



## Colombia: Santa Marta Trip Report 2025 (Apr 3 - 10, 2025)

[Link: Colombia: Santa Marta Trip Report 2025 \(Apr 3 - 10, 2025\)](#)

---

### Day 1 - Arrivals in Baranquilla

The first evening of our tour kicked off in the hotel lobby with group introductions and tour logistics and expectations! Dinner and off to bed for an early morning departure!

### Day 2 - Barranquilla -> Comunidad KM 4 (Palermo) - Salamanca Island Natural Park -> Minca -> Colores de La Sierra

Welcomed by the warm breeze and our illustrious driver Virgilio and his fantastic bus, we motored down the road to our first birding stop! Along the way, we stopped for coffee and a quick breakfast. Here, we met our local guide, and from there drove a few minutes to the town of Palermo, where we birded in the rural community of Comunidad KM 4 where a mix of dry forest and agricultural living yielded a whopping 83 species! Highlights here included **Chestnut-winged Chachalaca**, our first Colombian endemic! We were super excited to see other stunners like **Northern Screamer**, **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, **Bare-faced Ibis**, **Rufescent Tiger-Heron**, **Snail Kite**, **Chestnut Piculet**, **Russet-throated Puffbird**, **Turquoise-winged Parrotlet**, **Panama Flycatcher**, **Bicolored Wren**, and **Yellow-hooded Blackbird**! During our walk back to the vehicle, we had a flyover of **Roseate Spoonbills** and a flock of thirty-five **White-faced Whistling Ducks**—an absolutely epic start to our tour! From there, we headed to a mangrove area called Salamanca Park. Here, we targeted some new birds, and we were quite successful! Right off the bat, we went for the **Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird**. This rare and poorly-known Colombian endemic is highly range-restricted, found exclusively in the mangrove forests along the northern coast. We got lucky and saw three different individuals, and towards the end of our session here, we located a female occupying a nest! Other big highlights included **Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture**, **Black-collared Hawk**, **Short-tailed Hawk**, **American Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Pied Puffbird**, **Golden-green Woodpecker**, and **Bicolored**

**Conebill!** During the heat of the day, we drove to the town of Yucal, where we transferred to 4x4 vehicles we began our climb to the world-famous Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where cooler temperatures, stunning forest and more birds await us! Following check-in, we went birding and picked up **King Vulture, Plumbeous Kite, Zone-tailed Hawk, Whooping Motmot, Black-chested Jay, Yellow-legged Thrush, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, and Crimson-backed Tanager!** Dinner and checklists!



*Northern Screamer*



*Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird on nest*



*Whooping Motmot*

### **Day 3 - Reserva Gairama -> Poco Azul, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and Mountain House**

Before breakfast, we headed down slope to kick off our birding for the day! Our goal was to arrive in time to observe the largest parrot in the country, the **Military Macaw**. Early in the morning, they depart their evening roost and fly in search of food. Our timing worked well, and our efforts yielded ten individuals flying by. We also enjoyed a great many other birds, including **White-bearded Manakin**, **Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant**, **Forest Elaenia**, **Chivi Vireo**, **Orange-crowned Oriole**, **Scaled Pigeon**, **Blue-headed Parrot**, **Black-backed Antshrike**, and epic looks at the king of all sparrows, **Golden-winged Sparrow**! Back at our lodge, we recharged with hot coffee and a delicious breakfast. After breakfast, we picked up our first Santa Marta Endemics, the Santa Marta Antbird and the **Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner**. Additional highlights included **Peregrine Falcon**, **Pale-breasted Spinetail**, **Golden-faced Tyrannulet**, **Swallow Tanager**, **Black-headed Tangert**, **Bay-headed Tanager**, **Scaled Piculet**, and a group of fifteen **Swallow-tailed Kites** moving overhead! With our luggage already in our 4x4s, we continued up-slope to our lodge for the next three nights. Birding the surroundings for the rest of the day yielded a nice mix of new species. Highlights included other endemics like the **Groove-billed Toucanet**, **Santa Marta Tapaculo**, and **Santa Marta Brushfinch**. Additional new birds included **Blue-naped Chlorophonia**, **Golden-fronted Greenlet**, **Olive-striped Sparrow**, **Red-billed Parrot**, and **Keel-billed Toucan**. Back at the lodge, we got amazing looks at another endemic: the **Santa Marta Blossomcrown**, an adorable little hummer with sunburst colors on its forecrown! Our day ended with a spectacular sunset, a delicious dinner, and a fun recap of our day via sharing highlights and going over our checklist!



