

# Colombia – Multicoloured Tanager Tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

5th – 16th December 2023

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Striped Cuckoo



Shining Sunbeam



Horned Screamer



Lyre-tailed Nighthawk

Tour report kindly compiled by John Yates, images by John Yates and Andrew Rest

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Tour participants: Juan Manuel Cardona (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Tuesday 5th December**

The group members travelling from the UK left Heathrow on an overnight flight to Bogota.

## Day 2

**Wednesday 6th December**

Having arrived in Bogota there was a few hours wait before taking the short onward flight to Pereira. The first Colombian bird of the holiday was Blue-and-White Swallow as we disembarked in Pereira. All of our bags made it to the Pereira luggage conveyer belt (always a relief!) and we were met in the airport terminal by Juan, our guide for the next ten days. Our driver, Johnny, brought the comfortable coach to the airport pick-up, we loaded the luggage aboard and were off to La Rioja Marador for breakfast and some initial birding. Here we saw Orange-chinned Parakeet, Black-throated Mango, Saffron Finch, Spectacled Parrotlet, Vermillion Flycatcher, Ruddy Ground Dove, Blue-grey Tanager and the ubiquitous Black Vulture. The omelette that came with warm tasty bread is recommended.

Stomachs full, we were now set for some serious birding. We took the coach into a local gated community and after a few stops settled at a series of lakes near the Club House Malabar. Immediately we were seeing great birds like the near endemic Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Tropical Kingbird, Yellow Oriole, Wedge-tailed Grass Finch, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Grassland Sparrow, Osprey and both Dwarf and Striped Cuckoo. A Capybara appeared on the far bank of one of the pools which held both Pied-billed and Least Grebe, both Gallinules, Wattled Jacana and other waterbirds. Blue Dacnis and Thick-billed Euphonia added a splash of colour while a number of Seedeater species were noted.

After lunch, and having picked up our local guide, we then moved on to the Reserva Cauquita, but not before stopping at a stakeout for Red-breasted Meadowlark where we also connected with Ultramarine Grosbeak, and three species of Woodpecker – Acorn, Spot-breasted and Red-crowned. A few attractive Crested Bobwhites were seen feeding in gardens. A slow walk around the reserve itself gave many notable birds including a number of Flycatcher species and three endemics – Apical Flycatcher, Columbian Chachalaca and Greyish Piculet. We saw a number of hummingbirds including Long-billed Starthroat, White-necked Jacobin and the near endemic Steely-vented Hummingbird.

As dusk approached, we made our way back to Pereira and the Don Alfonso Hotel. A quick count showed we had seen 91 species on day 1, an impressive start.

## Day 3

**Thursday 7th December**

The tour itself was based in the Cauca River valley, that runs between the Western and Central Andes range in Colombia.

We were up early and following a quick coffee at the hotel we set off in the coach for Otún Quimbaya reserve. After 10 minutes, we swapped to 4x4 off-road vehicles and drove in the dark on rough forest tracks past the information centre deep into the forest. We arrived at dawn and prior to a picnic breakfast, we birded the main

track for an hour seeing a number of birds including Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and two ‘fly-over’ White-capped Tanagers. Feeling refreshed we then walked slowly back down the main track for a few miles regularly picking up ‘good’ birds such as the endemic Cauca Guan, Sickie-winged Guan, Andean Motmot, Slaty Antwren, Plain Antvireo, Marble-faced Bristle Tyrant, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Slaty-backed Chat Tyrant, Bronze-olive Pygmy Tyrant and many more including hummingbirds such as Tawny-bellied Hermit, White-throated Daggerbill, Green-fronted Lancebill, Bronzy Inca and White-booted Racket-tail. In addition, we saw subtly marked Woodcreepers, Barbtails, Spinetails and Foliage Gleaners. These are always a challenge!! Our first Black-capped and Golden Tanagers were noted high in the trees, while a Yellow-headed Caracara swooped over a family of Southern Lapwing feeding on the grass outside the information centre and a noisy party of Golden-plumed Parakeets gave us a ‘fly-by’.

North American passerine migrants included Acadian Flycatcher, Black-and-White Warbler, Tropical Parula, and both Canada, Yellow and Blackburnian Warblers. The latter were seen regularly over the holiday.

