



## Colombia

Bahía Solano, Andes, Magdalena Valley, Mitú, Villavicencio, Santa Marta

January-April 2022

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## Summary

During my visit to Colombia I saw 784 bird species. I'm not the most experienced tropical birdwatcher, my knowledge and preparedness was not the best. My primary objective was birdwatching, but I spent quite a lot of time with other activities (sightseeing, trekking, museums, carnaval, clubbing, beaches, etc.). I also traveled mostly alone on a limited budget, due to this I had to make a lot of trade-offs and leave many species behind. Focusing only on birdwatching the same route I made can be done in much shorter time, with many more species.

There are a lot of detailed professional trip reports available, but in the past years there have been some important changes on the places I visited, so finally I decided to prepare this report to provide some updates that can be useful even for more serious birdwatchers.

I tried to use coordinates found in trip reports but it turned out that in most cases those were outdated and it was better to check ebird for recent sightings and go for those. Therefore I don't add too many coordinates nor species, only the link to my ebird checklists. If a coordinate from an older trip report worked perfectly, I highlighted it.

## Resources

My most important resource was [Ross Gallardy's great trip report](#) and the resources described there. If a place is described in Ross' report, I only provide some updates if any of the info is outdated. The hotspots with coordinates for birds mentioned in the report worked sometimes, but I think checking ebird for recent sightings was more useful.

## General info

### Money withdrawal

ATMs are available almost everywhere. Some banks (BBVA, Colpatria, Banco Caja Social, etc.) don't add additional fees for withdrawal, but have small limits (eg. BBVA 300k COP) for withdrawal. Widely available Servibanca has a 1M or 2M COP limit for withdrawal, but they charge 1-2% commission. Some banks' ATM don't accept foreign cards. For example I couldn't use the most widespread Bancolombia ATMs. If ATMs are not available or don't really work, for example in Minca or in Bahia Solano, sometimes there are other options. Eg. in Minca there is a solution called ATM (but it has nothing to do with real ATMs): you "buy the money" on a similar terminal that they use in the shop. This way you can get money from your card, but with much higher (6%) commission.

It's good to have cash with you always. Even in bigger cities, many shops, bars, hotels, bus ticket offices, etc. do not accept cards.

### SIM cards. applications

If you travel independently, a SIM card with data usage is a huge help, almost indispensable. Getting a SIM card is very easy and the data packages are surprisingly cheap. Claro had a signal everywhere I went. In Bahia Solano only Claro has coverage.

Uber, Tappsy Easy: these two apps work only in the biggest cities, but using these apps makes traveling very cheap, easy and safe

Whatsapp: the entire Colombia uses Whatsapp and mostly only Whatsapp. In some cases reservations are possible only on Whatsapp. Most guides use only Whatsapp as well.

### Accommodation

It was easy to find something on booking.com almost everywhere I was, if not, or there was an especially good option, I will explain it in the corresponding section.

### Transportation

#### Taxi/Uber

Taxis are fairly cheap and widely available, but in most cities they can't leave a certain area, so if you plan to go birdwatching outside of a city, make sure that the taxi is allowed to go to the place you want. If not, in Bogota and Medellin use Uber, or try to check in your hotel if they know a driver who can take you to the place you want to go. Most Uber drivers are open for time-based transport services outside of Uber. For example in Bogota we agreed to hire the driver for 120k COP/5 hours.

In smaller villages where tuktuks (carrito) and/or mototaxis are available, those are the cheapest options to get around. In some places 4x4 taxis are available, but these are way more expensive.

#### Public transportation

Cheap, widely available but terribly slow, especially in mountainous areas. In Colombia there are plenty of road constructions so hopefully it will change soon, but even on the main roads we were happy when we had 30 km/hour average speed, but mostly we were slower. There is always a landslide, road construction, accident or something. The same applies for traveling with a rental car. The situation in plain areas is much better.

#### Domestic planes

Several companies have flights to Bahia Solano but to Mitu currently you can fly only with Satena. Bigger cities are served by multiple companies, including low-cost airlines and they're quite cheap. Consider choosing a plane even for smaller distances (300 km<) especially in mountainous areas as currently traveling bigger distances is very time-consuming in Colombia. In isolated places like Bahia Solano or Mitu, it's quite common that the plane can't land due to weather conditions. In Mitu my plane was canceled two times so I could leave Mitu only 2 days after I was supposed to. Consider this when you plan your trip, don't book your plane back home for the day right after your trip to remote and isolated places.



