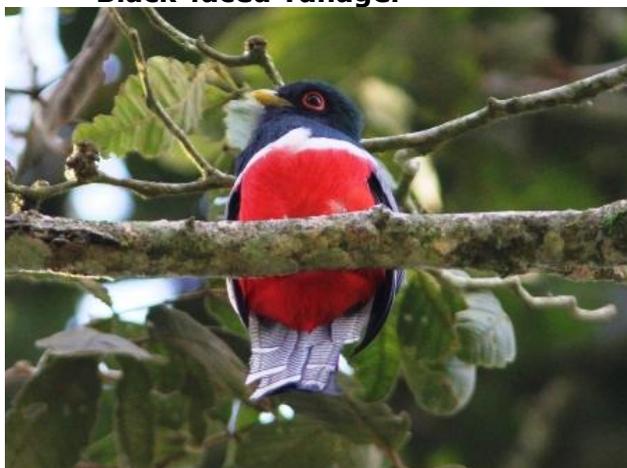
After our last dinner we finalized our notes, checked some of our photos and crashed into bed.



Black-faced Tanager



Blue-necked Tanager



Collared Trogon male



Colombian Chachalaca endemic

Day 4 – 31st March, 2013

On the last morning we still had a bit of time to check out the feeders and we saw the following hummingbirds there: **Brown-Violetear**, **Violet-bellied Hummingbird**, **Green-crowned Brilliant**, **Andean Emerald** and **Crowned-Woodnymph**. Of course we witnessed again the **Colombian Chachalaca** coming down to the feeder. They actually came down every day to feed on the fruits.



Purple-crowned Fairy



Crowned Woodnymph

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After breakfast before 8 o'clock we started our long journey. This was a transfer day from **Arrierito or Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve** to the **Tangaras or Tanager Reserve**. It was an hour to reach the asphalted road, plus we stopped a little bit at a huge dam and then continued to Medellin. At around midday we stopped at a petrol station.



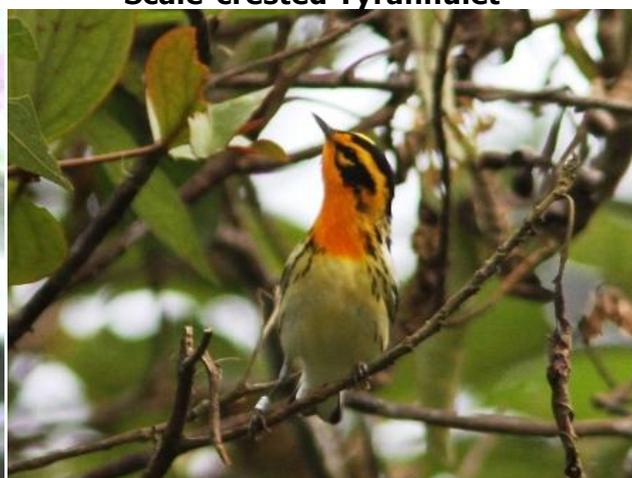
Bay-headed Tanager



Scale-crested Tyrannulet



Blue-necked Tanager



Blackburnian Warbler

We felt that the exhaust pipe became loose on the bed roads, so we got it repaired, which took us an extra hour. We had lunch in meantime and started to drive up into the hills again. We arrived to the **Tangaras Reserve** late afternoon very tired, but we got our pre-reserved rooms soon, so we could relax a bit before dinner.



Golden Tanager



Purplish-mantled Tanager

Day 5 - 1st April, 2013

After breakfast we went out on a tour on the Tangaras trail with a local guide and first we found **Toucan Barbet** which is now considered to be in its own separate family. We tried to

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photograph a **Red-headed Barbet**, which on the other hand belongs to the Barbet family and it is related to toucans. This is quite confusing, because of the name of the Toucan Barbet which instead does not belong to the Barbet family and of course it is not a Toucan either!:-) But the main thing was that we had a good view of both of them! :-)



White-headed Wren



Black Solitaire



Violet-tailed Sylph



Masked Trogon female

We also saw a nice bird, an **Olive Finch** which has a very restricted range, but here locally it is quite common. The next birds were **Rufous Wren** and **Indigo Flower-piercer** which is a rather uncommon, near endemic species. In the meantime we heard **Golden-headed Quetzal**, but we had to work harder later on to find it as well. Soon we were rewarded by a view of another endemic, a **Black-and-Gold Tanager**, which is actually listed as **vulnerable endemic** species!!

After that a **Smoke-colored Pewee** sallied from the canopy. There was also a **Blackburnian Warbler** and a **Golden-crowned Flycatcher**. We managed to find a **Glaucous Pigmy Owl**, but unfortunately it was not possible to photograph it.

