

FIELD REPORT

A BIRDING ADVENTURE IN THE LLANOS OF COLOMBIA: RESERVA CASANARE & HATO LA AURORA

JANUARY 13–19, 2025



Orinoco Goose, *Oressochen jubatus*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

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**A Birding Adventure in the Llanos of Colombia:
Juan Solito Lodge, Reserva Casanare
& Hato La Aurora,
with a full day near Bogota
January 13–19, 2025
by David Ascanio**

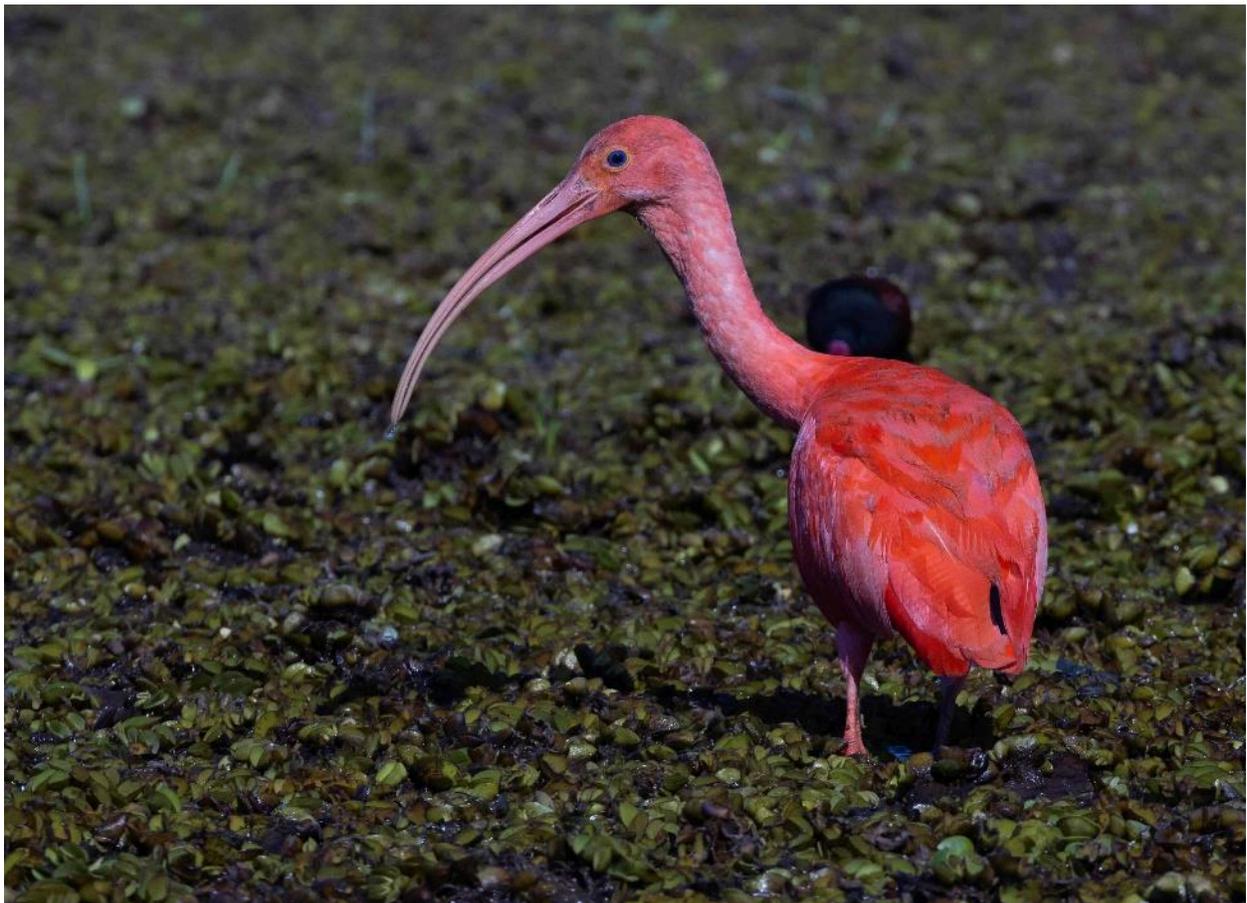
Photo album

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eBird Trip Report

ebird.org/tripreport/322702

It was still dark when the plane took off from the Bogota airport. It headed east, soaring over the Andes as the bright sun appeared over an extensive flatland reaching to the horizon. Torrential rivers from the Andes had carved the slopes, winding their way eventually to one of the greatest of South American rivers, the Orinoco. Could there be a better welcome to the Llanos of Colombia?