## Birding sites

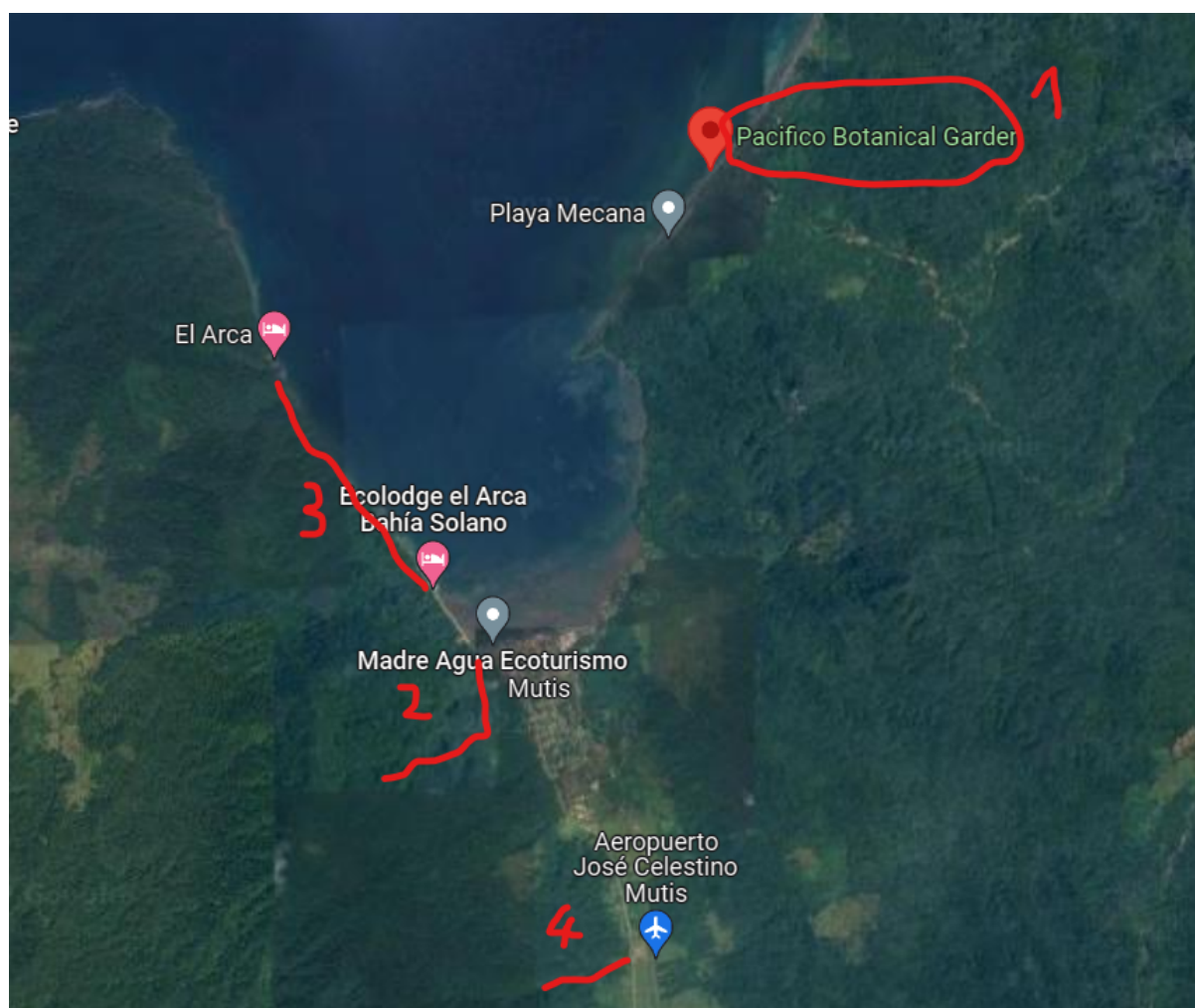
**Bahía Solano area** - 3 full and few half days birdwatching between 1-8 February 2022

General info: The safety situation has changed in the past months, so I was advised by several locals not to hike alone in the rainforest, but to hire a guide. I think the trails described below are totally safe and could be visited on my own, but as one night there was a serious gunfight with machine guns in Mutis (some districts in Mutis are a bit dangerous but the districts where accommodation can be found and El Valle is totally safe), I took the advice and for the trails in El Valle area I hired Balmes Mosquera who is definitely one of the best guides I've ever met. I definitely recommend him, not only because of the safety situation, but because he has very good eyes, finds everything and knows all of the hotspots and places in the area. You can contact him [here](#) or via whatsapp +57 313 5175691.

Logistics: several companies have flights to Bahia Solano. Tuktuks (carrito) are the main means of transport. They have fixed prices for the routes, but it's also possible to hire them for a day.

Accommodation: Nice and cheap (from 10 EUR pp in El Valle, 18 EUR pp in Mutis) accommodation possibilities are available at booking.com, both for El Valle and Mutis .

