

VENEZUELA TOUR

SATURDAY 17th FEBRUARY TO SATURDAY 3rd MARCH

Leader: Richard ffrench

Outline of Itinerary

17 February:	U.K. - Amsterdam - Caracas - Maracay
18 - 19 February:	Maracay - Henri Pittier National Park
20 February:	Maracay - Choroní Road - Caracas - Merida
21 February:	Merida - Green Chapel - La Azulita
22 February:	Merida - La Mucuy - Mucubaji - Los Frailes
23 February:	Los Frailes - Las Tapias - Paramo - Mucubaji
24 – 25 February:	Santo Domingo valley - San Isidro - Barinas
26 February:	Barinas - The Llanos - Hato El Cedral
27 February – 1 March:	Hato El Cedral
2 March:	El Cedral - Barinas - Caracas
3 March:	Europe

Day 1: Saturday 17th February - London etc. - Amsterdam - Caracas – Maracay

We took early planes from various airports to Amsterdam, catching a connecting flight on to Caracas, arriving around 3.15pm. Here we were met by our guide, Gustavo, and driver, Jesus, who drove us to Maracay, where we were to stay three nights at Hotel Italo. We also joined the rest of our party, who had arrived earlier.

Day 2: Sunday 18th February - Maracay - Rancho Grande - Las Delicias

We were soon up in the hills of the National Park at an altitude of about 3500 feet, finding several beautiful hummingbirds, such as Long-tailed Sylph, Violet-fronted Brilliant and Violet-chested. We watched some species at feeders, like the Groove-billed Toucanet and Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, and on a short walk in the grounds found a Moustached Puffbird and a striking cotinga, the Handsome Fruiteater. Later we descended to the suburbs of Maracay to get to know the commoner birds of the area. Over 80 species on the first day!

Day 3: Monday 19th February - Maracay - Turriamo Road - Ocumare - Rancho Grande

Starting early we drove over the hills towards the Caribbean, taking a side-road to a small village on the Turriamo Road which led us towards the village of Cumboto. We stopped many times, finding lowland tropical species including Russet-throated Puffbird and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, several woodpecker and woodcreepers, Lance-tailed Manakin, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Amazon Kingfisher. Special prizes included Collared Forest-Falcon and Fasciated Tiger-Heron. Then back over the hills to revisit some of the previous day's best places. Another very prolific day.

Day 4: Tuesday 20th February - Maracay - Choroní Road - Caracas - Merida

An early start took us up the mountain road again on a different route, where at 5000 feet we found some great birds, including Ochre-breasted Brush-Finch, White-tipped Quetzal and Booted Racket-tail. Soon it was time to return to Caracas for our flight over to the Andes; we reached Merida in mid-afternoon, enabling us to enjoy a little birding in the hotel gardens situated at about 3500 feet.

Day 5: Wednesday 21st February - Merida - Green Chapel - La Azulita

A great day at altitudes up to 7000 feet, exploring the cloud forest of the famed Green Chapel and the road leading down towards the Maracaibo basin. Special birds of the day included Collared Inca and Mountain Velvetbreast hummingbirds, Crested Quetzal, Rose-headed Parakeet, Masked Trogon and Black-mandibled Toucan. Tanagers were abundant, including the gorgeous Blue-necked and Magpie Tanagers, as well as the Blue-naped Chlorophonia. Certainly the Andes was living up to its reputation!

Day 6: Thursday 22nd February - Merida - La Mucuy - Humboldt Trail - Los Frailes

Moving on again, we visited the Sierra Nevada National Park at Mucuy, situated at about 7000 feet, where in the edge of the park we found a number of high altitude species, including the endemic Merida Sunangel and another rare hummer, the Purple-backed Thornbill (even new for Gustavo!); other goodies included the Andean Solitaire, the Moustached Brush-Finch and a lovely view of the tiny Gray-breasted Wood-Wren. A few of the party ventured a little way up the Humboldt Trail, which promised much but needed more time. Soon it was necessary to travel up to our next destination in the paramo region, to stay at the well-known Los Frailes hotel at about 9400 feet.

