

TRIP REPORT: COLOMBIA CLEAN UP AUGUST 2019

URABA, ANTIOQUIA AND INIRIDA



Dates: August 10th to August to 23rd August 2019

Participants:

Jules Eden – Lifelong birder jules@e-med.co.uk

Tom Eden [son] – non-birder, sports nut and studying Spanish at University.

Arrangements:

Manakin Tours

Cost:

A lot. POA

Why Colombia?

This was my fourth tour to Colombia within the last 18 months. The previous 3 trips were to all the usual places –[Mitu, Magdalena Valley, Cauca Valley, Santa Marta and the Bogota area] but this trip was designed to pick off most of the remaining endemics, whilst also going somewhere my son could not only speak Spanish but also find something interesting to do whilst I was out birding all day. As this was a Dad/Lad bonding session there had to be evening entertainment as well. I could not just slope off to bed after dinner as per usual bird tours as he would have thought me totally old and useless.

Our guide Alejandro Pinto [Ale] is a young Colombian that I have birded with before and the repeat business was because I thought he and Tom would get along well. He also has a lot of experience in Inirida which was to be the high point of the tour. He also has a great sense of humour, good eyes and tolerates all of my failings when birding.

August 10 -Medellin

Arrival day. Ale was meeting us at 7pm at the hotel, but my flight got me there at 9am. Tom had arrived safely on a bus from Santa Marta an hour before me.

The time was well spent on a tour to all things Escobar in Medellin. The culmination of the day was a meeting with his remaining family at their apartment downtown. We were allowed an hours Q and A with them with no questions "off-limits".

No – Pablo did not have a favourite bird nor possess binoculars.

No – he had no opinion on Mrs Thatcher or David Attenborough.

Yes –he was aware that the terror he caused in the jungles did put off the illegal loggers and hence kept many species hidden but alive.

August 11 Medellin to Apartado

A short flight to Apartado in Uraba province. This is the gateway to the world's most range restricted puffbird.

We were met by our local guide William from Uraba Nature Tours, dressed in full camo including a large patch on his shoulder with his blood group stencilled on it. Clearly a tough part of the world to bird.

Most reports have birders going to Turbo where there is a ferry to Bocas del Atrato, but we went a different way. 20 minutes from the airport is a small village by a river. From here we took a boat directly to Bocas, a longer boat ride but much less time in a car. After one hour on the water we swung into Bocas to pick up a local farmer called Nelson. He has a patch of forest 10 minutes back downstream with some good trees still left.

Within 3 minutes of disembarkation through 2 foot deep mud, Ale had the **SOOTY-CAPPED PUFFBIRD**. *[new species to me in capitals]*



Sooty-capped Puffbird

That's the way to start a tour.

We picked up a second one quickly and even Tom was impressed to hear that he had seen a species that 99% of birders have never seen.

The boat back and a short drive took us to Carepa where we checked into the hotel. We left Tom there after lunch as we headed off to some forest by a river on a ranch near Chigorodo, about an hour away.

This was William's spot for DUSKY-BACKED JACAMAR. 3 turned up and even did that jacamar thing where they perch in a line and moves their head in synchronicity. Very sweet. You can see why the world loves a jacamar.



Dusky-backed Jacamar

EVENING – I could not figure out why the locals in the bar opposite the hotel kept making bird-flying-shapes with their hands at me. Tom’s Spanish did not go that far either. Later we found the answer. Over 3 thousand Gray-breasted Martins have made the phone wires at the end of the road their evening roost. A spectacular sight – until you have to walk under them to the local Pool Hall to get drubbed by the boy. A least he took more guano than I did on the walk back. There is a God.



Don't look up with your mouth open.

August 12 – Carepa

The first full day birding. We drove an hour plus to some roadside forest where we parked up at Mutata and the sight of William in his combat fatigues clearly concerned the local kids waiting for the school bus. We hit on Choco Toucan, Rufous-winged and Golden-hooded tanagers, Purple Honeycreeper, Black-capped pygmy-tyrant and a White-tailed Trogon before the main event came along. 3 BAUDO OROPENDOLAS. In the scope and in the bag. We had to push on out especially as the kids were now used to us and asking for cigarettes. Cheeky.

