Full Detailed Itinerary - Northern Colombia: The Santa Marta Mountains and the Caribbean

Day 1: Arrival in Barranquilla

After arrival, you'll be transferred to an excellent hotel in the city for the night.

Day 2: Barranquilla to Riohacha

We'll drive through the city to the nearby Salamanca Island, having a field breakfast in the mangroves at dawn. We hope to find the extremely rare endemic Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird and the 0more common Sapphire-throated Hummingbird in the mangroves near the park HQ – it's possible Sapphire-bellied is only an age stage of Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, but for the moment it is considered a "good" species. We'll then bird the mangroves where hordes of wintering Prothonotary Warblers will accompany us as we search for Bicolored Conebill, Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Panama Flycatcher, Pied Water-Tyrant, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Chestnut Piculet, Black-crested Antshrike, and more. A short stop later in the morning should get us the pretty Stripe-backed Wren, handsome Russet-throated Puffbird, screeching Brown-throated Parakeets, and various waterbirds. Continuing along the coast, the main highway passes lagoons, which depending on water levels, can be jam-packed with countless waterbirds; time permitting we may make a few stops, but birding is along a very busy highway and most of the species are quite common and widespread. After stopping for lunch at a roadside restaurant, we'll continue northeast to the Guajira Peninsula. This arid corner of Colombia holds a number of birds shared only with neighboring Venezuela. In the cooler late afternoon, we'll bird some scrub for a first shot at the target birds (mentioned below). We'll spend one night in Riohacha.

Day 3: The Guajira Peninsula

After another field breakfast, we'll bird the deserts and dry woodland in and around the Los Flamencos reserve. The superb White-whiskered Spinetail, Vermilion Cardinal, and Orinocan Saltator are some of our most wanted targets, but we'll also look for Chestnut Piculet, Slender-billed Tyrannulet, Glaucous Tanager, Tocuyo Sparrow, Buffy Hummingbird, Red-billed Emerald, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Black-crested Antshrike, White-fringed Antwren, and others. The lagoons behind the beach vary in water levels, but are sometimes teeming with waterbirds. With luck we'll find some Scarlet Ibis among the more common White Ibis, along with other species like Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Black Skimmer, wintering shorebirds, gulls, terns, a chance for American Flamingo, and more. After a sumptuous lunch on the beach, we'll drive back down the coast for a few hours to some lowland forest near the village of Gaviotas. We'll spend the late afternoon looking for a few neat birds like Lance-tailed Manakin, White-bellied Antbird, Buff-breasted Wren, Barred Antshrike, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Cocoa Woodcreeper, and Crimson-crested Woodpecker. We'll spend the night at a nearby ecolodge near the beach.

Day 4: To the Santa Marta Mountains

The morning's plan is somewhat flexible – we may return to Gaviotas for a short time, bird another forested area such as Tayrona National Park, or get a head start on the foothills of the Santa Martas. We'll have lunch at a restaurant with good feeders that attract White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeleteer, Black-

throated Mango, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Whooping Motmot, Golden-winged Sparrow, and others. After lunch, we'll use 4WD vehicles for the ride up to the San Lorenzo ridge in the Santa Marta Mountains. This forested area is the only easily accessible area of the mountain range, and is now protected by a bird reserve that hosts all but a few of the much-coveted Santa Marta endemics. We'll spend three nights in a lodge located at the pleasantly cool middle elevations of the mountains. If we arrive early enough, we can spend time at the feeders; feeder activity is a bit unpredictable but it is not unusual for neat species like Band-tailed Guan, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Black-chested Jay, and White-tailed Starfrontlet to visit along with the more common species.

Days 5-6: The Santa Marta Mountains

This mountain range is completely cut off from the Andes, yet has the tallest peaks in Colombia. Due to its isolation and height, it holds one of the highest densities of endemics of any spot in the entire world. Twenty-two endemic bird species are currently recognized as well as more than seventy subspecies, some of which will likely be raised to species level in the future. We'll make the most of our time here, covering all the elevations accessible by road. The higher elevations hold flocks of screeching Santa Marta Parakeets, cute Yellow-crowned Redstarts, chattering Santa Marta Warblers, the stolid Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant, and a few skulkers like Brown-rumped Tapaculo, Rusty-headed Spinetail, and the recently split Sierra Nevada Antpitta. Working our way down the mountain, we'll get into range for White-tailed Starfrontlet, Streak-capped Spinetail, and Black-cheeked Mountain-Tanager. Around the lodge clearing is the best spot for Santa Marta and Sierra Nevada Brush-Finches and lots of endemic subspecies including Cinnamon Flycatcher, Black-hooded Thrush, Blue-capped Tanager, and Emerald Toucanet. Below the lodge the forest is taller and a little drier, and has some different species like White-lored Warbler, Santa Marta Blossomcrown and more birds with "Santa Marta" in their names, including the Tapaculo, Woodstar, and Foliage-gleaner. Other feathered gems that put gleams of lust into the eyes of visiting birders include White-tipped Quetzal, Emerald and Groove-billed Toucanets, Golden-breasted Fruiteater, and Rusty-breasted Antpitta. On one day, we'll need a very early start (3:30-4:00am departure with a field breakfast) in order to get up the very rough road to higher elevations, but on the other we can have a later breakfast in the lodge.

Day 7: El Dorado to Minca

Our start time will depend on which birds we are still looking for – sometimes it is necessary to go back up to the higher elevations if we missed any endemics up there, though anyone who prefers to just bird or relax around the lodge and take some photos is more than welcome to do so. Later in the morning, we'll head back down the mountains to the foothill town of Minca, where we spend one night in Minca (the same place with the feeders that we stopped at for lunch on day 4).

Day 8: Minca to Barranquilla

One last morning in the foothills will give us a chance to find several great birds not found higher in the mountains. The gorgeous Golden-winged Sparrow (which sometimes visits the hotel feeders) tops a nice list of targets that also includes Black-backed Antshrike, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-breasted and Rufous-and-white Wrens, Scaled Piculet, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, and others. After lunch, we'll start driving back to Barranquilla, stopping to look for the endemic Chestnut-winged Chachalaca en-route, before reaching Barranquilla for our final night.

Day 9: Departure

The tour ends this morning at the Barranquilla airport.

Toll free from the USA & Canada: (800) 348-5941

International number: +1-409-515-9110

Toll free from the UK: +0800-046-5654

Email: info@tropicalbirding.com