

Trip Report: Amazonian lowlands of Mitu, Colombia

4th Mar to 11th Mar 2012 – By Pritam Baruah

We birded for 7 days in the seldom visited lowland rainforests around the remote outpost of Mitu, close to the Brazilian border in far eastern Colombia. Located in the Amazon – Rio Negro Basin, Mitu is an outer lying part of the ancient Guiana Shield. The areas accessible for birding have extensive white-sand forests, tall terra firme forests, varzea, black rivers and large eroded rock formations (locally known as ‘cerros’). This habitat heterogeneity has led to high avian diversity and it presents the possibility of finding many sandy-belt specialities as well as other more widespread Amazonian species.

Mitu is included within the so-called “Orinoco-Negro White Sand Forest” Endemic Bird Area (EBA-065). Eight of the twelve known species endemic to this EBA have already been recorded in Mitu by earlier research: Grey-legged Tinamou (near-endemic), Orinoco Piculet, Yellow-throated & Spot-backed Antwren, Chestnut-crested & Grey-bellied Antbird, White-naped Seedeater and Azure-naped Jay. We recorded all 8 in this trip.

Mitu is also home to other white-sand specialities and regional targets (Guiana Shield, North of Amazon, Western Amazonia), apart from a host of special Amazonian birds. The list of target birds we recorded and missed can be found in the next section.

The tour was organized by **Pablo Florez** (www.multicolorbirdingcolombia.com). Pablo is one of the most experienced birders in Colombia and as such, has excellent knowledge of the Mitu area. Logistics in Mitu is quite difficult but everything went smooth thanks to his efforts. The trip was co-guided by **David Geale**, who is one of the best bird guides in South America – his formidable field skills were invaluable throughout the trip. There were 7 participants of six different nationalities.

Summary:

Overall, the trip was quite successful. We recorded 303 species of birds (272 seen and 31 heard only) including many specialities of the area in effectively 7 days of birding.

Highlights: Pompadour Cotinga, Orinoco Piculet, Red-Fan Parrot, Azure-naped Jay, Guianan Cock-Of-The-Rock, Tiny Hawk, Chestnut-crested, Grey-bellied, Black-headed, Imeri Warbling & White-plumed Antbird, Spot-backed, Yellow-throated & Cherrie’s Antwren, Black Bushbird, Blackish-Grey & Pearly Antshrike, Rufous-capped & Striated Antthrush, Yellow-crowned Manakin, Black Manakin, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Pale-bellied Mourner, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Spot-throated & Bar-bellied Woodcreeper, Point-tailed Palmcreeper, Brown-headed & Lemon-chested Greenlet, King Vulture, Paradise, Bronzy, Yellow-billed & Great Jacamar, Lafresnaye’s Piculet, Citron-bellied Attila, Chestnut-capped & White-chested Puffbird, Rusty-breasted Nunlet, Orange-cheeked Parrot, Black-bellied Thorntail, Gould’s Jewelfront, Collared Gnatwren, Dusky-chested Flycatcher, *Duidae* Fuscous Flycatcher, Blackish Nightjar, White-bellied Dacnis, Yellow-Green Grosbeak, Plumbeous Euphonia.

Heard-only targets: Grey-legged Tinamou, White-naped Seedeater and Pavonine Quetzal.

Point-tailed Palmcreeper was a significant range-extension. An individual was photographed and sound-recorded at the Mitu Cachivera trail-head, characteristically associating with *Mauritia* palms. On Feb 8th, some of us saw a swift flying over tall terra firme forest, which was quite possibly a Pale-rumped Swift (*Chaetura egregia*). It was in a group which included other *Chaetura* swifts (Grey-rumped & Short-tailed). This is probably one of the first, if not the first record of this species for Colombia. Unfortunately no photos or sound recordings were obtained.

Missed targets were: Tawny-tufted Toucanet, which is considered the biggest miss of the trip, Fiery Topaz, Brown-banded Puffbird, Cinnamon Manakin-Tyrant (Neopipo), Purple-breasted Cotinga, Guianan Gnatcatcher.

For unknown reasons, spontaneous bird song at dawn was lesser than expected throughout our trip. So we worked very hard, spending all possible day light hours in the field. There was ample evidence of hunting, explaining the very low density and shyness of mammals and both terrestrial and sedentary birds. Night birding was unproductive as the tight security around the area prevents getting into good habitat after dusk.

Logistics:

Getting there:

Mitu can be reached from Bogota's international airport on a 1.30 hour Satena flight that runs 3 days a week subject to frequent changes in schedule. It is important to re-confirm the tickets and flight schedule just before the flight. Our return flight was postponed by one hour which allowed us to bird for little bit more instead of arriving early at the Mitu airport, which has very limited seating and facilities.

Transportation:

There are very few 4-wheel vehicles for hire (probably only 2 currently) and we used the only large 4x4 available in town to reach the birding areas. We also had a moto-taxi (3-wheel open sided taxi), mostly used by one of the guides and me. Note that the road leading out of town towards Ceima Cachivera and MCH is far from ideal for moto-taxis, thus posing a risk of break-down. Getting stranded on that road can be quite inconvenient because there is no cell-phone connectivity and it has very little traffic. So both the vehicle and the driver have to be reliable. Motor-bikes are available too but we did not use them. The hired vehicles were mostly on time but on-time arrival is not always guaranteed. Changing pick up times while on a trail might not be possible due to lack of cell phone connectivity. We used a narrow motor-boat to get to Cajure trail. Row boats are also available for hire.

Hotel:

We stayed at the Hotel Mitusava for all 7 nights. It was conveniently located one block north of the main square on the straight road to Cerro Urania overlooking the Rio Vaupes. The area is safe and quiet. All participants were booked into clean and comfortable single rooms (some even had AC). Showers were cold but that is not a problem because it is quite hot and humid most of the time.

Food:

There are only two acceptable restaurants in town and both are walking distance from Hotel Mitusava. The one closer to the hotel has consistently slow service (Carrera-13/Calle-15A). The one farther out near the police station, (Carrera-12/Calle-13) is family run and has better food and faster service. It is recommended that people with dietary restrictions (such as vegetarians) bring some of their own food (instant noodles/rice, energy & protein bars, condensed milk, bread) because there is very little vegetarian food in Mitu. It is possible to get nice sandwich material in the restaurants though. There are also good grocery stores from which to buy supplies for breakfast and lunch in the field, which is the case on most days.

