



## Trip Report: Estado Bolivar, Venezuela

3<sup>rd</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> July 2009 (David Southall)

This report summarises a trip to Bolivar state in south-eastern Venezuela that Emma and I made together with David McLachlan-Karr. We covered some 3000km driving from Caracas to El Paují and back, where we spent three enjoyable days with Tony and Rita Crease. Along the way we also spent three days with Henry Cleve enjoying the Sierra de Lema and nearby lowland forests. The weather was typical for the wet season, with occasional intense rain - lasting from a few minutes up to several hours - interspersed between periods of fine weather. Fortunately the worst of the weather was reserved for the days when we were traveling, whilst in the Sierra de Lema we experienced sunshine, drizzle, rain and sunshine again and in the El Paují area we experienced no rain at all for three days. It was a highly successful trip and concluded with a personal total of some 245 confirmed species, including 37 “first time ever” species to add to my Venezuelan list.



*Greater Flowerpiercer; Tepui Whitestart [both km 122, Sierra de Lema]*



*Rufous-breasted Sabrewing [km 122, Sierra de Lema]*



*Spider and web [lowland forest trail near km 81]*

This was our third visit to the Escalera road that traverses the Sierra de Lema as it rises from the lowlands to the Gran Sabana, but it was our first during the wet season: Seasonal fluctuations in bird activity were apparent on the Sierra de Lema in particular, with regular sightings of numerous Rufous-breasted Sabrewings, Greater Flowerpiercers and noisy flocks of Golden-tufted Mountain-Grackles, whereas in March and November we found these species harder to come by. In contrast, having easily and regularly seen Guianan Cock-of-the-rocks and Scarlet-horned Manakins during previous trips, we did not see any this time.



*Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher [near km 132, Sierra de Lema]; Agouti [tall forest trail, Barquilla de Fresa]*



*Golden-tufted Mountain-Grackle; Cliff Flycatcher [km 122 and km 117.3, Sierra de Lema]*

Highlights whilst based at the Barquilla de Fresa included:

km 81 (@120m ASL): Along the side road heading west through lowland forest, plus side trails 2.4 and 2.8km from Highway-10, highlights included a pair of Great Jacamar (making their bizarre, cat-like calls), Purple-throated Fruiteater, Black-tailed Trogon, Ringed Woodpecker, Dusky Parrot and the world's smallest passerine - a Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant - floating bee-like as it gleaned inside the forest.

km 85 (@140m ASL): Although the hummingbird feeders at the Barquilla de Fresa were quieter than on previous visits, we did find Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper and Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper, plus a family of Agouti, along the forest trails behind the posada.

km 88 (@140m ASL): Along the Alto Cuyuni side road heading west through lowland forest from Highway-10 we experienced drizzly weather and activity was generally slow, although we did see a male Crimson Topaz near the Capuchinbird lek (no Capuchinbirds were heard or seen).



*Ringed Woodpecker (f); Great Jacamar [both in lowland forest near km 81]*

km 102 (@460m ASL): At the spectacular *mirador* looking across the forest and towards the tepuis beyond we found a mixed flock including a pair of Dusky Purpletuft and various honeycreepers foraging in low trees near the edge of the black-rock lookout, plus a pair of Blackish Nightjar.

km 111.5 (@850m ASL): Although the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock were nowhere to be seen, we did see a very responsive Flutist Wren.

km 117.3 (@1070m ASL): Cliff Flycatchers with two nestlings were at their regular haunt on the quarry, plus various tanagers and hummingbirds in the trees and shrubs on the low side of the road.

km 122 @1330m ASL): The open field filled with flowering bromeliads, moss and wetland plants was alive with Greater Flowerpiercers, Rufous-breasted Sabrewings and Tepui Whitestart, whilst the surrounding melastome-dominated stunted forest contained Tepui Brush-Finch, Streak-backed Antshrike, White-throated (Tepui) Foliage-Gleaner and - for a lucky few - Sharpbill. White Bellbirds (seen by David M-K) were heard from here onwards, whereas Bearded Bellbirds were heard and seen towards the upper reaches only.

km 123 @ 1350m ASL): The forest behind the old construction camp contained several Tepui Antpitta (seen by David M-K) whilst across the other side of the road from the camp, the short side-road contained Tepui and Slate-throated Whitestarts in close proximity.

km 131.5 (@1340m ASL): Mixed flocks included Roraiman Antwren, Ash-winged Antwren, Roraiman Warbler, Tepui Greenlet, Tepui Spinetail, plus McConnell's Spinetail and Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher.