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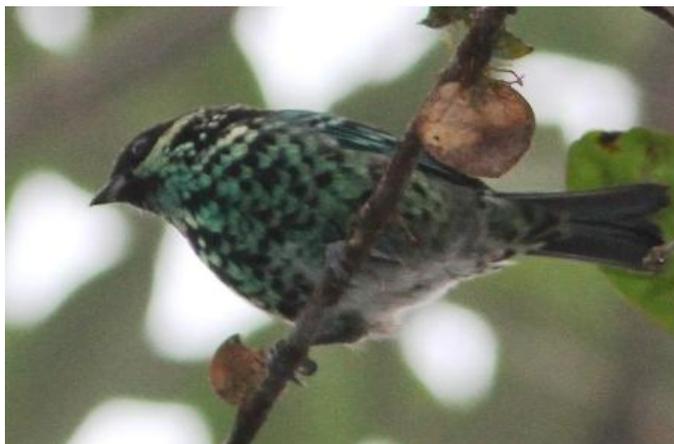
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A group of extremely colorful birds were foraging in the canopy including **Glistening Green Tanager** and a **Yellow-collared Chlorophonia** both near-endemics, plus **Black-chinned** and **Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers**. This latter one is also a near-endemic and quite an uncommon bird.



Beryl-spangled Tanager



Azara's Spinetail



Tricolored Brushfinch



Yellow-breasted Antpitta

Suddenly almost eye-level we saw a beautiful hummingbird perched, which was a **Violet-tailed Nymph**. Wow, what stunning shape and color it had! Of course we took photo of this beauty as well!:-) Later on we also found a more common, but still beautiful **Golden Tanager** and at a bit more open area a **White-headed Wren**.

From the more widespread species we mention **Golden-Olive Woodpecker** and **Band-tailed Pigeon**.

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Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager



Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager

We admired a **Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia**, **Mountain** and **Purplish-mantled Tanager**. We also took a photo of this latter near-endemic species. A **Tricolored Brushfinch** and a **Red-faced Spine-tail** were new later on.



Buffy Tuftedcheek



Golden-olive Woodpecker



Flame-rumped Tanager female



Blue-winged Mountain Tanager

Suddenly we really became excited because our local guide pointed out that the call that we heard was coming from a **newly described species**, which was **Alto Pisones Tapaculo!** :-)
We tried hard to see it, but it was too far away in the dense vegetation and was not willing to come closer unfortunately.

After that we took a photo of a **Slaty-backed Tyrannulet** and a female **Masked Trogon**.

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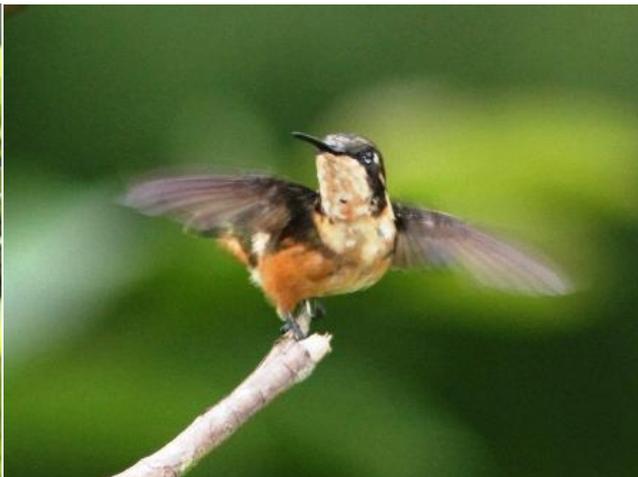
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The next species was a **Three-striped Warbler** and 2 different types of **flycatchers**: an **Ornate** and a **Handsome**. The latter one was actually really handsome, but we liked Ornate even better. :-)



Chestnut-headed Oropendola



Hummingbird, female Woodstar

Hummingbirds here were represented by **Tawny-bellied Hermit** and a **Violet-tailed Sylph**. After that on a moss covered branch we saw contrasting black and white, which turned out to be a **Black Solitaire** in a full view!!:-) It is quite uncommon bird not easy to see, because it is normally quite inconspicuous.



Chestnut-capped Brushfinch



Hooded Mountain Tanager

Frustratingly we heard several species which we could not find in the dense vegetation, neither of them we could lure out. These were **Narinjo Tapaculo** and **Yellow-breasted Antpitta**, both near endemic species. However the latter one we managed to see later, also photograph. We also heard **Chestnut-breasted Wren** and **Golden-ringed Tanager**, which is very uncommon endemic.

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Golden-fronted Whitestart



Masked Flowerpiercer

But we managed to see a beautiful male **Orange-breasted Fruit-eater**, which is quite uncommon as well and normally not mixed in flocks. We reached a small cascade, where we saw a **Green-fronted Lancebill**. Later on at another flock we had **Saffron-crowned, Beryl-spangled** and **Black-and-Gold Tanagers**, the latter one is a vulnerable endemic. **Yellow-bellied Eleania** was common, but we also had **Buffy-Tuftedcheek** and **Slate-throated Whitestart**. We took a photo of an **Azara's Spinetail** as well. We heard again the amazing **Golden-headed Quetzal**, but still had no view of it yet.



Bluish Flowerpiercer



Streak-necked Flycatcher



Black-capped Hemispingus



Montane Woodcreeper

On the other hand **Glossy Flower-piercer** and **Blue-capped Tanager** were quite common around. Finally we not just heard, but we saw and amazingly also managed to photograph the near endemic **Yellow-breasted Antpitta!** After that we also had an **Olivaceous Piha**.

