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## BIRDING TOURS COLOMBIA



**7 nights / 8 days tour**

### **SANTA MARTA MOUNTAINS & LA GUAJIRA PENINSULA**

**Join us for an unparalleled birding expedition to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the world's highest coastal mountain massif. This evolutionary island of endemism hosts an extraordinary concentration of endemic and specialty bird species. We will traverse the full altitudinal spectrum, reaching the San Lorenzo Ridge to bird the lush forests before exploring the arid scrublands and vital coastal wetlands of La Guajira Peninsula.**

This expedition is one of our most popular Colombia birding holidays for targeting a high concentration of endemics. Embark on an intensive 8-day / 7-night excursion to target the endemic, near-endemic, and specialty birds of the legendary Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, its surrounding Caribbean foothills, and the remote, semi-arid La Guajira peninsula.

The world-renowned Santa Marta Mountains represent an isolated "evolutionary island," hosting an unrivaled concentration of endemic species found nowhere else on Earth. Furthermore, this unique area is home to a multitude of highly sought-after near-endemics and distinct geographical subspecies, crucial for any comprehensive Neotropical list.

Strategically covering the high forests and lower foothills ensures maximum altitudinal coverage and exposure to the region's full avian spectrum. Beyond the mountain range, this itinerary meticulously explores the scrubland and xerophytic habitats of La Guajira for a key suite of arid-zone near-endemics—species shared with Venezuela but extremely challenging to observe elsewhere, offering a rare birding triumph.

Our team consists of expert birding guides in Colombia whose daily routine involves navigating these unique forests and wetlands. This intimate, year-round knowledge of

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bird movements and micro-habitats guarantees optimal positioning and significantly maximizes your sighting success.

Accommodation will be a blend of comfortable mountain lodges and functional, well-located lodging in Camarones. We prioritize your comfort and ensure a safe, relaxing experience.

Be prepared for challenging, yet rewarding, mountain tracks as we pursue our targets. The entire experience is complemented by exquisite, locally-sourced cuisine, including the freshest seafood, ensuring your journey is one of truly unforgettable birding in a destination of peerless natural wealth.

### **DETAILED ITINERARY:**

#### **Day 1: Arrival to Barranquilla.**

Your tour begins with your afternoon or evening flight into Barranquilla. Our representative will personally greet you at the airport and provide a comfortable, private transfer to your city hotel. We will then host a welcoming dinner, giving you a chance to settle in and rest before the adventure begins.

#### **Day 2: From Barranquilla to Minca, birding Kilometer 4, the Hummingbird Trail & Isla de Salamanca National Park.**

Start your day with an early breakfast before departing for Santa Marta and Minca. We'll begin birding en route at the Malecón of the Magdalena River to search for the sought-after **Northern Screamer**.

Our journey continues to Kilometer 4, the Hummingbird Trail and Isla de Salamanca National Park to target key endemics, including the **Chestnut-winged Chachalaca**, **Sapphire-bellied Hummingbird**, and **Turquoise-winged Parrotlet**.

A leisurely walk along the mangrove boardwalk might yield exciting species such as the **Bronze-brown Cowbird**, **Golden-green Woodpecker**, **Bicolored Conebill**, **Slender-billed Tyrannulet**, **Northern Scrub-flycatcher**, **Panama Flycatcher**, **Stripe-backed Heron**, and the uncommon **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron**, among others. We then continue north for an overnight stay at a comfortable lodge in Minca.



**Left:** Northern Screamer. **Right:** Northern Scrub-Flycatcher.

**Other cool birds:** Dwarf Cuckoo, Pied Puffbird, Stripe-backed Wren, Orange-crowned Oriole, Rufescent Tiger-heron, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Striated Heron, Cocoli Heron, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Purple Gallinule, Magnificent Frigatebird, Wood Stork, King Vulture, Hook-billed Kite, Snail Kite, Gray-lined Hawk, Common Black-hawk, one or more species of kingfishers – Ringed, Amazon, Green & American Pygmy Kingfisher.