We drove another hour and walked across farmland to get to a thinly forested trail called La Bonga, where they probably do the Conga.

This was still quite birdy despite the time but our big target, the Stripe-throated Wren was poorly behaved. It replied to tape but just stuck itself into the vine tangle and seemed to work backwards from there. A big miss. There is a perfect forest pool at the bottom of the trail where we lunched on pork fat encased in sticky rice. I gave mine to a passing farmers dog. He had come from a finca, a long walk up the other side of the valley where the Rufous-crowned Pittasoma had been seen. Sadly we had no time to try for this bird. The walk back threw us an unexpected THICK-BILLED SEEDFINCH as well as the discovery of William's main passion. He would disappear into the forest and come out clutching something in his hand. "Guess what I have?". "Spider" is my usual reply in these situations – but he would open his hand and proudly grin. "Mud" seemed to be the answer – but then a bright red frog would hop out – "Uraba Poisonous Frog".

He explained that he was not dead because he had specialist frog training.

At least we knew what to transfuse him with in case he picked up a more lethal species. We got back to the car just as the rains came.



Uraba Poisonous Frog

OTHER BIRDS OF NOTE [OBONs]- Chestnut-fronted macaw, Tawny-crested tanager, Collared forest-falcon, Red-rumped woodpecker, Golden-collared

manakin, Chestnut-backed antbird, Stripe-throated and White-whiskered hermits and a showy Bay Wren. [A shame its habits are not passed on to its Stripe-throated cousins.] Ochre-bellied flycatcher, Variable Seedeater.

EVENING – Tom has spent the day with William's son up on a beach north of Turbo. It looked fairly desolate but at least he had spoken Spanish.

A surprisingly good pizza was followed by guano-dodging before letting the boy beat me 5-0 at pool.

HOTEL – Cedros Plaza, Carepa. Wifi 5/5 – works even in the 3rd floor rooms. Fridges and A/C. Ask for a room with a balcony as it's good to dry clothes.

Bar over the road. 1 litre bottles of Aquila for \$6000, about £1.50

AUGUST 13 – Carepa to Anori

We had the morning to bird the Guineo Trail west of Carepa before we had to fly back to Medellin.

To say this was my worst mornings birding would be a lie.

It was my second worst.

2 thunder storms, fork lightning hitting the ridge near us, charged by 3 mad cows requiring a leaping dive into the bushes off the trail to avoid a gorging and another bloody poisonous frog leaping at me from Williams clutches, my day book soaked and ruined-as well as my cigarettes. All this bracketed a 5 minute clear rain free window. We did get **BLACK OROPENDOLA**. Several in fact, the other side of the valley, all the features seen easily in the scope.

Though seen on my last trip – this is a good spot for **CHESTNUT-WINGED CHACHALACA**. We had 3 at least, seen close and at a good time of day. The only other spot for these is a University Car Park in Barranquilla at some un-Godly time of the morning, where you only get a glimpse if you are lucky. This is much better and a must for all the "Chachy-fans" that lurk out there.

The storms had cleared by the time our flight departed for Medellin. From the city's local airport we met Johan our driver for the next 7 days and set to arrive at the Chestnut-Capped Piha Reserve near Anori in Antioquia. A 6 hour drive.

AUGUST 14 – Chestnut-Capped Piha ProAves Reserve [CCPR]



Dining area

This is a classic ProAves Reserve. A remote setting, run by a husband and wife team- Jose and Noreli with several brightly coloured rooms and no phone signal.

Tom slept in having been well beaten at backgammon after our late dinner last night. We left at 6am after breakfast for the uphill hike to the ridge where the piha likes to hang out.

Johan the Driver tagged along too so we had 3 pairs of eyes and mine for the day. Jose takes the lead here.

20m minutes in we hit a mixed flock that included SCARLET AND WHITE TANAGER at point blank range. RED-BELLIED GRACKLE soon followed with a SOOTY-HEADED WREN as well coming to the call. All this before my first need for a rest. It is about a slow 2 hours walk uphill to the ridge. A beautiful waterfall was a scenic rest stop and WESTERN WOODHAUNTER broke the silence near the top. We had arrived at the top by 9ish. Now to business. This piha is the world's most range restricted cotinga. And seen by few as this

reserve is not on the natural route on a classic Colombian bird tour. The plan of attack was to go back and forth along the high point of the ridge and wait for a call.