*Frog species; Dragonfly species [both at lowland forest trail near km 81]*

During our time around El Paují, Tony and Rita introduced us to two new locations - the Wairampay road (a turn-off from the road to Santa Elena) and a walking track though forest extending from El Paují to Uaiparú. The Wairampay road made for a spectacular dawn setting and delivered one of the trip highlights - a Crested Eagle flying across an open area before spending some 20 minutes preening nearby in the dawn sunlight, followed by scope views of a dark morph Crested Eagle on a distant ridge. Other highlights included several mixed tanager flocks, point-blank views of Fiery-shouldered Parakeets and Gilded Barbets, plus a large and impressively puffed-up *Pseustes sulphureus* snake.

The El Paují to Uaiparú hiking trail delivered an incredible number of species new to us, including the flycatcher-like Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, a Ringed Antpiper creeping along the forest floor and Buff-throated Foliage-Gleaner's calling at dawn. The walk added point blank views of hyper-active Collared Gnatwrens and a neck-twisting search for an impressive Scale-breasted Woodpecker. The walk culminated with a lunchtime encounter with an impressive ant swarm accompanied by half a dozen noisily buzzing White-plumed Antbirds plus Dusky-throated Antshrike, Stipple-throated Antwren, Blue-crowned Manakin and Plain-brown Woodcreepers amongst others. A subsequent walk in adjacent forest secured views of fast-moving Wing-banded Wren, before we enjoyed late-afternoon views of an Ash-throated Crake as it crept from the marsh in El Paují to investigate Tony's playback.



*Tramén, Ilú, Karaurín, Wadakapiapué and Yuraní Tepuis rise across the Gran Sabana*



*Misty dawn views at Wairampay road*



*Dawn at Chircayén Tepui [Wairampay road]*



*Fungus [El Paují to Uaiparú tall forest trail]; Sunset at Brochinia reducta filled wetlands [El Paují village]*



*Abundant moss [km 122, Sierra de Lema]*



*Light, leaves and morning dew [El Paují to Uaiparú tall forest trail and Wairampay road]*



*Crested Eagle (immature) [Wairampay road]*

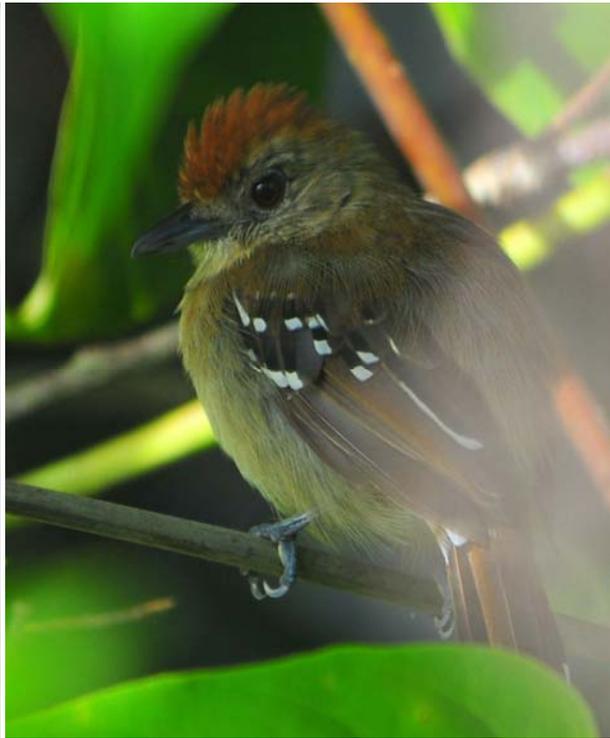
Our visit to the Uaiparú road and forest trail delivered one of the most unusual birds of the trip since, until Tony found it here last year, Smoky-fronted Tody-Flycatcher was not known to exist within almost 600km of El Paují and consequently is not listed in Hilty's Venezuela guide. Our persistence on a hot and sunny morning also gave us wonderful views of a Black-faced Antbird (finally - we are certainly not in complete agreement with Hilty's observation that is 'generally easier to see than others of genus'!) plus Amazonian Royal-Flycatcher, Dusky-chested Flycatcher, Pectoral Sparrow and a group of Rufous-throated Antbirds.



