



Trip Report: Coastal Cordillera and Hato Piñero (Estados Miranda and Cojedes) Venezuela, April/May 2008 (David Southall)

This report covers highlights from a trip Emma and I made to Venezuela at the end of the 2008 dry season. During our first weekend I joined David McLachlan-Karr for two early-morning, half-day birding trips in the Coastal Cordillera near Caracas. On the following long-weekend we all travelled together to Los Llanos, spending three nights at Hato Piñero and enjoying a series of self-guided bird watching walks as well as more general nature safaris with Hato Piñero's guides.



Caracas peak hour, Av. Francisco de Miranda

The weather during our trip was excellent – the dry season broke just prior to our arrival with the first heavy rains of the wet season (*invierno*) falling in both Caracas and Los Llanos around April 24th, but dry weather returned and persisted throughout our stay, with further heavy rains not falling until immediately after our departure on May 5th. Spring was very much in the air. Hillsides of bright yellow *Araguaney* trees were in full bloom along the Caracas-Maracay highway, many deciduous trees were either bare of leaves or in the process of responding to the first rains of *invierno* by breaking into fresh green leaf, whilst at Hato Piñero multitudes of different tyrant-flycatchers were busy nesting and the limited, end of dry season water remaining in the ponds and *caños* held large concentrations of bird, mammal and reptile life.

One notable change since our last visit to Venezuela was the impact of a new, permanent, ½ hour later Venezuelan time zone created in December 2007. At the end of April at Caracas' latitude of 11° North, this means dawn at about 05:15 (and dusk at 18:30) - so dawn birding now means 30 minutes less sleep. For trips to the east of the country dawn is a further 15 minutes earlier ... birders are definitely not beneficiaries of this 'revolutionary' initiative!

Our early-morning visit to Monumento Natural Pico Codazzi (ca. 2000m ASL) on the far side of Colonia Tovar was highlighted by excellent views of several Streaked Tuftedcheeks working in mixed flocks, Green-and-black Fruiteaters feasting on berry-laden roadside trees, a Bronzy Inca feeding at a flowering bush and

one of the many calling Chestnut-crowned Antpittas that flew onto an open perch to check us out. Although the extensive *chusquea* bamboo stands were teeming with endemic Black-throated Spinetails and the usual warbler suspects (Three-striped and Black-crested) we failed (again) to find David M-K's key target, the elusive Plushcap. At least Caracas Tapaculos responded to playback, but unfortunately failed to show.



Streaked Tuftedcheek; Black-throated Spinetail

Our early-morning visit to Los Venados on the southern flank of the Parque Nacional El Avila got off to an auspicious start with a flock of Venezuelan Parakeets feeding noisily in a Bukare tree next to the car park. Short-tailed Anthrushes called regularly but failed to show, however close up views of an endemic Guttulated Foliage-Gleaner made for a great highlight.



Guttulated Foliage-Gleaner



Heliconia at La Estancia, Caracas; Scarlet Macaws

Hato Piñero is some 4½ hours drive from Caracas and we started birding the entrance road around midday, where we soon saw Chestnut-vented Conebill and Crane Hawk at close range. A great start before we had even reached the lodge. That afternoon and the following two days we combined a series of mid-afternoon and pre-dawn, self-guided birding trips with the scheduled 8-11 am and 4-8pm guided nature observation trips on one of the Hato's safari trucks. Due to the lack of water we were unable to make boat trips on any of the Caños. The lodge was excellent, with the food much improved from our last trip in 2003 and the evening Cuba Libras from the open bar flowing liberally, whilst the guides were engaging and enthusiastic.