Birding sites:





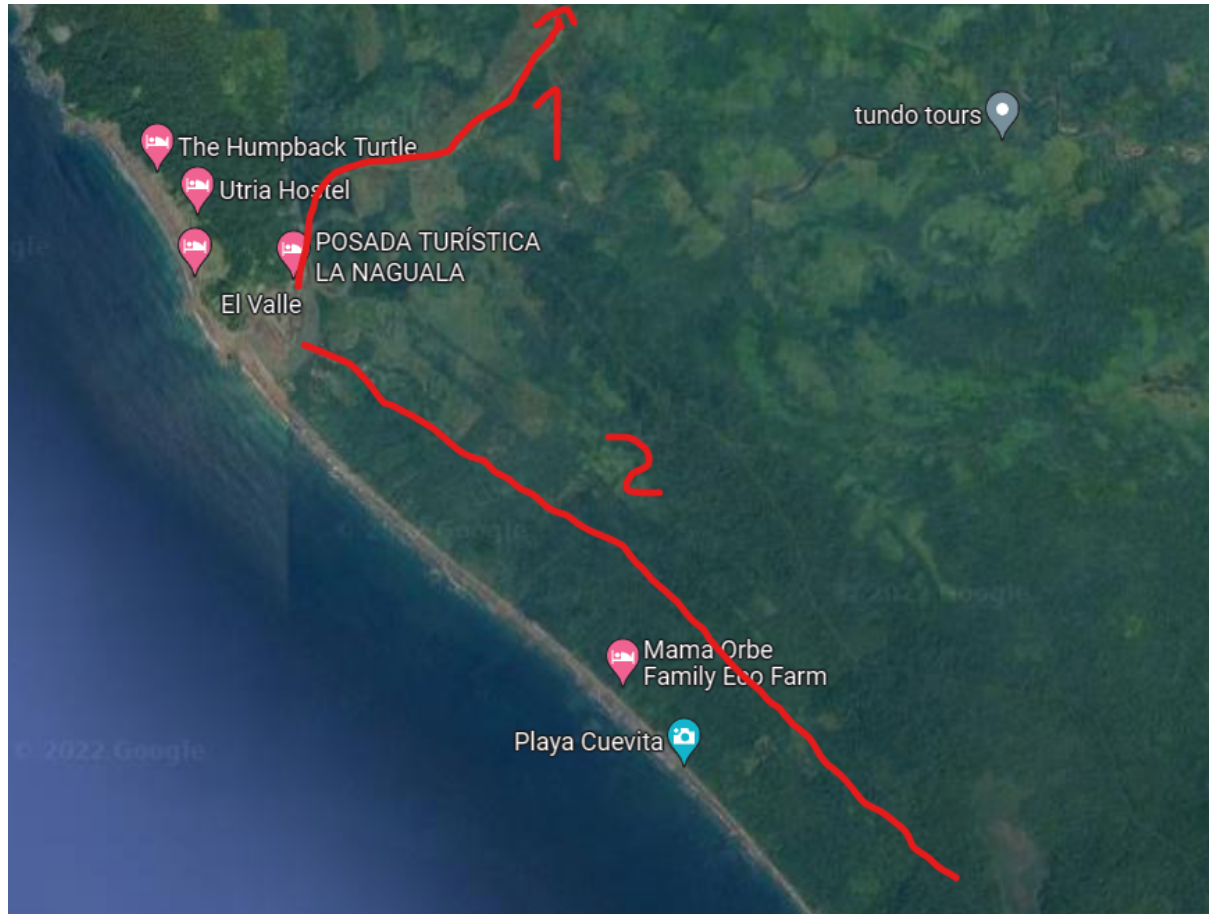
## Trails around Mutis

1.: Jardín Botánico del Pacífico: It's a nice place for a lot of Choco species and there is a Harpy Eagle nest in the garden. During low tide, it's possible to walk there from Mutis on the beach. Circa 90 minutes walking in the sand and at the end there is a tricky river crossing even with low tide. Otherwise you need to take a boat (lancha) from Mutis for 70k COP. They don't allow you to walk alone in the garden, so you have to book a guide, they have options for 40-70k COP, depending on which trail you want to do. Make sure that you discuss everything beforehand, there was some misunderstanding when I organized my trip there so I couldn't do what I wanted. Their [webpage](#) looks inactive, but it works and via whatsapp (Luisa: +57 320 6869523) or email you can arrange everything. They also have accommodation possibilities and prepare pre-ordered dishes. At least 1 full day is needed, but there are multiple trails, so more days can be spent there. [My checklist](#)

2.: Loma de La Virgen trail: very short trail (1-2 hours), starting from the city of Mutis.

3.: Trail starting from the last pier of Mutis, goes close to the shore. I didn't see anything that I didn't find later in other places. 2-3 hours should be enough.

4.: Trail de Cataratas: a short trail starting from in front of the airport. Ask for the "Cataratas" in one of the shops around the airport and they'll show the entrance point. Not a good trail, but if your plane is delayed, it's worth checking it instead of stranding at the airport. 1-2 hours should be enough.