*Black-faced Antbird [Uaiparú tall forest trail]*



*Pseustes sulphureus* snake; Dusky Antbird (f) [both Wairampay road]



Guianan Slaty-Antshrikes (male and female) [both Wairampay road]



Collared Gnatwren (immature); Mouse-colored Antshrike [both El Paují to Uaiparú forest trail]



*Brown Jacamar [El Paují village]; Dragonfly species [near Wairampay Road]*



*Fiery-shouldered Parakeet [Wairampay road]; Dusky-chested Flycatcher [Uaiparú road]*



*Blackish Nightjar [km 102 lookout, Sierra de Lema]; White-tailed Nightjar [Uaiparú road]*



*With David M-K on lowland forest trail near km 81*



*With Tony, Rita, Marco and David M-K in El Paují*

One footnote for distances along the Escalera Road from the lowlands via the Sierra de Lema to the Gran Sabana: the former road signs along the Escalera Road have been replaced with signs giving the distance not from El Dorado but instead from Puerto La Cruz. Hence San Isidro (formerly marked as km 88) is now marked as km 713, the Piedra de la Virgen (formerly marked as km 98) is now marked as km 723 etc.

Logistical notes: We traveled by 4WD which is very helpful on the rough road from Santa Elena to El Paují. Tony and Rita Crease [[trcrease@gmail.com](mailto:trcrease@gmail.com)] showed us several new sites around El Pauji and we stayed in Marco's posada. For the Sierra de Lema we stayed at Henry Cleve's Barquilla de Fresa near Las Claritas (km 85) [+58-288-808.8710/ 0426-991.9919]

## 1. Trip Bird List<sup>1,2</sup>

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated [those well known or confirmed on site by comparison with iPod playback]; in order of appearance on the plates of Hilty's 'Birds of Venezuela'. Emma and David McLachlan-Karr saw a few additional species, as did Tony & Rita Crease in El Paují.

Location where species seen: In order of travel:

**T**=Roadside of Highway-10 between Tumeremo and El Dorado (@ 100-200m ASL) [dusk Friday July 3<sup>rd</sup>], plus the Eiffel bridge area at km 3 (@100m ASL) [afternoon Friday July 10<sup>th</sup>]

**A**=Alto Rio Cuyuni Road west from main highway at km 88 (San Isidro) (@ 140m ASL). Also known as "Capuchinbird Road" [dawn Saturday July 4<sup>th</sup>, dusk Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup>]

**S**=Sierra de Lema, including various sites along Escalera Road including lookout at km 102 (@460m ASL), Cock-of-the-rock location at km 111.5 (@850m ASL); Cliffs and lookout at km 117.3 (@1070m ASL); Melastome-dominated stunted forest, fields and trails at km 122 and km 123 (@1330 to 1350m ASL); Tall forest and trails from km 131.5 to 132 (@1340m ASL) up to the start of the Gran Sabana at km 135 (@1340m ASL) [morning and afternoon Saturday July 4<sup>th</sup>, full day Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup>, morning Monday July 6<sup>th</sup>, dusk Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup>]

**B**=Barquilla de Fresa, including open garden and lowland tall forest trails behind the cabins (@ 140m altitude) [dawn Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup>]

**L**=Lowland tall forest accessed through road west from Highway-10 at km 81 some 4km north of Barquilla de Fresa (past rubbish dump), including side trails ca. 2.4 and 2.8km from Highway-10 (ca. 120m altitude) [dawn Monday July 6<sup>th</sup> and dawn Friday July 10<sup>th</sup>]