### **Day 3: Birding the foothills & middle altitudes in the Santa Marta Mountains.**

Today is a critical day for our endemic target species. We will spend the morning birding strategically along the scenic route from Minca as we ascend to the Mountain House Lodge. This dedicated drive takes us from the warm foothills (700m/2,300ft) to the cooler intermediate elevations (2,000m/6,560ft). This is the first of two crucial sessions specifically designed to secure sightings of the highly sought-after low- and medium-elevation endemics of the Sierra Nevada.

We'll begin the day with an early breakfast at our Hotel in Minca, where the dining deck transforms into a spectacular live show! You can relax and enjoy the sight of numerous hummingbirds zipping to nicely placed feeders, including the White-vented Plumeleteer, Black-throated Mango, the dazzling Steely-vented & Red-billed Hummingbird, the striking White-necked Jacobin, and the gorgeous Crowned Woodnymph, among many others. Just as exciting will be the birds visiting the fruit feeders, offering prime views of species like the distinctive **Orange-crowned Oriole** and the vibrant **Crimson-backed Tanager**.

As we ascend the mountain, we will make multiple strategic birding stops along the road, allowing us to simultaneously enjoy the spectacular mountain scenery and the avian activity.

The main targets for this crucial morning include a host of exclusive endemics: the **Santa Marta Antbird**, **Santa Marta Tapaculo**, **Santa Marta Blossomcrown**, **Santa**

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**Marta Foliage-gleaner, White-lored Warbler, Santa Marta Woodstar**, and both the **Santa Marta Brushfinch** and **Sierra Nevada Brushfinch**. Regrettably, the recently rediscovered Santa Marta Sabrewing is rarely observed on the mountain's Western slope.

In addition to the endemic targets, three captivating near-endemics will be a high priority for the day: the small **Coppery & Red-billed Emerald**, and the distinctive **Golden-winged Sparrow**.

After lunch, we'll shift our focus to the immediate area, enjoying the feeders and diverse gardens near the lodge. The Mountain House gardens act as a vibrant magnet, drawing an array of specialty species right to our doorstep.

Here, you'll have the fantastic opportunity to enjoy close-up views of top targets, including the endemic **Santa Marta Blossomcrown (E)** and **Sierra Nevada Brushfinch (E)**.

Other colorful visitors frequently sighted are the Red-billed Parrot, Black-chested Jay, majestic Crested Oropendola, Black-headed Tanager, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Blue-capped and Black-capped Tanager, the distinct Gray-breasted (Bang's) Wood-Wren, Bay-headed Tanager, Rusty Flowerpiercer, and the beautiful Blue-naped Chlorophonia, among many others.

A dedicated look at the feeders will also reveal stunning hummingbirds such as the **Lazuline Sabrewing**, Crowned Woodnymph, Sparkling and Lesser Violetear, Steely-vented Hummingbird, and Brown Violetear.



Left: Endemic **Santa Marta Blossomcrown**. Right: Endemic **White-lored Warbler**.

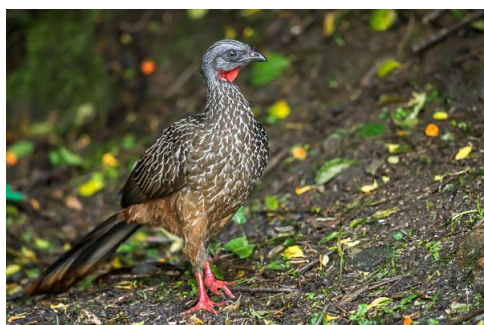


**Left:** Endemic **Santa Marta Tapaculo**. **Right:** Endemic **White-tailed Starfrontlet**.

We also hope to encounter a thrilling array of specialty species while birding near the lodge. Our primary targets include the imposing Band-tailed Guan and Crested Guan, the elusive but beautiful Rosy Thrush-tanager, the graceful Sooty-capped Hermit, and the vulnerable Military Macaw (VU).

Furthermore, we will search for three key variant subspecies essential for any comprehensive Neotropical list:

- **Yellow-billed Toucanet** (considered a variant of the Groove-billed Toucanet);
- **Santa Marta Toucanet** (the distinct *lautus* variant of the Southern Emerald Toucanet);
- **Santa Marta Tyrannulet** (*Zimmerius chrysops minimus*), also known as Coopman's Tyrannulet;
- The rare **Fulvous-headed Tanager**.