Time was getting on, so we jumped on the coach and spent the last hour of daylight at the Camaguadua Marsh. Here Blackish Rail, herons and egrets were joined by a number of mud-feeding migrant North American waders including both Yellowlegs and Spotted, Solitary and Least Sandpipers. There was a constant procession of Cattle Egrets and Bare-faced Ibis coming into roost while the only waterfowl of note were Blue-winged Teal which seemed to number in their hundreds. A Green Kingfisher shot across one pool looking for a late meal. Final bird of the day was a Bar-crested Antshrike near the car park.

Birding over for the day, we made our way to the Recinto del Pensamiento hotel which would be our base for next two nights. Over dinner we were ‘entertained’ by a loud saxophonist/vocalist. After dinner we had to move location to the ‘quiet’ hotel lobby for the daily list which had swelled to 140 species. I only count those that I have seen well!! Another packed day.

## Day 4

## Friday 8th December

I was up early again and while waiting for the group to gather I went on a very quick walk around the hotel grounds.

With coffee in hand, I had great views of Bay-headed Warbler, Great Thrush and Rufous-collared Sparrow.

This was one of the days on the tour I had been particularly looking forward too – an Antpitta day.

It took about an hour to make our way up to Rio Blanco Ecological Reserve but as soon as we arrived it was clear that this was a special place with Yellow-billed Cacique, Chestnut-capped and Slaty Brushfinch and Buff-breasted and Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers on the fruit feeders and the hummingbird feeders jumping with an array of birds including Masked Flowerpiercer, Lesser Violetear, Sparkling Violetear, Tourmaline Sunangel, Speckled Hummingbird, Long-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-tailed Coronet and Purple-backed Thornbill all fighting for an easy meal. A White-bellied Woodstar was in and out like a large bee.

At 7am we were all summoned to the first Antpitta feeding station next to the lodge. We took our seats, cameras at the ready and the Antpitta ‘whisperer’ began to call for Sofia to come forward for its breakfast. Not much

happened and then out of nowhere a lovely Bi-coloured Antpitta appeared putting on a great show devouring a free earthworm breakfast.

Having successfully ticked Antpitta number one, I was eager for more so we set off into the reserve walking up a track behind the lodge to viewing station two. It was here that we connected with Black-billed Mountain Toucan and White-throated Toucanet before being led down a side track to see both Chestnut-crowned Antpitta and Green-and-Black Fruiteater called in by the ‘whisperer’. Simply amazing!!!

We had some time now before the next part of the ‘Antpitta event’, so the in-house guide took us to another part of the reserve. He set his telescope up and beckoned us forward. Unbelievably there was a Stygian Owl in the scope!!! In fact, there were two, one either side of the path. The next hour was non-stop birds. We saw Band-tailed Pigeon, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Streaked Tuftedcheek, Pearled Treerunner, both White-tailed and Golden-faced Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Grey-hooded Bush Tanager, Barred Becard, Mountain Wren, Common Bush Tanager, Grey-browed Brush Finch, Russet-crowned Warbler, the striking Golden Fronted Whitestart, four species of Hemispingus and a host of Tanagers including Blue-capped, Blue and Black, Beryl-spangled and Saffron-crowned.

At 9am, it was time for Antpitta number three. Again, we were directed to another Antpitta station but this time there was no waiting as a Brown-banded Antpitta was actually already on-show waiting for his breakfast. He must have been hungry! An hour passed with more great birds and then we were at feeding station four for the subtly marked Slaty-crowned Antpitta. We had achieved a 100% Antpitta hit rate! What a fabulous birding day!!

After lunch a number of Capped Conebills appeared at the lodge, while on an afternoon walk, we were rewarded with Dusky Piha, Brown-capped Vireo, Masked Trogon, Grass-green Tanager, Streaked Xenops, Pale-edged Flycatcher and both Tyrannine and Plain-brown Woodcreeper.

As I had been struggling all afternoon and feeling a bit under the weather, I skipped dinner and the checklist and had an early night following a bag of hotel nuts and a coke.

## Day 5

## Saturday 9th December

I was feeling a lot better this morning which was lucky as we had another packed day ahead of us.

We set off for a working dairy farm called Hacienda el Bosque and after a small introduction from the owner, and breakfast, we were taken down for our appointment at another Antpitta station. At 7.50am, the guide started calling “Juli, Juli, Juli!!!” and within minutes an Equatorial Antpitta appeared for breakfast. In fact, a family party were in the local area as three individuals were present as well as Armando, a Gray-browed Brushfinch. There was actually a bit of friction between the two species for the free handouts.

