



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR COLOMBIA: Andean Endemics

*These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.*

**ENTERING AND LEAVING COLOMBIA:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport to enter Colombia which is valid for more than 60 days after the date of arrival in Colombia. A visa is not required when entering Colombia as a tourist for 60 days or less for citizens of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Citizens of other nations should check with their nearest Colombian embassy. The airline on which you travel to Colombia will issue you with a tourist card that must be completed before you reach the immigration desk.

(On departure at the international airport enter the terminal by the main entrance No. 4. Immediately on the left as you enter, roughly opposite check-in desk 50, is a booth (currently booth number 19) signed Aeronautical Civil Extension de Impuestos. Queue here to get an exit tax exemption slip. Then go to the airline check-in desk and check in).

**Important:** As soon as you book on the tour, please email the Sunbird office a colour scan of your passport – the page(s) with your photograph and passport details. These are needed by our ground agents to obtain internal air tickets. It is then crucially important that you do NOT change your passport or get a new one, otherwise extra costs may be incurred.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag from the originals.

**SAFETY:** After years of instability, Colombia is once again becoming a safe destination for sensible international travellers. The Colombian government has made impressive progress in strengthening its democratic institutions, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, intensifying counter-narcotics efforts, fostering socio-economic development, addressing immediate humanitarian needs, and ending the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Security has improved massively and violence has decreased markedly in most areas, and there is no significant terrorist threat in the areas we will visit. However petty crimes such as pick-pocketing are common in major cities including airports, so be careful.

The group will always be accompanied by our leader and a Colombian driver. We stay at reserves bought and protected by the NGO ProAves, which constantly advises us of the local political climate. With their help, we go to the greatest possible lengths to provide a safe and enjoyable tour. We take no risks and our Colombian assistants have their fingers on the pulse of the local political climate.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** This tour begins upon your arrival at our hotel in Bogotá on Day 1. There will be a short introductory meeting at 18.00 followed by dinner. On Day 2 we depart early for a 2½ hour drive to Chingaza National Park taking a picnic breakfast with us.

**END OF TOUR:** On the last day of the tour we fly back to Bogotá arriving around 16.00. To allow time to check-in and pass through security, your homeward flight should not depart earlier than 19.00.

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**TIME DIFFERENCE:** Colombia is 6 hours behind British Summer Time (BST).

**CURRENCY:** The local currency is the Colombian Peso. We recommend you bring a bank card that will work at ATMs and advise your bank that you will be travelling to Colombia. Traveller's cheques are very difficult to exchange and not recommended. ATMs are widely available in major cities and at airports. For any major items of expenditure, such as books or souvenirs, payment by credit card is recommended. MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, American Express less commonly. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you only need to change enough money to cover items of a personal nature.

If wishing to change money it is best to do so at the start of the tour on arrival in Bogota, as it is extremely difficult to do this elsewhere. It is possible to change money at the airport either before exiting the arrivals hall or immediately after exiting the hall (where the leader will be able to assist you if he is meeting you from that flight) We will spend some time in areas without ATM'S and where credit cards are not accepted, so it is wise to plan ahead. The leader will advise you where and when it will be possible to obtain money. Unlike some other Latin American countries US Dollars are not widely accepted.

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish is the official language of Colombia. Some of the larger hotels have one or more employees who speak English, but English is not as commonly spoken as it is in some other South American countries. A Spanish dictionary or phrasebook is useful and will probably add interest to your trip.

**CLIMATE:** Temperatures in Bogotá range from about 45° to 75° F year around, while the Santa Marta area sees lows of around 55° and highs in the 90s F; Otun Quimbaya near Armenia, The El Dorado Lodge and San Lorenzo Ridge in the Santa Marta Mountains are cool – a fleece, scarf and gloves are recommended here and might also be useful at other high elevation sites such as Jardín and Chingaza National Park. Santa Marta's coast and the Guajira Peninsula is very hot and dry. Our highest birding locale is Nevado del Ruiz at 13,000 feet. Fog and rain are possible at any time of year here.