**G**=Gran Sabana between Soldado Pionero and Santa Elena (@1380 to 860m ASL) [afternoon Monday July 6<sup>th</sup>]

**W**=Wairampay Road some 23km west of Santa Elena in the Rio Surunkún basin (@940m ASL) [morning Tuesday July 7<sup>th</sup>]

**R**=El Paují road between Cerro El Patrol and El Paují village in the Rio Uaiparú basin, including sites such as Cinco Ranchos (@ 900m to 820m ASL) [afternoon Tuesday July 7<sup>th</sup>]

**F**=Forest walking trail between El Paují and Uaiparú, plus the nearby Granzonera forest trail (@ ca. 830m ASL) [morning and afternoon Wednesday July 8<sup>th</sup>]

**P**=El Paují village, Tony and Rita's garden etc. (@ ca. 830m ASL) [afternoon Wednesday July 8<sup>th</sup>]

**U**=Uaiparú road and forest trail (@ ca.650 to 830m ASL) [morning Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup>]

**C**=Ciudad Bolivar [dawn Saturday July 11<sup>th</sup>]

Great Tinamou (W) (heard only)

Little Tinamou (A; W; U) (heard only)

Variegated Tinamou (W; U) (heard only)

Great Egret (G; R)

Yellow Headed Caracara (G, T)

Plumbeous Kite (U)

Turkey Vulture (U)

Laughing Falcon (T)

Gray Hawk (Gray-lined Hawk) (W; U) \*

Bat Falcon (R)

American Kestrel (T)

Roadside Hawk (U)

Tiny Hawk (U)

Black Vulture (T; A; L; R)

King Vulture (S)

Northern Crested Caracara (G)

Black Caracara (U)

Red-throated Caracara (S; W)

White Hawk (W)

Crested Eagle (W) \*

Swallow-tailed Kite (S; R; U; L)

Little (Variegated) Chachalaca (A; G; U)

Ash-throated Crake (P)

Ocellated Crake (W) (heard only)

Russet-crowned Crake (W) (heard only)

Wattled Jacana (R)

Scaled Pigeon (W)

Ruddy Pigeon (W)

Scaled Dove (C)

Ruddy Ground-Dove (C)

Blue Ground-Dove (W)

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<sup>1</sup> First sighting ever for DJS; \* = photo available from trip

<sup>2</sup> See Mary Lou Goodwin's "Birding in Venezuela" for location descriptions

Red-and-green Macaw (S)  
 Red-shouldered Macaw (P)  
 Blue-headed Parrot (L; W)  
 Dusky Parrot (L)  
 Orange-winged Parrot (P)  
 Blue-cheeked Parrot (U)  
 Fiery-shouldered Parakeet (W)  
 Green-rumped Parrotlet (T)  
 Orange-chinned Parakeet (C)  
 Golden-winged Parakeet (L) \*  
 Black-headed Parrot (W; L)

Striped Cuckoo (W; R) (heard only)  
 Squirrel Cuckoo (A; S; L; W; R)  
 Smooth-billed Ani (P)

Tropical Screech-Owl (U) (heard only)  
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (B) (heard only)

Blackish Nightjar (S; U) \*  
 White-tailed Nightjar (U) \*

White-collared Swift (T; A; L)  
 Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift (S)  
 Neotropical Palm-Swift (G)

White-chested Emerald (F)  
 Versicolored Emerald (S; T)  
 Glittering-throated Emerald (P)  
 Copper-tailed Hummingbird (P)  
 Fork-tailed Woodnymph (S)  
 White-chinned Sapphire (U)  
 Tepui Goldenthrroat (W)  
 Velvet-browed Brilliant (S)  
 Blue-fronted Lancebill (S)  
 Black-throated Mango (P)  
 Long-billed Starthroat (B; P)  
 Gray-breasted Sabrewing (B)  
 Rufous-breasted Sabrewing (S) \*  
 Crimson Topaz (A)  
 White-necked Jacobin (P)  
 Eastern Long-tailed Hermit (L)  
 Reddish Hermit (L; W; U)