Ale got the first glimpse, played the tape. It came in closer, and with a large amount of luck I nailed it through a perfect woody window about 20 metres away. And such was the light that you could actually see the brownish cap. CHESTNUT-CAPPED PIHA. Yihah.

The rest of the targets were farther back down the slope so we had time to chill at the top as it was the best place for lunch.

Jose went off and came back with a clenched muddy fist. “Guess....”

“Poisonous Frog” we replied before he could finish. Another red one. It posed on a mossy log very nicely.

Lunch was brought all the way up to us by the lodge. An incredible service, especially as they also woke Tom up and made him hike to the top as well.

He arrived exhausted as the quick “Meals-on-Legs” route is a near vertical climb for 30 minutes. After our chicken pasta Tom was a bit dismayed to hear we were just walking back down. I think he expected some zip-lining or bungee jumping here at the top. Such is youth.



Lunch atop the mountain

We played a few targets on the slow walk down, and CHESTNUT-CROWNED GNATEATER duly appeared. This was one of my “must-sees” so celebratory dances and fives all round. After the waterfall we got onto a WHITE-CROWNED TAPACULO though the naked eye views were the best as it moved quickly through the mossy undergrowth and was nigh impossible to get the binoculars on. We finished the trail with a COLLARED TROGON, observing the First Rule of Trogons*

OBONs – Beryl-spangled, Golden and Speckled Tanagers. Uniform Antshrike, Yellow-throated Bush-Tanager. Lineated and Buff-fronted Foliage-Gleaners, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. Black and Gold Tanager. Andean Motmot, Moustached Puffbird, Parkers Antbird. We saw Russet-crowned Crake in a grassy bog 5 minutes drive from the lodge.

There are good hummer feeders at the lodge as well as a fruit feeder that brought in 12 species:

Colombian Chachalaca, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Andean Emerald, Crowned Woodnymph, Brown Violetear, Purple-throated Woodstar, Green-crowned Brilliant, White-necked Jacobin, Black-winged Saltator, Red-headed Barbet, Bay-headed Tanager, Black-capped Tanager and Orange-breasted Euphonia.

*First Rule of Trogons – they will always have their back to you.

EVENING – with the Second Ashes test and the Chelsea vs Liverpool Supercup on and no wi-fi or phone reception Tom was a little tetchy. Daddy wins the backgammon again.

CCPR TIPS – there is no wi-fi here and patchy phone reception at best. Rooms have A/C but it is not really needed as it is quite cool here. There is no alcohol available at the lodge so bring your own, and they let you store it in their fridge. Laundry is possible here as they have just bought a tumble dryer. Food is excellent and coffee available all day.



Purple-throated Woodstar on the feeders.

AUGUST 15 – CCPR to Rio Claro

Ale had a secret spot 20 minutes down the road for another target endemic. We planned a 2 hour window to get it and briefed Tom we would be back and leave after lunch for Rio Claro. But when things go to plan, they really do sometimes. We got MAGDALENA ANTBIRD within 30 seconds of arrival at some roadside bushes, so were able to get back to the CCPR lodge, wake the lad and head out of Dodge much earlier.

It is a 5 hour drive to Rio Claro, but Johan shaved an hour off this thanks to his tailgating and good use of the horn. To Tom's delight Ale was happy to let him use his phone to get news of England in the Ashes series. We should really have bought a SIM card at the airport on arrival.

Rio Claro means Clear River – obviously. And the hotel there makes use of this with tubing, kayaking, spelunking or just jumping in it. Tom headed off to do one of these, but we drove farther down the road, past the cement factory to another bird site – the Condor Caves. Ale had seen our next target there 2 years previously, so we hoped it had not moved from that spot in the last 24 months!

It hadn't. GREY-CHEEKED NUNLET was in the same bush and hung around for a good half-hour. The riverbed towards the caves was covered by arching trees – creating an antbird tunnel. Bicoloured Antbird showed well, as well as Chestnut-backed.



Grey-cheeked Nunlet

This quick tick gave us extra time to get the main Rio Claro must see. The Antioquia Bristle-tyrant is best located around the cabins and chalets of the hotel – so must be pretty easy as you could, in theory, see it out of your room window or even from the restaurant. So there was no panic when we failed to get it in the 2 hours we had before sundown.