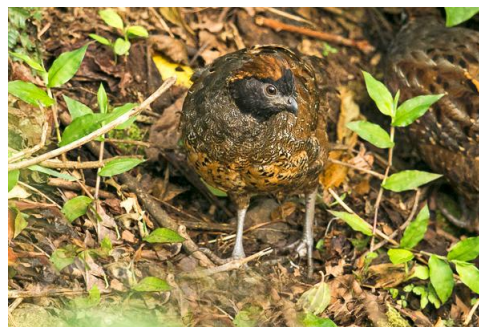


**Left:** Band-tailed Guan. **Right:** Southern Emerald (Santa Marta) Toucanet.

After dinner, the adventure continues! We will embark on a focused night search for the recently described (2018) **Santa Marta Screech-Owl**. This fascinating bird is a newly recognized endemic, yet an ancient inhabitant of these very forests.

Other cool birds: Swallow Tanager, Rufous-capped Warbler, Golden-crowned Warbler, Spectacled, Mottled & Black-and-white Owl, Pale-bellied & Long-billed Hermit, Gartered & Masked Trogon, Whooping Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Moustached Puffbird, Collared Aracari, Scaled Piculet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Ochre-bellied & Sepia-capped Flycatcher, Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Black-crowned & Masked Tityra, White-winged Becard, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Band-backed Wren, Bicolored Wren, Rufous-breasted Wren, Rufous-and-white Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush, Yellow-legged Thrush, Pale-breasted Thrush, White-lined Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Buff-throated Saltator, Thick-billed Seed-finch, Dull-colored & Sooty Grassquit, among many others.





**Left:** Endemic Santa Marta Brushfinch. **Right:** Near-endemic Black-fronted Wood-Quail (VU).

#### **Day 4: San Lorenzo Ridge birding (High-Altitude Endemics).**

We begin with an early departure from the lodge, driving directly to the highest point on the tour: the magnificent Cuchilla de San Lorenzo ridge. This is a crucial morning for high-elevation endemics. To maximize our birding time, we'll enjoy both breakfast and lunch served in the field. After a full day of high-altitude birding, we'll return to the lodge for dinner. If the target was missed the previous night, we will conduct a second night walk in search of the endemic **Santa Marta Screech-Owl**.

#### **Day Targets: The High-Elevation Endemic Quest**

This day at the highest elevations is strategically dedicated to securing a significant number of the Sierra Nevada's most restricted and highly sought-after endemic species.

#### **Santa Marta endemics:**

- Santa Marta Parakeet.
- Santa Marta Antpitta (VU) and Sierra Nevada Antpitta.
- Santa Marta Warbler (VU).
- Santa Marta Bush-tyrant (EN).
- Black-backed Thornbill.
- Rusty-headed Spinetail (VU).
- Black-cheeked Mountain-tanager.
- Brown-rumped Tapaculo.
- Hermit Wood-wren.
- Yellow-crowned Redstart.
- Santa-Marta Brushfinch.

**Key Near-Endemics:** In addition, we will actively pursue these striking near-endemics, often found in these specific high-altitude habitats.

- White-tipped Quetzal.
- Streak-capped Spinetail.
- Rufous-browed Conebill.



**Above:** Endemic **Santa Marta Parakeet**, photographed at Cuchilla de San Lorenzo.



**Left:** Endemic **Santa Marta Warbler** (VU). **Right:** Endemic **Santa Marta Bush-tyrant** (EN).

**Other cool birds:** Tyrian Metaltail (*Metallura tyrianthina disctricta*), Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager (*Dubusia taeniata carrikeri*), Black Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa humeralis nocticolor*), Barred Parakeet, Scaly-naped Parrot, Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, Lined Quail-Dove, Flammulated Treehunter, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Black-banded Woodcreeper, White-throated Tyrannulet, Black-throated Pygmy-Tyrant, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Blue-capped Tanager, Plushcap, Band-tailed Seed eater, Paramo Seed eater, Golden-bellied Grossbeak and Andean Siskin.



**Left:** Endemic **Black-cheeked Mountain-tanager**. **Right:** Endemic **Yellow-crowned Redstart**.

In these high-altitude environments, we also hold the thrilling potential to witness some of the most magnificent raptors: the majestic Andean Condor, the powerful Black-and-Chestnut Eagle, and the elusive Solitary Eagle.