After this success we moved to a series of feeders that predominantly held Shining Sunbeam hummingbirds with a supporting cast of Sword-billed Hummingbird, Buff-winged Starfrontlet and Mountain Velvetbreast.

Raptors had been a bit absent up until this morning when we had good views of Broad-winged Hawk and Black-chested Buzzard Eagle.

At 9am we made our way to a second Antpitta feeding station. This one was set-up to attract the sought-after Crescent-faced Antpitta. This seemed to take a while to appear, despite repeated calling of “Lunita, Lunita”, but eventually this one appeared on the stage. Fabulous!!! After seeing our sixth Antpitta, we took a short walk into the forest scoring with both Andean Guan and Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan.

After lunch, we jumped back in the van and slowly started to ascend from the highland into the Paramo ecosystem. Gradually we made our way up into the Los Nevado NP. This was principally to see Buffy Helmetcrest from a convenient viewing platform near the national park HQ. Most of the group saw the bird straight away but I had to wait to get a great view. We were at 5,000m and it was bitterly cold so we didn't stay long.

We had great views of a number of high-altitude species seen at several stops during the afternoon ascent and descent. These included birds such as both Paramo and Ash-coloured Tapaculo, both of which were seen well, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Yellow-bellied and Brown-backed Chat Tyrant, Grass Wren, Hooded Siskin, Yellow-breasted Brushfinch, Black-backed Bush Tanager, Plumbeous Seed Finch, Paramo Seedeater, and both Glossy and White-sided Flowerpiercer. At one-point, large numbers of White-collared Swift appeared over the coach.

We had a final hour in the hotel car park where we saw two specialist hummingbirds of the high-altitude Andes, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill and Tyrian Metaltail. In addition, we saw White-throated Tyrannulet, and both Black-chested and Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager.

The overnight hotel was the Termales del Ruiz lodge complete with its sulphur smelling thermal pools. This was a really nice hotel and I had a lovely evening meal of Spaghetti Carbonara. The hot pools looked inviting, but it was another early start tomorrow and then a long drive so bed beckoned.

We added 30 species during the day meaning that the trip list was now at 228 plus a few heard only.

## Day 6

## Sunday 10th December

Today was principally a travelling day as we moved from the Colombian Central to the Western Andes. We had a quick pre-breakfast visit to the feeders which mainly held Shining Sunbeam with the odd Golden-breasted Puffleg. Brown-bellied Swallows were noted near the hotel. We then birded the car park picking up Black-thighed Puffleg and then walked downhill from the hotel for a mile or so where we added Golden-crowned Tanager, Citrine Warbler and both Lacrimose and Black-chested Mountain Tanager.

Before heading west across the Cauca valley, we ascended again for a few miles seeing Andean Tit Spinetail, Plain-coloured Seedeater and both Andean Duck and Andean Teal at Laguna Negra. Viridian Metaltail was seen from the roadside on the way down.

It was a long drive now back past Manizales to our overnight hotel in Montezuma NP. However, we did break our journey for lunch at Ranchero Paisa (I recommend the ‘sweet and sour’ pork but not the fish + head) and at the stakeout for Turquoise Dacnis along a tributary of the Cauca River. On arrival I thought we were going to miss this beautiful bird, as they were absent for the first 15 minutes but suddenly Juan said he had found one and we eventually saw three individuals. Relieved we continued our journey west in good spirits.

On arrival at a small town called Pueblo Rico we transferred all of our luggage into 4x4 vehicles and stocked up on beer and coke in a corner shop. We then set off along a muddy track where after about an hour we arrived at Montezuma Lodge. It was getting dark so after being shown our large rustic rooms (with interesting shower) we had dinner, completed the checklist and set our alarms for an early start.

## Day 7

## Monday 11th December

What a day!

The alarm went off at 4.45am, I packed my day bag and as I was in a room about a five-minute walk up a track from the centre, I walked down to the lodge centre by torch light. We took the 4x4 jeeps along a long bumpy rutted track for about an hour, gradually gaining altitude, which eventually stopped at the end of a track near an army communication base. Bird feeders were topped up while we had breakfast and soon they were attracting an array of species such as Violet-tailed Sylph, Brown Inca, Velvet-purple Coronet, Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Empress Brilliant and the endemic Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer. The sky was clear and the air crisp with mind blowing views of the high Andes.