Altitude: We'll visit sites from sea level to around 13,000' (4000m). We will not be carrying oxygen on the vehicle. By the time we get to the 4000m elevation in the tour we would have already crossed the Andes several times and will have been staying and birding at elevations of 8,200' - 9,850' (2500m - 3000m). The day we are at 4000m we walk around a visitors' centre area and then bird down the road and usually after a few hours we are dropping down to lower elevations. No clients have had a serious problem so far with altitude sickness -- it is more the cold temperature that affects people. Clients would easily be able to stay with the vehicle if a problem arises at the higher elevation. Some participants who may experience minor symptoms such as headaches at the highest elevations are advised to drink normal quantities of water and walk slowly or sit quietly to alleviate any problems.

**PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** This is a fairly rigorous tour. Because the forests of the Colombian Andes are highly fragmented and only a few scattered sites remain accessible, there will be quite a few long drives between birding localities (usually 3-4 hours between two birding sites, but it could take as long as 8 hours to drive from Jardín to the Chestnut-capped Piha reserve). We will spend most of our time in mountain areas, and people can be subject to motion sickness on these mountain roads.

Most of our days will begin between 05:00 and 06:00, however there will be some mornings when we start at 04:30 so that we can reach areas in time to see rare parrots leave their roosts. Some breakfasts will be taken in the field; others will be eaten at our hotels and lodges. On some days, we will take a picnic lunch in the field and on others we will stop at roadside restaurants.

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Participants should be able to walk at a slow to moderate pace for 5 - 6 hours at a time; we may walk in the sun on some roads, though most of our trails will be in the shade. Although we'll take it slow and not cover long distances on foot, the trails on this tour are tougher than on many others, including some steep up-and-down tracks. The tougher trails will be at Chestnut-capped Piha and Las Tangaras reserves, where we may walk 4 km along steep trails to reach a ridge or a pass after 1,500 feet ascension (for both these days, people who don't want to hike the trails can stay at the comfortable lodges). Sturdy shoes or boots are necessary and a walking stick may be helpful at times. Rubber boots are highly recommended as some locations can be muddy.

Be aware that you will not be able to return to the lodge or the vehicle on your own should you become tired. On some days, however, it will be possible to stay behind and bird the lodge grounds; there is time for a siesta on those days.

The long drives will be broken up by toilet breaks and lunch stops. The group will typically return to the lodgings between 17:00 and 19:00, with dinner generally starting between 19:00 and 20:00. On most days, there will be a break of one hour between getting back and meeting up for dinner. The leader will call a list of the birds recorded during the day either just before or just after dinner.

**HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

No vaccinations certificates are necessary to enter Colombia. It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A, Typhoid, and Yellow Fever.

Malaria: A very small part of this tour is conducted in areas where there is a low risk of malaria; the remainder is at altitudes where it does not occur. Your tour guide will not be taking anti-malarial drugs. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Dengue Fever and Chikungunya: Dengue Fever and Chikungunya virus also occur in parts of Colombia and seems to be becoming more common in many parts of South America. There are no vaccines available, so no protection can be made in advance of travel. These diseases are transmitted by diurnal mosquitoes mostly in heavily populated areas. It is important therefore to cover up and use repellent wherever mosquitoes might be encountered.

Yellow Fever: The World Health Organization lists Colombia as being at risk of yellow fever transmission. At the time of writing, no proof of vaccination is required to enter Colombia. However, it is recommended that for visitors to certain areas have a Yellow Fever vaccination where there is a risk of transmission at altitudes below 2300m. Please click on this link for information about the new Yellow Fever vaccination requirements set out by W.H.O. <http://www.who.int/ith/updates/20160727/en>

There are few issues with insects on this tour. Chiggers are present off the roads in Santa Marta, but are not a real problem. There are a few mosquitoes in some areas. Bring a good insect repellent for mosquitoes and other insects that we will occasionally encounter.

Bottled water is readily available throughout the areas visited. Drinking water is provided at reserves, in the minibus when we are on the road, and with meals.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

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For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** All our lodges have electricity and all but one (Riohacha) have hot water. In Bogotá, Libano, Manizales, Jardín, Medellín and Barranquilla, we stay in comfortable modern accommodation with private bathrooms, and single-rooms are available.

Single-rooms cannot always be guaranteed at the Chestnut-capped Piha Lodge where we stay two nights; all accommodation here is on a twin-room basis with a private bathroom. We will spend one night in a basic but acceptable hotel at La Victoria.