Day 7: Friday 23rd February - Los Frailes - Las Tapias - Paramo near Aguila - Laguna Mucubaji

This was to be the day at altitudes up to 12,200 feet, and all managed it well. After starting at a patch of temperate forest below the hotel, we went up to the high paramo to concentrate on the rare and elusive species found only there. Success came with the Bar-winged Cinclodes, Paramo Pipit, Plumbeous Sierra-Finch and especially the endemic Ochre-browed Thistletail. After a thorough search we finally found the Paramo Wren, which obliged with several bursts of song from a prominent perch. After lunch at a convenient café, we went on to the lake at Mucubaji, finding the Speckled Teal, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant and Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant. An area of few birds, but special ones.

Day 8: Saturday 24th February - Los Frailes - San Isidro - Santo Domingo valley

Up before dawn in order to catch the proverbial early birds, we reached the San Isidro tunnel road to explore the subtropical area at about 4500 feet, finding a number of wonderful birds such as Red-headed Barbet, Golden-headed Quetzal and Masked Flowerpiercer. After an enthralling morning in the area, we moved back to the valley and searched extensively before finally running to earth our principal target, the beautiful Torrent Duck, a family complete with small duckling! Nearby was a White-capped Dipper, also hard to find, so the day ended well again.

Day 9: Sunday 25th February - Los Frailes - Las Tapias - Santo Domingo valley - Barinas

It was time to leave the Andes, but not without a final flourish; this started with an early visit to the Las Tapias area, where we were treated to magnificent views of the splendid Andean Guan and White-fronted Whitestart, and, after a protracted search, the incredible Ocellated Tapaculo at very close quarters. Then it was on down to lower levels, where we found Pale-headed Jacamar, Plain Xenops and Golden-faced Tyrannulet. Numbers of species also picked up again, and the Andes leg ended with a total of over 200 species for the area. (Special note: one species was found in the Andes, which is listed in the Red Data Book as highly endangered. For obvious reasons no precise location or date of sighting is given here for this species, the Red Siskin.)

Day 10: Monday 26th February - Barinas - The Llanos - Hato El Cedral

Now we were back in the tropics and the rest of the time was spent at low altitudes. Thankfully leaving behind the dusty city of Barinas, we moved on south into the state of Apure, the location of the El Cedral ranch. On the way we passed many watering-holes, often thronged with groups

of ducks, ibis and herons, but we resisted the temptation to stop more than once or twice, knowing there was even better to come! At the ranch, after a brief rest, we went out on a taster, and were immediately overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of water-birds, especially the whistling-ducks and ibis of several species. Evening tallies soared and each day seemed to bring new gems.

Days 11 – 13: Tuesday to Thursday 27th February to 1st March -Hato El Cedral

We spent these three days exploring the various parts of this 130,000 acre ranch on foot and by safari bus and boat. Each day brought total lists of over 120 species, many of these at comparatively close quarters. Apart from the open areas, we also explored the gallery forest and matas (clumps of trees in the savannahs). Highlights included the huge numbers of ducks, herons, storks and ibis, the Agami and Whistling Herons, Sunbittern, Hoatzin, Yellow-breasted Crake, Pinnated Bittern, Jet Antbird, Black-collared Hawk and many other raptors. Orinoco Geese had families of goslings trailing behind, and the Gray-necked Wood-Rails seemed to be everywhere.

One of the most spectacular sights was a gathering of well over 200 Black-necked Stilts, spread over a green marsh, which wheeled and reformed like well-drilled guardsmen. Scarlet Macaws were tracked to their feeding trees, and on a night-drive we found Great Potoo and a variety of nighthawks and nightjars. Burrowing Owls peered from their tunnels and various waders were found; four species of kingfishers were present along the channels, and on one gallery foray we found the incredible Red-billed Scythebill. Even within the ranch compound we found some good birds, with gorgeous Troupials and Yellow Orioles coming to the feeders, along with many Red-capped Cardinals. What a place! No wonder it has an international reputation.

