

Birder's Abroad

North-West Venezuela

1 – 19 April 2007

by Keith Shepherd & Jurgen Beckers

Introduction

The group consisted of 8 British birders guided by a young and enthusiastic Canadian, David Geale and Jurgen Beckers. David is an excellent guide, who has already a number of years experience in Peru, although this was his first trip to Venezuela.

Most participants had already some neotropical experience (all in Peru, some in Ecuador and Costa Rica), making things even easier.

The tour ran through the Easter Holiday period. This is also a holiday period in Venezuela (Semana Santa).

It is not the ideal period for various reasons. Organising is much more difficult, best hotels are full, even more noise in the reserves and – perhaps worse of all – no beer with the evening meals, which is now a Venezuelan law.

Besides April is not the best month for birding in Northern Venezuela. It is the beginning of the rainy season. However we were extremely lucky this year with the weather (read: no rain).

The majority of migrants had already left and most trees had finished flowering. (We only had one flowering tree for the whole trip, so the number of hummingbirds was disappointing).

April is breeding month for a lot of species and activity (especially in mixed flocks) is much lower. But some were more vocal and we managed to see a few good ones, some by playing tape, others by patience and observation.

Nevertheless we ended the trip with a good total of 511 species seen and an additional 21 heard.

This greatly thanks to the very special efforts of David. He was always active looking for the special species and trying to explain to all members where they were hiding.

We didn't go either to shore (for migrant waders), due to a car accident in Maracaibo which would have increased the species count.

Generally the trip was good, but far too much time was spent travelling and the program was a bit overloaded by squeezing a 3 week program (already overloaded) in 18 days. Most found that too much time was spend travelling.

2 – 4 April - Henri Pittier NP

Having arrived late on the 1st, our first full first day was spent at the Rancho Grande visitor centre.

Despite Semana Santa, it was relatively quiet here.

We managed to see most specialities: Guttulated Foliage-gleaner, Violet-chested Hummingbird, White-tipped Quetzal, Blood-eared Parakeet, Venezuelan Bristle-tyrant, Rufous-ored Tyrannulet, missing only on Handsome Fruiteater. But on the other hand we had Venezuelan Wood-Quail (a bonus) in return, a species not expected; we even had a few groups. Enough so that everyone had at least one good look.

The visitor centre balcony provided stunning views of many tanagers and other forest edge birds, including Red-crowned and Golden-Olive Woodpecker, Groove-billed Toucanet, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Crested Spinetail, Pale-breasted and White-necked Thrush, White-winged, Silver-beaked, Palm, Golden, Speckled, Bay-headed and Swallow Tanager.

The Choroní pass was another story. Noisy with an police post right on the top and many cars passing. A Mottled Owl called in the early morning and a few were able to see it before it flew off.

Rufous-cheeked Tanager was the one we were looking for and it was seen a few times; along with brief views of White-tipped Quetzal, and very good views of Ochre-breasted Brush-Finch.

We were also able to see all 3 Antthrushes (Black-faced, Short-tailed and Scalloped), occurring here; a first occurrence for Jurgen's trips to this area.

The 3rd day we birded the lower parts of the national park. Chestnut-sided Warbler – a rare migrant – was a new one for the N-W Venezuela trip.

With the manakins (apart from Lance-tailed) we were a bit unlucky: the times we saw Wire-tailed, it were always females. (Later in the Andes we had the same problem with Golden-winged Manakins.)

6 – 9 April - Hato El Frio - Los Llanos

The Llanos was good, with a record of 160 species seen on the 2nd day in Hato El Frio.

We had clouded weather most of the time (perfect climate) and there was activity all day, and every day a Giant Anteater during daytime and on one occasion excellent views of Southern Tamandua.

We also encountered many Yellow-billed Cuckoo's and at least 6 Upland Sandpipers on their way north and an unusual find this far inland was a Tricoloured Heron.

A White-naped Xenopsaris was a very unusual find around the ranch buildings. Whilst just a short distance further was another new one for Hato El Frio: Yellow-browed Tyrant.

We had several nice trips trying to cover all habitats. One dedicated for Pale-headed Jacamar, one for Horned Screamers, an evening trip with groups of Nacunda Nighthawks flying high overhead. Another good bird was Amazonian Black-tyrant. Just one male was seen.

10 – 14 April - The Andes

Before we arrived in the Andes it had been raining every day in the Andes, but when we finally arrived here, we had 4 days of very dry weather. Perhaps even too dry weather.