Outside of the cities, most of our accommodation are in very birdy settings, and some exciting birding can be had right from the balconies.

Several of the hotels we visit on this tour have swimming pools (including the Pantagora in Libano, and the Balundu in Jardín). We will also visit a Hotel which has thermal springs – this will be a daytime visit and we will mainly be looking at hummingbirds and possibly having lunch. If any guests would like to make use of the springs while we are looking at hummingbirds they are more than welcome but this is a birding day and any such activities will need to fit around those plans.

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry service is available at several locations during the latter part of the tour. However, the often-damp climate in the Andes can make drying laundry problematic especially when we are only making short stays at each destination. It is recommended that clients pack accordingly and perhaps bring several changes of dry clothes just in case it is impossible to dry laundry quickly.

**ELECTRICITY:** 110V AC 60Hz (US style plugs). An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Colombian cuisine is very diverse and varies depending on the different regions of Colombia. In some areas, you will find speciality food such as roasted ants or guinea pigs while in other areas Colombians wouldn't even touch those dishes.

Colombia is not a paradise for vegetarians as the Colombian diet includes a lot of meat. In the coastal areas, you will find a good variety of fish, lobster and seafood, often prepared with a sauce made with coconut milk. The offer of fresh fruit is overwhelming and many will be of varieties you have probably never heard.

In general, breakfast is quite important in Colombia and consists of fruit juice, coffee or hot chocolate, fruit, eggs and bread.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do everything possible to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

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**DRINKS:** Bottled water or a soft drink or a beer is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. Bottled water is provided for day use in the vehicle. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room etc. is the responsibility of the individual. As it can get hot and dry, we recommend that you bring a large, good-quality water bottle and keep it filled. It is not recommended to drink tap water anywhere in Colombia.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** Internet and mobile reception are available at many of the hotels but are often poor or lacking in some of the more remote and mountainous lodges. Internet and mobile reception should be reasonable-to-good in Bogotá, La Victoria, Libano, Manizales, Jardín, Medellín, and Barranquilla. The internet at El Dorado Lodge can be good (if there is electricity, which can be intermittent at this site) but there is no mobile phone reception. Internet and mobile phone reception is very poor or completely lacking at Otun Quimbaya, Las Tangaras Reserve and the Chestnut-capped Piha Reserve.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress will be informal throughout the tour. Please wear drab colours but no military-style or camouflage clothing should be worn. The Colombian people tend to dress very smartly, especially when going out to dinner, so shorts are not appropriate in hotel restaurants in the evenings.

In the field, lightweight and loose clothing for hot weather is recommended and a good sun hat is essential. A medium weight fleece is highly recommended for páramo and high elevation birding (where temperature can be close to freezing point early in the morning) and can be extremely useful as evening wear at some lodges, where we may be dining outside in a cool environment. A wool hat and gloves are also recommended. We also suggest bringing a small folding umbrella and a light waterproof jacket. We suggest sturdy footwear and you may want to consider bringing rubber boots of some kind. The following items are basic requirements.

Broad-rimmed sun hat + bandana	Comfortable, sturdy, waterproof footwear
Light shoes/sandals	Short-sleeved shirts
Long-sleeved shirts	Lightweight trousers
Loose clothing for hot weather	Shorts
Lightweight waterproof jacket	Light sweater or lightweight jacket
Rubber or neoprene boots	Warm sweater and/or jacket
Folding umbrella (very useful in tropical downpours)	

**MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT:** Please bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Sunscreen lotion	Sunglasses and lip balm
Torch with spare batteries	Pocket knife with bottle opener
BPA-free water bottle	Luggage locks
Collapsible hiking stick	Insect repellent
Small travel towel	Plastic bags
Universal plug and soap	Inflatable pillow or neck rest
Literature/Music for the long drives	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
Personal medication	

**Optional:** Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear. Telescopes are useful at a few sites on this tour, but the leader will have one for group use and in many places personal 'scopes may be more of a hindrance than a help.

