



Sunrise Birding, LLC
COLOMBIA
November 28 – December 11, 2011
TRIP REPORT
Leader: Diego Calderon





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HIGHLIGHTS: See the complete Trip List.
These are just a few highlights!

- **Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird**
- **American Avocet**
2nd for Colombia!
- **Santa Marta Screech-Owl**
- **Chestnut-winged Chachalaca**
- **Dwarf Cuckoo**
- **Multicolored Tanager**
- **Magdalena Antbird**
- **Scarlet-browed Tanager**
- **Northern Screamer**
- **Yellow-headed Brush-Finch**
- **Bicolored Antpitta**
- **Colombian Chachalaca**
- **Yellow-eared Parrots**
a new record in the W Andes!
- **White-throated Screech-Owl**



Unnamed, new species of
Screech-Owl
(*unofficially known as
Santa Marta Screech-Owl!*)
All photos © Diego Calderon

November 28

Our tour started with a pre-trip extension in Santa Marta where Pat and Jan were attending a wedding. Waly, our local operator/guide, and I picked them up early in Barranquilla and in less than an hour we were watching our first mega target in the parking lot of the Isla Salamanca National Park: a stunning endemic **Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird** singing (recorded!) and perched very exposed, showing its full shining blue breast and belly! **Chestnut Piculets** and **Russet-throated Puffbirds** were very active around as well. We started birding the mangroves area and got tremendous views of **Golden-green**



Woodpecker and **Pied Puffbird** along with **Black-crested Antshrike** and **Bicolored Conebill**. The new boardwalks above the water offer great access into the mangroves and were grand for **Green** and **Striated Heron** as well as **Yellow-chinned Spinetail**. Jan and Pat enjoyed trying to get a glimpse of the yellow under the bill. Our boat trip could not been better with all species of **Kingfishers** seen well (**Ringed, Green, Amazon, Green-and-rufous, and American Pygmy**); as well as sandpipers, plovers and terns. As we pulled into the shore, a **Northern Tamandua** allowed us to get as close as 3 meters offering detailed fine views!

After we finished with Isla Salamanca National Park we stopped at the swamps en route to Santa Marta looking for **White-cheeked** and **Northern Pintail**. What a SURPRISE we got when among some ~5,000 birds including terns, gulls, pelicans, egrets, sandpipers, plovers, teals, etc., I spotted a bird that turned out to be the second **American Avocet** recorded in Colombia! Fantastic and I digiscoped the first photographs of it!!!



To finish our day we got into Vale Road near Santa Marta and soon Waly stopped the car as we found a group of some 5 endemic **Chestnut-winged Chachalacas** crossing the road!

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and a covey of **Crested Bobwhites** closed our grand day! We made it to our Sierra's Sound Hotel in Minca and after a great dinner went to bed listening the nice melody of the river that passes nearby.

November 29

This morning after coffee and a snack, we left for a nice *mirador* and enjoyed three fabulous hours of **Orange-chinned Parakeets**, **Swallow Tanagers**, **Flycatchers** and **Tanagers** along with a panoramic vista of Santa Marta and the ocean down below. We got beautiful views of a powerful **Crimson-crested Woodpecker** vigorously dismantling a dead tree trunk near a relaxed perched psychedelic **Keel-billed Toucan** (well named Rainbow-billed also!). We returned to the hotel for a proper breakfast and then started birding our way up the mountain. **Black-chested Jay**, a **Santa Marta Tapaculo** that did not cooperate, and point-blank views of **Blue-naped Chlorophonias** while drinking local-made blackberry wine highlighted our late morning, but the obvious winner was the lovely couple of **Black-and-white Owls** roosting in a *Guadua* bamboo. We arrived for lunch at El



Dorado Lodge where we saw the **Black-fronted Wood-Quails** in the compost pile, **Santa Marta Toucanet** and the stunning **Golden-breasted Fruiteater**. Male **Lazuline Sabrewing**, **White-tailed Starfrontlet** and **Santa Marta Brush-Finches** entertained us at the feeders and later on we continued up the mountain. We arrived at the National Parks lodge at San Lorenzo where we nailed down a group of **Band-tailed Guans** preparing to roost. We tried for owls, but forest was deeply mute as it often can be.