Community:

Most of the birding is in community owned land and it is mandatory to take an escort from the community that owns the land. Sometimes these escorts can double up as spotters or porters or area guides with up-to-date knowledge of the terrain. Pablo has good relations with all the communities whose lands we explored so there were never any problems or delays. At this time, it seemed to be sufficient to just show up and ask for somebody to accompany us. However, to use somebody with good knowledge of local birds, fruiting trees and flowering trees it might be necessary to notify in advance. While good spotting ability is not uncommon among the native communities, expertise in hospitality and general birding (such as identification, planning) is improving due to educational initiatives by various organizations.

Safety:

Mitu is infamous for the bloody 1998 invasion by FARC guerrillas which left the little town in ruins. Since then, the Colombian army and police have maintained a very conspicuous grip on the area and it is believed to be quite safe for several years now. However, old land-mines do get found in outer lying areas once in a while and the presence of anti-social elements cannot be ruled out. So it is important to understand the current security situation before venturing out for birding. A local guide would know best and the army and police are always at hand to ask. Walking around in town even in the evening was safe.

Weather:

We had comfortable temperatures throughout the week ranging from mid 20s to mid 30s and very high humidity. It rained at least a little bit every day and it remained overcast for long spells. However we had heavy rains on three different days and it got inconvenient when it ate into our birding time. But even with the constant threat of rain, we lost only about a day due to rain. Light rain was not entirely bad because bird activity would pick up soon after it stopped but heavy rains were inconvenient. It was possible to bird from 5.45 am to 5.45 pm at this time of the year.

Birding areas:



1. **Urania:** Secondary forest, clearings and dry forest. Very easily accessible. 10 minute drive on a straight road east of Mitu. The first foot-bridge and the forest patches before and after seem to be high on bird (and human) activity all the time. We started birding 200 meters before the foot-bridge. The trail goes through the Urania community and then climbs up a huge *cerro* which can be good for canopy birds, cotingas and perched raptors. The view from here is awesome. East of the rock, there is a narrow trail through varzea and terra-firme which we did not visit but is highly recommended. There is also a small varzea trail bearing north from the road much closer to Mitu as shown on the map.
2. **Cajure Trail:** This lies on the north bank of the Rio Vaupes. Tall terra firme, varzea and different types of white-sand forest. Apparently one can hike this trail for days through forest and small communities and it gets progressively remote. By boat downriver for 10 minutes and then take the first tributary north for another 20 minutes until some rapids. The Cajure community is settled on the right bank and that is where the trail starts. Birding starts 400 meters after that at a long bridge over swampy ground with seasonally inundated forest on both sides. Birding is excellent at the bridge. The trail widens after the bridge and has nice tall forest on both sides until moving into extensive white-sand forest, mostly *humid chamizal* (humid stunted white-sand forest with dense undergrowth) and *dry chamizal* (dry open stunted white-sand forest with poor undergrowth).

3. **Ceima Cachivera:** Primary and secondary terra-firme and white-sand forest, mostly all *humid varillal* (tall humid white-sand forest with developed understory). Has an easily accessible Guianan Cock-Of-The-Rock lek. 25 minutes by 4x4 from the center of Mitu to the community of Ceima. *Cachivera* means rapids and its namesake is located at the trail-head near the settlement. There were some promising *cerros* in the area which we did not visit but they are recommended for views of the upper canopy and emergent layers.
4. **Mitu Cachivera:** Trail through good white-sand forest, mostly *dry varillal* (medium to tall open dry white-sand forest) and also small patches of *humid chamizal* and scrub until it reaches a small black river. The river can be crossed on foot during low water season. 250 meters before the river there is a narrow trail that connects to the Bocatoma Trail. After the river, the trail runs through terra firme forest with clearings and patches of *humid chamizal*. Bird activity along the Mitu Cachivera trail is generally low just like any other white-sand forest but lots of regional and habitat specialists can be encountered here. 10 minute drive from center of Mitu to a dilapidated bridge and another 10 minutes walk to the trail head through a settlement.
5. **Bocatoma Trail (Pipeline Trail):** Excellent white-sand forest. Humid stunted forest with understory at different stages of development and black water pools. This wide trail, originally an unpaved road for maintaining the pipeline that runs along it, leads into terra firme forest but we did not get that far because we birded here twice for only for half a day each time. 10 minute drive from center of Mitu to the same dilapidated bridge as above. This south-east bound trail starts right after the bridge. There is a shortcut trail that connects this trail with the Mitu Cachivera trail so it might be a good idea for birders to spend the whole day exploring both trails without getting back into town; Note that it is possible to bird in humid secondary forest or open areas during mid-day when activity inside white-sand forest is most likely to stop.
6. **MCH (Santa Cruz Road):** This is the quintessential tall terra firme site around Mitu. There are two wide trails through primary forest and one narrow and one wide trail through mostly secondary and disturbed forest, all with excellent birding. Birding from the main road can be good for species that prefer open disturbed areas and also for canopy flocks and cotingas. One hour by 4x4 from center of Mitu to the Santa Cruz intersection. The left turn goes eastwards to the hydroelectric project which lends the name MCH (although the trails are located well before the project site). Along with the possibility of most specialities, this is in general the most bird rich area around Mitu and hence spending two full days here is recommend.

Although Mitu provides a nice diversity of habitats, it would be nice to have other birding features such as: a canopy tower, oxbow lake, clay lick and large bamboo patches. Note that the current lack of canopy towers is somewhat compensated by the large *cerros* in Urania and Ceima. The lack of oxbow lakes might be because of the ancient geomorphology of the area. A protected hunting-free area might increase the chances for large terrestrial birds such as curassows. Most of these limitations can be addressed by a standard birding lodge inside forest and hopefully there will be one in the future. But even so, the currently accessible trails present a wonderful diversity of birds.