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The next unique species was the **endangered near-endemic Choco Vireo**, followed by a **Uniform Treehunter** which is a quite uncommon bird. We also photographed a **Chestnut-headed Oropendola**. Later another amazing local endemic, a **Crested Anttanager** crossed our way. :-)



Long-tailed Antbird



Plushcap

Today was actually an amazing **Birds' day or Birthday for Andrea** with several near endemic and endemic species most of them new for us! What a lovely day!!:-) We returned to the lodge, had a rest, then a nice dinner and happily returned to room to check our photos and get ready for next's day surprises!!



Lachrymose Mountain-tanager



Rufous-crowned Tody Flycatcher



Cinnamon Flycatcher



Slate-throated Whitestart

Day 6 - 2nd April, 2013

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Today we went out birding to **El Carmen-Urrao road**. The first bird was not so excited, a **Band-tailed Pigeon** but the 2nd one was a **Stripe-headed Brushfinch** followed by **Pale-eyed** and **Great-Thrush**. Then we had again another local endemic, a **Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer**! This is a very local stunning bird which we managed to photograph as well. Wow, what a start! :-)



Slaty-backed Chat-tyrant



Pearled Treerunner

We also photographed a strikingly colored **Crimson-Mantled Woodpecker**!! What a nice after birthday present for Andrea!:-) We also had a **Hooded Mountain Tanager** with nice red eyes and a **Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet**. **Smoked-colored Pewee**, **Golden-fronted Whitestart** and **Collared Inca** were common here.



Collared Inca



Torrent Tyrannulet



White-lined Tanager male



Red-faced Spinetail

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We photographed **Masked Flower-piercer** also with very strong red eyes and **Green-and-Black Fruit-eater** as well. We had **Chestnut-capped Brushfinch**, **Montane Woodcreeper** and **Black-capped Hemispingus**. After these species we found **Long-tailed Antbird** and a lovely **Plushcap** followed by **Rufous-crowned Tody Flycatcher** and a **Lachrymose Mountain-Tanager**. We also had the chance to see **Rufous Spinetail**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Blueish Flowerpiercer**, **Yellow-throated Vireo** and **Streak-necked Flycatcher**.



Bananaquit



Slaty Spinetail immature

Before the end of the day beside the previous day's species we also had **Cinnamon Flycatcher**, **Pearled Tree-runner**, **Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant**, **Slate-throated Whitestart** and **Torrent Tyrannulet**. Our very last new bird for the day was a **White-lined Tanager**. After dinner at dusk we saw a mammal approaching the feeders. Locals called it chucha which is the **Common or Black-eared Opossum**.



Sickle-winged Guan



Emerald Toucanet



Squirrel



Rufous-breasted Flycatcher

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Day 7 - 3rd April, 2013

Before breakfast we found a nice **Highland Motmot** in the garden. Later on also a **Bananaquit** and some spintails: an immature **Slaty Spinetail** and a **Red-faced Spinetail** gave a great opportunity to compare the 2 species. After breakfast before 8 o'clock we left the Tangaras Reserve and our aim was to drive back East and then down through Pereira and up to **Otun Quimbaya Reserve** in the Western Andes.

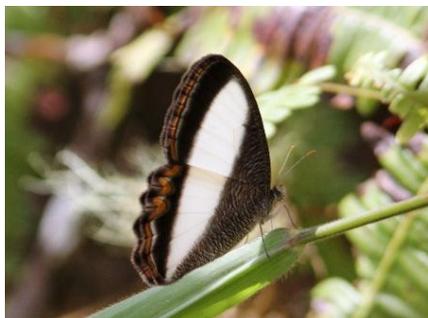


Southern House Wren



Saffron Finch

On the way unfortunately we bumped into roadworks and traffic jams, so we lost more than 30-40 minutes with those. We stopped on the way close to the fork of Urau, where we spent about an hour with birding alongside the road, since we knew that Antioquia Wren was discovered in this area just a year before. Unfortunately we saw just common species such as **Yellow-headed Caracara**, **Yellow Warbler**, **Squirrel Cuckoo** and **Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher**.



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Scarlet-fronted Parakeet



White-collared and Chestnut Collared Swifts

As we looked up in the sky we saw a huge group of swifts, actually hundreds of them, mainly **White-collared**, but also a few **Chestnut-collared** ones. Later on at about midday we stopped at the Bolonbolo bridge as well where we photographed **Scarlet-fronted Parakeets**. This stop was followed by a lot of mountain driving, finally we reached the city of Pereira from where through La Florida we continued to Otun Quimbaya.

We arrived in dark, but fortunately our reserved room waited for us and finally we could also get a simple dinner as well. We were quite tired after a long day again, so we went to our room, which was named after a bird, the Cassique and went to bed as early as possible.

Day 8 - 4th April, 2013

Otun is one of the best places in the world to observe **Red-ruffed Fruitcrow** and the endangered endemic **Cauca Guan**. They are relatively easy to see here, although they were believed to be extinct until a population of the species was rediscovered in 1990. Although we spent short time here we hoped to find some of these local specialities.