Some trails around El Valle

1.: Road to Mutis: I was advised not to walk alone on the road, but later Balmes said that it's ok to hike alone in the first kms close to El Valle. Otherwise it's worth going here with a guide because the road is quite long and some birds can be found in private areas where the permission of the owner is needed. 1 full day can be easily spent there.

Highlights: Rose-faced Parrot, Great Green Macaw, Black-tipped Cotinga [Checklist](#)

2.: Trail to Utria NP: if you cross the bridge in El Valle to the south, just follow the road, it runs directly to the trail. The first few kms of the trail are easy, but then it becomes quite narrow and it's easy to lose the way back if you leave the trail for an antbird or something else, so be careful. I was advised not to walk on this narrow part in the dark. Going to the end and back can be done within 1 full day.

Highlights: Tawny-faced Quail, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Tiny Hawk, Bicolored and Spotted Antbirds, Choco Syristes, Baudo Oropendola [Checklist](#), [Checklist 2](#)

Summary: best trails were the 2 around El Valle and Jardin Botanico del Pacifico

### **RN Chicaque** - 8-10 February 2022

General info: It's a private reserve very close to Bogota. It's a nice cloud forest for the Eastern Andes species below 2000m, not too many specialities, but easy birding, so it can be a nice destination if you have a quick stopover in Bogota.

Logistics: From Bogota I took the Transmilenio to Terminal Soacha then took a 20 mins Uber ride to the entrance of the reserve (4.606255, -74.305607). The reserve itself lies on a very steep hillside and the accommodation is 6 km walking from the entrance, so walking back to the entrance with a heavy bag can be challenging. It's also possible to pay for a car taking the bags down and back.

Accommodation: refugio with a nice restaurant, but camping is also possible. Booking in advance is needed via [chicaque.com](http://chicaque.com)

Birding: Every trail I took was quite productive, but my favorite was the trail from the entrance to the refugio. I had read somewhere that there are a lot of feeders where hummingbird specialities can be seen easily, but unfortunately there was only one feeder next to the reception building without any colibri. After passing the parking lot, there is a yellow entrance building with a shop and then stairs. The first part of the stairs are surrounded with different flowers. It took a while, but finally I saw nice hummingbirds (eg. Black Inca) here. [Checklist 1](#), [Checklist 2](#), [Checklist 3](#)

### **East and Western Andes and Magdalena Valley**

I think this area and the hotspots there are very well described, so let me describe only some recent updates. Only the less popular spots we visited (I didn't find detailed info about it in

trip reports) will be described in detail. For this part of the trip I was accompanied by Tamás Judák and we rented a Renault Logan. Car rental is quite cheap in Colombia.

### **PNN Sumapaz updates**

General info: in February the area was guarded by PNN rangers and we were not allowed to leave the main road. This made it impossible to see the Bogota Rail, but fortunately we saw everything else spending few hours walking on the road up and down from the headquarters at Laguna de los Tunjos (4.289385, -74.207493)

Logistics: from Bogota we took a taxi to Usme (Alcaldía de Usme) and there we were waiting for the bus, but finally we agreed with a local driver to take us to Laguna de los Tunjos for 80k COP. Later it turned out that there is a direct bus from Terminal Salitre which takes you to Laguna de los Tunjos in 3 hours. I was told that the day (Sunday) we visited Sumapaz there were only 2 buses per day, both directions. We took this bus back to Bogota. Sorry, I forgot to write down the name of the company.

### **SFF Otun Quimbaya updates**

Logistics: a car is needed. There is a chiva passing the road, but it departs too late. We managed to drive along the road with a Renault Logan, but lower cars didn't pass.

Accommodation: rooms at the SFF Otun Quimbaya headquarters Yarumo Blanco (4.728996, -75.577911) were not available in February 2022. But on booking.com or airbnb there are multiple possibilities in the surroundings, eg. in La Florida

Birding sites: in February 2022 the trails starting from SFF Otun Quimbaya headquarters Yarumo Blanco (4.728996, -75.577911) were accessible only with pre-booked guided tours at 10.00 and 13.00 for 10/15k COP/pers. It was too late, the guide knew nothing about birds, we saw literally nothing, so I do not recommend booking that trip. Everything can be seen from the road (Via la Suiza)

Hooded Antpitta spot at 4.705435, -75.540186 should work, but unfortunately a tree fell on the road the night before we went there, so we had to leave the car behind and walk. We arrived to the spot at 7:00 am. It was definitely too late.

**Reserva Rio Blanco** - no updates, the info in Ross Gallardy's report was still accurate in February 2022, you can find the current prices and make reservations at <http://www.reservarioblanco.co/>.

**Nevados de Ruiz** - no updates, the info in Ross Gallardy's report was still accurate in February 2022



## **Cocora valley - Acaime**

General info: a less popular birding site next to one of the most popular tourist destinations in Colombia.