**Day 5: Birding intermediate altitudes above & below Mountain House.**

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Today, we will execute a strategic final push, specifically designed to locate any remaining target species that may have eluded us and to secure better, more prolonged views of the most coveted endemics. Rest assured, with our presence in one of the most bird-rich localities on the planet, there will be absolutely no scarcity of spectacular forest birds to pursue.



**Left:** White-tipped Quetzal (NE). **Right:** Lined Quail-dove.

We will dedicate the morning to seeking out the more challenging and elusive species in the forests immediately above and below the lodge. Our key targets could likely include the secretive **Black-fronted Wood-Quail** (NE & VU), the endemic **Sierra Nevada Brushfinch**, and the stunning **White-tipped Quetzal**.

We will also focus on locating the Rusty-breasted Antpitta, the shy Gray-throated Leaf-tosser, and the vibrant Crimson-crested Woodpecker. Completing this list are the uncommon White-necked Thrush, the spectacular Golden-breasted Fruiteater, both the Cinereous and Black-and-white Becard, and the elegant Lined Quail-Dove.



**Left:** Lazuline Sabrewing. **Right:** Crowned Woodnymph.





**Left:** Golden-bellied Flycatcher. **Right:** Blue-naped Chlorophonia.

Beyond the main targets, the area is rich with additional delights. We also anticipate great sightings of the charming Spectacled Tyrannulet, the iconic Keel-billed Toucan, the elusive Montane Foliage-Gleaner, and the near-endemic Streak-capped Spinetail (NE).

Other beautiful forest birds expected include the Golden-bellied Flycatcher, the secretive Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush, and the thrushes: Pale-eyed, Yellow-legged and Black-hooded Thrush, among many other specialties of the region.

### **Day 6: Descending the Mountain to the Caribbean Coast.**

We dedicate the morning to final birding as we descend the Santa Marta Mountains, working our way from the lodge down to Minca. This final session allows us to target any lower-elevation species we may have missed earlier in the tour. In the afternoon, we will transfer to the coastal town of Camarones on the La Guajira Peninsula, preparing to explore a dramatically different, arid ecosystem on Day 7.



**Left:** Near-endemic Streak-capped Spinetail. **Right:** Endemic Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner.

After lunch, we begin our scenic drive north along the Caribbean coast and into the unique La Guajira Peninsula, arriving at the town of Camarones by the end of the day. Our base for exploring this distinct arid environment will be El Remanso del Santuario, a charming, small lodge situated right within the boundaries of the renowned Los Flamencos Wildlife Sanctuary.

### **Day 7: Arid-Zone Birding in La Guajira**

Today is completely dedicated to exploring the unique scrublands and vital marshes of the La Guajira Peninsula. This arid ecosystem presents a dramatic contrast to the Sierra Nevada, offering a final opportunity to find a crucial suite of specialty and near-endemic

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birds adapted to this dry, coastal environment. We will meticulously work the habitats around the Los Flamencos Sanctuary to secure our targets.

Los Flamencos Wildlife Sanctuary is a nationally protected area situated entirely within the ancestral Wayú indigenous territory. While the sanctuary features an expansive wetland system rich in aquatic and riparian birds, our primary focus will be on the arid scrublands.

This unique, dry habitat is where the peninsula's most sought-after and biologically fascinating bird species reside.

As is essential in desert environments, we will make a very early start today to maximize our crucial birding hours before the intense sun takes hold. Our priorities will center on locating species that are geographically isolated to this dry peninsula—many of them near-endemics shared only with neighboring Venezuela. Successfully locating this specialized suite of birds is a major objective of the La Guajira section of our tour.

It is remarkable just how bird-rich these seemingly dry forests are, flourishing despite limited precipitation. The combination of abundant sunlight and relatively open views, even within the thickets and shrubs, will provide for exceptional birding and fantastic opportunities for clean photographic shots. This itinerary is also ideal for Colombia bird photography tours.