So we started early morning at 6.00, drove about 3-3,5 miles but on a really challenging road with some short birding stops, so this short distance took us about 45 minutes! Finally we stopped and started birding on foot.:-)

The very first bird we found was a good one, an **Emerald Toucanet**. After that we found a guan, it was not the Cauca Guan yet, but the **Sickle-winged Guan**. We also found a perched, drying out **Road-side Hawk**. The next surprising bird was a **Golden-headed Quetzal!** Another target species was **Rufous-breasted Flycatcher** and later on we saw a **Common Bush-Tanager**, **Beryl-spangled** and a **Grey-headed Tanager** as well. The only mammal we saw was a **squirrel** with an attractive tail with orange on the upper part all the way.



Cauca Guan



Red-ruffed Fruitcrow

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On the way back we found a **Southern House Wren** and a **Black-chested Mountain Tanager**. After that we were finally surprised by the very localised endemic, the **Cauca Guan!!** We managed to take some photos and our adrenaline level was still high when we bumped into a **Red-ruffed Fruitcrow**. What a fantastic morning! :-)

Later on we noted a **Saffron Finch** and a **Highland Motmot** as well.

We arrived back to our accommodation at around 1.30, had lunch, packed and at about 3.00 we started to drive down towards Manizales. During the day we saw **Southern Lapwing** and **Bare-faced Ibis**.

Around 5 o'clock we reached the city, quickly visited a petrol station and a tire shop where we double checked and made it repaired one of our tires. After that finally we started to drive up to Rio Blanco. During the way we had some amazing new species such as **Band-winged Nightjar** and **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**. We also heard a **Rufous-banded Owl**.

We knew that it was also possible here to see White-throated Screech-Owl, Common Potoo, Rufous-bellied Nightjar, Andean Pygmy Owl and Stygian Owl.

We stayed here at **Rio Blanco** at a very simple accommodation for 2 nights, but we hoped to have an early start and a full day birding next day at this marvelous area.



Day 9 - 5th April, 2013 - Rio Blanco Reserve

This day we had a local guide Albeiro with us, who is feeding every day at the same time several local antpitta species. That is why this one of the World's best places to see Antpittas up-close. Actually Rio Blanco Reserve touted as one of the three best birding sites in the World mainly because of the Antpittas, but not just that!

The reserve boasts several well-maintained trails and hummingbird feeders which attract various species. It is possible to observe five species of Antpittas including the endemic **Brown-banded**, plus **Bicolored**, **Chestnut-crowned**, **Chestnut-naped** and **Slate-crowned Antpittas** within a few hours at the three feeders located a short hike from the lodge.

We saw all but Bicolored, but we heard that one as well. We managed to take excellent photos of all the other four species. We also heard **Spillman's** and **Blackish Tapaculos**. **Green-and-Black Fruit-eater** came to the feeders as well and gave us a good chance to take excellent photos of it.



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Antpittas: Chestnut-crowned, Slate-crowned, Chestnut-naped & Brown-banded



Green-and-Black Fruit-eater male and female

Early morning the only mammal species we had was a nice **Grey fox** and at the same time we found **Masked** and **White-sided Flower-piercers**. We heard a **Golden-headed Quetzal** and almost at the same time we spotted an **Azara's Spinetail**.

The next bird was a **Crimson-mantled Woodpecker** and a beautiful male **Blue-crowned Trogon**. As we walked on the trails in the forest we saw some tanagers and thrush species such as **Blue-and-Black Tanager**, **Beryl-spangled Tanager**, **Great Thrush**, **Glossy Black Thrush**, but also a **Mountain Woodcreeper** and **Canada Warbler**. After that we saw a nice **Andean Guan** and took also a photo of it with which we were really happy. :-)



Andean Guan



Blue-crowned Trogon male

Later we returned back from the forest to the road where at the edge at a little ditch we found a pair of **Capped Conebills**. This is a good species to see, so we were really happy with it! :-) However the picture Gabor took is not excellent but at least recognizable! As we went back to another forest trail we had a nice surprise again in a form of a **Black-billed Mountain-Toucan** which showed itself quite nicely, so again, we had to take some good shots..:-) Wow!

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Capped Conebill



Crimson-mantled Woodpecker



Black-billed Mountain Toucan



Flammulated Treehunter

Later on we found on the ground a **Stripe-headed Brushfinch** and a **Slaty-backed Chat-Tyrant**. On one of the tree trunks a **Powerful Woodpecker** searched for food and nearby we were quite lucky to find a quite uncommon bird, a **Flammulated Treehunter**. Same is valid for another rare species that we found there **Scaly-naped Parrot**. Then we saw a **Strong-billed Woodcreeper** and also a **Stripe-headed Brushfinch** which we could also photograph. In the meantime we heard a **Bronze-winged Parrot** and again that mysterious **Spillman's Tapaculo**. :-)



Glossy-black Thrush



Scaly-naped Parrot

The next bird we saw was a **Black-collared Jay** but it was quite in a distance. After that we had a **Grey-breasted Wood-wren**, **Sickle-winged Guan**, **Blue-capped Tanager**, **Golden-faced Tyrannulet** and **Yellow-bellied Siskin**.