Itinerary:

March 4: Arrival. 2.45 hours at Urania.
 March 5: Ceima Cachivera.
 March 6: AM – Mitu Cachivera; PM – Urania.
 March 7: AM – Cajure Trail; PM – Urania Varzea trail.
 March 8: MCH.
 March 9: AM – Mitu Cachivera; PM – Bocatoma Trail.
 March 10: MCH.
 March 11: AM – Bocatoma Trail. Departure.



Black water pool in white-sand forest (Bocatoma Trail)

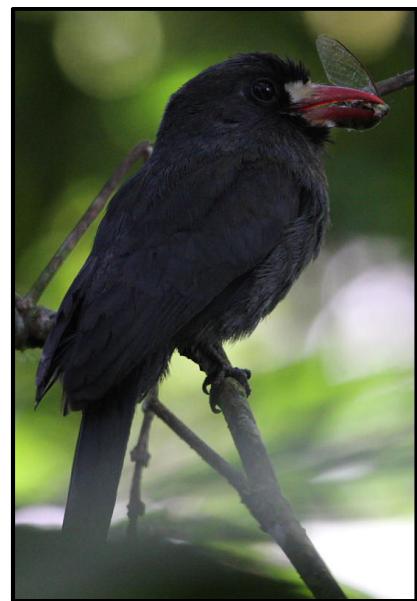
Diary:

March 4: 2.45 hours at Urania.

Our flight from Bogota was scheduled to depart at 9.00 am but it was delayed by almost 3 hours, eating into valuable birding time. By 1.30 pm, we were ready to eat at the restaurant closest to the hotel but slow service meant that we wasted a full hour here. As we sat at our outdoor table waiting for our food, we picked up all the common local birds. Finally, we were birding at 3.00 pm and what a start it was. We got out of our vehicles to the raucous calls of **Red-Fan Parrot** right overhead, giving us spectacular perched views. After our only **Chestnut-eared Aracari** of the trip, we headed east towards the first bridge. Our aim was to reach Cerro Urania soon enough to bird from the high lookout and then get into a forested trail. But the incredible bird activity around the first bridge kept us busy for well over an hour. We had cracking views of **Orange-cheeked Parrot**, **Yellow-crowned Manakin**, **Blue Ground-Dove**, **Striped Woodcreeper**, **Green-backed Trogon**, **Red-and-Green Macaw** among many other species. The open habitat after the bridge had two good trees for hummingbirds, where we had **White-necked Jacobin**, **Versicoloured Emerald** & **Green-tailed Goldenthrout**. A little further on, the trail rises towards the *cerro* but just before that at the bottom, **Azure-naped Jays** were very common. From the *cerro*, we had excellent scope views of **Amazonian Umbrellabird** and the only **Many-banded Aracari** of the trip. **Plumbeous Euphonia** at the bottom of the *cerro* was the last great bird of the evening and we ended with 78 species in only 2.45 hours.

March 5: Ceima Cachivera.

We drove 30 minutes south to the small community of Ceima where we planned to bird the whole day in mixed white-sand and tall terra-firme forest. After waiting for the local guide from the village to arrive, we started birding just before 6.00 am. We resisted stopping for a whole suite of tantalizingly vocal antbirds in order to get to the Guianan Cock-Of-The-Rock lek quickly. However, several **Blackish Nightjars** at a small clearing halted our hike. As we were admiring their sudden sallies, bird activity picked up around us and we had **Channel-billed Toucan**, **White-throated Toucan**, **Slender-billed Xenops**, **Crimson-crested Woodpecker** and **White-fringed & Grey Antwren**. We reached the lek after a short walk and took up positions. We were patiently waiting when a sudden flash of orange blazed through the dark forest and abruptly settled above us. The outrageous **Guianan Cock-Of-The-Rock** had arrived for its dance. As we watched him, some movement above us turned out to be uncooperative females. On our way back to the main trail, we had **Great-billed Hummingbird** and **Ringed Antpipit**. We also spent over 20 minutes trying to spot a calling **Lined Forest-falcon** but it frustrated us until it decided to leave without a hint of show. Back in the main trail we had great views of several antbirds including **Imeri Warbling**, **Black-faced**, **Yellow-browed**, **Black-throated**, **White-browed & Grey Antbird** and finally the enigmatic **Black Bushbird**. Other great birds were **Scale-breasted Woodpecker**, **Rufous-capped Anthrush**, **Ivory-billed Aracari** and a **Swainson's Flycatcher**, which is an uncommon austral migrant. This hike goes through some excellent primary forest interspersed with secondary forest, clearings and even some low lying *igapo* (black water flooded forest). An understory flock led by **Dusky-throated Antshrike** also had **Rufous-tailed Antwren** and a **Lafresnaye's Piculet** among others. Another highlight of the day was the relatively common but exquisite **Black-eared Fairy** in its utterly graceful bathing ritual. By 1.30 PM it was getting very hot and activity was winding down so we decided to have lunch sheltered under a large rock formation. And we did well because just like typical Amazonian afternoons, the weather changed from hot & humid to 30 minutes of torrential downpour within seconds. After the rain stopped, we traced our way back. A canopy flock yielded the only **White-bellied Dacnis** of the trip. We also picked up many widespread Amazonian species on the way back. Notable among them were **Dusky-chested Flycatcher**, a confusing *Myiozetetes* which was common here and **White-fronted Nunbird**. As the day was coming to an end, we were walking through a patch of primary forest with good visibility through the understory. Having not seen any specialities lately, we decided to speculatively try for one of the main targets of the trip. And no sooner did we play the tape, an aggressive response was heard and a pair of incredible **Chestnut-crested Antbirds** screamed into quick views for everyone. There were no army ants around and this could very well be a pair defending its nesting territory.