### **Top-Priority Near-Endemics**

Our primary focus will be on these highly-sought near-endemics, many shared only with Venezuela:

- White-whiskered Spinetail
- Buffy Hummingbird
- Chestnut Piculet
- Slender-billed Tyrannulet
- Vermilion Cardinal
- Orinoco Saltator
- Black-backed Antshrike
- Tocuyo Sparrow

### **We will also search for:**

- **Hummingbirds & Emeralds:** Red-billed Emerald, Shining-green & Ruby-topaz Hummingbird.
- **Parrots & Parakeets:** Green-rumped Parrotlet, Blue-crowned Parakeet, and Brown-throated Parakeet.
- **Flycatchers & Antbirds:** Pale-tipped Inezia, Venezuelan Flycatcher, Black-crested Antshrike, and Northern White-fringed Antwren.

- **Tanagers & Finches:** Glaucous Tanager, Yellow Oriole, Trinidad Euphonia, Pileated Finch, Lesson's Seedeater, and Black-faced Grassquit, among many others that inhabit this vibrant coastal ecosystem.



**Left:** Female **Vermilion Cardinal** (NE & VU). **Right:** Male **Black-crested Antshrike**.



**Left:** Female **Black-crested Antshrike**. **Right:** Male **Vermilion Cardinal** (NE & VU).

Completing our expected sightings are several additional raptors: the impressive Crane Hawk, Savanna Hawk, Black-collared Hawk, Harris's Hawk, and the White-tailed Hawk.

In the lower vegetation, we anticipate the Common Ground-dove, Plain-breasted Ground-dove, and Scaled Dove. Also, the Buff-breasted Wren, Southern House Wren, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Tropical Gnatcatcher, and the vibrant Venezuelan Troupial.

(We may also encounter the very common House Sparrow.)



**Left:** Near-endemic **Slender-billed Tyrannulet** (*Inezia tenuirostris*).

**Right:** **Green-rumped Parrotlet** (*Forpus passerinus*).

The coastline and marshes are exceptionally rich in diversity, hosting numerous resident and migrant shorebirds arriving from the North. During our time here, we anticipate spectacular sightings of the Magnificent Frigatebird, the vibrant Tricolored Heron, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, and Great Egret. We will also look for both the Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Heron, along with the striking Capped Heron.

Our list of terrestrial shorebirds includes the elusive Wilson's Plover and Collared Plover, among many other species. Furthermore, along the interior shoreline, we expect to locate the distinctive Double-striped Thick-Knee, often seen in pairs or small family groups.



**Left:** The **Reddish Egret** (NT) at Camarones: this amazing egret jumps and dances while hunting for fish. A joy to see!

**Right:** American Flamingo: both resident and migrant populations are to be found in the Colombian Caribbean. This image taken at Punta Gallinas, the most northern geographic feature of the Guajira Peninsula and the South American continent.

Starting in late September and continuing through March/April, the coastal region becomes a vital stopover for a great variety of North American migrants. This influx enriches our sightings with species like the Great Blue Heron and Osprey, along with numerous shorebirds including the Marbled Godwit, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, and a diverse selection of plovers: American Golden Plover, Gray (Black-bellied) Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, and Snowy Plover, among many other seasonal visitors.



The protected marshes are home to an array of spectacular resident aquatic birds. We anticipate breathtaking views of the gorgeous American Flamingo, the attractive Reddish Egret (NT) (seen in both its striking white and dark morphs), the vibrant Scarlet Ibis, White Ibis, and the elegant Roseate Spoonbill. Completing this impressive list are the slender Black-necked Stilt, the distinctive American Oystercatcher, and the stately Wood Stork.

### **Day 8: Final Birding and Departure.**

We dedicate our final morning to a successful farewell birding session within Los Flamencos Wildlife Sanctuary, maximizing our last hours in this unique ecosystem. Following a final brunch, we will take a comfortable 30-minute transfer to Riohacha Airport for our domestic flight to Bogotá. From Bogotá, you can seamlessly connect with your outbound international flight either this evening or the following day, officially concluding your unparalleled Colombian birding expedition.

### **Important Flight Note:**

Participants should arrange their domestic flight departure from Riohacha (RCH) for **no earlier than 1:00 PM (local time)**.