Amazonian White-tailed Trogon (R; L) \*  
 Amazonian Violaceous Trogon (L) \*  
 Black-tailed Trogon (L)  
 Masked Trogon (S)  
 Collared Trogon (U)

Swallow-winged Puffbird (A; W; R; U; L)  
 White-necked (Guianan) Puffbird (A)  
 Brown Jacamar (G; R; P) \*  
 Green-tailed Jacamar (U)  
 Paradise Jacamar (A)  
 Great Jacamar (L) \*

Green Kingfisher (A) \*

Blue-crowned Motmot (U) (heard only)  
 Black Nunbird (T; W; R; U)  
 Gilded Barbet (W, F; U) \*  
 White-throated Toucan (A; W; L)  
 Channel-billed Toucan (A; B; W; L) \*  
 Green Araçari (L) \*  
 Ivory-billed Araçari (R)  
 Black-necked Araçari (A)

Scale-breasted Woodpecker (F)  
 Ringed Woodpecker (L) \*  
 Golden-olive Woodpecker (S) \*  
 Yellow-throated Woodpecker (L)  
 Red-crowned Woodpecker (C)  
 Yellow-tufted Woodpecker (T; W; U)  
 Lineated Woodpecker (R)  
 Crimson-crested Woodpecker (U)  
 Red-necked Woodpecker (L)

Golden-spangled Piculet (A)  
 Wedge-billed Woodcreeper (S; W)  
 Plain-brown Woodcreeper (B; F)  
 Streak-headed Woodcreeper (W; R)  
 Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper (B)  
 Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper (B)  
 Black-banded Woodcreeper (R)

McConnell's Spinetail (S) (heard only - *seen by DMK*)  
 Tepui Spinetail (S)  
 Plain Xenops (S)

Buff-throated Foliage-Gleaner (F; U)  
 Tepui (White-throated) Foliage-Gleaner (S) \*

Fasciated Antshrike (W; L) \*  
 Black-crested Antshrike (T)  
 Roraiman Antwren (S) \*  
 Ash-winged Antwren (S; L)  
 Stipple-throated Antwren (F)  
 Plain Antvireo (L) \*  
 Guianan Warbling Antbird (A; L) \*  
 Imeri Warbling Antbird (W; U) \*  
 Guianan (Eastern) Slaty-Antshrike (A; W; F; U) \*  
 Streak-backed Antshrike (S) \*  
 Mouse-colored Antshrike (R; F) \*  
 White-shouldered Antshrike (U)  
 Dusky Antbird (W; U) \*  
 Dusky-throated Antshrike (F) \*  
 Black-throated Antbird (U)  
 Scaled Antpitta (W) (heard only)  
 Gray Antbird (W; L)  
 Tepui Antpitta (S) (heard only, *seen by DMK*)  
 Black-faced Antbird (U) \*  
 Rufous-throated Antbird (U)  
 White-plumed Antbird (B; F) \*

White-bearded Manakin (R)  
White-crowned Manakin (F)  
Golden-headed Manakin (W; R)  
Blue-crowned Manakin (F; U) \*  
White-throated Manakin (R) \*  
Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin (F)  
Wing-barred Piprites (U) (heard only)  
Thrush-like Schiffornis (F) (heard only)

Whiskered Flycatcher (L)  
Euler's Flycatcher (U)  
Bran-colored Flycatcher (P)  
Forest Elaenia (R)  
Amazonian Royal-Flycatcher (F; U)  
Common Tody-Flycatcher (W; T)  
Smoky-fronted Tody-Flycatcher (U) [not in Hilty]  
Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant (F) (heard only)  
Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant (L)  
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet (T) \*  
Slender-footed Tyrannulet (R) \*  
Black-fronted Tyrannulet (S)  
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher (S) \*  
Cliff Flycatcher (S) \*  
Tropical Kingbird (T; A; S; G; W; R; U)  
Dusky-chested Flycatcher (U) \*  
Yellow-throated Flycatcher (R)  
Social Flycatcher (B)  
Rusty-margined Flycatcher (P)  
Great Kiskadee (C)  
Variegated Flycatcher (S; W; F; U) \*  
Plain-crested Elaenia (P) \*  
McConnell's Flycatcher (S; F)  
Fork-tailed Flycatcher (G)  
Tropical Mockingbird (C)