Scarlet Ibis, *Eudocimus ruber*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

A delicious breakfast in the city of Jopál was followed by the 4-wheel-vehicle drive to Paz de Ariporo and the Reserva Casanare. Borrow pits along the road were great locations to start birding. Pairs of Orinoco Goose appeared, along with five species of ibis: Buff-necked, Sharp-tailed, White, Bare-faced, and Scarlet. The storks gathered to hunt fish trapped in these ponds included dozens of Wood Storks and several Jabirus.



Buff-necked Ibis, *Theristicus caudatus*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

The grasslands and scrubby vegetation were also an irresistible invitation to stop. We observed pairs of Horned Screamers, scattered Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and an Aplomado Falcon that couldn't stay put thanks to the continual attacks of one of those flycatchers. Just a few hours in, we were realizing that life for the birds of the Llanos is a struggle, and everything here is on the alert to catch prey—or to avoid becoming prey!

A Llanero-style lunch waited for us at the reserve. The dining room and kitchen are next to the Ariporo River, so Scarlet Macaws, Violaceous Jays, and parrots kept us distracted during the meal.

After a well-deserved break, we explored the riverine forest behind the lodge. On a brief walk, we recorded Chestnut-vented Conebill, Pale-eyed Tody-Tyrant, a roosting (and presumably nesting) Great Potoo, Orange-fronted Yellow-Finch, and the unique

White-bearded Flycatcher, the sole member of the genus *Phelpsia*, named in honor of the father of modern ornithology in Venezuela, W.H. Phelps.



Horned Screamer, *Anhima cornuta*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

With three full days at the reserve and its environs, we opened our first full day of birding in the beautiful Mata de Caña wetland. Along the road, we found two King Vultures, one in juvenile plumage and the other an adult, sharing a carrion feast with Black and Turkey Vultures. Continuing on the track through grassland and scrub, we met up with Whistling Heron, Double-striped Thick-Knee, and Buff-necked Ibis. Once at the wetlands, we found a mosaic of colorful waterbirds covering the landscape. Over much of the morning in this extensive wetland, we admired the beautiful electric-green wing speculum of the Brazilian Teal, the astonishing red of the Scarlet Ibis, and the variable clutch size of the colorful Orinoco Goose. After another well-deserved break, the afternoon found us visiting sand dunes, wetlands, scrubby vegetation, and extensive grasslands before we arrived at the ranch headquarters. We experienced the sunset

from the old quarters, built more than 70 years ago. The sight of the bright red sun disappearing beneath the horizon was complemented by piglets and chickens running free while cowboys were finishing the day's laborious field work. It was a beautiful experience.



King Vulture, *Sarcorampus papa*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

The second full day opened with a rich breakfast, which we enjoyed as Scarlet Macaws and Sharp-tailed Ibises flew over the forest and a Sunbittern serenaded us with its soft sweet whistles. We boarded a large covered canoe to explore the Ariporo River. Horned Screammers patrolled the riverbank along with Gray-cowled Wood-Rails, Rufous-breasted Hermit, the cute Pied Plover, and the uniquely strange Hoatzin. Waterbirds abounded, and we added Whistling, Little Blue, Snowy, Cocoi, and Striated Herons and Western Cattle and Great Egrets. Ibises here included the Bare-faced, Scarlet, Buff-necked, and Green. Barking Hoatzins and raucous chachalacas added to the volume of the morning chorus.



Sunbittern, *Eurypyga helias*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

After two hours going upstream with a noisy two-stroke outboard, we spotted a pair of Crestless Curassows, and we decided to wait for them to come out of the forest. We wound up enjoying some thirty minutes of superb views of one of the rarest species of the Llanos. But the best was yet to come. On our return downstream to the lodge, another curassow flew over the boat and landed on the beach, giving us even more glorious views of what is probably the most threatened species in the Llanos. What a way to close the morning!

In the afternoon, rather than visiting wetlands and rivers, we drove to a farm to explore the gallery forest, where we had views of the Rufous-tailed Jacamar and of displaying Wire-tailed Manakins. Then came another great moment: As day gave way to evening and the light dimmed, an owl called. It didn't take long to find it, and we enjoyed the serenade of a pair of *Strix* owls—it still isn't clear whether it was a Black-and-white or a Black-banded Owl. The experience was beyond magical, one of those moments to last a lifetime.