Logistics: The Cocora valley opens at 7:00 am, we didn't try to enter earlier. From Salento there are jeeps and buses that take you to the valley. The road to the valley was renovated last year, now any car can make it.

Accommodation: in the lovely village of Salento there are abundance of possibilities and there are some more options along the road to the valley as well

Birding: there is only one trail, the Cocora valley trail, it's easy to find as every tourist goes there (entrance: 4.638179, -75.485044). There is an entrance fee of 5k COP/pers. The first hour is through open land with the typical wax palms. Then the trail enters a nice pristine forest. There are 5 dingy bridges to cross, sometimes it can be tricky with field scopes, cameras, etc. The Acaime lodge with hummingbird feeders is about 5-6 kms from the start. This part of the trail is quite crowded but most of the tourists turn back at this point. In February 2022 the lodge with hummingbird feeders was closed. From this point the trail starts to ascend steeply and with the changing elevation it goes through different vegetation. We spent only one day here and turned back from 3200 m elevation but the trail reaches the paramo and it turned out that there is a lodge on the mountain where staying overnight is possible. As we came down quite late we found the first part of the trail (between Acaime lodge and entrance) empty so we could pick up some other nice species. We were told that we had to leave the trail before dark/sunset if we don't have a reservation in the mountain lodge. After all, we found surprisingly good birding on the trail. [My checklist](#)

## **Jardin updates**

As the Yellow-eared Parrot reserve and some hotspots around it and on the road from Jardin to Las Cruces are quite well described, I'd like to highlight only two things. The first is that with a Renault Logan we could drive only 6 kms on the road to the reserve, then we had to give it up. So a 4x4 is needed. There is a chiva passing that road if 4x4 is not available. The other thing I didn't see in many trip reports is that in the village of Jardin there is a private garden with an Andean Cock-of-the-rock lek and with some bird feeders, 10 mins walking from the city center. It's open between 15:00-17:30, the entrance fee is 10k COP/pers, but it's totally worth it. The birds display a few meters from the hides, it's amazing. More details and exact location [here](#).

## **Las Tangaras Proaves Reserve updates**

Detailed info can be found in Ross Gallardy's report. It was one of the best birding places we visited. The only update is that we were asked to pay 40k COP/pers at the Las Tangaras Lodge (5.852739, -76.182254) the day before we wanted to hike the trails. It's allowed to watch birds on the road, but for entering the trails the fee above should be paid. Another point visiting the lodge is that they can explain the available trails and they can open the gate

to the hummingbird feeders at the top of the road for the time you ask. The road was still in quite good condition, any rental could make it.

**Rio Claro Natural Reserve** - no updates, the info in Ross Gallardy's report was still accurate in February 2022, the prices might have changed slightly. The only thing I'd like to highlight is that if you plan to go to Bogota by public transportation, make sure that you leave the reserve in the morning. It took 11 hours to arrive to Bogota: after some waiting a bus took us to Doradal in 1 hour then after some waiting we took another one to Bogota and it took another 7 hours.

### **Mitu** - 8-13 March 2022

General info: we agreed with some other birdwatchers that birdwatching close to Mitu was one of toughest ones. And not just because of the climate. The birds were very shy and it was difficult to find and see them. Then they immediately flew away. We don't know the reason. My final list was far below my expectations. Maybe the reason was that I didn't manage to go to Pueblo Nuevo, I couldn't contact them. Later it turned out that it would have been possible to make one-day trips from Mitu (with tuktuks it takes a bit more than 1 hour to get there), but I didn't know about it when I was there. It was my fault, but if you go to Mitu, don't miss Pueblo Nuevo! According to ebird it's the best place in the area.

Logistics: Currently only Satena has flights from a bigger city (Bogota) to Mitu. By car it's not possible to get there. The airport is quite basic and the weather is capricious so it's possible that the planes simply can't land for days. My flight back to Bogota was delayed 2 days. And it's surprisingly common. Don't plan your trip to Mitu right before your flight back home.

In Mitu there are few cars and as I was alone I only used tuktuks (carritos) and mototaxis. Mototaxis can be identified by something yellow (tape, t-shirt, bag, literally anything yellow) on the hand clutch. Within the city they work with fixed rates, if you want to go further you should negotiate the price and agree what time to take you up when you go back. Once I saw a bus that seemed to be a kind of public transportation, but I'm not sure.

Accommodation: in Mitu there are multiple possibilities available at booking.com but there are many more hotels that are not on booking. In theory it's possible to stay at Pueblo Nuevo, but I couldn't contact them.

Birding sites: Joshua Vandermeulen was in Mitú right before me and he wrote an [excellent trip report](#) about the area and the birding places. I can't add anything to his report. I'm really sorry it was not available before I went to Mitú.