*Groove-billed Toucanet*



*Bay-headed Tanager*



*Santa Marta Blossomcrown*



*Birding Sierra Nevada, Santa Marta*



*Golden-winged Sparrow*



*White-bearded Manakin*

#### **Day 4 - Cuchilla de San Lorenzo, Estación Experimental, Finca Palo Alto**

Our earliest morning yet involved a very bumpy drive up to Cerro Kennedy, where we would bird the highest slope of the mountain, home to an astonishing number of endemic species. This stretch of the mountain is called the Cuchilla de San Lorenzo, which translates to the Knife of San Lorenzo,

which describes the thin “knife blade” like ridge where we spent the morning birding. We lucked out with great weather and cleaned up on endemics. We had insanely good fortune with some of the hardest targets up there - the **Santa Marta Parakeet** and the **Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant**. Other endemics observed included **White-tailed Starfrontlet**, **Santa Marta Antpitta**, **Brown-rumped Tapaculo**, **Streak-capped Spinetail**, **Hermit Wood-Wren**, **Santa Marta Brushfinch**, **Yellow-crowned Redstart**, and **Black-cheeked Mountain Tanager**. Other fantastic non-endemics included **White-tipped Quetzal**, **Scaly-naped Amazon**, **Tyrian Metaltail** (endemic subspecies), **Chestnut-collared Swift**, **Mountain Velvetbreast**, **Band-tailed Guan**, and a brief sighting of **Band-winged Nightjar** during the drive up. On our way back down, we stopped a few more times to search for more birds. Our efforts yielded a nice mix of species including a couple of mixed flocks! Species observed included **Golden-breasted Fruiteater**, **Slaty-backed Nighthale-Thrush**, **Blue-capped Tanager**, **Brown-capped Vireo**, and the endemic **White-lored Warbler**! If you can believe it, we lunched at the lodge and headed back out for more birding after a short siesta hour. Our efforts away from the lodge yielded new species like **Coppery Emerald**, **Plain-brown Woodcreeper**, **Gray-throated Leaf-tosser**, **Long-billed Hermit**, **Montane Foliage-gleaner**, **Rufous-breasted Wren**, **White-sided Flowerpiercer**, and **Dull-colored Grassquit**. Back at the lodge for sunset, the hummingbird feeders and lovely garden produced a nice mix of hummers, including **Sparkling Violetear**, **Brown Violetear**, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **White-vented Plumeteer**, and the **Santa Marta Blossomcrown** paid us another visit just before the last light of day!



*Santa Marta Parakeet*



*White-tailed Starfrontlet*



*Birding Cuchillade San Lorenzo*



*Sunset at Mountain House*

## **Day 5 - Lower Elevation Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta**

We geared up for another fantastic day in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where we birded the roads below the lodge. Our first important stop was to a road intersection where a flowering Inga sp. The tree yielded a very special endemic hummingbird, the **Santa Marta Woodstar**! Other nice birds included the **Scarlet-fronted Parakeet**, **Masked Tityra**, **Bran-colored Flycatcher**, **Golden-bellied Flycatcher**, and **Black-chested Jay**. We birded our way to a nearby farm where we staked and waited for the warming thermals of the morning to get the raptors moving. Our efforts were rewarded with a nice mix of species, including **Broad-winged Hawk**, **Short-tailed Hawk**, **Plumbeous Kite**, and an absolutely amazing observation of juvenile **Black-and-Chestnut Eagle**, which provided a great show for all! Afterwards, we birded along the road, picking up **Yellow-backed Oriole**, **Giant Cowbird**, **White-lined Tanager**, **Crested Oropendola**, **Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush**, **Rufous-and-White Wren**, and **Yellow-bellied Elaenia**. After lunch, we took a well-deserved siesta and returned to our birding endeavors around 3 PM. We had fantastic looks at the adorable little **Rusty-breasted Antpitta**, **Sierra Nevada Brushfinch** (endemic), **Streaked Saltator**, and **Stripe-throated Hermit**, and the bird that stole our hearts was the **Rosy Thrush-Tanager**. Seeing this gorgeous bird required some patience, but we lucked out and got to see a stunning male. Then we heard the **Black-fronted Wood-Quails** calling from the nearby brush. Although we didn't get to lay eyes on them, getting to hear them was still a treat! After dinner, we grabbed our flashlights and observed not one, not three, but two different **Santa Marta Screech-Owls** vocalizing under the moonlight!



*Black-chested Jay*



*Rosy Thrush-Tanager*



*Birding at Mountain House*



*Santa Marta Woodstar*

## **Day 6 - Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta -> La Guajira**

Today we said goodbye to our mountain home and descended in 4x4's to the lowlands, where we transferred back to our bus! We stopped along a forested road to look for some fantastic birds! Although it was about 10 AM when we started, we detected a whopping 51 species in 90 minutes!