With a great list of birds already in our pocket, the last day in the wonderful Llanos had come. After another fine breakfast, we drove to the main road to explore the matas, isolated stands of trees on the grassland. Here we found the astonishing Venezuelan Troupial and White-tailed Goldenthrout. In the borrow pits, more Jabiru and Wood Storks were observed while we enjoyed the Capped Heron flying away on soft wingbeats. Savanna Hawks were alert for prey, and a Laughing Falcon sang in the distance. Oropendolas, orioles, macaws, parrots, and parakeets rounded off another great morning of avian richness.



Crestless Curassow, *Mitu tomentosum*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

We closed the tour with a drive to a complex of sand dunes surrounding another magical wetland, where views of Dwarf Cuckoo, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, and the poorly known Yellow-browed Tyrant rounded off a cultural and wildlife experience that had taken us back in time to when the unique music, poetry, harsh conditions, and culture of ranch life were at the center of the Llano's economy.

Now that you have enjoyed the plains of the Orinoco, I would like to invite you to consider a visit to some other, very different but equally bird-rich destinations:

Feathered Gems of Northern Peru

2024 photo album: [flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720322937717/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720322937717/)

2023 eBird trip report: ebird.org/tripreport/293996

Colombia: Hummingbirds & Tanagers of the Western Andes: A Relaxed & Easy Departure

2022 Photo album: [flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720323174444/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720323174444/)

2024 eBird trip report: ebird.org/tripreport/303506

The Amazon Cruise

2024 photo album: [flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720317051001/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720317051001/)

2024 eBird trip reports: ebird.org/tripreport/200056 and ebird.org/tripreport/207054

ventbird.com7A Birding Adventure in the



Spectacled Caiman, *Caiman crocodilus*. Photo © D. Ascanio.



Strix sp. Photo © D. Ascanio.



Venezuelan Troupial, *Icterus icterus*. Photo © D. Ascanio.

LLANOS OF THE ORINOCO: RESERVA CASANARE, HATO LA AURORA & JUAN SOLITO LODGE

For information about number of individuals and dates when the bird species was seen or heard, see ebird.org/tripreport/322702.

ITINERARY

13 January 2025. Arrival.
14 January 2025. Flight to El Yopal. Transfer to Juan Solito.
15–17 January 2025. Reserva Casanare & Hato La Aurora.
18 January 2025. Transfer to El Yopal. Flight to Bogotá.
19 January 2025. Departure.

BIRDS

Cinereous Tinamou, *Crypturellus cinereus*
Horned Screamer, *Anhima cornuta*
White-faced Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna viduata*
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna autumnalis*
Orinoco Goose, *Oressochen jubatus*
Muscovy Duck, *Cairina moschata*
Brazilian Teal, *Amazonetta brasiliensis*
Blue-winged Teal, *Spatula discors*
Rufous-vented Chachalaca, *Ortalis ruficauda*
Crestless Curassow, *Mitu tomentosum*
Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*
Pale-vented Pigeon, *Patagioenas cayennensis*
Ruddy Ground Dove, *Columbina talpacoti*
Scaled Dove, *Columbina squammata*
White-tipped Dove, *Leptotila verreauxi*
Eared Dove, *Zenaida auriculata*
Smooth-billed Ani, *Crotophaga ani*
Striped Cuckoo, *Tapera naevia*
Dwarf Cuckoo, *Coccyzua pumila*
Nacunda Nighthawk, *Chordeiles nacunda*
Band-tailed Nighthawk, *Nyctiprogne leucopyga*
Common Pauraque, *Nyctidromus albicollis*
White-tailed Nightjar, *Hydropsalis cayennensis*
Great Potoo, *Nyctibius grandis*
Common Potoo, *Nyctibius griseus*
Rufous-breasted Hermit, *Glaucis hirsutus*
White-bearded Hermit, *Phaethornis hispidus*
Pale-bellied Hermit, *Phaethornis antophilus*