Not to be outdone, other creatures made their appearance. Apart from the numerous Capybara, we came across several Long-nosed Armadillos, huge numbers of Spectacled Caiman and Side-necked Turtles, a couple of Anacondas, one of them a giant (thankfully tucked up in his pond), an Orinoco Crocodile and the large Tegu Lizard. Also we had a distant view of a Giant Anteater, and at closer quarters a troop of Collared Peccary, as well as many Savannah Foxes. At the ranch the resident Red Howler Monkeys lazed away in the trees above us, seemingly nonchalant amongst this miracle of wildlife.

Day 14: Friday to Saturday - 2nd - 3rd March - Hato El Cedral - Barinas - Caracas - Europe

Of course this idyll could not last for ever, and sadly we made our way back to "civilisation" via the usual routes without mishap, enjoying a final lunch at Caracas airport with our efficient local operator and saying our farewells to the friendly and ever attentive support staff, before taking off for the return to Britain. It had been a feast of wildlife, not to be forgotten.

List of birds seen or heard; a few mammals etc at the end.

Main locations:

1. Caracas to Henri Pittier National Park: 4 days
2. The Andes and Santo Domingo valley: 5 days
3. The llanos - El Cedral Ranch: 4 days

English name	1	2	3
Highland Tinamou	h	h	
Little Tinamou	h	h	
Least Grebe	+		
Pied-billed Grebe			+ +
Magnificent Frigatebird	+		
Neotropic Cormorant	+	+	+
Anhinga			+
Brown Pelican	+		
Fulvous Whistling-Duck			+
White-faced Whistling-Duck			+
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck			+
Orinoco Goose			+
Brazilian Duck			+
Torrent Duck		+	
Speckled Teal		+	
Blue-winged Teal			+ +
Whistling Heron		+	+
Little Blue Heron			+
Snowy Egret			+
Capped Heron			+
Cocoi Heron			+
Great Egret	+	+	+
Cattle Egret	+	+	+
Striated Heron	+	+	+
Agami Heron			+
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron			+

English name	1	2	3	
Black-crowned Night-Heron			+	
Boat-billed Heron			+	
Fasciated Tiger-Heron	+			
Rufescent Tiger-Heron			+	
Least Bittern			+	
Pinnated Bittern				+
White Ibis			+	
Scarlet Ibis			+	
Bare-faced Ibis	+	+	+	
Glossy Ibis			+	
Sharp-tailed Ibis				+
Buff-necked Ibis				+
Green Ibis			+	
Roseate Spoonbill			+	
Wood Stork			+	
Maguari Stork			+	
Jabiru			+	
Black Vulture	+	+	+	
Turkey Vulture	+	+	+	
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture			+	
Osprey			+	
Gray-headed Kite		+	+	+
Hook-billed Kite		+		
Swallow-tailed Kite		+		
Snail Kite			+	
Sharp-shinned Hawk		+		
Great Black Hawk			+	
Savanna Hawk			+	
Harris's Hawk			+	
Black-collared Hawk			+	
Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle		+		
Gray Hawk	+			

English name	1	2	3	
Roadside Hawk	+	+	+	
Broad-winged Hawk		+		
Short-tailed Hawk	+			
White-tailed Hawk	+		+	
Black Hawk-Eagle	+			
Crested Caracara		+		+
Yellow-headed Caracara		+	+	+
Laughing Falcon			+	+
Collared Forest-Falcon	+	h		
American Kestrel		+	+	+
Merlin		+		
Peregrine Falcon			+	+
Rufous-vented Chachalaca		+		+
Andean Guan		+		
Yellow-knobbed Curassow			+	
Crested Bobwhite			+	
Gray-necked Wood-Rail	+		+	
Yellow-breasted Crake			+	
Purple Gallinule			+	
Sunbittern			+	
Limpkin			+	
Wattled Jacana			+	
S. American Snipe			+	
Greater Yellowlegs			+	
Lesser Yellowlegs			+	
Solitary Sandpiper			+	
Spotted Sandpiper		+	+	
Least Sandpiper				+
Stilt Sandpiper			+	
Double-striped Thick-knee			+	
Black-necked Stilt			+	
Collared Plover			+	