**TOUR SIZE:** Minimum 4, Maximum 8 Participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** José Luna, José Castaño, or Daniel Uribe (Expert Colombian Birding Guides)

**Standard Rate:** US \$3,850 per person. Applicable for a group size of 4 – 8 participants.

**Single Supplement:** US \$275. Covers single occupancy for all 7 nights of the tour.

### **Price Includes:**

Your tour price is **all-inclusive** of the following:

- **Accommodation & Transport:** Lodging for all 7 nights and all necessary ground transportation.
- **Meals:** All meals as specified in the itinerary (from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on the final day of the tour).
- **Fees & Gratuities:** Entrance fees to all National Parks and private reserves, along with all tips for guides, drivers, and lodge staff.
- **Guidance:** Expert, professional birding guidance throughout the tour.
- **Hydration:** Daily complimentary water intake.

### **Price Does Not Include:**

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The tour price excludes the following:

- **Flights:** International flights and domestic flight tickets (Riohacha to Bogotá) are not included.
- **Beverages:** Alcoholic drinks or beverages beyond those served with included meals.
- **Personal Expenses:** Laundry services, souvenirs, travel insurance, and other items of a personal nature.

### **Extension Opportunity: The Remote Perijá Mountains.**

We highly recommend extending your trip by three (3) additional days to bird the remote Perijá Mountains, located above the city of Valledupar (a comfortable 4-hour drive from Camarones). This is a crucial opportunity to secure sightings in a distinct, high-altitude massif.

#### **Exclusive Extension Targets: The Perijá Endemics**

This extension is dedicated to finding a unique suite of birds restricted to this mountain range and shared only with Venezuela. Our key targets include the following near-endemic species:

- Perijá Starfrontlet (*Coeligena consita*).
- Perijá Metaltail (*Metallura iracunda*).
- Perijá Thistletail (*Asthenes perijana*).
- Perijá Tapaculo (*Scytalopus perijanus*).
- Perijá (Phelps') Brushfinch (*Arremon perijanus*).
- Perijá Antpitta (*Grallaria saltuensis*).

We will also specifically search for the unique subspecies Yellow-breasted Brushfinch (*Atlapetes latinuchus nigrifrons*), also known as Black-fronted Brushfinch, which might become a full, valid species in the near future.

#### **Perijá Extension Pricing**

The additional cost for this exclusive 3-day extension is structured as follows:

<b>Extension Rate</b>	US \$1,750 per person Applicable for a group of four (4) to eight (8) participants (based on twin accommodation).
<b>Single Supplement</b>	US \$150. Covers single occupancy for all three (3) nights of the extension.

## Booking, Payment, and Policies

### I. Booking and Deposit

To secure your place on the tour, please adhere to the following payment schedule:

- **Deposit:** A 50% deposit is required six (6) months prior to the tour's start date.
- **Final Payment:** The remaining 50% balance is due ninety (90) days before the first day of the tour.

### II. Payment Method

- **Payment:** Payment must be made by wire transfer to our bank account in Colombia (Bancolombia).
- **Instructions:** A detailed instruction sheet for the wire transfer will be emailed to you. This procedure is generally considered fast and easy.

### III. Cancellation Policy

Please note our policy regarding cancellations:

- **Cancellation 90 days or More Prior:** We will refund your payment minus a cancellation fee of US\$500 per person.
- **Cancellation Fewer than 90 days Prior:** No refund will be available.
- **Refund Responsibility:** Refunds may be affected by fluctuations in foreign currency exchange rates. The client will be solely responsible for any bank surcharges, fees, or costs imposed by banks or money exchange procedures associated with the refund.

### IV. Important Note on Itinerary (Flexibility)

Birding Tours Colombia will make every effort to adhere to the specified itinerary, sites, and attractions. However, please be advised:

- **Right to Vary:** Birding Tours Colombia reserves the right to introduce necessary variations to the itinerary, services (including lodges, restaurants, and guides), and sites at short notice due to unpredictable or unforeseen events.
- **Quality Guarantee:** In all cases, we guarantee that we will preserve the core attractions and activities as much as possible, and special efforts will be made to maintain the same high quality and characteristics that have been offered.

Abbreviations used:

E = Endemic

NE = Near Endemic

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NT = Near Threatened  
VU = Vulnerable  
EN = Endangered  
CR = Critically Endangered

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