White-tailed Goldenthrroat, *Polytmus guainumbi*
Blue-tailed Emerald, *Chlorostilbon mellisugus*
Glittering-throated Emerald, *Chionomesa fimbriata*
Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, *Aramides cajaneus*
Limpkin, *Aramus guarauna*
Double-striped Thick-knee, *Hesperoburhinus bistriatus*
Black-necked Stilt, *Himantopus mexicanus*
Pied Plover, *Hoploxypterus cayanus*
Southern Lapwing, *Vanellus chilensis*
Collared Plover, *Anarhynchus collaris*
Wattled Jacana, *Jacana jacana*
Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria*
Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes*
Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*
Yellow-billed Tern, *Sternula superciliaris*
Large-billed Tern, *Phaetusa simplex*
Hoatzin, *Opisthocomus hoazin*
Sunbittern, *Eurypyga helias*
Jabiru, *Jabiru mycteria*
Wood Stork, *Mycteria americana*
White Ibis, *Eudocimus albus*
Scarlet Ibis, *Eudocimus ruber*
Sharp-tailed Ibis, *Cercibis oxycerca*
Green Ibis, *Mesembrinibis cayennensis*
Bare-faced Ibis, *Phimosus infuscatus*
Buff-necked Ibis, *Theristicus caudatus*
Roseate Spoonbill, *Platalea ajaja*
Anhinga, *Anhinga anhinga*
Rufescent Tiger-Heron, *Tigrisoma lineatum*
Boat-billed Heron, *Cochlearius cochlearius*
Capped Heron, *Pilherodius pileatus*
Whistling Heron, *Syrigma sibilatrix*
Little Blue Heron, *Egretta caerulea*
Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*
Striated Heron, *Butorides striata*
Western Cattle-Egret, *Ardea ibis*
Great Egret, *Ardea alba*
Cocoi Heron, *Ardea cocoi*
King Vulture, *Sarcoramphus papa*
Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus*
Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, *Cathartes burrovianus*
Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*
Pearl Kite, *Gampsonyx swainsonii*
White-tailed Kite, *Elanus leucurus*
Plumbeous Kite, *Ictinia plumbea*
Crane Hawk, *Geranospiza caerulescens*

Black-collared Hawk, *Busarellus nigricollis*
Savanna Hawk, *Buteogallus meridionalis*
Great Black Hawk, *Buteogallus urubitinga*
Roadside Hawk, *Rupornis magnirostris*
American Barn Owl, *Tyto furcata*
Tropical Screech-Owl, *Megascops choliba*
Great Horned Owl, *Bubo virginianus*
Burrowing Owl, *Athene cunicularia*
Black-and-white Owl, *Strix nigrolineata*, or Black-banded Owl, *Strix huhula*
Ringed Kingfisher, *Megaceryle torquata*
Amazon Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle amazona*
Pale-headed Jacamar, *Brachygalba goeringi*
Rufous-tailed Jacamar, *Galbula ruficauda*
Chestnut-eared Aracari, *Pteroglossus castanotis*
Red-crowned Woodpecker, *Melanerpes rubricapillus*
Little Woodpecker, *Dryobates passerinus*
Lineated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus lineatus*
Laughing Falcon, *Herpetotheres cachinnans*
Crested Caracara, *Caracara plancus*
Yellow-headed Caracara, *Daptrius chimachima*
American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*
Aplomado Falcon, *Falco femoralis*
Orange-chinned Parakeet, *Brotogeris jugularis*
Festive Amazon, *Amazona festiva*
Yellow-crowned Amazon, *Amazona ochrocephala*
Orange-winged Amazon, *Amazona amazonica*
Spectacled Parrotlet, *Forpus conspicillatus*
Brown-throated Parakeet, *Eupsittula pertinax*
Chestnut-fronted Macaw, *Ara severus*
Scarlet Macaw, *Ara macao*
Blue-crowned Parakeet, *Thectocercus acuticaudatus*
Northern White-fringed Antwren, *Formicivora intermedia*
Plain Thornbird, *Phacellodomus inornatus*
Yellow-chinned Spinetail, *Certhiaxis cinnamomeus*
Pale-breasted Spinetail, *Synallaxis albescens*
Wire-tailed Manakin, *Pipra filicauda*
White-winged Becard, *Pachyramphus polychopterus*
Cinereous Becard, *Pachyramphus rufus*
Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, *Atalotriccus pilaris*
Common Tody-Flycatcher, *Todirostrum cinereum*
Yellow-olive Flatbill, *Tolmomyias sulphurescens*
Ochre-lore Flatbill, *Tolmomyias flaviventris*
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, *Camptostoma obsoletum*
Yellow-bellied Elaenia, *Elaenia flavogaster*
Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, *Sublegatus arenarum*
Vermilion Flycatcher, *Pyrocephalus rubinus*
Yellow-browed Tyrant, *Satrapa icterophrys*