But best birds were seen on this part of the tour. The highlight of the whole trip, as voted by the group, was undoubtedly **Ocellated Tapaculo**, a very secretive species which is nearly impossible to see, and which everyone (10/10) saw very well.

Voted in 3rd place was a male Spangled Coquette, with his crest up at Rio Frio.

Other toppers – also seen by everyone – were: 2nd, Bearded Helmetcrest (male & female), Spotted Nightingale-thrush, Amethyst Woodstar and Booted Rackettail; all closeby at eye level.

Military Macaws were common, more so than usual. We had several flying overhead and some even perched.

White-bellied Antbird and Band-tailed Guan were heard at several places but we failed on seeing them.

15 – 19 April - Maracaibo region

On the way north we made a few stops adding Pygmy Swifts and Black-whiskered Vireo to the list. It had been raining and the dry scrub was full of bright green leaves. Humidity was high and it felt extreme hot. Not so pleasant but the birds made it feel cooler: many White-whiskered Spinetails, a few Chestnut Piculets, Northern Scrub-Flycatchers, Slender-billed Inezia's and Maracaibo Tody-flycatchers. A Black-backed Antshrike called once, but we were unable to see him.

A morning was spend in savannah. We counted 5 Northern Screamers, a couple Red-and-Green Macaws, 5 Jabiru's, but we missed the Dwarf Cuckoo.

A couple of White Hawks were circling low over the forest in the Perija foothills, and a couple of the group were very fortunate to see an Andean Lamiisoma, an extremely rare and difficult to see species.

On the last morning one of the group braved an early start and added; Buffy Hummingbird, Vermillion Cardinal, Caribbean Coot, Mangrove Warbler and Bicoloured Conebill.

All the group saw a male Ruby-throated Topaz at the very last moment in a flowering tree at the airport.

Below is a list of all species seen on the trip; hopefully I have highlighted the endemics correctly.

Thanks to everyone who came along and made the trip what it was; despite some of the problems we experienced.

Trip List

Great Tinamou
Highland Tinamou
Little Tinamou
Brown Tinamou
Rufous-vented Chachalaca
Band-tailed Guan
Andean Guan
Wattled Guan
Crested Bobwhite
Venezuelan Wood-quail
Horned Screamer
Northern Screamer
White-faced Whistling-duck
Black-bellied Whistling-duck
Orinoco Goose
Brazilian Teal
Blue-winged Teal
Speckled Teal
Scaled Piculet
Chestnut Piculet
Red-crowned Woodpecker
Smoky-brown Woodpecker
Red-rumped Woodpecker
Golden-olive Woodpecker
Spot-breasted Woodpecker
Lineated Woodpecker
Crimson-crested Woodpecker
Red-headed Barbet
Emerald Toucanet
Groove-billed Toucanet
Yellow-billed Toucanet
Collared Aracari
Keel-billed Toucan
Citron-throated Toucan
Black-mandibled Toucan
Pale-headed Jacamar
Rufous-tailed Jacamar
Russet-throated Puffbird
Crested Quetzal
White-tipped Quetzal
Golden-headed Quetzal

Collared Trogon
Masked Trogon
(Northern) Violaceous Trogon
Blue-crowned Motmot
Belted Kingfisher
Ringed Kingfisher
Amazon Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Squirrel Cuckoo
Hoatzin
Greater Ani
Smooth-billed Ani
Groove-billed Ani
Striped Cuckoo
Military Macaw
Scarlet Macaw
Red-&-green Macaw
Chestnut-fronted Macaw
Scarlet-fronted Parakeet
Brown-throated Parakeet
Blood-eared Parakeet
Rose-headed Parakeet
Green-rumped Parrotlet
Orange-chinned Parakeet
Blue-headed Parrot
Bronze-winged Parrot
Red-lored Parrot
Yellow-crowned Parrot
Orange-winged Parrot
Mealy Parrot
White-collared Swift
Chestnut-collared Swift
Grey-rumped Swift
Short-tailed Swift
White-tipped Swift
Pygmy Palm Swift
Neotropical Palm Swift
Rufous-breasted Hermit
Stripe-throated Hermit
Sooty-capped Hermit
Pale-bellied Hermit
White-necked Jacobin