### **Edge of Los Llanos - Villavicencio**

Before my flight to Santa Marta I had some free days in Bogota and instead of staying in Bogota I decided to go to Villavicencio (3-4 hours from Bogota) to pick up some llanos species.

**Bosque Bavaria** - 2 half days 18-19 March 2022

In Villavicencio there are multiple nice and cheap hotels. Bosque Bavaria can be reached from the center of Villavicencio by taxi (~15k COP, 20-30 mins). There is one single road going through the forest, entrance is at 4.175057, -73.641888. There is no entrance fee. As there is no vigilance either, anyone can enter. I was warned once that it can be dangerous. Nothing happened to me during my two visits, but maybe it's better to be careful.

Birding was surprisingly good there, I saw some species I expected to see in the Amazonian, not at the edge of the llanos (Amazonian Umbrellabird, Yellow-billed Nunbird, Amazonian Motmot, etc.). [My checklist](#)

### **Rancho Camana - 20-22 March 2022**

General info: Rancho Camana is an agro-ecological farm with 1.7 acres. The farm has some feeders visited by some nice birds and nocturnal primates live in the garden.

Logistics: From Villavicencio's bus terminal buses go very often towards Restrepo. After getting off the bus I took a taxi for 8k COP to the ranch (4.284925, -73.561982).

Accommodation: reservations can be made only via [Rancho Camana's](#) webpage. It's quite popular, make sure you book your stay in advance. The area is full of resorts and hotels, people from Villavicencio come here to spend the weekend, so if Rancho Camana is full, there are uncountable other options.

Birding sites: I did some birdwatching in the neighborhood. Marta, the owner of the ranch, can explain where to go to watch birds in the surroundings, but Bosque Bavaria was much better and my main target was to see some llanos birds. Marta has a good relationship with local birders and she gave me the contact of Edilson Torres Rodriguez. I paid 50k COP for a half day birding and for this money he took me to the different sites on his motorbike. I definitely advise to ask Marta to contact local birders, they have up-to-date and extensive knowledge about the birds that can be found in the area, including some surprising species (eg. Harpy Eagle can be seen in the county). With Edilson we visited fishponds called Piscicultura Vereda Los medios (entrance: 4.253662, -73.544521, [checklist](#), entry allowed only with local birder), lakes called Vereda Los Medios (4.257620, -73.550253, [checklist](#)) and forests and wet areas next to the road called A Vereda Los Medios (the road that passes the two sites above).

### **Camarones (Riohacha) - 25 March 2022**

General info: The old road to the village of Camarones is a well-known place for some near-endemic species that can be seen only here and in Venezuela.

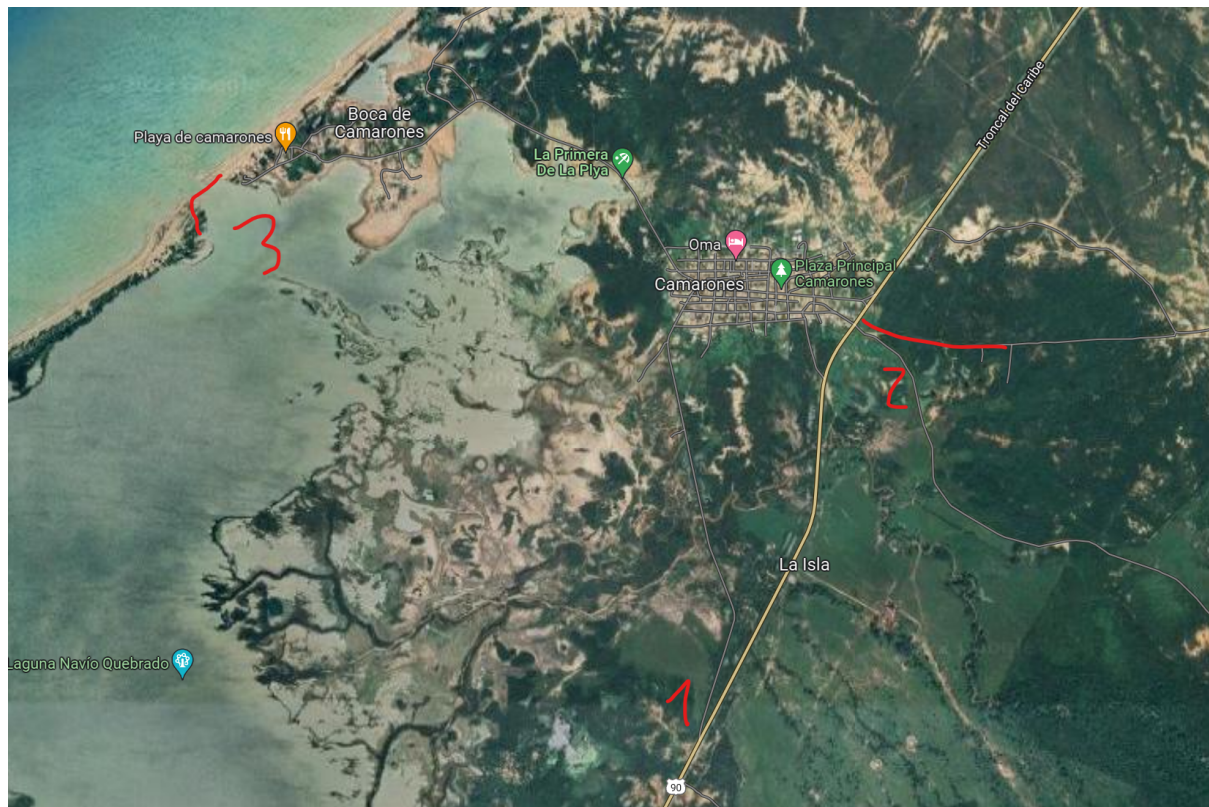
Logistics: I contacted Guajira Birding Tours (via Whatsapp +57 310 7012276) and they offered a guide for full day for 220k COP, half day 180k COP, plus a car for 300k COP, 4x4 for 450k COP. I found it a bit expensive, so I asked around in the hostel I stayed in Riohacha and could find a driver with a car for 80k COP (half day). When the driver realized that we were heading to Camarones, due to security reasons he insisted on hiring a local indigenous guide as well, so I hired one for 50k COP/half a day. It was far cheaper than the other option