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On another trail we had **Red-hooded** and **Fawn-breasted Tanagers**, followed by a beautiful **Blue-winged Mountain Tanager**. We also had 2 strangely named tanager species, a **Superciliaried Hemispingus** and **Black-capped Hemispingus**.



Stripe-headed Brushfinch



Canada Warbler



Baltimore Oriole



Golden-winged Sparrow

We also identified a **Pale-edged Flycatcher** and a small **Streaked Xenops**. On one of the trees we managed to locate **Scaly-naped Parrot**, but more excitingly **Golden-plumed Parakeet** as well which is a very local endemic species. Unfortunately no photo of this beauty!! However there was quite a big group of them. :-)



Rufous-capped Warbler



Golden-faced Tyrannulet

One of the last bird this day was **Yellow-billed Cacique** and a **Long-tailed Antbird**. **Rio Blanco Reserve proved to be an excellent place for Butterflies as well**. We managed to take several great photos of colorful species here. After this fantastic birding we were quite

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hungry, so we were absolutely ready for a nice dinner. We went quite early to bed, because next morning we wanted to start early.



Swallow Tanager female and male



Black-chested Jay



Montane Foliage-gleaner

Day 10 - 6th April, 2013

This morning we really started early. We had breakfast at 5.30 and left already at 5.50!! From Rio Blanco we headed to Manizales, which we reached within half an hour and continued back to Medellin. It was quite a long drive through plenty of mountain roads, but since it was Saturday the traffic was relatively moderate with less lorries than usual.

In Medellin even the GPS was lost for a while but we still managed to get there in time to give back our car. As usual there was a little debate with the car rental, but we sorted out everything. So the journey was about 5-5,5hours with short stops.

From Medellin we flew to Bogota, which was just about an hour flight and within 45 minutes we continued to Santa Marta. We arrived just before 5 o'clock to Santa Marta. We could go directly, but then we should have started even earlier from Rio Blanco. From Santa Marta airport we got a taxi up to **Minca** where we arrived around 6ish in the evening and stayed here for 2 nights. After getting our room we just walked out to a nearby lovely restaurant called Lazy Cat and this is exactly how we felt. We had a nice dinner.

Day 11 - 7th April, 2013

This morning we were excited to discover the area so we decide to have a late breakfast and we started early to walk on the road which goes up to the hills.

Here we had **Black-chested Jay**, a male **Flame-rumped Tanager**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Rufous-capped** and **Blackburnian Warbler**. Later on we heard and saw as well **Keel-billed**

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Toucan and a **Golden-green Woodpecker**. We also were quite happy to find **White-bearded** and **Golden-headed Manakins**.



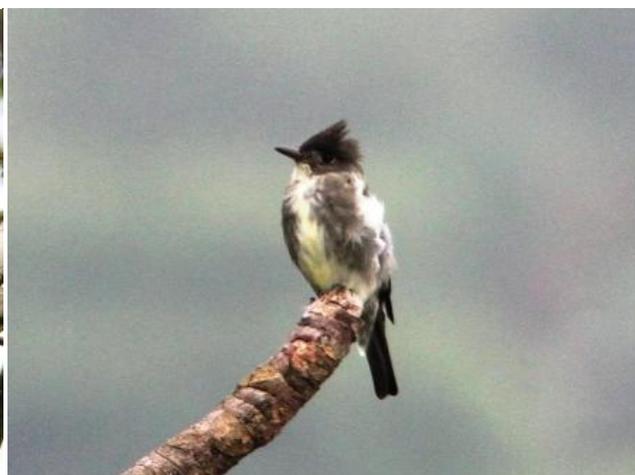
Black-capped Tanager spp. margaritae



Blue-capped Tanager



Lined Ground Dove



Olive-sided Flycatcher

We enjoyed a beautiful view of both female and male **Swallow Tanagers**. As it turned out the female was building a nest close to the road. We also found a lovely **Golden-winged Sparrow** and a resting **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** with its wings hanging down. The last birds on this walk were **Pale-breasted Thrush** and **Baltimore Oriole**.

After 3 hours birding we went back to the hotel and had breakfast. Then we spent time at the **hummingbird feeders** and we saw several species here such as **White-necked Jacobin**, **Rufous-breasted Hermit**, **Brown Violetear**, **Black-throated Mango**, **White-tailed Starfrontlet**, **Long-billed Starthroat**, **Santa Marta Woodstar**, **Red-billed Emerald**, **White-vented Plumeleteer**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, **Steely-vented Hummingbird** and **White-chinned Sapphire**.

We missed Violet-crowned Woodnymph here, but that one we had before and also not had Coppery Emerald here, but we had that one later on higher up. We heard that also Pale-bellied Hermit now coming to the feeders at the Hotel Minca, but we did not see it here. There were news about Santa Marta Sabrewing which was seen nearby, but it did not come to the feeders.

As today at the relatively low elevation it was really hot we decided to check our emails which we had not done for a long time till this day.

Late in the afternoon we went down to the town to organize our next day's transfer up to the Eldorado Lodge. This is not an easy job to do although there are a lot of people who offer their services to take you up, but they are either not really look like trustable or ask a horrible amount of money or both :) Finally in front of a restaurant we saw an open jeep and after some negotiations we arranged the pickup for next day.

