



HILLSTAR
NATURE

Colombia

The Chocó & the Western Andes

5th- 11th February, 2025

Leaders: Mollee Brown & Yessenia Tapasco



A ridgetop view from up high in the Cordillera Occidental, the Western Andes of Colombia. Here a Hillstar Nature friend works on photographing a rare hummingbird, along with some flowerpiercers. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

Sporting three Andean mountain ranges, Colombia is a birder's paradise with a remarkable variety of landscapes and near 20% of all bird species on the planet. This week we focus on "La Cordillera Occidental", the Western Andes, which rise above the Pacific and the Choco offering an amazing variety of startlingly beautiful and special birds.

This 1-week trip is based at just two hotels. One in the scenic mountains around and outside of Cali, the nation's 3rd most populous city, and the other just below the Western Andes's highest peak, Cerro Tatamá. Featuring a cool crisp climate, good photo opps, excellent birding along mountain trails and roads with a great list of showy endemics, we base ourselves at one luxurious lodge, and a more remote lodge surrounded by an intensely biodiverse wilderness.

We visit the edge of Farallones de Cali National Natural Park, an area incredibly rich with birds where with luck we could encounter snazzy birds like Toucan Barbet, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Black Solitaire, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Glistening-green Tanager, and much more. With close to 500 species now recorded from this location we will not run out of birds to seek! Nearby there are feeding stations where we have a good chance to take some great photos, and also to see birds like the Blue-headed Sapphire, and the incredibly beautiful (and well-named!) endemic Multicolored Tanager. With luck here, we could encounter the endemic Chestnut Wood-Quail as well. Later we visit San Cipriano, well known as place that is hosts the tricky range-restricted Five-colored Barbet, a Choco endemic, and also the finicky Sapayoa which is the only New World representative of the Old World Broadbill family.

And we'll visit the more remote wilderness of Tatamá National Natural Park. A park encompassing some 200 square miles of rolling slopes and peaks, it is cloaked in humid tropical forest and cloud forest of the unique Chocó bioregion. We'll have chances here for a dizzying number of showy hummingbirds as well as a couple of banging tanagers in



Known now from just 5 sites, the Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer was thought extinct from 1965 until 2003. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

the genus *Bangsia*, the Black-and-gold Tanager and the Gold-ringed Tanager. In addition to the endemic tanagers, we have more chances here at Black Solitaire, the super range-restricted, endemic Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer, and many other birds too. And here we explore an area that includes the number one eBird hotspot in Colombia, which happens to be the nation with the highest list of birds in the world.

A luxury stay mixed with remote and rustic wilderness, this exploration of Colombia's lowest Andean range offers some of the most thrilling birding on the "bird continent" of South America.

Detailed itinerary

Day 1, February 5th: Arrival into Pereira

Most international flights arrive into Bogota and some travelers choose to book their travel to Pereira through Bogota, but note there are direct flights from Miami to Pereira (PEI). The latter is best if you can make it work. Plan your international flights from the US to arrive mid-day or mid-afternoon. We will arrange transport to our hotel, Hotel Movich, where we will enjoy a welcome dinner together. If you arrive earlier in the day you can relax at the hotel until our meeting at 630pm in the hotel lobby for dinner. Night in Pereira.



Velvet-purple Coronet is a spiffy hummingbird with a great name. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

Day 2, February 6th: Transfer to PNN Tatamá

Rising early, we make our way north about a 2-hour drive, for the wilds of Tatamá National Natural Park. The park was created in 1987, this park and the Montezuma road leading up through it, has had 620 species of birds recorded along it. Birding the lower slopes we'll hope to connect with birds like Tanager Finch, Lanceolated Monklet, Club-winged Manakin, and hummingbirds like Velvet-purple Coronet, Empress Brilliant and much more. Accommodations are good considering the location, but still a little rustic, though the home-made food here from the hosting family of our lodge is excellent. Night at Montezuma Ec lodge.

Day 3, Feb. 7th: PNN Tatamá.

The number one eBird hotspot in the most bird species rich country in the world is right here. We'll have all day to explore this incredible birding area. Building on our sightings from the day prior, this time we'll ascend higher in the Western Andes to seek specials like Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer, Munchique Wood-Wren, and a host of others. There is a chance too for birds we may or may not have seen the day prior including, Choco Vireo, Gold-ringed Tanager, Black-and-gold Tanager, Crested Ant-Tanager, Black Solitaire, two species of chlorophonias, and much much more. This is an incredible mosaic of cloud forest, rainforest combining elements from the Choco on up to the upper reaches of the highest part of the Western Andes. It will likely be very humid if not wet. Night at Montezuma Ec lodge.