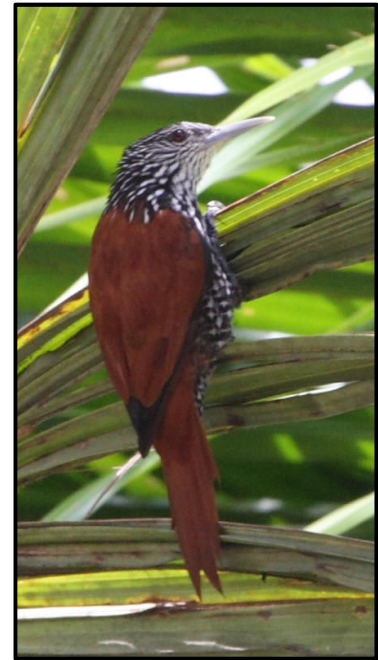


White-fronted Nunbird

The ride back to Mitu for David and me in the 3-wheel moto-taxi turned out to be rather comical. Crammed in with equipment, driver and an unexpected third passenger (a hilarious mother-daughter duo), the overloaded moto-taxi stalled several times in the middle of nowhere and had to be pushed to start every time. Furthermore, sometimes its gear would refuse to shift either from 2nd to 1st when moving or from neutral to 1st when stalled. On the other hand when we really should have stopped for a long black snake visible by the roadside, the taxi hurried away under screams of terror. A **Ladder-tailed Nightjar** was seen on the way back, which eventually took over an hour instead of the expected 30 minutes.

March 6: AM – Mitu Cachivera; PM – Urania.

Our early dawn start was delayed by 15 minutes at an army checkpoint whose personnel seemed confused by the 7 strange foreigners in front of them carrying suspicious equipment and looking for birds. After convincing them and getting advised about our personal safety, we stopped at a dilapidated bridge right before the “12 de Octubre” community. We were looking for a special bird for which the habitat appeared quite unsuitable. But apparently the highly degraded creek side vegetation was similar enough to the varzea or Llanos type for this particular pair of **Blackish-Grey Antshrike**. A little ahead we began our first foray into extensive white-sand forest and we were very excited about the possibilities here. But true to the nature of this strange forest type, bird activity was very low. We started well enough with a small mid-canopy flock led by a pair of **Amazonian Antshrikes** that also held **Cherrie’s Antwren** and the **Duidae Fuscous Flycatcher**. But after that came long periods of silence and the intermittent honeycreeper – this was to be the norm in all major white-sand areas. We had 4 species of honeycreeper here including the uncommon **Short-billed Honeycreeper**. But every now and then the general sense of emptiness would thankfully be broken by a nice bird. Some of these were **Black Manakin**, **White-browed Purpletuft**, **Rufous-tailed Xenops**, **Lineated Woodcreeper** and one of the most sought after specialties – **Spot-backed Antwren**. The trail reached a small black river after which it continues towards higher ground. But as it got warmer and drier towards noon, an overwhelming silence came upon us and anticipating an even quieter afternoon, we decided to head back to town so we can try another trail after lunch. On our way back, we were delighted by a very close **Rusty-breasted Nunlet**. And as luck would have it, when we reached the trail-head where we started the day, a **Point-tailed Palmcreeper** started calling from the palms in the open habitat. This very cooperative individual turned out to be the first record for Mitu and a northward range extension by about 600 km. Some fly by **Dusky-billed Parrotlets**, **Moriche Oriole** and a **Paradise Jacamar** were also seen here.



Point-tailed Palmcreeper

After lunch we decided to visit Urania again, where quantity is always guaranteed. The sporadic rain meant that we conveniently spent a lot of time at the roofed bridge. It was a very nice viewing platform for birds that were regularly visiting the surrounding habitat. We had 4 species of kingfisher including the **Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher**. A nice flock had **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**, **Masked Tanager**, **Amazonian Streaked Antwren** and **Black-chinned Antbird**. After the rain, we started walking back west and we soon added **Bicoloured Antbird**, **Gould’s Jewelfront**, **Striped Manakin** and **Blue-crowned Trogon**. We had further great looks at **Red-fan Parrot** which we found to be reliable about 200 meters west of the bridge where a small patch of primary forest starts to cradle the road. It was dusk by now and some of us decided to stay back for some night birding. But unfortunately it was unsuccessful.

March 7: AM – Cajure Trail; PM – Urania Varzea trail.

We left the hotel at 5.00 AM for our boat ride to this trail. The boat dock was a mere five minute walk from the hotel. Our boat was 15 minutes late and when it arrived, it was a long, narrow and not to mention wobbly boat. Filled to capacity, we reached the community after an uneventful 30 minute boat ride. After plodding through some treacherous mud, we reached the first bridge where we had some great birds – **Bar-bellied Woodcreeper**, **Chestnut-capped Puffbird**, **Yellow-throated Antwren** and **Black-headed Antbird**. The wide trail after the bridge produced a very cooperative **Citron-bellied Attila**, **Bronzy Jacamar**, **Pectoral Sparrow** and a heard-only **Grey-legged Tinamou** which frustrated us by coming very close but not showing itself. This enigmatic species was

previously thought to be endemic to the Orinoco-Negro sandy belt but it has since been recorded in the white sand pockets of Loreto in north-eastern Peru, where several other range extensions of white-sand specialists have occurred. An **Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner** is worth a mention only because we strangely failed to see any other foliage-gleaner on this trip. After a large clearing we entered white-sand forest (mostly *humid chamizal* grading into *dry chamizal*) and the only thing of note was the spectacular silence all around us. To make matters worse, it suddenly started raining very heavily and we decided to head back while also hoping to find some shelter for the people who forgot their rain gear. We found shelter under a large hut that served as a school classroom. But after 30 minutes the rain suddenly stopped. Since it stopped earlier than expected, we decided to head back into white-sand and try our luck again. But yet again we failed to locate any new birds. Heading back, our luck turned around as soon as we reached the wide trail with tall forest on both sides. A spectacular male **Pompadour Cotinga** was perched above the trail in all its purple glory. At the bridge we had a large flock where we picked up some widespread Amazonian species including **Rufous-bellied Euphonia**, **Ocellated Woodcreeper** and **Dusky Antbird**. Back at the start of the trail we saw a huge fruiting tree buzzing with activity but unfortunately it was already 1.00 PM, our boat had arrived and it was time to head back.