EVENING – there is a buffet dinner – a fully stocked bar with cold beers at \$6k and average wi-fi as so many people are hooked on to it. Daddy continues his hot-streak at backgammon.

We made an attempt at owling here. My rule for this nocturnal pursuit is that it should only be done in flip-flops, in the hotel grounds with a drink in one hand. Anything more than this is over-zealous and will generally lead to disappointment.

We saw nothing.

AUGUST 16 – Rio Claro to Jardin

It had rained all night. It was still raining at dawn. Ale waved at me from his room – there was no point going out until it had stopped. 6am became 8 am. We had early breakfast whilst the drenching continued. Rio Claro had become Rio Mudbath. Finally it ceased at 9am. Mission Bristle-Tyrant could begin.

And it was a complete failure. Nada – not even a call. A Barred Puffbird and *egregious* Black-faced Dacnis did not even make up for 1% of how disappointed we were. Ale couldn't even look me in the eye.

Did we try hard enough? We split up 3 ways, took walkie-talkies to call each other in case one of us heard one – did the steep climb over the hill to a spot – twice. But we missed it.

No matter though – Bristle-Tyrants are rubbish anyway.

We drove to Jardin.

Civilization at last. The hotel was on the town square which was packed with bars and restaurants. Some may call this a living Hell – if you are used to quiet lodges in forests – but to me, from South London it was like coming home.

EVENING – with a 4.30 am start tomorrow, it had to be an early one. Taught Tom cribbage and he wins his first game. Pool later, another 5:0 loss. We run into Juan from Medellin who drove me on the last trip to Colombia. He sees me first- coming across the square to say Hi.

AUGUST 17 – Jardin

Johan spots a Tropical Screech-owl on the way up to Alto Ventanas where we arrive by 6am to stake out and see YELLOW-EARED PARROT. 3 flew by close enough to pick out all the colouration but they did not perch anywhere scopable. We pushed on to the breakfast spot at Penas Blancas. This was a proper Colombian farmhouse, with pigs and dogs lazing in the doorway and the cooking team alternating between kicking the chickens out of the culinary area and heating arepas, chocolate and huevos revueltos Colombian-style [with onions and tomatoes]. Juan made an appearance with his client – a famous Costa Rican bird photographer called Jeff. We all had the same post-brekkie plan – to go to the new antpitta feeding spot started only this year by the lady who used to have a Rufous Antpitta feed higher up the hill.

Ale calls – he has heard more parrots – and across the valley we could pick out 50 of them below a cliff face. Scope views showed all the yellow we needed on their ears.

Antpitta action. 7 of us set off up the short but steep climb to the feed-zone. We all settled on rudimentary benches or tussocks. Jeff had to walk a fair few paces away as his camera was “too big”. Let whistling and name calling commence. “ Bejessa. Bejessaaaaaaaaa”. And so on until in came the CHESTNUT-NAPED ANTPITTA. It was quite tame and I was awarded my feeding moment for good behaviour. It hopped into my hand to take the worm. Certainly worth more than 2 in the bush, [especially if they are bristle-tyrants.] We left Juan and Jeff at the feeder and walked back down to the car. The pitta lady had a cotinga spot for us.



Chestnut-naped Antpitta

This coffee area drew a blank so we went with Ale’s hunch back towards Alto Ventanas. Before that area, Ale let out a high pitched Spanish scream, Johan hit the brakes. He had spotted 2 birds perched on a bare tree 100 metres away. And in the scope –they were CHESTNUT-CRESTED COTINGA.

The day improved even more less than a minute later. A tapaculo was calling in the forest right by where we had emergency stopped.

It was the one I really wanted. I have been missing this bird my whole life – and get heartache every time I read a report where it has been seen. Could this be the moment?

No – it came in behind a tree root and somehow got into a thick tangle and would not move. SAS-style I climbed up a three metre mud bank to get closer and a different angle. Still no view. Then it just went quiet. I could have wept.

Ale and Johan commiserated and offered me some spare clothes – such was my filthy state, but they were too small. Then another sound we recognised – the low rumble of Juan's old Landcruiser. He pulled up and asked what we had seen. On hearing the news, Jeff leant across and showed me his last picture. "where did you get that?" I asked.