Highlights here included a nice mix of hummingbirds like the **Ruby Topaz Hummingbird**, **Black-throated Mango**, **Long-billed Starthroat**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, and **Pale-bellied Hermit** and a quick fly-by of the **White-chinned Sapphire**. Other great birds included **Lance-tailed Manakin**, **Hook-billed Kite**, **Crimson-crested Woodpecker**, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, **White-bellied Antbird**, **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, **Trinidad Euphonia**, and **Buff-breasted Wren**. We stopped in to scan a dry savannah, which yielded **Double-striped Thicknee**, tons of **Crested Caracara**, and a beautiful **Savanna Hawk** perched on a palm tree. After lunch at a delicious restaurant in the xerophytic dry forest of La Guajira, we headed out for late afternoon birding. Our session explored the saline lagoon and coastal beach flats by boat and foot. During our 3-hour session, we picked up 72 species. We encountered a great variety of migratory shorebirds and waders. Highlights from these groups include **Mangrove Rail**, **Roseate Spoonbill**, **Tricolored Heron**, **American Oystercatcher**, **Whimbrel**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Reddish Egret**, **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, and **Solitary Sandpiper**. Other great birds included **Black Skimmer**, **Pearl Kite**, **Merlin**, **Green-rumped Parrotlet**, **White-whiskered Spinetail**, **Gray Kingbird**, **Yellow Oriole**, **Northern White-fringed Antwren** and **Glaucous Tanager**.



*Mangrove Rail*



© Benny Jacobs Schwartz

*Northern White-fringed Antwren*



*Birding coastal beach flats*



*Boat trip*

## **Day 7 - Centuario de las Flora y Fauna los Flamencos**

Today was our last day of birding, so we had to make it count! We kicked off at 6 AM birding the dry forest of La Guajira in a reserve called Centuario de la Flora y Fauna los Flamencos, where we got a fantastic mix of new birds! Highlights included **Rufous-vented Chachalaca**, **Crested Bobwhite**, **Black-backed Antshrike**, **Red-billed Scythebill**, **Yellow-hooded Blackbird**, and the star of the region, the **Tocuyuo Sparrow**, a regional endemic! Afterwards, we made a quick stop to photograph stunners like **Orinocan Saltator**, **Scaled Dove**, and the star of the show, the **Vermilion Cardinal**, AKA “El Rey de la Guajira” which translates to the King of the Guajira. We continued to a new area, and along the way, we picked up a big surprise, the **Whistling Heron**. While we were picking our jaws up off the floor, we had a **Wood Stork** flyover! Another new trip bird! We transferred into a couple of smaller cars to visit a hyper-saline lagoon where thousands of **American Flamingos** greeted us. We enjoyed a breathtaking flyby of about sixty individuals, which was more than we could have ever asked for! We continued scanning the area and picked up a lone **Scarlet Ibis**! We saw the bird fly back into the shade of the mangroves, and with a desire to get a better look, we moved in that general direction. We slowly made our way over and made sure not to alter the bird's behavior in any way as we got into a closer position for some photos and closer observation. On the way back, we picked out the noticeably stouter bill of a **Wilson's Plover**, a great highlight! Here we also got great looks of **Gray Kingbird**, **Cattle Tyrant**, and **Vermilion Flycatcher**! What a great session! With a bit more time left on the clock, we hustled back in the cars and returned to the Boca de los Camarones. We scanned this lagoon for a rare gull that has been continuing in the area for some time. During our first scan with the scope, we didn't find the bird. However, when a group of terns and gulls flushed up by a nearby boat, we snapped some pictures of them in flight, with the hopes of reviewing the photo to look for field marks of the bird in question. A classic technique called “spray and pray”. With our lunch ready, we chowed down, repacked our bags, and drove to the airport. At the airport, while waiting for our flight, we looked through the images, and our hard work and dedication paid off! The slender, red beak and crisp gray line of the gull's hood revealed that we had in fact refound the **Gray-hooded Gull**! This was our last new bird for the trip, bringing our tour total to a whopping **337 species**! We spent the night in Bogota and said goodbye to folks

who would not be continuing on to the next portion of the Colombia tour!



*Wilson's Plover*



*Scarlet Ibis*



*American Flamingos*



*Orinocan Saltator*



*Vermilion Cardinal*



*Birding Los Flamencos*



*Coffee break La Guajira*



*Birding Los Flamencos, Colombia*

## **Day 8 - Trip wrap and departures!**

Rest day for those continuing on to the Colombia Birding Tour and goodbyes to folks not joining for the second portion!



*Our group, 2025*

[Colombia: Santa Marta eBird list \(Apr 3 - 10, 2025\)](#)