Open stunted white-sand forest (dry chamizal), Cajure Trail

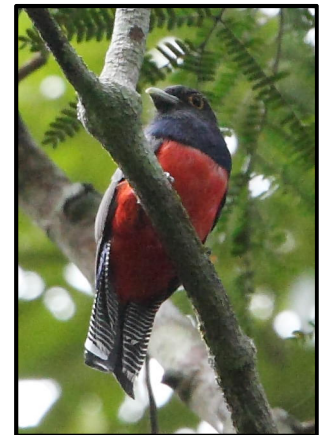
We only had little over 2 hours of birding for the evening and we decided to do a small varzea trail on the road to Urania. This short muddy trail ends at the Rio Vaupes and it was very active. The distinctive rattling call of a Cinereous Antshrike indicated that an understory flock was nearby. We soon realized that it was actually an army ant swarm with the **Cinereous Antshrike** acting as both leader and sentinel. We had great views of both **Spot-throated Woodcreeper** and **Amazonian Barred Woodcreeper** in the flock. We ended the day with a small flock of **Yellow-Green Grosbeak**.

March 8: MCH.

We started driving at 4.50 am and reached an hour later. Our plan was to take the wide trail off of Santa Cruz Road but as it would still be dark in the trails through the forest interior, we decided to bird from the main road for some time. Our first of the day was a real star – the **Orinoco Piculet**, which showed very well. A **Black-capped Becard** was called in from a small flock. Inside the trail we had great birds including **Spot-backed & Scale-backed Antbird**, **Stipple-throated Antwren** and **Cream-coloured Woodpecker**. But the best sighting of the day was a 10 minute look at a stationary **Striated Antthrush**, which was something of a minor miracle after the runaround it gave us. We first heard this super secretive species from the trail in primary forest that had good visibility through sparse undergrowth. However even though it was responding to our playback it didn't seem to be coming any closer. So we decided to walk off trail and get a little closer ourselves. But as we walked in, we realized that the bird was much closer than we earlier thought; Some of us had glimpses of it rapidly scurrying through the undergrowth to a spot

where it was no longer visible. After 10 minutes of waiting for it to move or even call, it finally responded but it was calling *behind us*. None of us had a clue how it could have gotten behind us without us knowing. So now we started scanning behind us. After some time we quickly glimpsed it again and unbelievably enough it was walking on the wide trail we had left earlier. And just as quickly it duly disappeared into the other side. Exasperated, we came up with a plan to stop this deception – all the participants would wait quietly on the trail at some distance and David would remain hidden on this side of the trail and play its call. The expectation was that the bird would cross the trail towards the playback and we would have nice views of it on the trail. But it was not to be – the bird had hidden itself in a large tangle and wouldn't move. It looked like we had to give up. But since we had already spent so much time on it, David suggested a desperate move: walk quickly towards the bird in a group and hope that it shows after it flushes. The chance of this succeeding with a notoriously skulking antthrush was quite slim but we decided to try it anyway. So we did it, crashing through the undergrowth towards the calling bird. But as we got very close we realized that the bird surprisingly did not move at all. On the other hand, since we were closer now, the view was much less obstructed! And after some scanning, there it was, sitting stationary, confident of its invisibility.

At a clearing when we were having breakfast and getting bit by chiggers, we saw **Turquoise Tanager** and **Golden-green Woodpecker**, which was just one among the 10 species of woodpeckers we saw during the day. Heading back through the trail, we had a very nice **White-chested Puffbird**. We then decided to hike along Santa Cruz road in more open habitat further ahead. But our plans were spoilt by road maintenance workers hacking through the roadside vegetation. We still added a gorgeous **Yellow-billed Jacamar**, **Chestnut-crowned Becard** and **Fasciated Antshrike** but a **Silvered Antbird** would remain heard-only because it refused to come anywhere close to the recent machete work. And then it started raining heavily, pretty much continuously for a few hours until it was lunch time. We had taken shelter under some palms but for lunch we found a shed in a clearing along the MCH road. While having lunch, some of us saw a **Pale-rumped Swift** flying among other swifts and this is possibly an early record for the country. Rain remained a problem throughout the rest of the day but we squeezed in some birding whenever it offered some respite. A trail off of MCH road through secondary and disturbed forest had **White-necked Thrush**, **Screaming Piha** and several **Golden-headed Manakins** displaying at a lek. Walking along the MCH main road we added **Plum-throated Cotinga**, **Moustached Antwren** and **White-crowned Manakin**. Before returning to Mitu, we went to the day's first trail to retrieve a dropped laser pen and there we found **Amazonian Violaceous Trogon** and **Pale-bellied Mourner**.



Blue-crowned Trogon

March 9: AM Mitu Cachivera; PM – Bocatoma Trail.

We spent the whole day in white-sand forest today. But eventually it turned out to be even quieter than the previous days and we also had sporadic rains taking up some of our time. We started quite well, with a bird we first thought was our target Brown-headed Greenlet uttering a single 'peeoo' note instead of four. But when it finally allowed us to see it, we realized it was instead a neat little **Collared Gnatwren** uttering its single note call. Then we had a nice army ant swarm in the first patch of *humid chamizal* along the trail. It was attended by 5 species: **Plain-brown Woodcreeper**, **Elegant Woodcreeper**, **Scale-backed Antbird**, **Bicoloured Antbird** and one of the most bizarre and sought after antbirds – the **White-plumed Antbird**, which is an obligate army ant follower. Several delightful adults were flying all around us with their shocking facial décor. Later we crossed the black river on foot and onto a clearing where a canopy flock yielded **Lemon-chested Greenlet**. Then we hiked into more mature forest. We saw an obligate white-sand specialty – the **Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin**, in what looked like a small patch of *humid chamizal* within tall terra firme forest. We were then looking for a calling **Pavonine Quetzal** but we got distracted by a **Great Jacamar** that was showing very well nearby. Unfortunately the quetzal did not bother to show up after we were done with the jacamar. Since we did not pack lunch today, we back-tracked, adding a **Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher** before driving back to Mitu for a late lunch.



Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin

After more rain delay we were finally birding in the Bocatoma trail, also known as Pipeline Trail in english. A **Spangled Cotinga** was the first nice bird. It was seen perched on top a tree at the edge of the 2nd clearing. But the day clearly belonged to one of the mega birds of the trip – the poorly known **Grey-bellied Antbird**, giving us excellent views. A pair was walking slowly in predictable lines along the floor of *humid chamizal*, never perching more than a foot above the floor. We saw little else for the rest of the evening but a very responsive **Yellow-throated Flycatcher** was nice. It was almost dark by the time we were back at the wooded edge of the 2nd clearing, when suddenly we heard one of our targets calling loudly from a mere 10 feet away. It was the much sought after **White-naped Seedeater**, which had eluded us so far. But unfortunately it was too dark to see it. A desperate attempt at spot lighting it only revealed its quick escape.