"Just after you left the pitta station, we played it as a long shot and one came out" – it was the perfect picture of the just-missed tapaculo.

We were back up there before you could say "speeding fine" in Spanish. Ale played the call and in minutes the angels chorused Hallelujia, all the Gods looked benevolently down upon us and in came OCELLATED TAPACULO.

Life is good.

Ale suggested we look for something else – but I like to finish on a high – and said the only way to beat this would be 20 Cock of the Rocks at point blank range with a beer in my hand. Fortunately Jardin has just the place.

Time to find Tom and see what he has been up to.

OBONs – Rufous-breasted chat-tyrant, Golden-fronted Whitestart *chrysops ssp*, Black Inca, Lachrymose and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Blue-capped Tanager, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Montane Woodcreeper, Speckled Hummingbird, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Green and Black Fruiteater.

EVENING – Tom had made an 8 kilometre hike uphill to a waterfall that gushes through the top of a huge cavern. Aptly named The Cave of Splendour, his pictures were incredible. He had only just made his descent when I arrived back, so to celebrate my tapaculo and his new family distance record we hit the bars and clubs of the town square. On a Saturday night in Jardin, the local farmers bring in their specialist small horses and ride in the "quick-piaffe" style through the night. With a 4am start it was a unique experience being kept awake all night by the sound of horses hooves.

HOTEL – Hotel Valdivia. Excellent. Wifi works in the rooms – hot showers and views over the town square.



Oh Yessss. Ocellated Tapaculo





A rather stern looking Chestnut-naped Antpitta

AUGUST 18 – Jardin to Santa Rosa de Cabal

An early departure to get to the Bolombolo Dry Forest for this morning's endemic. Continuing our roll, ANTIOQUIA WREN came to the call with little difficulty. This would give us more time at our destination to maybe get the parrot a day early.

We checked in to our spa-hotel after the 4 hour drive but had made such good time that we could lunch early and get up to the Fuerte's Parrot viewpoint at Corta Deral.

In the morning's they fly right to left from the mountain roost to other forest feeding areas – so Ale staked us out for a left to right fly-by as they returned at dusk. We had 2 hours so we could see any early returners.

None came. Plenty of Scaly-naped Parrots, a Purple-backed Thornbill and Grass-green Tanagers but nothing Fuertein.

Back at the hotel the owner was keen to know how we got on, as it is the main accommodation for visiting birders. " No problems – you will see them tomorrow – everyone does"

I went to bed with a sense of dread as the last time we had 2 shots at a species it became the “The Great Rio Claro Bristle-Tyrant Disaster”

AUGUST 19 Santa Rosa de Cabal to Bogota

We were back at Corta Deral for 5.30 am looking right this time.

“If they have not come by 7.30am”, said Ale, “then it is too late after that”

At 7.29am he revised that to 8.30.

We gave up at 9.

Fuerte’s is now top of my list of “Things you cannot depend on”, pushing British politicians into the Number 2 spot.

As our flight from Pereira to Bogota was not until late we had time to swing by Otun-Quimbaya, but on Sunday afternoons it will be tourist busy and at a bad birding time.

And that is the beauty of Nature. It was a brilliant session. 3 mixed flocks, everything we wanted to call did so and a cheeky surprise on the way out of CHESTNUT WOOD-QUAIL in binocular view just off the roadside where we had seen another fly across.

OBONs – CHESNUT-BREASTED WREN, Slaty-capped Flycatcher , Bronzy Inca , Cauca Guan , Variegated Bristle-Tyrant , Collared Trogon.

EVENING - Airport Bogota Hilton. Tip: ignore the reception advice that there is nowhere to go locally. 200 metres left out of the hotel are bars and cafes in the smart neighbourhood. Better than the rip-off prices this chain charges its guests.

AUGUST 20 – Inirida

This is what I had really been waiting for. I had read all the trip reports, mainly from a Mr Bartels and knew that there were a lot of fantastic species that awaited us and that I had also not seen in Mitu the year before.

It was Tom’s first trip to the Amazon as well. The Satena flight was on time and the in-flight views were of forests, ox-bow lakes and huge bald stone mountains.