We then began our walk back down towards the lodge. We tended to bird for a mile on foot then get back in the 4x4 jeeps for a short distance before walking again. En route we saw new birds including the endemic Munchique Wood Wren, Andean Solitaire, Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonia, Golden-headed Quetzal, Brown-billed Sythebill, Star-chested Treerunner, Rufous Spinetail, Narino Tapaculo, Black-throated Tody-Tyrant, both male and female Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Barred Fruiteater and both Streak-necked and Handsome Flycatchers. Tanagers seen included the beautiful Purplish-mantled and endemic Gold-ringed with the latter seen bathing in a track pool. Finally Black-chinned Mountain Tanagers were seen high in the forest trees.

A number of rain shelters with seats and feeders had been constructed along the track and in the vicinity of these we saw Tanager Finch, Olive Finch, Dusky Bush Tanager, Choco Brushfinch, Golden-collared Honeycreeper and Blackish Flowerpiercer. This was also a good place for lunch.

On our return to the lodge, we spent the final hour of daylight at the garden feeders that were jumping with familiar hummingbirds but new species including White-tipped Sicklebill, Green Thorntail, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Purple-throated Woodstar and Andean Emerald. In addition, we saw Black-winged Saltator.

After dinner and the checklist, I returned to my room satisfied that I had a personnel bird count in excess of 280.

## Day 8

## Tuesday 12th December

Today was really a repeat of yesterday except that we didn't take the jeeps right to the top of the track allowing us to bird at lower altitude.

We met at 5.20am for coffee and after a jeep transfer, forest birding starting immediately with a distant Yellow-vented Woodpecker and a flushed and flighty Highland Tinamou. Other new birds added on our walk included Golden-olive Woodpecker, Pacific Tuftedcheek, Scaly-throated Foliage Gleaner, Red-faced Spinetail, Ornate

Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Bush Tanager and Three-striped Warbler. We added four new tanagers; Glistening-green, Flame-faced, Silver-throated and the endemic Black and Gold.

We also managed to get excellent views of generally skulking birds such as Ochre-breasted Antpitta and Tatama Tapaculo.

Towards the end of the day, we hit a purple patch with Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Choco Warbler, Toucan Barbet, Red-crested Tanager and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper all being recorded in rapid succession.

Western Emerald was a new bird for us at the feeders.

I passed 300 species for the holiday.

## Day 9

## Wednesday 13th December

Before leaving Montezuma we had another couple of hours of birding around the lodge. We walked past the feeders into the forest having seen Green-crowned Brilliant, Flame-rumped Tanager, Northern Waterthrush, Buff-rumped Warbler, Buff-throated Saltator and Green Honeycreeper in the vicinity of the lodge.

We had a maximum of two hours before we had to leave for in our trip to the wetlands so we couldn't go far but during this time we saw Cocoa Woodcreeper, Lineated Woodpecker, a fly away Choco Toucan, Slaty-headed Tody Flycatcher, a showy White-throated Spadebill, Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Russet-backed Oropendola while both Metallic-green, Golden-hooded and Blue-naped Tanagers were seen well in the tree tops. Just when we were about to leave the local guide picked up a Lanceolated Monklet which was only really visible through a small window through the foliage, so we all took turns to get a view through the telescope.

When we returned to the lodge, we were treated to a Black-cheeked Woodpecker on the fruit feeder and were further immersed in a hummingbird heaven.

It was time to leave so we took the 4 x 4 jeeps back down to Pueblo Rico where Johnny was waiting for us with the coach. We were soon on our way to Laguna de Sonso wetland reserve.

As we arrived, a Grey-cowled Wood Rail was seen walking along a drainage ditch parallel to the road. We had a nice lunch and were given a nice little bird pamphlet for the reserve and then we set off on a walk seeing Greater Ani and Masked Tityra. We had picked up a local guide at the entrance gate to the reserve who showed us a pair of Tropical Screech Owl, Great Potoo and even a Lesser Nighthawk. Out on the marsh I was delighted to see a number of Horned Screamers at fairly close range. In addition, we saw American Coot, Glossy Ibis, Snail Kite, Ringed Kingfisher, Sand Martin and a pair of Oriole Blackbird in the vicinity of the first observation platform. As we left the reserve, a Buff-necked Ibis was feeding on a pool with Bare-Necked Ibis.