March 10: MCH.

We found ourselves in the MCH area yet again, starting at 4.45 am to be on time for the cacophony of dawn songs. We were hoping to catch up on the following targets: Tawny-tufted Toucanet, Cinnamon Neopipo, Brown-banded Puffbird, Fiery Topaz and Pearly Antshrike. Eventually we dipped on all but the last one but we did have other good birds. We planned to bird mostly in the two remaining trails that we could not visit the previous time we were here – first the smaller wide trail through primary forest and then the wide trail through secondary & disturbed forest. The first trail produced some nice widespread Amazonian species such as **Rufous-tailed Flatbill**, **Plain-throated Antwren**, **Pink-throated Becard** and **Cinereous Mourner**. A large canopy flock had **Wing-barred Piprites** and **Dusky-capped Greenlet** among a host of tanagers and flycatchers. But foliage-gleaners were still conspicuous by their absence. A **Pale-tailed Barbthroat** was present while having our late breakfast. We also managed to spot a **Lawrence's Thrush** mimicking away perched on a bare branch high up in the canopy. We then drove a short distance on the MCH road to the other trail. At the trail head we met another birder, Avery Bartels (who happens to guide for Ecoturs) and he helpfully alerted us to an eye-level flowering tree for hummingbirds and the spot where he saw Tawny-tufted Toucanet earlier in the day. We saw **Grey-breasted Sabrewing** and some common hummingbirds in that tree but altogether failed to locate the targeted toucanet even after staking out potential areas (areas with fruiting palms) for several hours over the rest of the day. We saw a **King Vulture** and also had a canopy flock with common Amazonian species before it started raining, prompting us to have an early lunch in a hut belonging to an indigenous family. Rain pretty much affected the rest of the day. An understory flock held a **Pearly Antshrike** and also a **Chestnut-belted Gnateater**, which responded to playback only momentarily and then decided to continue on with the flock without showing itself. While staking out for the toucanet we saw a **White-shouldered Antshrike** and a secretive boreal migrant, the **Grey-cheeked Thrush**. After finally giving up on it, we were walking back to the vehicle when we saw an amazing **Tiny Hawk** at eye-level. Known to be a specialist at preying on hummingbirds, it was silently staking out the same flowering tree where we saw hummingbirds earlier.

March 11: AM – Bocatoma Trail.

Today was our last morning at Mitu and we were at the trail-head by 5.45 am. And finally for a change, the white-sand forest was busy; in fact it was so busy that all through the morning we didn't go even five minutes without seeing a bird. Yet again we had very satisfactory looks at **Grey-bellied Antbird** in similar habitat but this was almost certainly a different territory. At a small clearing of *dry varillal* further along the trail, we came across a large flock that seemed to continue forever. In that flock we finally had cracking views of one of our sandy-belt targets, the **Brown-headed Greenlet**. We also had almost eye-level views of **Paradise Tanager** and **Yellow-backed Tanager**, both brilliant tanagers that usually forage in the canopy of tall forest. A solitary **White-eyed Tody-Tyrant** was seen away from the flock. We planned to turn back at another clearing a little ahead, which held a tall tree known to be frequented by Fiery Topaz. Unfortunately it was not flowering at this time. In the clearing we had a **Pied Puffbird** respond aggressively to playback of Brown-banded Puffbird and also heard a **Dot-backed Antbird** which only gave a quick glimpse of it moving away from us. Characteristically, it vocalized well in response to playback but remained out of sight in the distance. On our way back, an exquisite **Black-bellied Thorntail** was seen very well and an **Opal-rumped Tanager** in a canopy flock at the 2nd clearing was the last new tanager or for that matter, the last bird of the trip.



Black-bellied Thorntail

Bird list:

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6		3/7		3/8	3/9		3/10	3/11
1	Variegated Tinamou	H						H		H	H	
2	Little Tinamou						H					H
3	Cinereous Tinamou		H									
4	Grey-legged Tinamou					H		H		H		H
5	White-throated Tinamou			H				H				
6	Speckled Chachalaca					S					S	
7	Little Blue Heron				S	S			S			
8	Great Egret		S					S				S
9	Cattle Egret			S								
10	Snowy Egret	S										
11	Capped Heron					S						
12	Striated Heron	S				S						
13	Bare-faced Ibis	S										
14	Black Vulture	S										
15	Turkey Vulture	S										
16	Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture	S										S
17	Greater Yellow-headed Vulture		S	S			S	S	S			
18	King Vulture										S	
19	Grey-headed Kite		S	S		S						
20	Plumbeous Kite	S	S	S	S	S		S	S	S	S	S
21	Swallow-tailed Kite			S		S		S				
22	Tiny Hawk										S	
23	Lined Forest-Falcon		H									
24	Roadside Hawk	S	S	S		S	S	S	S		S	S
25	Black Caracara	S	S	S				S	S			
26	Red-throated Caracara	S	S	S		S		S			S	S
27	Laughing Falcon						H					
28	Bat Falcon							S			S	
29	Grey-necked Wood-Rail		H									
30	Southern Lapwing	S	H			S		H			H	S
31	Spotted Sandpiper					S	S		S			
32	Yellow-billed Tern	S				S						
33	Ruddy Pigeon	S	S	H				H			S	
34	Plumbeous Pigeon							H			H	
35	Scaled Pigeon	S										
36	Common Ground-dove			S		S						
37	Blue Ground-Dove	S			S	H						
38	White-tipped Dove			S								
39	Grey-fronted Dove										H	
40	Ruddy Quail-Dove										H	
41	Red-and-Green Macaw	S										
42	Scarlet Macaw	S	S			S		S			S	
43	Red-bellied Macaw					S						
44	Maroon-tailed Parakeet		H	S		S		S			S	S
45	Sapphire-rumped Parrotlet								H			
46	Cobalt-winged Parakeet	S	S			S		S	S		S	S