November 30

Early this morning we climbed up the road to Cerro Kennedy on top of San Lorenzo ridge. We enjoyed breath-taking view of the three Santa Marta snow-peaks known as Bolivar, Colon and the Guardian and soon the birds won our attention, the first being **Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant**. We spent our morning in the ridge getting tremendous views of both **White-lore**d and **Santa Marta Warblers**, **Streak-capped** and **Rusty-headed Spinetail**, **Santa Marta (Black-cheeked) Mountain-Tanager**, and **Santa Marta Brush-Finch**. **Santa Marta Parakeets** perched very close allowing outstanding views as did the **Scarlet-**

fronted Parakeets. Red-crested Cotinga was also seen and is a great bird not often seen in this mountain! **Yellow-crowned Whitestarts** joined us for breakfast time approaching us less than three meters away. The morning offered great birding including **Black-throated Tody-Flycatcher** and the humongous billed **Strong-billed Woodcreeper** as we walk along the road.



As we returned to the lodge, I asked Waly about the White-tipped Quetzals on the ridge and he told me that we should target them lower down the slope. Less than five seconds later, a pair of **White-tipped Quetzals** called and showed up amazingly well for us exchanging Waly's words for our joy. After a delicious lunch, rain kept us indoors but we enjoyed a bit of reading and napping. **Santa Marta Mountain-Tanager** and **Blue-capped Tanager** passed by the window while Jan and I scanned once in a while. After a great pasta dinner we went owling down the road hoping for better results than yesterday. We hoped right as an individual of the unnamed new species of Screech-Owl (*unofficially known as **Santa Marta Screech-Owl!***) responded to playback and came in less than 2 meters away!

What a great way to finish our day! We spent the last few minutes looking at the stars!

December 1

This morning we had time for some birding before descending the mountain to catch an early afternoon flight. We went down the trail behind the National Park facilities and found a **Brown-rumped Tapaculo** and a **Santa Marta Antpitta**, a group of **Santa Marta (Black-checked) Mountain-Tanagers**, **Santa Marta Brush-Finch** and **Blue-naped Chlorophonias** feeding on some melastome fruits in the canopy just above our heads. We packed the car and started coming down the mountain making stops to enjoy a beautiful waterfall and to try for Santa Marta Tapaculo that was completely silent. The small tienda rewarded us with prolonged views of a female **Santa Marta Woodstar** feeding on orange *marmelada* flowers. After nice lunch, we boarded our Airbus to Medellín and had great dinner at Crepes and Waffles and got a good stack of wine for the next day's dinners.



December 2

Today we left Medellín early to bird in the Central Andes slope facing the Magdalena Valley. We enjoyed a delicious breakfast and then watched a nearby banana feeder packed with **Thick-billed Euphonias**, **Lemon-rumped Tanagers**, **Blue-gray** and **Palm Tanagers**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Plain-colored Tanager** and **Great Kiskadee**. Later

on we started birding along the road where we enjoyed a feast of tyrannulets, seedeaters, flycatchers and tanagers along with huge **White-collared Swifts** flying low. **Bar-crested Antshrike, Pacific Antwren, Black-bellied Wren, Cinereous** and **Cinnamon Becards** showed very well for us. Later in the morning, we continued on to Rio Claro. After lunch and a bit of a noon rest, we birded around the grounds and saw **King Vultures** flying high. At the same time a **Barred Puffbird** perched in a tree above us offering superb scope views. We heard the endemic **White-footed Tamarins** but they were jumping out of our view. We walked up 15 minutes from the restaurant along the Rio Claro River to the entrance of one of the local **Oilbird** Caves. After sunset, the show of these huge silhouettes flying against the moon sky entertained us for a good half an hour. A nice fresh night complemented by the calls of a **Pauraque** was much enjoyed.