White-headed Marsh Tyrant, *Arundinicola leucocephala*
Pied Water-Tyrant, *Fluvicola pica*
Short-crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus ferox*
Brown-crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus tyrannulus*
Cattle Tyrant, *Machetornis rixosa*
Lesser Kiskadee, *Philohydor lictor*
Great Kiskadee, *Pitangus sulphuratus*
Boat-billed Flycatcher, *Megarynchus pitangua*
Rusty-margined Flycatcher, *Myiozetetes cayanensis*
White-bearded Flycatcher, *Phelpsia inornata*
Piratic Flycatcher, *Legatus leucophaeus*
Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus*
Fork-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus savana*
Violaceous Jay, *Cyanocorax violaceus*
White-winged Swallow, *Tachycineta albiventer*
Gray-breasted Martin, *Progne chalybea*
Brown-chested Martin, *Progne tapera*
Southern Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*
Tropical Gnatcatcher, *Polioptila plumbea*
Southern House Wren, *Troglodytes musculus*
Bicolored Wren, *Campylorhynchus griseus*
Rufous-and-white Wren, *Thryophilus rufalbus*
Tropical Mockingbird, *Mimus gilvus*
Pale-breasted Thrush, *Turdus leucomelas*
Spectacled Thrush, *Turdus nudigenis*
Black-billed Thrush, *Turdus ignobilis*
Great Thrush, *Turdus fuscater*
Purple-throated Euphonia, *Euphonia chlorotica*
Grassland Sparrow, *Ammodramus humeralis*
Yellow-browed Sparrow, *Ammodramus aurifrons*
Eastern Meadowlark, *Sturnella magna*
Red-breasted Meadowlark, *Leistes militaris*
Crested Oropendola, *Psarocolius decumanus*
Yellow-rumped Cacique, *Cacicus cela*
Venezuelan Troupial, *Icterus icterus*
Yellow Oriole, *Icterus nigrogularis*
Shiny Cowbird, *Molothrus bonariensis*
Giant Cowbird, *Molothrus oryzivorus*
Carib Grackle, *Quiscalus lugubris*
Oriole Blackbird, *Gymnomystax mexicanus*
Yellow Warbler, *Setophaga petechia*
Blackpoll Warbler, *Setophaga striata*
Masked Cardinal, *Paroaria nigrogenis*
Black-faced Tanager, *Schistochlamys melanopis*
Silver-beaked Tanager, *Ramphocelus carbo*
Blue-gray Tanager, *Thraupis episcopus*

Palm Tanager, *Thraupis palmarum*
Burnished-buff Tanager, *Stilpnia cayana*
Chestnut-vented Conebill, *Conirostrum speciosum*
Orange-fronted Yellow-Finch, *Sicalis columbiana*
Saffron Finch, *Sicalis flaveola*
Grassland Yellow-Finch, *Sicalis luteola*
Blue-black Grassquit, *Volatinia jacarina*
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, *Sporophila minuta*
Gray Seedeater, *Sporophila intermedia*
Bananaquit, *Coereba flaveola*
Olive-gray Saltator, *Saltator olivascens*

OTHER SPECIES

MAMMALS

Red Howler Monkey, *Alouatta seniculus*. Heard only.
Capybara *Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*. This is the largest rodent in the world. It was seen in most wetlands visited.
Black Agouti, *Dasyprocta fuliginosa*. A single individual was observed coming to eat bananas fallen from the bird table.
Crab-eating Fox, or Savanna Fox, *Cardocyon virginianus*. Observed once.
Collared Peccary, *Pecari tajacu*.
White-tailed Deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*. This species apparently colonized South America by way of the Panama isthmus. It was observed on the ranch.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Spectacled Caiman, *Caiman crocodilus*.
Green Iguana, *Iguana iguana*.
Whip-tailed Lizard, *Ameiva* sp.
Tegu Lizard, *Tupinambis teguixin*.
Llanos Side-necked Turtle, *Podocnemis vogli*. Common in wetlands.
Orinoco Crocodile, *Crocodylus intermedius*.
Red-footed Tortoise, *Chelonidys carbonarius*.
Common House Gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus*.
Anaconda, *Eunectes murinus*. Wonderful views of a mating pair.

INVERTEBRATES

Leaf-cutter Ants. *Atta* or *Acronymex* sp.
Fire Ants, *Solenopsis* sp.
Blue Morpho, *Morpho* sp.
Praying Mantis, order Mantodea.