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6		3/7		3/8	3/9		3/10	3/11
47	Dusky-billed Parrotlet			S								
48	Black-headed Parrot			S		S		S	S			
49	Orange-cheeked Parrot	S		S				S	S		S	
50	Blue-headed Parrot		S									
51	Festive Parrot			S								
52	Mealy Parrot	S		S		S		S	S		S	S
53	Red-fan Parrot	S			S							
54	Little Cuckoo		S									
55	Squirrel Cuckoo	H	H					S	S			
56	Smooth-billed Ani	S	S	S		S		S	S	S	S	S
57	Pauraque	S								H	S	
58	Band-tailed Nighthawk	S			S							
59	Ladder-tailed Nightjar		S									
60	Blackish Nightjar		S									
61	Amazonian Swift	S										
62	Short-tailed Swift	S	S			S		S			S	
63	Grey-rumped Swift		S			S		S				
64	Pale-rumped Swift							S				
65	Fork-tailed Palm Swift	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
66	Pale-tailed Barbthroat										S	
67	Great billed Hermit		S				S	S				
68	Straight-billed Hermit		S	S					S			
69	Reddish Hermit		S		S			S	S		S	S
70	Grey-breasted Sabrewing										S	S
71	Black-throated Mango											S
72	White-necked Jacobin	S										
73	Black-bellied Thorntail											S
74	Versicoloured Emerald	S			S			S				
75	Green-tailed Goldenthrout	S										
76	White-chinned Sapphire				S			S				
77	Fork-tailed Woodnymph		S		S			S			S	S
78	Gould's Jewelfront				S							
79	Black-eared Fairy		S					S				S
80	Green-backed Trogon	S	S							S		S
81	Amazonian Violaceous Trogon							S				
82	Blue-crowned Trogon				S	H					S	
83	Pavonine Quetzal								H			
84	Amazon Kingfisher	S			S	S						
85	Ringed Kingfisher				S	S		S				
86	Green Kingfisher				S	S						
87	American Pygmy Kingfisher					S	S					
88	Green-and-rufous Kingfisher				S							
89	Amazonian Motmot			S							S	
90	Paradise Jacamar			S		S	S	S				
91	Bronzy Jacamar					S	S					
92	Yellow-billed Jacamar							S				
93	Great Jacamar								S		S	
94	Pied Puffbird											S

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11			
95	Chestnut-capped Puffbird				S					S		
96	White-chested Puffbird					S						
97	Rusty-breasted Nunlet			S		H						
98	White-fronted Nunbird		S			S		S		S	S	S
99	Swallow-winged Puffbird	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
100	Gilded Barbet	S	S	S	S					S		
101	Lemon-throated Barbet		S									
102	Lettered Araçari	S					S					
103	Chestnut-eared Aracari	S										
104	Many-banded Araçari	S										
105	Ivory-billed Araçari		S				S					
106	Channel-billed Toucan	H	S				S	H		H		
107	White-throated Toucan	H	S			S	S			H		
108	Orinoco Piculet						S					
109	Lafresnaye's Piculet		S				S					
110	Yellow-tufted Woodpecker	S	S			S	S	S		S	S	S
111	Little Woodpecker						S					
112	Red-stained Woodpecker		S	S	S		S					
113	Golden-green Woodpecker						S					
114	Scale-breasted Woodpecker		S				H					S
115	Chestnut Woodpecker						S			S	S	S
116	Cream-coloured Woodpecker						S					
117	Lineated Woodpecker	S	S				S	S		S	S	S
118	Crimson-crested Woodpecker		S									
119	Red-necked Woodpecker			H		S						
120	Rufous-tailed Xenops			S		S				S		
121	Slender-billed Xenops		S									S
122	Plain Xenops		S							S		
123	Cinnamon-rumped Foliage-gleaner		H				H	H		H		
124	Olive-backed Foliage-gleaner			H	S							
125	Olivaceous Woodcreeper								H			S
126	Wedge-billed Woodcreeper		S	S						S		
127	Plain-brown Woodcreeper		S			S		S				S
128	Amazonian Barred Woodcreeper			S		S				S	S	S
129	Spot-throated Woodcreeper					S						
130	Bar-bellied Woodcreeper				S							
131	Buff-throated Woodcreeper		S	H	H		H			S		
132	Striped Woodcreeper	S										
133	Ocellated Woodcreeper				S					S		
134	Elegant Woodcreeper							S				
135	Straight-billed Woodcreeper			S								
136	Lineated Woodcreeper			S								
137	Point-tailed Palmcreeper			S								
138	Fasciated Antshrike						S			H		
139	Amazonian Antshrike	S		S	S			S				S
140	Blackish-grey Antshrike			S								
141	White-shouldered Antshrike									S		
142	Mouse-coloured Antshrike			H								

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11			
143	Plain-winged Antshrike		S									
144	Pearly Antshrike							S				
145	Cinereous Antshrike					S	S	S				
146	Dusky-throated Antshrike		S									
147	Cherrie's Antwren			S	S							
148	Yellow-throated Antwren				S		H		S			
149	Pygmy Antwren		S		S		H		H			
150	Plain-throated Antwren								S			
151	Grey Antwren		S		S				S			
152	Spot-backed Antwren			S			H		H	S		
153	White-flanked Antwren		S		S		H		S			
154	Stipple-throated Antwren						S		H			
155	Rufous-tailed Antwren		S						H			
156	Amazonian Streaked Antwren			S								
157	Moustached Antwren						S		S			
158	Grey Antbird		S									
159	Dusky Antbird		H		S							
160	Silvered Antbird						H					
161	Black-headed Antbird				S							
162	Black-faced Antbird		S						H	H		
163	White-browed Antbird		S									
164	Black-chinned Antbird			S		S						
165	Spot-backed Antbird						S		H	S		
166	Spot-winged Antbird								H			
167	Yellow-browed Antbird		S									
168	Imeri Warbling Antbird		S		H		H		H			
169	Grey-bellied Antbird							S		S		
170	Black-throated Antbird		S		H		S		S	S		
171	White-plumed Antbird						S					
172	Chestnut-crested Antbird		S									
173	Bicolored Antbird		H	S		H		S	H			
174	Scale-backed Antbird						S	S				
175	Dot-backed Antbird									H		
176	Black Bushbird		S									
177	Rufous-capped Antthrush		S				H	S				
178	Striated Antthrush						S					
179	Thrush-like Antpitta		H									
180	Chestnut-belted Gnateater								H			
181	Ochre-bellied Flycatcher		S		S		S	S	S	S		
182	Rusty-fronted Tody-flycatcher		S									
183	Spotted Tody-Flycatcher						H					
184	Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher							S				
185	Ringed Antpipit		S				H					
186	Slender-footed Tyrannulet	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		
187	Forest Elaenia		S	H								
188	Grey Elaenia								H			
189	White lored Tyrannulet		H									
190	Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet		S	S	S	S		S	H		S	