December 3

We were out very early this morning looking for our main target in Rio Claro. We walked up the trail following the river and soon found a stunning male near-endemic **Magdalena Antbird** (recently split from Dull-mantled) in full view a few meters from the trail. Fantastic! We took another trail to the forest where we found big active groups of **Tawny-crested** and **Dusky-faced Tanagers**, a hard-to-find **Scarlet-browed Tanager**, and an amusing understory mixed-flock with **White-flanked, Checker-throated**, and **Slaty Antwrens**. Later on, we headed south toward Victoria. We detoured to check a spot and got no less than six **Northern Screamers** and a noisy couple of **Chestnut-fronted Macaws**. A **Colombian Chachalaca** flew above the car in the main highway and we made it to Victoria by early evening.



December 4

Pouring rain kept us birding from our hotel terrace while having nice breakfast.

Nonetheless, we got good views of **Spectacled Parrotlets** and **Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Black-billed Thrush, Crimson-backed Tanager, Lemon-rumped Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager, Palm Tanager** and **Thick-billed Euphonia** coming to the banana feeders. By 10 AM we decided to go on and leave to Manizales as rain was still falling. We made some short stops at around 2000 m elevation on the road as several new localities for the endemic **Yellow-headed Brush-Finch** have been found. On our second stop we found this endangered endemic with 4 individuals showing really well. Later on near the ridge of the Central Andes, a short stop caught heard a mixed flock which produced grand views of **Great Thrush, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Golden-crowned Tanager, Glossy Flowerpiercer, Masked Flowerpiercer, Rufous-collared Sparrow** and **Slaty Brush-Finch**. We finished our afternoon at the Recinto del Pensamiento hummingbird feeders above Manizales with more than 10 species recorded while drinking fine coffee.

December 5

Today was our Rio Blanco reserve full day and we started with Antpittas galore! **Chestnut-naped, Chestnut-crowned** and **Brown-banded Antpitta** came straight to us at feeders. Nesting **Powerful Woodpeckers** added great fun to the antpitta feeders and it was quite a show! A **Shining Sunbeam** spotted by Albeiro was greatly appreciated as this is a near-paramo high elevation hummingbird that rarely visits Rio Blanco. A confiding **Bicolored Antpitta** rewarded us at its own feeding station (as has regularly been doing since started to be fed with worms). Then



came the rain again! We had lunch and birded from the house corridors enjoying the hummers at the feeders. Around 3 pm, the rain eased so we walked up to the road luckily getting the much desired **Masked Saltator** with prolonged scope views. We also had brief views of the special **Golden-plumed Parakeets** and **Rusty-faced Parrots**.

December 6

This morning we were supposed to get to Los Nevados National Park but the main road had suffered from last night rains and had few landslides. We tried to take the old road but the police advised us that a bridge had been washed out by an avalanche last night. Bad luck! We decided to head to La Carmelita road in the Cauca Valley below Pereira to target for **Dwarf Cuckoo**. Quite immediately when we got out of the car, the bird presented itself above our heads showing its beautiful red eyes. What a cuckoo! Some flycatchers and seedeaters were seen in the open areas and further on we stopped for a couple of *Myiarchus* flycatchers that flew in front of the car, one of them being the endemic **Apical Flycatcher**.

We moved a little bit south along the Cauca River to look for some cool Comb Ducks that were recorded in swampy areas over the past month. We looked for them everywhere but the specific spot had been drained as was part of a rice field preparation for next season so unfortunately we never saw them. Our consolation was several nice water birds including **Cinnamon Teal, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Blackish Rail**, and many others. We were supposed to drive to El Cairo in the afternoon to bird for Chocó endemics in Galapagos Road for the next couple of days, but more landslides did not allow us to get there, so we changed plans. We chose Apia as our next station where we could have a mix of Western Andes and Chocó birds. We arrived and settled in, enjoyed dinner at the local little restaurant and became part of a birthday party where we sang, clapped and almost ate cake.



December 7

From Apia we drove 30 minutes to the Western Andes ridge at La Linea. A planned five minute stop turned into two and a half hours thanks to great birds. Amazingly, we had **Speckle-faced Parrots** perched in full view at eye level! Other prizes included a **Golden-winged Manakin** that flew in and slipped below our viewing point several times. Several tanagers flew and foraged in fruiting trees above, most notably the smart, endemic **Multicolored Tanager**. **Blue-naped** and **Chestnut-breasted Chlorophonias** added color while feeding on some mistletoes. A female of the localized endemic **Turquoise Dacnis** also showed up briefly as well. Exploring the ridge we found huge mixed flocks packed with Chocó tanagers, foliage-gleaners, manakins, flycatchers and becards. We found a wonderful fruiting fig tree where in a couple of hours we recorded loads of tanagers, barbets and fruiteaters, plus some nice orchids in the area. At the end of the day, some **Yellow-eared Parrots** flew by above our heads making their characteristic calls... a new record for this endangered 'near-endemic'! We returned to Apia for the night after a wonderful day birding in an unexpected, alternative location.