Black-crowned Tityra (L)  
Chestnut-crowned Becard (U)  
Bright-rumped Attila (W) (heard only)  
Dusky Purpletuft (S)  
Ringed Antpipit (F)

Pompadour Cotinga (F)  
Spangled Cotinga (W)  
Grayish Mourner (L)  
Screaming Piha (A; L; W; F)  
Bearded Bellbird (S)  
White Bellbird (S) (heard only - *seen by DMK*)  
*Sharpbill (S - seen only by Emma & DMK)*  
Purple-throated Fruitcrow (L)  
Red-ruffed Fruitcrow (T)

White-thighed Swallow (W)  
Blue-and-white Swallow (S; P)  
Tawny-headed Swallow (P)  
Southern Rough-winged Swallow (W; P; T)  
Gray-breasted Martin (T)

Coraya Wren (S; U) \*  
House Wren (T)  
Flutist Wren (S)  
Wing-banded Wren (W; F)  
Collared Gnatwren (F) \*

Pale-eyed Thrush (S)  
Black-billed Thrush (S)

Red-eyed Vireo (W; T)  
Buff-cheeked Greenlet (T)  
Tepui Greenlet (S)

Roraiman Warbler (S)  
Tropical Parula (S)  
Slate-throated Whitestart (S) \*  
Tepui Whitestart (S) \*  
Greater Flowerpiercer (S) \*  
Red-legged Honeycreeper (S; W)  
Purple Honeycreeper (S; W)  
Short-billed Honeycreeper (A)  
Green Honeycreeper (B; W; U)  
Blue Dacnis (S)  
Black-faced Dacnis (W)  
Bananaquit (A; S; W; P)

Burnished-buff Tanager (W; P)  
Black-headed Tanager (S)  
Bay-headed Tanager (S)  
Turquoise Tanager (W)  
Spotted Tanager (S; W; R)  
Green-and-gold Tanager (W)  
Masked Tanager (W)  
Yellow-bellied Tanager (S)  
Paradise Tanager (A; L; W; R; U)  
Opal-rumped Tanager (U)  
Violaceous Euphonia (W; U)  
Plumbeous Euphonia (U)  
White-lored Euphonia (W; U)  
Palm Tanager (T; A; S; B; P; U)  
Blue-gray Tanager (P)  
Silver-beaked Tanager (A; S; U)  
White-lined Tanager (S)  
Red-shouldered Tanager (P)  
Fulvous-crested Tanager (F)  
White-shouldered Tanager (W; F)  
Olive-backed Tanager (S) \*  
Magpie Tanager (W)

Buff-throated Saltator (W; U) \*  
Yellow-green Grosbeak (A; L)  
Pectoral Sparrow (U)  
Tepui Brush-Finch (S)  
Lesser Seedfinch (W; T)  
Blue-black Grosbeak (A)  
Blue-black Grassquit (R)  
Plumbeous Seedeater (W)  
Yellow-bellied Seedeater (R; U)  
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater (A; G)  
Lined Seedeater (S)

Lesson's Seedeater (T) \*  
Rufous-collared Sparrow (G)  
Hooded Siskin (W)  
Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch (F) (heard only)  
Golden-tufted Mountain-Grackle (S) \*

Olive Oropendola (U) \*  
Green Oropendola (T; S)  
Crested Oropendola (A; W; U)  
Red-rumped Cacique (A)

Combined total: 245 confirmed species for trip, including 37 "first time ever" species for DJS ...

In addition, we saw a family of Red-rumped Agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) feeding on the forest trails at the Barquilla de Fresa at dawn; a Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasybus novemcinctus*) crossing the road as we birded on our way to El Pauji; an impressive *Pseustes sulphureus* snake that was some 2m long and inflated itself when encountered crossing the Wairampay road; various attractive frogs; and Emma and Rita saw a Jaguarundi (*Herpailurus yaguarondi*) crossing the El Paují road at noon.