Northern White-fringed Antwren (f); White-bellied Antbird



Iguana; Spectacled Caiman

Highlights on the dirt roads around the 80,000 hectare property included incredible numbers of Yellow-knobbed Curassow, innumerable water birds and Spectacled Caiman congregated around the few remaining ponds, Cunaguaro (Ocelot) seen on night safaris and the Jaguar that we were convinced we smelt and heard on a night time stake-out and the Jaguar paw prints and remnants of the its Side-Neck and Snapping Turtle feast we found at Caño San Geronimo. Thanks to the efforts of our crocodile-hunting guide Ricardo, we were able to pose for photos holding a two foot long baby Spectacled Caiman. Not to be outdone, Alejandro Nagi demonstrated how to catch a Pauraque Nightjar (armed with nothing more than a torch) which we admired before it too was released unharmed.



Cocoi Heron at Caño San Geronimo; Great Egret and Spectacled Caiman



Black-collared Hawks



Crimson-crested Woodpecker (f)



Rufescent Tiger-Heron



Roadside Hawk

Early-morning birding highlights in the dry forest at the end of the road to La Escorsonera included White-bellied Antbird (numerous once Emma had located the first one), Red-legged Tinamou (seen only by David M-K), Lance-tailed Manakins and nesting Yellow-olive Flatbills (building black pendulous nests), whilst Sunbitterns and Gray-necked Wood-Rails regularly crossed the mud flats surrounding nearby pools. A late-morning and mid-afternoon walk along the trails adjacent to Caño San Geronimo revealed a surprisingly large

number of species given the time of day. Many were observed to be nesting, including Pale-tipped Inezia (in a cup-shaped nest over the trail), Rusty-backed Spinetail (eye-level, messy nest in shrub fork) and Common Tody-Flycatcher (light coloured, pendulous nest), plus the endemic White-beared Flycatcher, tiny Pale-eyed Tody-Tyrant and the stunning Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher. Curtis Marantz, returning from a morning recording Cocoa Woodcreeper calls, was kind enough to help identify several cryptic flycatchers and his advice on where to find the Red-rumped Woodpeckers proved to be unerringly precise. Our final dawn walk was relatively quiet, except for a spectacular Ornate Hawk-Eagle perched at mid-level shortly after we entered the Caño San Geronimo trail.



A calling Whistling Heron; Yellow-knobbed Curassow



White-tipped Inezia; Brown-crested Flycatcher



Emma, David and David M-K on the safari truck



Rusty-backed Spinetail and nest; White-bearded Flycatcher

Other memorable sightings included a Blue-gray Tanager and Glaucous Tanager providing a perfect comparison of the brighter wings of the former and darker head of the latter as they perched next to each other at the edge of the Cojedes River, a Great Horned Owl perched after dusk on a palm in the dry savannah, mixed flocks of Black-bellied and White-faced Whistling Ducks surrounding the eastern ponds and the sunset-light enhanced orange-red of the Scarlet Ibis. An addition to the species listed in the October 2005 'Field Checklist of the Birds of Hato Piñero' was the Yellow-billed Cuckoo seen on several occasions in dry forest at both La Escorsonera and Caño San Geronimo. Mammals seen included Capuchin Monkeys in tall, dry forest (who performed very aggressively when they heard the iPod Jaguar calls) and Red Howler monkeys in gallery forest across the Cojedes River. Emma also enjoyed prolonged close-up views of an Ocelot during a morning horse ride.



Yellow-olive Flatbill; Ochre-ored Flatbill



Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher; Rufous-tailed Jacamar



Baby Spectacled Caiman at sunset



Spectacled Caiman

Overall we enjoyed some fantastic Coastal Cordillera and Llanos birding that reminded us how great Venezuela can be (despite the super early mornings!) and wet our appetite for the next time we can visit.

1. Trip Bird List^{1,2}

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated [those confirmed on site by comparison with playback]; in order of appearance on the plates of Hilty's 'Birds of Venezuela'.

Location where species seen: In order of travel: PC=Monumento Natural Pico Codazzi; LV=Los Venados, Parque Nacional El Avila; C=Caracas city and environs; R=Road between Caracas and Hato Pinero; HP=Hato Pinero.