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Since we were exhausted and bird-wise it was quite silent we decided to rest a bit. In the evening we went to an Irish-Colombian restaurant which had a nice style and we had an excellent dinner there! :-)



Day 12 - 8th April, 2013

This morning we started early again and walked up towards the hill and this time we managed to get a bit further up. We had quite similar species though plus we had **Rufous-capped Warbler, Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Crested Oropendola, Thick-billed Euphonia, Sepia-capped Flycatcher** and **Black-chested Jay** plus several **Southern Rough-winged Swallows**.



We were quite surprised but the fact that a **Peccary** run out of the woods directly to Gabor and was staring strangely at him perhaps feeling as a distant relative in him? :) We thought that this was a clear sign that Gabor was supposed to go back to the hotel and have a shower! :-) So we returned, Gabor jumped into the bath and took a nice shower :-) and then had breakfast. We checked out and went down to wait for the jeep.

Finally after 10 we could start our adventurous journey with this strange jeep. The habitat and the road changed fast, actually as the road deteriorated the habitat got better and better. :-) Most part of the road is pretty steep, *rough mountain road* going up sometimes rocky, sometimes muddy surface, but that is the only way to reach the top birding lodge in Colombia with incredible birds and wildlife around.

Well, quite soon our little jeep broke down. Our enthusiastic driver who was probably much younger than the car itself managed to run the vehicle again. Later on it became really foggy and we heard some exciting calls. We looked up and just managed to see some **Red-and-Green Macaws**. Wow!! Our euphoric state evaporated fast as we broke down again with the car. Now we became curious what is really the age of that jeep??

When we heard the answer we were not sure that we really will make it up to El Dorado Lodge. It was a 31years old Suzuki. :-) We were shocked, but still hoping!! Well, the 2 guys tried really hard and after hours of jumping from rocks to rocks and some more breakdowns and a bit of noise and smoke we made it. We arrived to El Dorado before dark!! Hurray! :-) We congratulated to our team and said goodbye and we were really happy, because at the lodge people already new, that we were coming. They heard the noise!!:-) So we were just in time

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for a late lunch than we got our room and we were so excited to get around and discover this amazing area.

So, we ventured out to look for some birds. The first one was the amazing **Golden-headed Quetzal!** Not a bad start! It was followed by a **Blackburnian Warbler**, a **Mountain Foliage-gleaner** and a **Mountain Woodcreeper**. Of course most of the bird here are special local subspecies if not a near endemic or fully endemic species. Such as the next one we found which was an exciting local endemic subspecies of the **Black-capped Tanager, margaritae spp.**

We also saw **Blue-capped Tanager, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Mountain Eleania** and a female **Lined Ground Dove**.



During the evening our blood pressure went up when we heard another endemic, the **Santa Marta Screech Owl**. So this day was full with excitement which we shared with the other guests at the dinner table. However the evening was not over yet since the restaurant always attracted lot of moth species with their big lights. We saw some extremely beautiful ones here.

Day 13 - 9th April, 2013

Today we decided to discover the premises of El Dorado Lodge which is the Crown Jewel of ProAves's lodges. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw that on the wall of the restaurant and around how full everything was with plenty of incredible moth species and even bugs and other insects. So first we checked this incredible variety of species around.



Crested Oropendula



Santa Marta Brushfinch

Our pre-breakfast walk between 6 and 9 was on the trail to the platform and tower and back. We had seen beautiful big flocks of **parrots** mainly **Yellow-crowned** and **Mealy Parrots**. We also had an upclose view of a **Crested Oropendula**.

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We had a nice breakfast at around 9 and then we decided to go down on the road through the forest and birding that area. We had here **Lined-Flowerpiercer, Golden-breasted Fruit-eater** which is a rare bird inside subtropical forests. We also saw a **Slate-throated Whitestart**. Birding in the forest was not easy at all, there was not a huge activity, but later on whatever we found was quite exciting.



Golden-breasted Fruit-eater



White-lored Warbler-endemic



Colombian Brushfinch endemic



Evening flock of Parrots at El Dorado

After the more or less common birds local endemic species started to come thick and fast. The first one was a **White-lored Warbler** followed by a **Santa Marta Brushfinch**.

Later on we had **Colombian Brushfinch** and **Scaly-naped Parrot**. After that we decided to turn back, arrived to the lodge just before lunch. After eating we spent some time to check out hummingbirds at several flowery bushes and feeders. First we had a female **Violet-crowned Nymph** and after that a **Green-Violetear**. Later on we found the first **endemic** hummingbird, a female **White-tailed Starfrontlet**. Another beautiful near-endemic was **Coppery Emerald**, we took a great photo as well of a female. During the afternoon we also saw **Sparkling Violetear** which we could compare with a **Brown Violetear**.

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Green Violetear



Violet-crowned Nymph

Around 4 o'clock we ventured out on the Vivero trail on which we went even further then in the morning, this time further and above the lookout tower. This was not so productive for birds although we had a beautiful landscape with all the different ranges of the Santa Marta Mts.