Multicolored Tanager is a star endemic of Colombia. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

Day 4, Feb. 8th: AM birding & transfer to Cali.

Today we'll take stock of our sightings to this point and then make a decision as to where we are best to spend our time. We can continue to bird the forests of Tatamá or we may up and leave to bird a wetland site en route to Cali. The grounds of the hotel where we spend the remainder of our trip are good for endemics such as Colombian Chachalaca and Grayish Piculet. Night at La Araucana Ec lodge.

Day 5, February 9th: San Cipriano. Just 650 feet above sea level neatly tucked away into the Pacific lowlands, San Cipriano is a hot and humid little town of about 1000 residents that is not accessible by road. Nestled snugly into the Choco foothills, it is only accessible via a unique mode of transport called a “Brujita”, a little witch. These are motorcycle-driven flat train carts that use the old railroad to transport cargo and nowadays, birders as well. We’ll make our way there to explore the surrounding rainforest and along the way hope for birds like the endemic Grayish Piculet, and regional specials like Dusky Pigeon, Blue-whiskered Tanager, Baudo Guan, Pacific Flatbill, and seldom-seen species including Five-colored Barbet, and the enigmatic Sapayoa. Night just outside Cali.



Purplish-mantled Tanager is one of the many showy species in the family we may encounter. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

Day 6, February 10th: PNN Farrallones de Cali & nearby fincas

Birding an area known as Anchicaya Alto at the edge of Farallones de Cali National Natural Park, we will wind our way down to legendary Doña Dora’s El Descanso. A wonderful hostess, Doña Dora is well-known here and abroad for the many birds and birders she’s hosted. We’ll hope for about 12 hummingbird species, while perhaps enjoying the home-made cheese empanadas. As we learn Doña Dora’s story, we will enjoy the birds and hope for close encounters with Toucan Barbet, and other birds that visit her feeding stations. Along the road to and from El Descanso, we will work hard to find as many other birds as we can here. We’ll hope to encounter Rufous-gaped Hillstar, Purplish-mantled Tanager, Black-headed Brushfinch, among various other possibilities and this super bird-rich road.

Also nearby are several fincas (farms) where we may spend some time at feeding stations and walking the natural areas around them in search of birds like Multicolored Tanager, Chestnut Wood-Quail, and Blue-headed Sapphire. The latter is but one of a great show of hummingbirds that could include, White-booted Racket-tail, Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Long-tailed & Violet-tailed Sylph, among more. The photo opps should be great, but our time away from the feeding stations should also net us lots of birds, as we seek Narino Tapaculo, Streak-capped Treehunter, and more. Night just outside Cali.

Day 7, February 11th: Transfer to Cali & points onward. Depending on timing of flights, we may opt for a little birding around the lodge before transfer to Pereira for our flights home or to our next destination.

CONTINUE ON: Join the High Times in Cordillera Central tour that begins on the evening of February 11th.

¡Hasta pronto! Thank you for joining this Hillstar Nature experience!



Ochre-breasted Antpitta is heard more often than seen, and frequents the slopes of the Western Andes, including Farallones de Cali National Natural Park where this one was seen. (Photo ©Hillstar Nature/George Armistead)

Tour Price/person*: \$3432

Deposit: \$1000

Single supplement: \$445

Final Payment Due: 5 October 2024

*Based on double occupancy at lodgings, with a group size of 6 to 9 registrants. Maximum groups size is 9 registrants, plus guide(s) and driver(s). If less than 6 registrants, trip may be cancelled or re-negotiated. Note that if you want a roommate we can try to find you one, but we cannot guarantee anyone a roommate, and if none is available, you will be charged the single supplement.

The tour price (fee) includes services from upon arrival on Day 1 into Pereira (PEI) until drop off at Cali (CLO) on Day 7, including:

- All meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 7.
- All accommodations from Day 1 through until Day 7.
- All transport from arrival into Pereira (PEI) on Day 1 through to Day 7 until guests are transported to Cali (CLO) near mid-day.
- All guiding services, access permits and entrance fees to birding areas.
- Tips for drivers and staff at hotels and restaurants.

Excluded from your tour fee are:

- Any flights. We can advise you on best times for your flights, but we do not book flights or arrange air travel at this time. On some tours that feature internal flights as part of the tour's itinerary and represent travel within that country, we may include the flights as part of the tour price and make those arrangements.

- Alcoholic beverages, laundry services, charges for phone calls, and any other items of a personal nature.
- Visa fees, airport taxes, airline baggage fees, etc.
- Tips to local Colombian guide.