Little Tinamou (HP) (heard only by Emma and DM-K)	Southern Lapwing (R; HP)
Red-Legged Tinamou (HP) (heard only)	Gray-necked Wood-Rail (HP)
Crested Bobwhite (HP)	Sunbittern (HP) *
	Wattled Jacana (HP)
Neotropic Cormorant (HP)	Double-striped Thick-knee (HP)
Limpkin (HP)	Collared Plover (HP)
Buff-necked Ibis (HP)	Spotted Sandpiper (HP) *
Green Ibis (HP)	Black-necked Stilt (HP)
Bare-faced (Whispering) Ibis (HP)	Lesser Yellowlegs (HP) *
Sharp-tailed Ibis (HP) *	
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (HP)	Black Skimmer (HP)
White-faced Whistling-Duck (HP)	
Muscovy Duck (HP)	
	Pale-vented Pigeon (HP)
Black-crowned Night-Heron (HP)	Band-tailed Pigeon (PC)
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (HP) *	Scaled Dove (HP)
Cocoi Heron (C; HP) *	Ruddy Ground-Dove (C; HP)
Great Egret (HP) *	Eared Dove (HP)
Cattle Egret (R; HP)	White-tipped Dove (HP)
Tricolored Heron (HP)	
Roseate Spoonbill (HP)	Scarlet Macaw (HP) *
Scarlet Ibis (R; HP)	Chestnut-fronted Macaw (C; R)
Jabirú (R; HP) *	Yellow-crowned Parrot (HP)
Wood Stork (HP)	Brown-throated Parakeet (HP)
Boat-billed Heron (HP)	Venezuelan Parakeet (LV)
Capped Heron (HP)	Green-rumped Parrotlet (HP)
Rufescent Tiger-Heron (HP) *	Orange-chinned Parakeet (HP)
Whistling Heron (HP) *	
	Yellow-billed Cuckoo (HP) *
Yellow-headed Caracara (HP)	Striped Cuckoo (HP) (heard only)
Turkey Vulture (R; HP)	Squirrel Cuckoo (HP)
Crane Hawk (HP)	Smooth-billed Ani (HP)
Snail Kite (HP)	Groove-billed Ani (HP)
Savanna Hawk (R; HP)	Inca Jay (LV)
Black-collared Hawk (HP) *	
Aplomado Falcon (HP)	Great Horned Owl (HP) *
Roadside Hawk (R; HP) *	Great Potoo (HP)
Black Vulture (C; R; HP)	
Northern Crested-Caracara (R; HP)	Nacunda Nighthawk (HP)
White-tailed Hawk (HP)	Pauraque Nightjar (HP) *
Great Black-Hawk (HP)	
Ornate Hawk-Eagle (HP)	Blue-tailed Emerald (HP)
	Copper-rumped Hummingbird (C)
Hoatzin (HP)	Speckled Hummingbird (LV) *
Rufous-vented Chachalaca (HP)	Glittering-throated Emerald (HP)
Yellow-knobbed Curassow (HP) *	Tyrian Metaltail (PC)
	Black-throated Mango (LV; HP)
	Lazuline Sabrewing (LV)

¹ **First sighting ever for DJS**; * = photo available from trip; # = apparent range extension versus Hilty maps/altitude

² See Mary Lou Goodwin's "Birding in Venezuela" for location descriptions

Bronzy Inca (PC)
Russet-throated Puffbird (HP)
Rufous-tailed Jacamar (HP) *

Amazon Kingfisher (HP)

Groove-billed Toucanet (LV)

Golden-olive Woodpecker (PC)
Smoky-brown Woodpecker (PC)
Red-rumped Woodpecker (HP)
Red-crowned Woodpecker (C; HP) *
Crimson-crested Woodpecker (HP) *

Olivaceous Woodcreeper (LV)
Plain-brown Woodcreeper (LV; HP)
Cocoa Woodcreeper (HP)
Straight-billed Woodcreeper (HP)
Strong-billed Woodcreeper (PC)