English name	1	2	3	
Pied Lapwing			+	
Southern Lapwing		+	+	
Large-billed Tern				+
Gull-billed Tern			+	
Yellow-billed Tern			+	
Black Skimmer			+	
Band-tailed Pigeon		+		
Pale-vented Pigeon			+	
Ruddy Pigeon		+		
Eared Dove		+	+	
Scaled Dove	+		+	
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove			+	
Ruddy Ground-Dove	+	+	+	
White-tipped Dove	+	+	+	
Lined Quail-Dove		+		
Scarlet Macaw			+	
Chestnut-fronted Macaw		+		+
Scarlet-fronted Parakeet		+		
Brown-throated Parakeet		+	+	+
Blood-eared Parakeet	+			
Rose-headed Parakeet			+	
Green-rumped Parrotlet		+	+	+
Orange-chinned Parakeet				+
Red-billed Parrot		+		
White-capped Parrot		+		
Yellow-crowned Parrot			+	
Squirrel Cuckoo	+		+	
Hoatzin			+	
Greater Ani			+	
Smooth-billed Ani		+	+	
Groove-billed Ani			+	
Barn Owl			+	

English name	1	2	3
Great Horned Owl			+
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl		+	h
Burrowing Owl			+
Great Potoo			+
Short-tailed Nighthawk	+		
Lesser Nighthawk			+
Band-tailed Nighthawk			+
Pauraque			+
White-tailed Nightjar			+
Chestnut-collared Swift			+
White-collared Swift	+	+	
Vaux's Swift	+		
Short-tailed Swift		+	
White-tipped Swift	+		
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift	+		
Rufous-breasted Hermit		+	
Sooty-capped Hermit		+	
Green Violetear		+	
Black-throated Mango	+		+
Blue-tailed Emerald	+		+
Golden-tailed Sapphire	+		
Glittering-throated Emerald	+		+
Steely-vented Hummingbird		+	
Copper-rumped Hummingbird	+		
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird		+	
White-vented Plumeleteer			+
Speckled Hummingbird	+	+	
Violet-fronted Brilliant	+		
Violet-chested Hummingbird	+		
Mountain Velvetbreast		+	
Bronzy Inca	+	+	
Collared Inca		+	

English name	1	2	3	
Golden-bellied Starfrontlet		+		
Orange-throated Sunangel			+	
Merida Sunangel			+	
Booted Racket-tail	+	+		
Purple-backed Thornbill		+		
Tyrian Metaltail		+		
Long-tailed Sylph	+	+		
Amethyst Woodstar	+			
Crested Quetzal			+	
White-tipped Quetzal	+			
Golden-headed Quetzal		+		
Collared Trogon	+			
Masked Trogon		+		
Violaceous Trogon		+		
Ringed Kingfisher		+	+	
Amazon Kingfisher	+	+	+	
Green Kingfisher		+		+
American Pygmy Kingfisher			+	
Pale-headed Jacamar		+		
Rufous-tailed Jacamar	+		+	
Russet-throated Puffbird		+		+
Moustached Puffbird	+			
Red-headed Barbet		+		
Emerald Toucanet		+		
Yellow-billed Toucanet		+		
Groove-billed Toucanet	+			
Black-mandibled Toucan			+	
Scaled Piculet	+	+	+	
Red-crowned Woodpecker		+	+	+
Smoky-brown Woodpecker	+	+		
Red-rumped Woodpecker		+		+
Golden-olive Woodpecker		+	+	