and finally the half day was enough to see everything I wanted. When I was there I realized that there are local guides with motorbikes offering their services just at the new entrance to Camarones village at 11.422523, -73.058254. When we arrived at the area at 6:00 am, they were not there, only later, but it can be another option for birders traveling alone without a car.

Accommodation: there are options in the area of Camarones. I stayed in Riohacha and I think it was a good decision. Riohacha is just 30 mins from the birding area and it was easier to arrange my trip to Camarones from there. On the other hand there are nice restaurants, shops, more hotels, etc.

Birding sites:



1.: Old road to Camarones: this is the place for the target species. The entrance to the road is at 11.400926, -73.067075. The road is not in the best condition, but any car can make it. There are multiple footpaths to both sites from the road. The places close to the water/river were more productive than the others. There is a clearing on the left side towards Camarones, after the first bridge at 11.408954, -73.066453. It was the best spot. Within 1 hour I saw almost all of my targets here. The line of bushes by the road was quite productive as well.

2.: In Ross Gallardy's report this road is referred to as Tocuyo Sparrow Trail. I didn't see Tocuyo Sparrow there, but the birding was quite productive (I saw Crested Bobwhite only here)

3.: Mudflats, laguna: nice place for waders, terns, gulls, etc.

Tocuyo Sparrow spot: there is a recent spot for Tocuyo Sparrow 15 kms to the south from Camarones at 11.306895, -73.111548.

### [Checklist](#)

## **Minca/El Dorado/Cuchilla San Lorenzo** - 1-6 April 2022

General info: Santa Marta Mountains have almost 30 endemic species. Some birds can be found at lower elevations around Minca, some others in the El Dorado ProAves reserve 13 kms from Minca.

Logistics: From Santa Marta to Minca buses go quite often from the market. The bus terminal of Santa Marta is far from the market, so you should take a taxi to get there from the terminal. From Minca you can rent 4x4s with drivers or mototaxis to the closer sites. Mototaxis work for a fixed price, based on the distance, they have their base at the center of Minca. If you want to leave early you should arrange your ride the day before. There are multiple options to go to El Dorado. There is public transportation, the bus that goes towards Cienaga from Minca can take you to the entrance road to the reserve (Restaurante Mirador del Mar, 11.096526, -74.082475). Then you can walk to the reserve, El Dorado lodge is 5 kms from the restaurant. The road condition is quite bad, only 4x4s and motorbikes can make it. You can rent a 4x4 from Minca, to the El Dorado lodge it's 250k COP one way. I chose the third option, hiring 2 mototaxis to the lodge, one for me and one for my backpack, 50k COP/motorbike.