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11			
191	White-eyed Tody-Tyrant									S		
192	Double-banded Pygmy Tyrant					H				S		
193	Rufous-tailed Flatbill									S		
194	Yellow-margined Flycatcher									H		
195	Grey-crowned Flycatcher	S	S	S	S							
196	Yellow-breasted Flycatcher	S										
197	Whiskered (Sulphur-rumped) Flycatcher									S		
198	Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher									S		
199	Fuscos Flycatcher Duidae			S				S				
200	Drab Water-Tyrant				S							
201	Pale-bellied Mourner						S					
202	Cinereous Mourner									S		
203	Bright-rumped Attila									H		
204	Citron-bellied Attila	H		H	S			H		H		
205	Sulphury Flycatcher				S			S		S		
206	Dusky-capped Flycatcher	S			S							
207	Short-crested Flycatcher			H	S							
208	Swainson's Flycatcher		S									
209	Tropical Kingbird	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		
210	Fork-tailed Flycatcher	S			S		S	S		S		
211	Piratic Flycatcher	H	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		
212	Dusky-chested Flycatcher		S				S	S		S		
213	Rusty-margined Flycatcher	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		
214	Yellow-throated Flycatcher								S			
215	White-browed Purpletuft			S	S					S		
216	Pompadour Cotinga				S					S		
217	Plum-throated Cotinga						S					
218	Spangled Cotinga		S				S		S	S		
219	Screaming Piha		H		H		S	H		S		
220	Amazonian Umbrellabird	S			S							
221	Guianan Cock-of-the-rock		S									
222	Golden-headed Manakin						S			S		
223	White-crowned Manakin						S	S	S	S		
224	Blue-crowned Manakin		S	S			S			S		
225	White-bearded Manakin		S	S	S					H		
226	Striped Manakin		H		S							
227	Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin		S			H	H	H		H		
228	Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin							S		S		
229	Black Manakin			S				S				
230	Yellow-crowned Manakin	S										
231	Wing-barred Piprites					H				S		
232	Chestnut-crowned Becard						S					
233	Pink-throated Becard									S		
234	Black-capped Becard						S					
235	Thrush-like Schiffornis									H		
236	Black-tailed Tityra	S	S				S	S		S		
237	Rufous-browed Peppershrike	H	H				H			S		
238	Red-eyed Vireo							S				

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11			
239	Brown-headed Greenlet						H		S			
240	Lemon-chested Greenlet						S					
241	Dusky-capped Greenlet							S				
242	Tawny-crowned Greenlet							H				
243	Azure-naped Jay	S			S							
244	White-winged Swallow			S	S							
245	White-banded Swallow	S		S	S							
246	Grey-breasted Martin	S	S	S	S			S				
247	House Wren	S		S	S	S	S					
248	Scaly-breasted Wren		H			H		H				
249	Coraya Wren		S	H	H	S		H	S			
250	Buff-breasted Wren			H								
251	White-breasted Wood-Wren					S		S				
252	Collared Gnatwren						S		S			
253	White-necked Thrush			H		S		H				
254	Lawrence's Thrush					H		S				
255	Grey-cheeked Thrush					H		S				
256	Magpie Tanager		S			S		S				
257	Yellow-backed Tanager								S			
258	Flame-crested Tanager		S									
259	Fulvous-crested Tanager		S						S			
260	White-shouldered Tanager							S				
261	Silver-beaked Tanager	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
262	Blue-grey Tanager	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
263	Palm Tanager	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
264	Green-and-gold Tanager		S									
265	Paradise Tanager		S		S			S	S			
266	Turquoise Tanager					S						
267	Bay-headed Tanager					S		S				
268	Masked Tanager			S								
269	Opal-rumped Tanager								S			
270	Yellow-bellied Tanager		S									
271	Swallow Tanager	S		S		S	S	S				
272	Yellow-bellied Dacnis	S	S	S	S							
273	Black-faced Dacnis							S				
274	Blue Dacnis			S				S				
275	White-bellied Dacnis		S									
276	Bananaquit				S							
277	Green Honeycreeper		S	S	S		S					
278	Short-billed Honeycreeper			S				S	S			
279	Red-legged Honeycreeper			S				S	S			
280	Purple Honeycreeper	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
281	Slate-coloured Grosbeak		S					H				
282	Buff-throated Saltator	S	S		S	S		S	S			
283	Yellow-browed Sparrow	S	S	S	S	S		S				
284	Chestnut-bellied Seedeater	S			S	S	S	S				
285	White-naped Seedeater							H				
286	Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch		S	S		S	S					

		Urania	Ceima Cachivera	Mitu Cachivera	Urania	Cajure Trail	Urania Varzea	MCH	Mitu Cachivera	Bocatoma Trail	MCH	Bocatoma Trail
	English Name	3/4	3/5	3/6	3/7	3/8	3/9	3/10	3/11			
287	Pectoral Sparrow		H	H	S		S	H		H	H	
288	Yellow-green Grosbeak					S			S			
289	Blue-black Grosbeak				H		H			S		
290	Blue-black Grassquit	S	S	S	S		S	S		S		
291	Blackpoll Warbler	S	S									
292	American Redstart	S										
293	Northern Waterthrush		S									
294	Green Oropendola	S										
295	Olive Oropendola			S								
296	Red-rumped Cacique									H		
297	Yellow-rumped Cacique	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		
298	Moriche Oriole		S	S				S		S		
299	White-vented Euphonia	S	S	S	S		S	S		S		
300	Orange-bellied Euphonia		S									
301	Golden-bellied Euphonia			S								
302	Rufous-bellied Euphonia			H	S					S	S	
303	Plumbeous Euphonia	S		S	S							

Participants:

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