White-tailed Starfrontlet female endemic



Coppery Emerald female near endemic



Brown Violet-ear



Sparkling Violet-ear

On the way back we had a very strange experience. Suddenly above our head we heard a strange noise like a bullet or a really fast arrow dashing through the sky. We looked at each other, but we had no idea what it was.

We continued a few hundred yards and this experience repeated itself. Finally at the 3rd time we had realized, that this extreme noise was caused by **parrots** coming, almost falling down from the sky extremely fast following the steep slopes of the mountain. We also saw several **toucans** and large groups of **parrots** flying in a big distance.

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Violet-crowned Nymph



White-sided Flowerpiercer

The last 2 birds were **Emerald Toucanet spp lautus** which lives just in the Santa Marta mountains and we also had a **White-sided Flowerpiercer**. We arrived back to the lodge at around 7pm, had dinner and went to bed as fast as it was possible since we planned to start a hike really early at around 3 o'clock next morning.



Black Flowerpiercer



Mountain Eleania



Tyrian Metaltail



White-throated Tyrannulet

Day 14 - 10th April, 2013

Well, we woke up before 3, had a quick coffee and some biscuits, we got packed breakfast, but unfortunately they were late, so we could start just around at 3.45!! :- (Our aim was to reach the higher elevation as soon as possible and then walk down with birding during the day. We tried to find the higher elevation species. Of course it was still totally dark when we started and we just had one small flashlight with us. It was also quite cold since the elevation at El

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Dorado is about 2000m!! We covered quite a distance and gained about 600 meters or 2000 feet of elevation within 2,5 hours up to the **Cerro Kennedy**.



Streak-capped Spinetail endemic



Santa Marta Lacrymose Mountain-tanager

When we were close to the top we had our breakfast and at around 7 slowly we started to descent checking all the birds on the way down. Some of the first birds were **Andean Siskin**, **Black Flowerpiercer**, **Mountain Elaenia** and **White-throated Tyrannulet**.

Our first hummingbird was **Tyrian Metaltail**. After that we had a **Scaly-naped Parrot** which is a rather uncommon species in this area. Than we started to find the first endemics here.



Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant



Santa Marta Parakeet endemic



Yellow-fronted Whitestart endemic



Rusty-headed Spinetail endemic

The first one was a **Santa Marta Mountain Tanager** which we managed to photograph as well. Another good endemic species was **Streaked-capped Spinetail**.

Further on we found a **Yellow-bellied Chat-Tyrant** and a **Scarlet-fronted Parakeet**. Again we found a Spinetail, this time it was another very localized endemic, the **Rusty-headed**

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Spinetail, which is listed by Birdlife as vulnerable species. We still had not run out of surprises: the next one was a **Yellow-fronted Whitestart** again another local endemic. We found **Mountane Woodcreeper's local endemic subspecies Santa Martae**. **Olive-striped Flycatcher** also has its own local **subspecies galbinus**.

Once we had a group of **Santa Marta Parakeets** flying above our head, but luckily we also found them at least twice perched as well, so we could see them better.

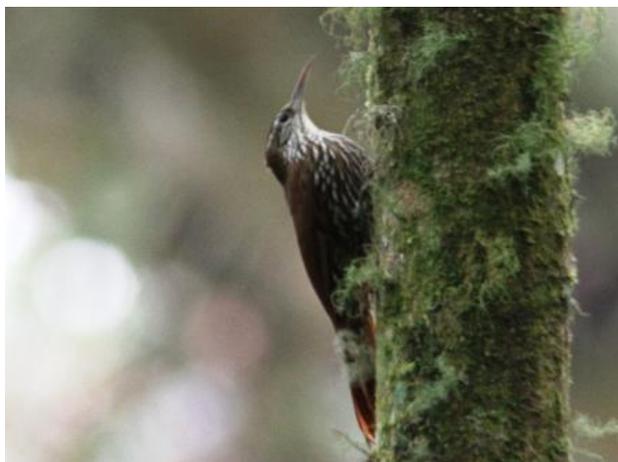
We heard **Rufous Antpitta** but unfortunately we couldn't even get a glimpse of it. :- (On the other hand we were lucky with the **Brown-Ramped Tapaculo**.

We searched Santa Marta Antpitta and Flammulated Treehunter, but we failed both. :- (But we managed to find **Santa Marta Mountain Tanager** and **Santa Marta Warbler**.

By midday we ended up with a very nice list of endemics, so we were happy to arrive back. We were extremely tired and just wanted to have a nice lunch and tell our nice story of this morning to the others.

During the afternoon we took it easy, watched the stunning variety of hummingbirds and some endemic species in the garden. We also decided to spend time with photographing these unique birds around.

In the evening we had our last dinner here and however we were very tired we took some time again with the moth and insects coming in the restaurant and around. And also some birds for this buffet style all inclusive. :-)



Montane Woodcreeper Santa Marta spp. Santa Marta Emerald Toucanet spp lautus



Grey-throated Leaf-tosser



Golden-headed Quetzal

Day15 - 11th April, 2013

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We started with breakfast at 6 o'clock and after that we walked down to the forest. We found basically almost in the garden a **Groove-billed Toucanet**. We also heard a huge group of parrots in a distance. There were several of the "regular" endemics around that we had seen during the previous days, but when we were watching a **Colombian Brushfinch** a bird flew between our heads with high speed. Gabor in the corner of his eyes saw it landing on the ground among the leaves. It took us couple of minutes to find it since it was completely camouflaged and motionless. It was actually a **Grey-throated Leaftosser!** This is a very secretive bird and highly uncommon to see it. So we were extremely lucky with it. We also saw a **Slate-thorated Whitestart**.