ALL GUESTS/REGISTRANTS MUST:

- Review Travel Documents. For international travel, guests must have a current passport valid for six months beyond the end date of this tour, with at least 1 blank page for stamps.
- Review COVID-19 and other health requirements required to travel into or around the destination.
- Review Hillstar Nature's Code of Conduct.
- Consider obtaining travel and medical insurance to cover incidents over the duration of this tour.
- Sign the Hillstar Nature Terms & Conditions, which includes the assumption of risk/liability waiver.

Cancellation Policy

If a guest/participant cancels registration:

- 120 days or more prior to the start of the tour, a refund is issued minus a \$250/person processing fee.
- Between 119 and 90 days prior to the start of the tour, half of the tour fee will be returned to the registrant.
- 89 days or less prior to departure, no refund of payments or deposits are issued.

Pace, Rigor, Climate & Pests

- Moderate pace. Early mornings and a couple drives of up to 4 hours. Significant time enjoying bird feeding stations. Great photo opps.
- Two hotels: First is very comfortable ecolodge (4-5 star). 2nd is rather rustic (1.5-2 star). Both have good grounds for birds & photography, and great food.
- Range in elevation, from foothills below 1000 feet to high areas above 9000 feet. Not much rigorous hiking, but considerable time on foot and walking on a slope, along roads and trails.
- Weather varies from pleasantly cool to warm, but is consistently humid to rainy and wet. Few if any biting insects expected.

This is a trip designed for birders interested in sampling and seeing the avifauna of the Western Andes. All birding is done along trails, roadsides, or around grounds of lodgings, and walking is at a slow pace due to elevation, and so as not to startle wildlife and see as much as possible. Our time is mostly on foot, and mostly divided between stationary birding at lodges with feeding stations providing great photo opps, and trail or road birding, with slow walking. There is little if any real hiking anticipated, but guests should be prepared for significant time on foot in potentially rainy weather. We rise pre-dawn to be in position for best birding. Breakfast will be at our lodge or in the field and the same goes for lunch. Dinners are at/near our accommodations. Guests should expect that at times we will not be near comfortable bathroom facilities, and so a field stop/bush break might be the only option for a rest break.

Elevation is a consideration on this tour. Please consult your physician regarding travel to areas of high elevation. Elevations range from ~600 to about over 9000 feet above sea level. Weather is variable throughout the tour, but generally we expect it to be humid to wet, and cool, pleasant or warm. Up high early on we could hit lows in 40s, while down at lower elevation in afternoons we could enter the 90s. A light waterproof (or strongly water-resistant) layer to go over a fleece along with light rain pants are recommended. Biting insects are usually not an issue when in middle and upper elevations, but we could encounter some in lower elevations. We recommend carrying a small supply of insect repellent or to consider pre-treating your clothing with repellent prior to departure. Generally, nature enthusiasts visiting Colombia very rarely encounter diseases like Malaria, Yellow Fever, etc. but it is possible. We strongly urge guests to consult a doctor about vaccinations and medications prior to travel. Elevation sickness is possible, so we urge guests to seek medical advice on spending time at high elevation. All participants are required to show proof of COVID-19 vaccinations.

Packing

Please limit yourself to one mid-size suitcase/duffel and another smaller bag for daily use on outings. Group travel dictates we consider our fellow traveler's comfort, and this includes not over-packing. Laundry services are available at most hotels we visit but having lightweight clothes that can be hand-cleaned in rooms is an advantage.

Lightweight clothing that is easy to layer is best for this variable climate. Lightweight raingear is recommended. Some guests bring umbrellas but if these are utilized they can obstruct others' view in some situations. Neutral colors are best for our time in the field to limit our visibility to the birds and wildlife we seek. We could encounter mud along trails and roadsides, so good trail shoes, hiking shoes or hiking boots are recommended for field outings, while a pair of slip-ons, flip flops, or comfortable walking shoes for around the hotels/lodges are good to have as well.

A pair of gloves and warm hat are recommended, and a buff (lightweight neck-warmer) for use as breathing barrier or for warmth can be helpful too. Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses are good for if we encounter bright, clear conditions, especially at elevation. A daypack (small backpack or the like) for your belongings for daily field outings is useful, and some folks find that having a walking stick for balance is nice or having a foldable stool/chair is nice for times when we sit and wait in an area for a bird(s) to show. Power outlets in Colombia are similar to those in the US/Canada (110v/60Hz). Cell service is good in most areas but can be spotty in the Andes or along curvy mountain roads, and Wi-Fi is offered at all hotels but subject to disruption at times. A small supply of insect repellent is advisable.

Updated: 21 June 2023_GLA