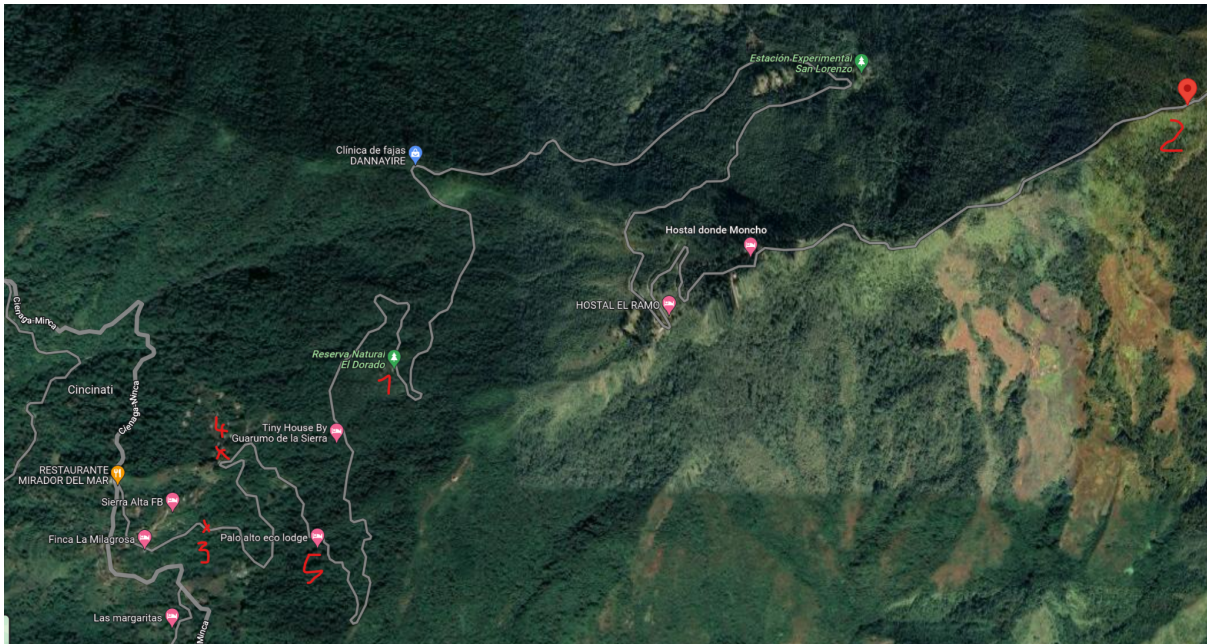
Accommodation: in Minca there are plenty of options from very cheap to exclusive luxurious hotels. In the El Dorado Proaves Reserve there are multiple options as well, but I do advise to stay at the ProAves El Dorado lodge. When I was there I was the only guest for 40 USD/night. They recently built a restaurant and it's amazing, the view from there is fantastic, one of the best located restaurants I've ever been to. The food rates at the el Dorado restaurant are: breakfast 15k COP, lunch 45k COP and dinner 40k COP. They have guiding service for 80k COP/day as well.

There are some options in the reserve to buy the most essential things (e.g. in the Restaurante Mirador del Mar, La Tienda, etc and the places offering housing sell soft drinks, coffee, beer and meals, but it's difficult to get less basic things there).

### Birding sites:

In Minca I checked ebird and tried to go to the places where the species I wanted to see had been seen recently. Minca is very touristic, after early morning most places close to Minca become crowded

In El Dorado Proaves Reserve the most important trail is the 14 km long road itself from the Restaurante Mirador del Mar to the Santa Marta Parakeet spot. It goes through different elevations and vegetation and finally I managed to see almost everything on the road.



*Road from the Restaurante Mirador del Mar to the Santa Marta Parakeet spot*

1.: El Dorado lodge and surroundings: the lodge and the restaurant 1km from the lodge has feeders that are good for some hummingbirds. There are some trails around the lodge, but beside Fulvous-headed Tanager and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser I saw everything on the road as well. Gray-throated Leaf-tosser is quite common on the trails, it has nests in the wall of the trail from the lodge to the restaurant.

2.: Santa Marta Parakeet spot: 11.110459, -74.042348. This historical spot worked perfectly. I arrived there at 5:40 and in 2 minutes I managed to see a Santa Marta Parakeet. You must arrive before the first lights. It's 8 kms from the El Dorado lodge, uphill, so I think you should leave the lodge at least 2 hours before the first lights if you walk. Black-backed Thornbill was seen here as well, a bit later.

3.: Comida Dona Sofia: 11.094907, -74.078858. The flowers around this small restaurant and in its garden is the spot for Santa Marta Blossomcrown and Woodstar. In April the Woodstars had already left the area, but Blossomcrown was present. I had to pay 10k COP for seeing it, but for this price the owner showed Santa Marta Antbird to me and gave me some recent infos about some good species. They also have a room for rent.

4.: La Tienda: 11.097405, -74.078365. This place was known for its hummingbird feeders and as a reliable spot for the endemic hummingbirds. There were no hummingbird feeders when I was there, but they sold beer at least.

5.: Palo Alto: this place was known for its hummingbird feeders and as a nice spot for White-tailed Starfrontlet, but there were no feeders up. White-tailed Starfrontlet is easy at the El Dorado lodge.

[Checklist of road between Restaurante Mirador del Mar and El Dorado lodge](#), [Checklist of the lodge \(only new species\)](#), [Checklist road between Santa Marta Parakeet spot and lodge](#)