

# Venezuela - Andean Endemics

## Naturetrek Tour Dossier

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### Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Caracas and transfer to accommodation  
**Day 2** Sierra de la Culata  
**Day 3/4** Merida  
**Day 5/6** Santo Domingio Valley  
**Day 7** Barinas  
**Day 8/9** Transfer to Caracas and fly London

### Departs

November

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code VEN01) or brochure

### Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and enjoy walking as a high percentage of the time will be spent on foot.

### Focus

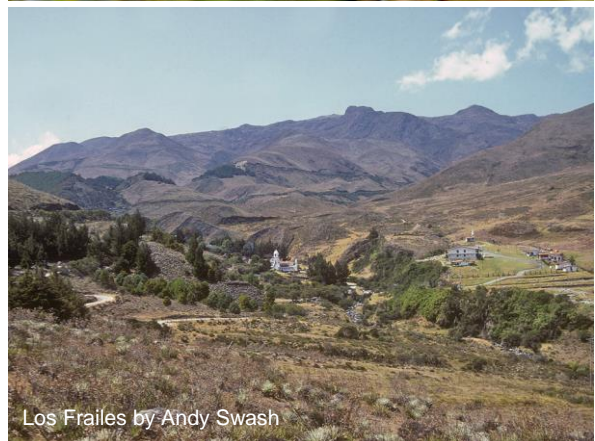
Birds



Cliff Flycatcher by Andy Swash



Rufous-browed Peppershrike by Andy Swash



Los Frailes by Andy Swash



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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Day 1

## Caracas

We depart this morning on a scheduled flight from Heathrow bound for the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, via Europe, arriving during the early evening. Having collected our luggage we will be transferred to a convenient inn located in a colonial area along the coast. Our orientation dinner will take place at 6 - 7pm.

## Day 2

## Sierra de la Culata

We will take an early flight to Mérida. This vibrant university town of 350,000 is located at 1,500meters (5,000 feet) in a deep valley between the twin cordilleras of Sierra Nevada and La Culata, which will be the focus of our birding efforts on this tour. Given good weather, our flight in to Mérida can afford spectacular views of the snow-clad peaks at over 5,000 meters (16,500 feet). On arrival we will head westwards to the western foothills of the drier Sierra de La Culata. Here we will search for Maracaibo Basin endemics like the Pygmy Palm-Swift and Citron-throated Toucan. We will also look for Andean foothill species, which include Bronze-winged Parrots, Black-chested Jays and a selection of tanagers and hummingbirds. We have a chance for rarities like the endangered Saffron-headed Parrot and Military Macaw along with large numbers of commoner species on the edge of their range like Yellow-tailed Oriole and the stunning Crimson-backed Tanager. The El Tao lodge is a spiritual retreat as well as a well-known destination for birders and has over a hundred species around the cabins. Here we might see Stripe-breasted Spinetails, Red-billed Scythebills, gaudy Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds or perhaps striking Magpie Tanagers. The organic coffee plantations provide prime wintering habitat for boreal migrants such as Cerulean, Black-and-white, Blackburnian and Mourning Warblers.

## Day 3

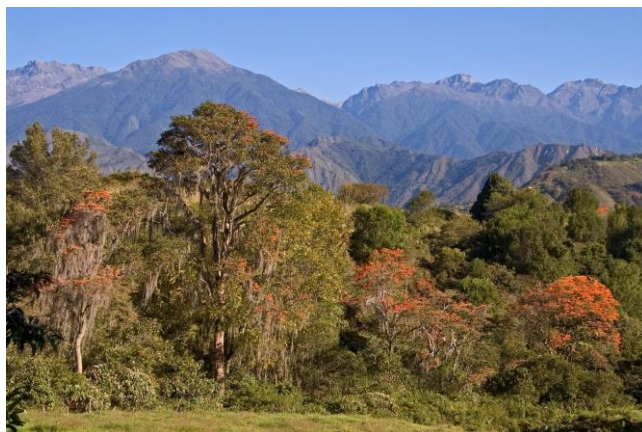
## Merida - Sierra Nevada

The morning will likely begin with some birding in the subtropical elevations as we look for Scarlet-fronted Parakeets, Black-mandibled Toucans and Immaculate Antbirds. Most of the birds will be in mixed feeding flocks with a variety of tanagers a staple component of these: Beryl-spangled, Speckled, Saffron-crowned and Blue-capped. For the last few years, this area has proven to be reliable for the threatened Grey-throated Warbler, which we will look for. Later on we will be seeking Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, perhaps hearing Wattled Guans, and looking for further mixed flocks. Migrant warblers such as Blackburnian and Tennessee are common members of such gatherings. We will hope to have lunch at a delightful area where we have previously encountered eight or more species of hummingbird feeding, including Buff-tailed Coronets and Gorgeted Woodstars. This is also the best area for Barred Parakeets, a nomadic bamboo obligate species. By mid-afternoon we will drop down the east slope of Sierra de La Culata into Mérida again. Our inn for the night is a delightful colonial coffee house at 1,500 meters (5000 feet) in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