Memorable. Daniel Orjuela our local guide was waiting in arrivals.

The heat hits you like a hundred hairdryers, especially after chilly Bogota. There is a small amount of wind-chill in the open tuk-tuk on the way to the hotel. This is the staple of travel here as there are no roads much beyond the town – only rivers. And as it was wet season, these rivers came right into the town submerging several houses on our way to the Fuente del Guania Hotel de Lujo. Fuente for short.

This is a new hotel run by a charming lady with 2 Border Collies. It is a little out of the main town – but only 5 minutes away by 2 dollar tuk-tuk ride.

We lunched and left Tom in the hands of Pepelito, one of the drivers to find a swim-hole locally, and we headed south to the Cero Cano Culebra Trail.

This was not under-water and as the heat faded the white-sand forest yielded BLACK MANAKIN, YELLOW-CROWNED MANAKIN and 3 BROWN JACAMARS. Soon followed GOLDEN-SPANGLED PICULET and SCARLET-SHOULDERED PARROTLETS.

Our local guide got us on to RED-SHOULDERED TANAGERS just as the sun was setting. A great afternoon, Inirida was exceeding my expectations.

OBONs – Plumbeous Euphonia , Cherrie's Antwren , Tropical Gnatcatcher *ssp innotata* , Least Nighthawk , Green-backed Trogon , Ivory-billed Aracari , Scaled Pigeon , Variegated Flycatcher.

EVENING – good local food at a meat-eaterie, but the flight and heat have had their toll, an early night.

AUGUST 21 – Inirida

All the reports I have read of this area are from the dry season. January through March seems the “best” time as all the trails are dry and walkable. But the flooded wet season does have one advantage. You have to go everywhere by boat. Perfect if your lazy-gene is as dominant as mine.

We tuk-tukked to where the road was submerged and got a boat-taxi to the Sabanitas Community. SWAINSONS FLYCATCHERS were common on the wires. The indigenous village chief had a large motorised dug-out canoe and he was taking us on to the Cano Carbon Trail that ran 8 metres deep below us.

Of course all the ground dwellers like leaf-tossers and ant-pittas had found terra firma elsewhere – but we were now eye-level with the forest canopy.

You had just to be good at rotating your body quickly without falling overboard. Piranhas inhabit these waters.

COMMON SCALE-BACKED ANT BIRD , BLACK-BELLIED CUCKOO and *certhia* AMAZON-BARRED WOODCREEPER kicked us off. Then finally we got a reply and fly-by to our tape. And with a bit of tippy-toes on the rocking boat we had a perched CAPUCHIN BIRD. Things quietened so we found some dry land for “the facilities” and had GREEN-TAILED GOLDENTHROAT as well as Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant and Yellow-throated Woodpecker.

Lunch was back at the Community, cooked by the headman’s family and was what the Scots would call - a Piranha Supper. The locals amuse themselves after eating this fish by putting the toothy lower jaw on their tongue and extending it out like Alien. Cue mass indigenous hysterics when I tried it and almost swallowed it. We had a 2 hour pause in hammocks before trying again for a Yapacana Antbird we had heard earlier. No luck.



They eat us – we eat them. The cycle of life.

The day ended on the road outside of Inirida with RUFIOUS-CROWNED ELAENIA, Plain-crested Elaenia and Black-faced Tanagers.

EVENING – pizza Amazon style followed by another pool session by the port area. “Don’t accept any drinks from people” our guide warned. We promptly did as dos Inglese were a total novelty at this venue – contrary his warnings we did not wake up in a hedge- minus wallets and kidneys.

AUGUST 22 – Inirida

This was to be the best day of the whole tour. We headed upstream on the Inirida River and swung off down the Matraca trail, even deeper underwater than yesterday’s one.

Black-chinned Antbird was seen with Pygmy Antwren, Orange-winged Parrots flew calling overhead as Chestnut-eared Aracaris piled through the canopy. The first lifer was an ORINOCO SOFTTAIL showing really well close to our port-side. Black-tailed Trogon to starboard and a VARZEA SHIFFORNIS at the bow. A while later Ale caught a glimpse of a colourful crest and just above the high water mark we had two AMAZON ROYAL FLYCATCHERS nest building. We cut the engine and tied up to a tree to watch this spectacle for half an hour. Further up the flooded trail a SLENDER-BILLED KITE called and I got it flying off from its perch.