We then drove on to our final hotel the lovely Araucana Lodge, our base for the next two nights. This certainly was a deluxe hotel with large rooms, a good shower and food.

With two days to go I was up to 339 species.

## Day 10

Thursday 14th December

Juan asked us to be ready for breakfast at 5.15am ready for a 5.45 start.

Today we were bound for La Florida – El Bosque de las Aves famed for its feeders with attendant Hummingbirds, Tanagers, Motmots and Barbets. However, this area offered so much more than expected.

On arrival we were taken to a viewing platform for Scaled Antpitta. Unfortunately, she never showed up and the proprietor Javier said that she had been a bit hit and miss recently as she was thought to be sitting on eggs.

We spent the next hour at the feeders where we saw Red-headed Barbet, Andean Motmot, Summer Tanager, Golden-naped Tanager, White-lined Tanager, and then the star of the tour - a number of Multi-coloured Tanagers!!!! It was a constant flow of different birds including many we had previously seen. After a while a party of Columbian Chachalaca appeared next on the fruit feeder and then the next time I looked they had magically morphed into a Sickle-winged Guan!! A Variegated Bristle Tyrant appeared in a tree nearby.

At 9am we were summoned to a different viewing platform and this time we were successful with a Chestnut Wood Quail family that turned up on time giving excellent views.

We then took a walk in the forest with a request to be back by 11am. Near the lodge we saw Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Dusky Leaf-tosser, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Lineated Foliage-Gleaner, Streak-capped Treehunter, Uniform Antshrike, Blue-naped Euphonia, Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Rufous-Crested Tanager, Rusty Flowerpiercer and a Black-billed Peppershrike.

Back at the lodge we followed Javier along a track into the forest and another feeding station. We sat down and waited and waited. Some of the group wandered off to see an Andean Solitaire then out of nowhere a Little Tinamou appeared. Absolutely unbelievable!!!

After lunch we took another walk in the opposite direction and a Golden-winged Manakin was found giving amazing scope views along with a beautiful singing Whiskered Wren.

We decided to try again for the Scaled Antpitta but again this was unsuccessful so we headed back to Araucana Lodge where we just had time to visit the feeders where Green Hermit was new and a female White-lined Tanager was seen in the vegetable garden.

Quite a day with a species count of 23 while the holiday count had climbed to 361

N.B. – Javier has a small eco-shop that sells a range of mugs, T-shirts, cushion covers etc at reasonable prices

## Day 11

Friday 15th December

Our final full day in Colombia before we got the flight home. After a discussion we decided that we needed to be leaving for the airport by 2pm at the latest so we had half a day to find a few more birds.



We were bound for the legendary Buenaventura Road and the mythical Doña Dora as featured recently on the Birders Show. I had been watching these You Tube videos for the last few months and it was with great anticipation that I was final visiting.

On route, Juan asked Johnny to stop the coach and we all disembarked at a nondescript cliff face and Juan asked us if we could find the bird. We couldn't so he set up the scope and there was an obvious female Lyre-tailed Nightjar sitting out in the open.

We continued to the fast-flowing river where a pair of Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper were present.

New birds seen at Doña Dora included Brown Violetear, Crowned Woodnymph, White-whiskered Hermit at point blank range, Black-headed Brushfinch and Dusky-faced Tanager and beautiful Rufous- throated and Grey-and-Gold Tanager.

From the road we added Squirrel Cuckoo, Pacific Antwren, Zeledon's Antbird, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Piratic Flycatcher, both Yellow-throated and Choco Vireo and both Sooty-headed and Bay Wren. We then managed to find a final couple of North American migrants in Swainson's Thrush and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

We returned to Doña Dora for lunch and then just sat admiring the birds at the feeders until we had to leave. However, there is always one more bird and at the last moment a superb White-tailed Hawk was seen from the balcony.

We then took the two-hour trip back to Cali where we picked up a flight to Bogota and then an onward flight to London.

## Day 12

## Saturday 16th December

This afternoon we arrived safely back at Heathrow where we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways home.

### Summary

First thanks must go to Juan Manuel Cardona our guide who was superb and patient with the group and Johnny for getting us around safely. Without Juan we wouldn't have seen anywhere near the number of birds recorded on the holiday. In total I saw 383 species while others saw or heard a few more. Thanks to all the birders on the trip who made it a great holiday.

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Doña Dora and High Andes view