## Day 4

## Merida - Sierra Nevada

Our morning will begin early at one of the most famous birding trails in South America: the Humboldt Trail. The broad track begins at about 2,200 meters (7,000 feet) and eventually reaches the highest peaks of the Venezuelan Andes, though we are unlikely to climb more than 400 – 500 meters (1,200 – 1,600 feet). The list of birds recorded along the trail is long, but we will have a fair chance of seeing Golden-headed Quetzal, Black-collared Jay, Chestnut-bellied Thrush, Venezuelan Tyrannulet, Green-and-black Fruiteater and Moustached and Slaty Brush-Finches. We will, of course, be seeking Mérida endemics like Rose-crowned Parakeet, Mérida (Longuemare's) Sunangel, Grey-naped Antpitta, Mérida Tapaculo, Blackish Chat-Tyrant, Grey-capped Hemispingus, Salty-backed Hemispingus (rarely seen here) and White-fronted Whitestart. Occasionally we are lucky enough to find flocks of White-capped Parrot or even the endangered Rusty-faced Parrot. Sometimes Barred Forest-Falcons or Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrushes can be lured in to view too. On our way out of this area we will be looking for White-capped Dippers and Torrent Tyrannulets along a fast-flowing Andean stream and keeping our eye on the skyline for a Black-and-chestnut Eagle or White-rumped Hawk.



Weather permitting, we may take an evening excursion on which we have regularly heard – and occasionally seen – Rufous Nightjar and Tropical Screech-Owl. We have also encountered Rufous-bellied Nighthawks.

## Day 5

## Santo Domingo Valley

Another early breakfast will give us the chance to either revisit the Humboldt Trail for extra speciality birds such as Grey-naped and Slate-crowned Antpittas, or to bird the open areas below this known as La Mucuy. After a restaurant lunch we will take a scenic drive through Andean Villages, as we climb into the highlands to our hotel for the evening. The cosy Los Frailes Hotel is located at an elevation of 2,900 meters (9,500 feet) in the spectacular Santo Domingo Valley. If there is time we will do some late afternoon birding. A good selection of high altitude avifauna is to be found right at the hotel, including Orange-throated Sunangel, Mérida Tapaculo, Mérida Flowerpiecer, Mérida Wren and Andean Siskin.

## Day 6

## Santo Domingo Valley

Today we will be glad to sleep later than usual and spend the morning birding the high elevation Andean meadows of the páramo zone up to 3,800 meters (12,500 feet) - and, if the group wishes, even as high as 4,200m (13,900 feet). This treeless environment found above 2,500 meters (8,000 feet) has a unique flora, the dominant plant being a composite, Espeletia. Typical Andean páramo bird species occur here, such as Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Streak-backed Canastero, Páramo Pipit and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. Our main quarry will be further Mérida endemics like Ochre-browed Thistletail, Mérida Wren and Mérida Flowerpiecer as well as specialties like Bearded Helmetcrest (tough in the dry season) and

Andean Teal. In the afternoon we will look for Torrent Duck along the upper Santo Domingo river and will take time to find other high Andean birds as well. Further specialties might include Narrow-tailed Emerald, Red-crested Cotinga and Black-and-white Seedeater. We will spend the night once again at the Hotel Los Frailes.

## Day 7

## Barinas

Today will be an early start as we drive in the dark to our first location: the San Isidro tunnel track, better known as home to Venezuela's most accessible Cock-of-the-Rock lek where the bright orange males of this species jostle for access to females. We will aim to visit the lek early in order to maximise our chances for the Cock-of-the-Rock. Often we are early enough to catch Band-winged Nightjars and Tropical Screech-Owls as we have breakfast; we have occasionally found Lyre-tailed Nightjars here too. In this exquisite forest, rich in bromeliads, tree-ferns and orchids, we will look for fruiting trees in order to observe feeding fruiteaters and tanagers. We will also be on the lookout for Band-tailed Guan, Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Saffron-headed Parrot, Red-headed Barbet, Crested Quetzal and Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. Beautiful Cliff Flycatchers are usually seen on our return for lunch. In the afternoon we will continue downward into the drier habitats looking for Pale-bellied Hermit, Pale-headed Jacamar, White-browed Antbird, and White-ruffed Manakin. The night will be spent in the town of Barinas, the gateway to the llanos.

## Day 8

## In Flight

We will have several hours in which to enjoy a little birding in the Andean foothills or llanos close to Barinas before heading to the airport for our flight back to Caracas to make our international connection in the late afternoon.

## Day 9

## London

We will arrive back at Heathrow in the afternoon.

## Tour Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and enjoy walking as a high percentage of the time in the field will be spent on foot.

## Weather

The climate in Venezuela varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. The cordilleran climate is largely mild and temperate with chilly nights; like a spring day in England. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

## Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except the evening meal on the day of arrival and on the day of departure.

## Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry and souvenirs.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking. Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on maximum group sizes to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of 10.