We then heard one of the targets – MOUSE-COLOURED ANTSHRIKE. When these are played, according to Ale, they go quiet and up. But as there wasn't much more "up" it could have gone we got great views in the canopy of a tree a few metres away. I think I shall recommend the wet season here.

The morning session finished on a high with SPECKLED SPINETAIL. We headed back to find Tom and get lunch.

OBONs – Sulphury-rumped Flycatcher , Wire-tailed Manakin , Striped/Long-billed and Strong-billed Woodcreepers , Spot-backed Antbird , Dusky Antbird, Amazonian Umbrellabird , Reddish Hermit.

After lunch and seeing off the heat of the day, we headed back to the port, with Tom to go downstream on the Inirida and then up from its confluence on the Guaviare River. For here lies species new to science.

This part of the river was busy. After the Inirida and Guaviare meet, it stays named after the latter until it becomes the Orinoco. Venezuela is only an hour away by boat – so every enterprising local and Venezuelan were running boats full of food, oil and essentials from Colombia – and gasoline in the other direction. After the Guaviare turn-off things got quieter.

Daniel had a new spot for the wet season for the Big Target. Discovered a few years ago by Pablo Flores, it is an antshrike that looks very different to all others except the Chestnut-backed Antshrike which lives 600k away in Peru. Frankly if you see images of the 2 then our one here looks very different – there's barring only to the mid-chest, then black above. The Peruvian cousin has barring up to the throat. They do sound similar – but if you are really honest – all antshrikes sound the same. That hollow laughing repertoire offers little in range or variability. So it is a new species, INIRIDA ANTSHRIKE and I will fight anyone who says differently.

It came to the call and posed openly in a nearby tree. At one point I had the female and an ORINOCO PICULET in the same binocular field. Tom was not impressed when I said this was equivalent to a hole in one in golf, something he has yet to achieve.

Farther upstream we had a DARK-BILLED CUCKOO and Daniel found his seedeater spot – with everything but the Lesson's we wanted. A White-eared Jacamar came easily and we soon had to boat back before sundown.

OBONs – Rusty-backed Spinetail , Black-capped Donacobius , Hoatzin , Scarlet and Chestnut-breasted Macaws , Lined/chestnut-bellied and Gray Seed eater. Both river terns and incredibly close views of the Pink River-dolphins. The best day by far.

EVENING – Madness. Tom had seen a strange game throughout rural Colombia. It is called “tejo” and involves throwing a heavy disc 20 metres into a metre square wet clay target. In the middle of the clay lies a metal ring, and if your tejo goes into this little circle you get big points. Lying on 2 points on this ring are explosive packages of dynamite. Hit these and its 3 points for an explosion.

After 3 bottles of Antiqueno, the local fire-water and a case of beer, England had lost to Colombia, Daniel had won the singles, but – I had beaten Tom.

What a day. And as we were the only guests we took over the music system and hit Inirida with English Indie-rock and danced the night away semi-naked in the heat.

AUGUST 23 – Inirida to Bogota

A last mornings birding before our flight. I slept through both alarms and was woken by Ale’s shouts at 6 am.

It did not need a breathalyser to tell I was probably still inebriated.

We tukked down the road to Curva Pepes and got straight on to a WHITE-NAPED SEEDEATER. A lifer for Ale as well.

Daniel had a friend with some farmland that was still partially forested called Cano Vitina. And here came the last lifer of this tour – YAPACANA ANTIBIRD – male and female at point blank range, even my toxic breath did not scare them away.

We tried for another antbird but my headache became too debilitating. Ale took pity on me and we headed back early to get Tom and go to the airport.

It was with great sadness we left Inirida – truly a wonderful part of the world and yesterday’s boat back at sunset with the dolphins was our tour moment.

Jules Eden

September 2019



Guaviare River

Post-tour. We spent a week in Taganga next to Santa Marta in the North SCUBA diving.

I took a morning to visit Minca which added Rosy Thrush-tanager, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant and a showy SCALED PICULET.



On the Ocellated Tapaculo at Penas Blancas



Cano Vitina –looking for antbirds and Nurofen



The author celebrating a Capuchinbird