Sparkling Violet-ear
Black-throated Mango
Ruby-topaz Hummingbird
Spangled Coquette
Blue-tailed Emerald
Red-billed Emerald
Blue-crowned Woodnymph
Shining-green Hummingbird
Golden-tailed Sapphire
White-tailed Goldenthrout
Buffy Hummingbird
Glittering-throated Emerald
Copper-rumped Hummingbird
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
White-vented Plumeleteer
Speckled Hummingbird
Violet-fronted Brilliant
Violet-chested Hummingbird
Bronzy Inca
Collared Inca
Golden Starfrontlet
Orange-throated Sunangel
Merida Sunangel
Booted Racket-tail
Tyrian Metaltail
Bearded Helmetcrest
Long-tailed Sylph
Long-billed Starthroat
Amethyst Woodstar
Mottled Owl
Ferruginous Pygmy-owl
Burrowing Owl
Great Potoo
Lesser Nighthawk
Band-tailed Nighthawk
Nacunda Nighthawk
Pauraque
White-tailed Nightjar
Little Nightjar
Band-tailed Pigeon
Pale-vented Pigeon
Plumbeous Pigeon (Heard only)
Ruddy Pigeon

Eared Dove
Scaled Dove
Common Ground-dove
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove
Ruddy Ground-dove
Blue Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Grey-fronted Dove
Lined Quail-dove
Sunbittern
Limpkin
Clapper Rail
Grey-necked Wood-rail
Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen
Caribbean Coot
Upland Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Wattled Jacana
Double-striped Thick-knee
Black-necked Stilt
Collared Plover
Pied Plover
Southern Lapwing
Black Skimmer
Laughing Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Royal Tern
Yellow-billed Tern
Large-billed Tern
Osprey
Grey-headed Kite
Hook-billed Kite
Swallow-tailed Kite
Pearl Kite
White-tailed Kite
Snail Kite
Plumbeous Kite
Plain-breasted Hawk

Bicoloured Hawk
Crane Hawk
White Hawk
Common Black-hawk
Great Black-hawk
Savanna Hawk
Harris' Hawk
Black-collared Hawk
Black-chested Buzzard-eagle
Roadside Hawk
White-rumped Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
White-tailed Hawk
Zone-tailed Hawk
Black Hawk-eagle
Ornate Hawk-eagle
Black-&-chestnut Eagle
Crested Caracara
Yellow-headed Caracara
Laughing Falcon
Barred Forest-falcon
American Kestrel
Aplomado Falcon
Merlin
Peregrine
Pied-billed Grebe
Brown Booby
Anhinga
Neotropic Cormorant
Whistling Heron
Tricoloured Heron
Little Blue Heron
Snowy Egret
Capped Heron
Cocoi Heron
Great Egret
Cattle Egret
Striated Heron
Green Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-heron
Black-crowned Night-heron
Boat-billed Heron
Fasciated Tiger-heron

Rufescent Tiger-heron
Pinnated Bittern
Greater Flamingo
White Ibis
Scarlet Ibis
Whispering Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Sharp-tailed Ibis
Buff-necked Ibis
Green Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Brown Pelican
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture
King Vulture
Andean Condor
Wood Stork
Maguari Stork
Jabiru
Magnificent Frigatebird
Olive-striped Flycatcher
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
Slaty-capped Flycatcher
Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher
Common Tody-flycatcher
Maracaibo Tody-flycatcher
Black-headed Tody-flycatcher
Sooty-headed Tyrannulet
Black-capped Tyrannulet
Venezuelan Tyrannulet
Golden-faced Tyrannulet
Brown-capped Tyrannulet
Southern Beardless-tyrannulet
Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet
Northern Scrub-flycatcher
Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet
Forest Elaenia
Greenish Elaenia
Yellow-bellied Elaenia
Plain-crested Elaenia (Guides only)
Mountain Elaenia

White-throated Tyrannulet
Torrent Tyrannulet
Slender-billed Inezia
Pale-tipped Inezia
Venezuelan Bristle-tyrant
Variegated Bristle-tyrant
Rufous-lored Tyrannulet
Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant
Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant
Yellow-olive Flycatcher
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher
Flavescent Flycatcher
Bran-coloured Flycatcher
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher
Cinnamon Flycatcher
Cliff Flycatcher
Fuscous Flycatcher
Smoke-coloured Pewee
Tropical Pewee
Black Phoebe
Vermilion Flycatcher
Yellow-bellied Chat-tyrant
Brown-backed Chat-tyrant
Streak-throated Bush-tyrant
Smoky Bush-tyrant
Amazonian Black-tyrant
Pied Water-tyrant
White-headed Marsh-tyrant
Yellow-browed Tyrant
Cattle Tyrant
Dusky-capped Flycatcher
Venezuelan Flycatcher
Brown-crested Flycatcher
Tropical Kingbird
Fork-tailed Flycatcher
Grey Kingbird
Boat-billed Flycatcher
Lemon-browed Flycatcher
Golden-crowned Flycatcher
Streaked Flycatcher
Rusty-margined Flycatcher
Social Flycatcher
Piratic Flycatcher