After this great experience we got another nice surprise, a nice male **Golden-headed Quetzal** flew around. Then the female came as well, so we had them both. We could watch them quite long, because one or the other was always around and flying from one tree to the other, then we always followed it and found it again and again... It was really nice and good fun! :-)

What a fantastic morning we had again!! :-)

After this very exciting experience we walked back to the lodge, had our lunch and waited for our good old jeep to come for us... which didn't come.... so we just waited and waited and waited.....

We waited quite long, but after a while we got quite excited, since we were not sure anymore, if they will come for us at all. We knew of course that there was some problems with the car, so we didn't know what's going to happen now. Finally at 5.30pm we had 2 cars, but we just wanted one, so there was a kind of situation between the 2, because we wanted to go with the good old one since it just managed to come up for us, but the other one came up for us as well.



Greyish Saltator



Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher



The 2 drivers had a discussion and basically they decided regardless our decision that the new SUV will take us down, but for double price. Well, finally we started to go down with this car, soon it became dark and we started to lament that perhaps it was really better to try to go down with this one.

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Then suddenly a surprise: this relatively new, luxurious car stopped and broke down as well! It seemed that the Santa Marta Mountains wanted us to remain there, which actually we would loved to do! But this time we had to go on... The driver repaired the car and finally we crossed Minca, reached asphalted road and finally we arrived back to Santa Marta. There we had to find another taxi which took us to the Hotel Yuluka at the edge of the **Tayrona National Park**. When we entered into our room we realized that the taxi went away with one of our suitcases. :- (So we fast went back to the reception, talked to the owner and they called the police which made the taxi driver turn back from a gate just before the entrance to the toll road. Thanks God he returned with our suitcase. This day was really full with surprises , good and bad and some adventures.

Day16 - 12th April, 2013

We spent our last full day in Colombia at the Tayrona National Park. This national park is famous for having beautiful landscapes, seaside, rock formations and also birds and other wildlife. We decided not to take our big cameras just the bins and going leisurely. :-)

Since we just stayed about 1km away from the entrance of the national park the owner of the hotel was really kind and took us there. From here you had to use a national park vehicle to travel for about another 3 miles or 5 kilometers to the beginning of the trails. The trails go through a very nice dry forest, but it is rocky as well. Our first birds were here **Bicolored Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren** and **Garthered Trogon**. We also had a poison arrow frog, which turned out to be the local endemic one, the **Yellow-striped Poison Arrow frog**. And we also saw some **lizards** and several beautiful **butterflies**.

Later on we found **Jet Antbird** and **Black-crowned Antshrike**. **Pale-eyed Pigmy-tyrant** was new and also **Southern Bentbill**. We quickly saw a manakin which later on turned out to be a beautiful **Lance-tailed Manakin**. We also saw a **Buff-breasted Wren**.



Bicolored Wren



Orange-chinned Parakeet

After this as temperatures went up we decided to go to the beach, vamos a la playa. :-) where we understood why this National Park is so popular with non-birders as well. :-) There are beautiful pristine beaches with amazing and huge rock formations.

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But do not dream to jump into the water here, because of the towering waves and hidden rocks. But further on we found some lovely beaches which were ideal to rest and also to have our picnic. We had a swim here since this bay was good for it, nice shallow, beautiful water! We walked around a bit and took some pictures.

At another lagoon we saw **Striated Heron** and **Bared-faced Ibis**.

Then we decide to go back first through a mangrove forest, where we saw **Protonotary Warbler** and then a much older and drier forest with some taller trees. Bird activity was pretty good here thus we had **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher**, **One-colored Becard** and **Northern Royal Flycatcher**. We also heard the typical call of a **Collared-forest Falcon**.

If we could have another day then we could make a special effort to find the Blue-billed Curassow with a much longer hike. But we had no more days... unfortunately. :-)

Late afternoon we returned to the hotel, had our dinner and packed for next day's departure.

Day17 - 13th April, 2013

This morning we took it easy, but still we could see in the garden **Bicolored Wren**, **Greyish Saltator** and a pair of **Orange-chinned Parakeets**. We had a later breakfast and after that at about 10.40 we had our transfer to the airport of Santa Marta. From Santa Marta we flew to Medellin where Andrea managed to change our ticket to an earlier flight, so we arrived to Bogota much before than what we planned. We had a room booked in a hotel in Bogota not too far from the airport, but also this way we just arrived there in the evening and since we were extremely tired of the last 17 days we went to sleep early. :-)

Day18 - 14th April, 2013

We had a transfer to the airport and flew from Bogota to Cancun, so arrived at home the same day. Hasta la vista Colombia...we really hope to see you and your beautiful birds and wildlife soon!:-)



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