

2024 Colombia Trip

Note: Click on [this link](#) to see the full album of photos from this trip. Click on any photo for a larger view.

Background

When we returned from Brazil in 2023, Jim suggested that maybe it was time to “taper off” the birding tours. “Not!” Linda objected. Soon, Jim suggested we return to Colombia with Mark Pretti, one of our favorite guides, and Linda was happy to agree. Mark offers tours for small groups at very reasonable cost by keeping his overhead charges low. He doesn’t advertise, at least not much, relying on word of mouth. This trip covered some of the same areas we checked out on 2014, so we had a chance to see what ten years of development had produced.

Medellin

For our first visit to a city made famous by a drug cartel, we weren’t sure what to expect. Medellin turned out to be quite nice and easy to get to. We flew from SFO to Panama City, which has a nice lounge now, and caught a short flight to Medellin, arriving in the morning. That left time to ease into the local birds by visiting a park in the area. Based on the photos from the first day, we were more interested in butterflies than birds. Mark’s tours cater to clients who, like us, are interested in all aspects of the natural world, not just birds.

This Dagger Wing Butterfly is interesting, as it looks completely different with wings open or closed.



Dagger Wing Butterfly Wings Closed



Dagger Wing Butterfly Wings Open

Las Tangaras

The next day, we traveled to Las Tangaras Reserve. Tangara means “Tanager” in Spanish, but according to Google, it can also mean *marvel* or *wonder* as well, making it a fitting name for the lodge. Besides having access to several good spots for birds, the lodge is famous for the activity at its bird feeders.



This Brown Violet Ear Hummingbird, as usual for bird names known by the hardest feature to observe, cooperated for a change. The *violet ear* is usually not visible. The light has to hit the feathers just right to show it.

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Brown Violet Ear Hummingbird



This Silver-throated Tanager visited the feeder and provided a nice opportunity to snap this photo.

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Silver-throated Tanager at Feeder

Rio Blanco Reserve

We visited the Rio Blanco Reserve, which we had stayed at in 2014. It looks much improved now. It still had the semi-trained Antpittas. These usually shy birds have been accustomed to being fed at the same time each day, a practice invented by Angel Paz in Ecuador. Now, lodges all over the country are trying the same trick



Bicolored Antpitta

because birders will come to see these birds. Our first viewing was this Bicolored Antpitta.

A Buff breasted Mountain Tanager waiting for a turn at the feeder distracted us briefly.

But soon, we headed for a different spot, arriving in time to see a Chestnut-crowned Antpitta called “Pancho.”

We stopped briefly at a lunch spot, where we saw another new

mammal, Andean Squirrel. This one was having a *discussion* with a Blue-winged Mountain-tanager over who owned the feeder.



Chestnut-crowned Antpitta

Along the road, we spotted this Andean Motmot, which used to be considered a subspecies of Blue-crowned Motmot, has been elevated to a full species.



Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager



Andean Motmot



Andean Squirrel and Blue-winged Mountain-tanager

Reserva Mirador El Roble--Casa y Bebedores de Colibríes

A day trip into nearby mountains took us to a private home with multiple feeders and a surprise. A place with a name almost as long as the drive up there: Reserva Mirador El Roble--Casa y Bebederos de Colibríes. The last part means something like “house and feeders of hummingbirds.

Indeed, after seeing a Buff-tailed Coronet feeding on a Fuchsia flower, decided to try feeding one by holding a flower in her hand.



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Buff-tailed Coronet Feeding on Fuchsia



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Linda feeding Hummingbird

However, we saw a mammal we had never observed before, an Oncilla, for the most fun of the day.

As soon as we had arrived, the Oncilla showed up, looking like a small house cat. It is actually smaller than most house cats. She had learned that the sound of a car full of tourists meant she could earn a treat just by showing up.



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Oncilla waiting for her treat



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Oncilla Accepting her treat

Our hostess held some fish meat left over from cleaning and the cat rose up to get it. Once she had her reward, she disappeared into the brush.

Hacienda El Bosque



Equatorial Antpitta

This place is a working ranch/farm, but has lots of great birds. We arrived early, in time for breakfast at a newly built café. Then, it was eye candy time. We started with another Antpitta, the curiously named Equatorial Antpitta. He responded to the name “Juli,” when called.

Then, we raced to another feeding station where we got terrific views of Barred Fruiteaters, not lifers, but still great. Below are the male and female.

We had time for yet another lifer Antpitta, Crescent-faced Antpitta, “Lunita.” Linda and I voted her the bird of the trip.

A Golden-faced Tyrannulet, a small flycatcher that usually stays hidden popped out to see what was going on.



Male Barred Fruiteater



Crescent-faced Antpitta, “Lunita.”



Female Barred Fruiteater



Golden-faced Tyrannulet



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Swordbill Hummingbird

This Swordbill Hummingbird was not a lifer, but what an incredible bill!
Always worth a photo, and this one turned out well.

Hotel Termales

Our final stop before heading home was Hotel Termales. The hot pools the name suggests were welcome, as the hotel was high up in the mountains and cold. There were some good birds to be seen there. However, it was foggy most of the time and the photos were not up to our standards. Sorry.

Colombia deserves its reputation for diversity of nature. There are still some parts of it that may show up on our travel list in the future.