Lesser Kiskadee
Great Kiskadee
White-bearded Flycatcher
White-naped Xenopsaris
Cinnamon Becard
Chestnut-crowned Becard
White-winged Becard
Black-&-white Becard
Cinereous Becard
Masked Tityra
Black-crowned Tityra
Green-&-black Fruiteater
Golden-breasted Fruiteater
Red-ruffed Fruitcrow
Andean Cock-of-the-rock
Wire-tailed Manakin
Lance-tailed Manakin
Golden-winged Manakin
Great Antshrike
Black-crested Antshrike
Barred Antshrike
Western Slaty Antshrike
Plain Antwren
Slaty Antwren
Rufous-winged Antwren
White-fringed Antwren
White-bellied Antbird
Bar-winged Cinclodes
Pale-legged Hornero
Andean Tit-Spintail
Ochre-browed Thistletail
Azara's Spintail
Pale-breasted Spintail
Rufous Spintail
Stripe-breasted Spintail
White-whiskered Spintail
Crested Spintail
Rusty-backed Spintail
Yellow-chinned Spintail
Streak-backed Canastero
Rufous-fronted Thornbird
Pearled Treerunner
Streaked Tuftedcheek

Guttulated Foliage-gleaner

Montane Foliage-gleaner
 Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner
Grey-throated Leaf-tosser
 Plain Xenops
 Streaked Xenops
 Plain-brown Woodcreeper
 Olivaceous Woodcreeper
 Straight-billed Woodcreeper
 Striped Woodcreeper
 Cocoa Woodcreeper
 Olive-backed Woodcreeper
 Streak-headed Woodcreeper
 Montane Woodcreeper
Red-billed Scythebill
 Black-faced Antthrush
 Short-tailed Antthrush
 Scalloped Antthrush
Plain-backed Antpitta
 Chestnut-crowned Antpitta
Grey-naped Antpitta
Slate-crowned Antpitta
Blackish Tapaculo
Northern White-crowned Tapaculo
 Mérida Tapaculo
Ocellated Tapaculo
 Rufous-browed Peppershrike
 Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo
 (David only)
 Red-eyed Vireo
Black-whiskered Vireo

Brown-capped Vireo
 Golden-fronted Greenlet
 Scrub Greenlet
 Black-collared Jay
 Black-chested Jay
 Green Jay
 White-capped Dipper
 Andean Solitaire
Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush
Spotted Nightingale-thrush
 Veery
 Grey-cheeked Thrush
 Swainson's Thrush
 Yellow-legged Thrush
 Great Thrush
 Glossy-black Thrush
 Black-hooded Thrush
 Chestnut-bellied Thrush
 Pale-breasted Thrush
 Black-billed Thrush
 Bare-eyed Thrush
 White-necked Thrush
 Tropical Mockingbird
 Black-capped Donacobius
 Bicoloured Wren
 Stripe-backed Wren
 Whiskered Wren
 Rufous-breasted Wren
 Rufous-&-white Wren
 Buff-breasted Wren
 House Wren

Mountain Wren
 Grey-breasted Wood-wren
 Southern Nightingale-wren
 Long-billed Gnatwren
 Tropical Gnatcatcher
 White-winged Swallow
 Grey-breasted Martin
 Brown-bellied Swallow
 Blue-&-white Swallow
 Southern Rough-winged Swallow
 Barn Swallow
 Andean Siskin
 Yellow-bellied Siskin
 Lesser Goldfinch
 Rufous-collared Sparrow
 Grassland Sparrow
 Yellow-browed Sparrow
 Golden-winged Sparrow
 Black-striped Sparrow
 Moustached Brush-finch
 Slaty Brush-finch
 Ochre-breasted Brush-finch
Chestnut-capped Brush-finch
 Red-capped Cardinal
 Tennessee Warbler
 Tropical Parula
 Yellow Warbler
 Mangrove Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
 Blackburnian Warbler
 Blackpoll Warbler

Black-&-white Warbler
 American Redstart
 Northern Waterthrush
 Mourning Warbler
 Slate-throated Whitestart
White-fronted Whitestart
 Black-crested Warbler
 Russet-crowned Warbler
 Golden-crowned Warbler
 Three-striped Warbler
 Bananaquit
 Chestnut-vented Conebill
White-eared Conebill
 Bicoloured Conebill
 Blue-backed Conebill
 Black-faced Tanager
 Magpie Tanager
 Common Bush-tanager

Italics *Heard only***Bold** **Endemic**

Total Seen

Total Heard

Trip Total