

**EASTERN  
ANDES  
MINI  
TOUR**



**156 BIRD SPECIES  
OBSERVED**



**BIRDING AND  
CULTURAL TOUR**



**6 HAPPY GUESTS  
3 BIRD GUIDES**

**TRAVEL JOURNAL**



**BIRDING BOGOTA & BEYOND**

The capital city of Colombia and the third-highest capital in South America, Bogotá is situated at approximately 8,660' and is the home base for our mini tour of the Eastern Andes. Six guests joined guides Eliana Ardila Kramer, Marc Kramer, and Roger Rodriguez Ardila for an exploration of the natural areas both within and just outside this bustling metropolis of 9 million people. Four of the guests were continuing on from the previous Charm of the Andes tour, while two others were fresh arrivals from the U.S.!

The only risk in visiting Colombia is wanting to stay!



## DAY 1 | BOGOTA



While in Colombia’s cosmopolitan urban center, our first day of the tour provided the perfect opportunity to take advantage of experiencing some local culture. Joined by our local cultural guide, Marcela, we were whisked away by “funicular” rail car to the top of Montserrate. The mountain rises over Bogota, dominates the skyline, and is a popular tourist attraction.

It’s not only a religious place with a historic church, but even before the arrival of the Spanish it was sacred to the local Muisca indigenous people. We wandered the cobble paths, browsing through the souvenir market and all the local tootchkes. Gawking at the local cuisine throughout the restaurant section, we drooled over the famous Bandeja Paisa dish, baked plantains with cheese, empanadas, and other mouthwatering Colombian dishes. There was a light drizzle and quite a bit of fog, so although the views down to the expanse of Bogota were not expansive, it was still a fun pilgrimage up!

Our guide Marcela was a wealth of cultural and historical facts about Bogota, not to mention full of energy and smiles! After Montserrate, she walked us through the quaint historic district of La Candelaria. This neighborhood is an eclectic juxtaposition between old and new, historic and modern. There were world-class museums, restaurants, Spanish colonial architecture, unique graffiti murals, and the wide-open Bolivar Plaza to explore! We wandered through centuries-old churches, sipped hot canelazo in the streets (spiced sugar cane and cinnamon drink), ogled some handcrafted Wayuu and Arawak mochila bags, and learned much about Bogota history!





## DAY 2 | CHINGAZA NATIONAL PARK & HUMMINGBIRD OBSERVATORY



Before dawn, we sipped hot coca tea at our Bogota hotel and made an early departure for Chingaza National Park. This high elevation park in the Eastern Andes northeast of Bogota is not only an important source of drinking water for Bogota, but also a haven for Andean flora and fauna, especially birds of which there are both endemics and several near-endemics. Starting our bird walk at 10,400 feet in the Guajira Forest Reserve, highlights on the first part of our stroll included Black-billed Mountain-Toucan, Olive-striped Flycatcher, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, and a secretive Andean Solitaire that hid in dense foliage. On multiple occasions we spotted Golden-fronted Redstarts, the subspecies in the

Eastern Andes having a white face. Further up in the reserve, we encountered a stern-looking Andean Pygmy-Owl being mobbed by a frenzied swarm of songbirds! Amongst the diverse passerines perturbed about the owl's presence were Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Sparkling and Lesser Violetears, Blue-backed Conebill, Black-capped and White-banded Tyrannulets, and Bluish, White-sided, and Black Flowerpiercers. Phew! Throughout our morning explorations, we were vigilantly listening and watching for an important target bird and Colombian endemic, the Brown-breasted Parakeet known to nest in the area. It wasn't until the very last moment, that Hermes our driver finally spotted 3 parakeets that were silent and nearly invisible while perched in a tree. They revealed themselves for a short glimpse before flying off deeper into the forest. Success!

In the afternoon, we explored the wonders of the famous Hummingbird Observatory (Observatorio de Colibríes). Victoria, the owner, always serves a superb lunch here, catering to vegetarians, vegans, as well as the omnivores — our group members were comprised of a wide range of dietary preferences. And then.... Hummer Time! Everyone was dazzled and mesmerized by the fantastic line-up of Eastern Andean hummingbirds — a brilliant kaleidoscope of fast-flitting gems of color and life. The Sword-billed Hummingbird wowed everyone with the longest bill in relation to body size of any bird in the world! The Great Sapphirewing, second largest hummer in the world, dazzled us with its deep blue colors and slower wingbeats compared to other hummingbirds. White-bellied Woodstar, Glowing Puffleg, Black-tailed Trainbearer, Blue-throated Starfrontlet, and an entire cast of Trochilid characters with ingeniously crafted names came to visit the plethora of nectar feeders here — all at a distance of only a few meters away from our eyes. Great photo spot!





## DAY 3 | TABACAL LAGOON & ENCHANTED GARDEN

Heading to the west of Bogota this morning and descending in altitude, our sights were set on Tabacal Lagoon, an important wetland area situated at 4,100 feet. We had a great Colombian breakfast en route, with huevos revueltos (scrambled eggs), hot almojabanas (Colombian cheese bread), caldo (traditional breakfast soup), chocolate con queso (hot chocolate with soft melted cheese), arepa, pan (bread), and fresh tropical fruit. Coming down over 4,000 feet in altitude from the cool climate of Bogota, the weather here was quite a bit warmer in the 70's °F. Everyone shed a few outer layers of clothing.