Black-throated Spinetail (PC) *
Pale-breasted Spinetail (HP)
Plain Thornbird (HP)
Yellow-chinned Spinetail (HP)
Rusty-backed Spinetail (HP) *
Plain Xenops (HP) *
Streaked Tuftedcheek (PC) *

Barred Antshrike (HP)
Black-crested Antshrike (HP)
Northern White-fringed Antwren (HP) *
White-bellied Antbird (HP) *

Short-tailed Antthrush (LV) (heard only)
Chestnut-crowned Antpitta (PC)

Guttulated Foliage-gleaner (LV) *

Lance-tailed Manakin (HP)

Vermilion Flycatcher (HP)
Yellow-olive Flatbill (HP) *
Ochre-ored Flatbill (HP) *
Greenish Elaenia (HP)
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (C)
Common Tody-Flycatcher (HP)
Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher (HP) *
Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant (HP)
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet (HP)
Pale-tipped Inezia (HP) *
White-throated Tyrannulet (PC; LV)
Marble-faced Bristle-Tyrant (LV)
Cattle Tyrant (HP)
Gray Kingbird (HP)
Tropical Kingbird (LV; C; HP)
Social Flycatcher (C; HP)
Rusty-Margined Flycatcher (HP) *
White-bearded Flycatcher (HP) *
Streaked Flycatcher (LV; HP)
Golden-crowned Flycatcher (LV)

Boat-billed Flycatcher (HP)
Great Kiskadee (C; HP)
Lesser Kiskadee (HP)
Variegated Flycatcher (HP)
White-headed Marsh-Tyrant (HP)
Pied Water-Tyrant (HP)
Fork-tailed Flycatcher (HP)
Brown-crested Flycatcher (HP) *
Dusky-capped Flycatcher (LV; HP)
Tropical Mockingbird (HP)

White-winged Becard (HP)

Green-and-black Fruiteater (PC)

Blue-and-white Swallow (HP) *

Bicolored Wren (HP)
Stripe-backed Wren (HP)
Buff-breasted Wren (HP) *
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren (LV)
House Wren (HP)
Tropical Gnatcatcher (HP)

Yellow-legged Thrush (LV)
Glossy-black Thrush (PC;LV)
Black-hooded Thrush (LV)
Bare-eyed Thrush (C)

Brown-capped Vireo (LV)
Red-eyed Vireo (LV)

Black-and-white Warbler (HP)
Blackpoll Warbler (HP)
Three-striped Warbler (PC; LV) *
Black-crested Warbler (PC)
American Redstart (HP)
Slate-throated Whitestart (LV)

White-sided Flowerpiercer (PC)
Common Bush-Tanager (PC; LV; HP)
Highland Hepatic-Tanager (PC; LV)
Blue-capped Tanager (PC; LV)
Fawn-breasted Tanager (PC)
Fulvous-headed Tanager (LV)
Hooded Tanager (HP)
Chestnut-vented Conebill (HP)
Bananaquit (LV; C; HP)
Swallow Tanager (PC)
Black-capped Tanager (LV)
Beryl-spangled Tanager (PC)
Burnished-buff Tanager (PC; HP)
Speckled Tanager (LV)

Palm Tanager (C)
Blue-gray Tanager (LV; C; HP)
Glaucous Tanager (C; HP)
Silver-beaked Tanager (HP)

Ochre-breasted Brush-Finch (LV)
Blue-black Grassquit (HP)
Gray Seedeater (HP)

Rufous-collared Sparrow (PC; LV)
Red-capped Cardinal (HP)
Pileated Finch (HP)
Saffron Finch (C; HP)

Yellow-backed Oriole (HP)
Yellow Oriole (HP)
Venezuelan Troupial (HP) *
Carib Grackle (R; HP)
Shiny Cowbird (LV)
Crested Oropendola (HP)
Yellow-rumped Cacique (R; HP)

Combined total: 194 confirmed species for the 2 mornings birding in the Coastal Cordillera and 2½ days at Hato Piñero. including 18 “first time ever” species for DJS.



Whistling Heron