December 8

We started birding a trail in Agualinda Park targeting Yellow-headed Manakin. This bird did not cooperate and we only heard it in the distance. We did, however, get nice views of **Golden-breasted Fruiteater** and heard the new undescribed Western Andes Tapaculo species known as '*pisones*'. Three **Red-crested Cotingas** were foraging in the canopy, new for the park and for sure at this elevation: only 2000 meters! **Whiskered Wren** gave good views as well before we descended the ridge to head toward Otun National Park near Pereira.

On arrival at Otun, we were quite frustrated with the torrential levels of the river impacting in our search for **Torrent Ducks**. We went to another smaller stream where one of the reserve rangers showed us a couple of males and later on Pat spotted another pair including a beautiful female as they moved downstream with the current. **Red-ruffed Fruitcrow** was also seen very well eating *Cecropia* fruits. While having dinner at Otun National Park, a **Tropical Screech-Owl** came to the veranda to catch a moth and gave us a close view!



December 9

We started our day on the trail behind the lodge and first bird we got was a very close endemic **Cauca Guan** happily foraging in an Araliaceae crop. The bird stayed there for us for more than 30 minutes allowing exceptional scope views and photographs! A male **Great Antshrike** displayed just 4 meters away from us and **Flame-rumped Tanagers** were all around the garden. After breakfast, we enjoyed loads of **Red-ruffed Fruitcrows** along the park road. Later on, we departed for Jardin in order to secure our views of Andean Cock-of-the-rock before dusk. We made some stops in the Cauca Valley and got

another big endemic for the day: **Colombian Chachalaca**. We made it to Jardin and went down the little creek to get the crazy males of **Andean Cock-of-the-rock** doing their noisy dances... an amazing thing to watch!

December 10

This morning we left our colorful colonial hotel in Jardin to bird Ventanas Peak. We started with **Munchique Wood-Wren** which entertained us with its melodious song while **Streak-throated Bush-Tyrants** flew by above our heads. We enjoyed our field breakfast while a big mixed flock packed with tanagers flitted through the nearby trees. **Black-capped** and **Superciliated Hemispingus**, **Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager**, **Blue-capped Tanager**, **Hooded** and **Blue-winged Mountain-Tanagers**, **Grass-green**, **Purplish-mantled**, **Black-capped**, **Blue-and-black**, **Beryl-spangled** and **Saffron-crowned Tanagers**, **Blue-backed Conebill**, and **White-sided** and **Masked Flowerpiercers** were all in attendance.

Amazing! Some good furnariids also appeared including **Streaked Tuftedcheek** and **Pearled Treerunner** actively working the mossy tree trunks and bromeliads. **Yellow-eared Parrots** perched not so far away giving superb scope views. At the top, an **Andean Pygmy-Owl** showed well before some hummingbirds chased it away. **Golden-crowned Tanagers** and **Sharpe's Wrens** travelled in small mono-specific flocks all over the peak. We returned to **Jardin** to enjoy the colorful magic main square with the best Colombian coffee and beer with Jose our local guide for this area.



December 11

Our final morning of this trip, we went to the Quebrada Bonita area to look for the endemic **Red-bellied Grackle**. The grackles were nowhere to be seen but we did find some nice big groups of **Russet-backed Oropendolas**. We returned back to town for breakfast and then departed the Western Andes. We made stops en route to Medellín and got amazing views of a bird that is going to be a big surprise next year for Colombia, but still details cannot be public ;-). We arrived in Medellín by 2pm and went to La Romera Reserve. Before the entrance gate, we were treated to great views of **Red-bellied Grackles** right above the car.



Report by Diego Calderon, December 2011

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