Beginning right at the parking lot at Tabacal Lagoon, birds were bounding out of the forest left and right. A pair of Band-backed Wren were conspicuously singing and displaying, and we had very good looks at Cinereous Becard, the near-endemic Bar-crested Antshrike, and numerous colorful tanagers. Working the open campground area, we discovered a pile of discarded orange halves on the forest floor which was unexpectedly hosting a group of gorgeous Black-headed Brushfinch and Orange-billed Sparrow. We heard Rusty-breasted Antpitta, and had swift looks at Black-bellied and Speckle-breasted Wren.

The trails leading up to the lagoon also had some good birds in store. Although not cooperative for the entire group, some of us had a glimpse of one of our target endemic birds, Velvet-fronted Euphonia. At the lake, a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail and a White-tipped Dove walked nonchalantly on the opposite shore, while Green and Ringed Kingfisher fished the back shoreline and Least Grebes and their chicks dove below the water's surface. We tallied 63 species at Tabacal in total.

Not far from Tabacal, the Jardin Encantado (Enchanted Garden) in San Francisco de Sales, amazed and delighted everyone with a frenzy of feverish hummingbird feeder action! This garden of Doña Leonora is a real haven for hummingbirds and may be the one place where you can see the most individual hummingbirds in your life. There are over 40 nectar feeders here, labelled with numbers, that are constantly swarming hundreds of hummingbirds. It's a literal "Trochilidaze"! Picture an overwhelming blur of chattering noises, tiny flashes of color, and the challenge to identify the 10-15 different quickly-moving species. It can be a little difficult to assimilate it all the first time you experience it. Highlights included the endemic

Indigo-capped Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango, White-vented Plumeleteer, and several others. Everyone was mind blown by the sheer number of birds and the wild excitement of incessant hummingbird commotion. Wow!



## DAY 4 | LA FLORIDA PARK & CHICAQUE NATURAL PARK

Navigating through the busy urban roads, today's morning journey was to La Florida Park, on the outskirts of the city in northwest Bogota. The park is a wetland area, a small remnant of an extensive swath of wetlands that once existed in Bogota before urbanization. Although heavily impacted by development, the small remaining natural areas here are excellent for finding the endemic and range-restricted Bogota Rail — which we successfully did! Although Roger explained that it was going to require a lot of time and patience to coax the rail to come out into the open, we had a rail that cooperated almost immediately and left the reeds into the sunshine. Walking a half-dry half-muddy trail that parallels the wetland, we spotted a group of small mammals — wild guinea pigs — actually an endemic subspecies of the Brazilian Guinea Pig, *Cavia aperea ssp. anolaimae*. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were present and conspicuous, and we caught a glimpse of a sneaky Spot-flanked Gallinule darting across an open area. Silvery-throated Spinetail, a skulky and Colombian endemic Furnariid, was a challenge but we were able to find a pair in the surrounding parkland. Being that this was our first wetland habitat, we added 13 new birds for the trip list here!

The afternoon found us driving over to west side of Bogota to Chicaque Natural Park at 8,850 feet. This is a cloud forest reserve, a tranquil misty escape from the nearby city and offers nature trails, impressive views, and good Eastern Andean birds! Working the road leading up to the reserve, while in the tour bus Roger spotted a mixed flock foraging down the hill so we all jumped out of the bus. In the flock, we had the





endemic Golden-bellied Starfrontlet, Moustached Brushfinch, Montane Woodcreeper, Common Chlorospingus, and Black-eared Hemispingus, among others. The glimpse at the Starfrontlet was very fast, and since it's an endemic bird, we really wanted better looks. At the park restaurant, Arboloco, there were a couple of hummingbird feeders that sometimes attract the Starfrontlet, alas — the feeders only got Violetears and Sunangels today. After lunch we picked up Black-crested Warbler, a heard Buff-breasted Mountain Tanager and Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, and saw Blue-capped Tanagers, but overall the afternoon bird activity was relatively quiet.

Returning to Bogota, we completed our final bird checklist together, which resulted in 156 species for the Eastern Andes portion. For those who completed both the Charm of the Andes and the Eastern Andes extension, we had a combined total of 295 species! The six guests and three guides enjoyed a farewell dinner at our hotel, and we wished our travelers safe journeys back home to the U.S. tomorrow. Everyone enjoyed being based in a single modern hotel for the entire duration of the Eastern Andes mini-tour, experiencing Bogota city culture, and viewing the feathered gems of the Eastern Andes!



## DAY 5 | BOGOTA

The final day of tour was a travel day for everyone, returning to the Bogota International Airport for their flights home.

We had several new birders on this trip that are now hooked on birding — and can't wait to return to Colombia for more adventures with Birding by Bus!

**KNOW**

**MORE**

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF THE BIRDS, FLORA AND OTHER FAUNA SEEN DURING THIS TRIP, PLEASE VISIT THE FOLLOWING LINKS:

eBird Trip Report -  
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/74204>

iNaturalist Project -  
<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/birding-by-bus-colombian-andes>