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**Note:** The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope and tripod	Spotlight
Field guides and reference books	Recording and playback equipment
Laser pointer	Basic first-aid kit

**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

At the time of writing, the weight limit for baggage on the internal flights is 20 kg.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these stack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and easy to obtain, but birds are very difficult to photograph. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with this tour, though you should bring your own telescope if you want to do this. The leader's telescope is for group members to look through. In the ProAves reserves photography is permitted but if you subsequently post any pictures online the reserve name should be acknowledged, and the species should be described using the name as in the McMullan guide (see Bibliography below).

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

Note: In the ProAves reserves photography is permitted but if you subsequently post any pictures online the reserve name should be acknowledged along with any bird species shown, which should be described using the name as in the McMullan guide (see Bibliography below).

**TRANSPORT:** Travel will mostly be by minibus, with 4WD jeeps used in a few localities such as in the Santa Marta Mountains and at Jardín. In some areas, minibus travel will alternate with jeep rides to the higher elevations. We fly from Medellín to Barranquilla.

Note that jeep rides can be rough and cramped for short distances. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants must be willing to take their turn to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

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**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. Smoking is not allowed in some hotel rooms and is strictly forbidden in all ProAves lodge bedrooms. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. Theft is a worldwide problem so if you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Birds:

Erize, F., Rumboll, M., and J. R. Mata. 2006. *Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers*. Princeton University Press. This pocket size book with great illustrations is an excellent addition to the Ridgely and Tudor (2009) field guide to songbirds of South America. Recommended.

Hilty, S.L., and W.L. Brown. 1986. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press. The best neotropical field guide of its time. Now somewhat outdated in taxonomy and distribution matters, but still excellent. **Recommended.**

McMullan, M., T.M. Donegan, and A. Quevedo. 2014. *Field Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. ProAves. Small pocket-sized field guide that illustrates all the species on the Colombian list. **Highly recommended; the best field guide for this tour.** The 3rd edition of the Colombian Field Guide has been published and is now the best field guide for our Colombia tours.

Restall, R., et al. 2007. *Birds of Northern South America: An Identification Guide*. 2 vols. Yale University Press. Species accounts in Vol 1, maps and plates in Vol 2. An excellent (but not infallible) and generally up-to-date reference, the second volume useful in the field as well

Ridgely, R.S., and G. Tudor. 1989 and 1994. *The Birds of South America*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press. Covers all the Passerines of South America known at the time of publication, though not all species are illustrated in the superb plates by Guy Tudor; excellent text with distribution maps. A must for anyone seriously interested in South American birds.

## COLOMBIA: Tour Information...8

Ridgely, R.S., and G. Tudor. 2009. *Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America: The Passerines*. University of Texas Press. New field guide version of the above two volumes. **Recommended.**

Beckers, J. and P. Florez. 2013. *Birdwatching in Colombia*. Image Printing Packaging Limited. A comprehensive site guide including many sites visited on the tour.

### Recordings:

Alvarez, M., et al. 2008. *A Guide to the Bird Sounds of the Colombian Andes*. 7 cds. Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Krabbe, N. *Birds of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia*. Vocalizations from 135 species of birds found in El Dorado Bird Reserve and other parts of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. 2 cds. John V. Moore Nature Recordings.

### Butterflies:

D'Abrera, B. 1984. *Butterflies of South America*. Hill House.

### Mammals:

Emmons L.H. and Feer, F. 1997. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Second Edition. The University of Chicago Press. Far from comprehensive but seems to be the best compact guide currently available for Neotropical mammals.

### General:

Woods, S. 2008. *Colombia*. Bradt. Good general travel guide to Colombia.

Carriker, M.R. 2001. *Vista Nieve: The Remarkable True Adventures of an Early Twentieth Century Naturalist and His Family in Colombia, South America*. Blue Mantle Press. A fascinating account of Melbourne A. Carriker, Jr. who collected and described many of the Santa Marta endemics.

Todd, W.E. and Carriker, M.A. 1922. *The Birds of the Santa Marta Region of Colombia. A study in Altitudinal Distribution*. Annals of the Carnegie Museum. This historical study of the birds of the Santa Marta Mountains can be downloaded from the following link <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/8985>

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100

[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

**MAPS:** Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop  
Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

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**NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB:** Please support this international organisation which published three excellent journals each year about the birds of the Neotropics. The NBC also raises money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.neotropicalbirdclub.org](http://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions, please contact us.