English name	1	2	3	
Crimson-mantled Woodpecker		+		
Spot-breasted Woodpecker			+	
Lineated Woodpecker	+	h	+	
Crimson-crested Woodpecker			+	
Olivaceous Woodcreeper		+		
Wedge-billed Woodcreeper	+			
Straight-billed Woodcreeper			+	
Buff-throated Woodcreeper		+		
Streak-headed Woodcreeper	+			
Spot-crowned Woodcreeper		+		
Red-billed Scythebill			+	
Bar-winged Cinclodes		+		
Ochre-browed Thistletail			+	
Azara's Spinetail			+	
Pale-breasted Spinetail			+	
Rufous Spinetail			+	
Black-throated Spinetail		+		
Crested Spinetail		+	+	
Yellow-chinned Spinetail				+
Streak-backed Canastero			+	
Common Thornbird			+	
Pearled Treerunner		+		
Montane Foliage-gleaner		+		
Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner	+			
Plain Xenops		+		
Streaked Xenops			+	
Black-crested Antshrike	+			
Barred Antshrike		+	+	
Plain Antwreos	+	h		
Slaty Antwren	+			
Rufous-winged Antwren	+			
White-fringed Antwren			+	

English name	1	2	3
Jet Antbird			+
Rufous-tailed Antthrush	h		
Chestnut-crowned Antpitta		h	
Rusty-breasted Antpitta			h
Brown-rumped Tapaculo			h
Ocellated Tapaculo		+	
Green-and-black Fruiteater		h	
Golden-breasted Fruiteater			+
Handsome Fruiteater	+		
Andean Cock-of-the-Rock			h
Wire-tailed Manakin	+		
Lance-tailed Manakin	+		
White-bearded Manakin		h	
Olive-striped Flycatcher		+	
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher			+
Slaty-capped Flycatcher		+	+
Common Tody-Tyrant			+
Black-capped Tyrannulet			+
Venezuelan Tyrannulet		+	
Golden-faced Tyrannulet			+
Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet		+	
Southern Beardless Tyrannulet	+	+	+
Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet		+	
Forest Elaenia	+	+	
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	+	+	+
Mountain Elaenia			+
White-throated Tyrannulet		+	+
Torrent Tyrannulet		+	
Pale-tipped Tyrannulet			+
Venezuelan Bristle-Tyrant		+	
Variegated Bristle-Tyrant			+
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant	+		

English name	1	2	3	
Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant				+
Yellow-olive Flycatcher	+	+		
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher			+	
Flavescent Flycatcher		+		
Cinnamon Flycatcher	+	+		
Cliff Flycatcher		+		
Fuscous Flycatcher			+	
Greater Pewee	+	+		
Black Phoebe	+	+		
Vermilion Flycatcher			+	
Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant		+		
Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant		+		
Amazonian Black Tyrant				+
Pied Water-Tyrant			+	
White-headed Marsh Tyrant			+	
Cattle Tyrant	+		+	
Dusky-capped Flycatcher		+	+	
Short-crested Flycatcher				+
Brown-crested Flycatcher				+
Tropical Kingbird	+	+	+	
Fork-tailed Flycatcher			+	
Gray Kingbird			+	
Boat-billed Flycatcher	+	+	+	
Golden-crowned Flycatcher	+	+		
Streaked Flycatcher		+	+	
Rusty-margined Flycatcher	+	+	+	
Social Flycatcher		+	+	+
Piratic Flycatcher			+	
Lesser Kiskadee				+
Great Kiskadee	+	+	+	
White-bearded Flycatcher				+
Chestnut-crowned Becard		+		

English name	1	2	3
Black-crowned Tityra		+	
Green Jay	+	+	
Rufous-browed Peppershrike	+	+	
Red-eyed Vireo	+	+	+
Brown-capped Vireo	+	+	
Golden-fronted Greenlet		+	
Scrub Greenlet			+
White-capped Dipper		+	
Andean Solitaire		h	+
Yellow-legged Thrush		+	
Great Thrush		+	
Glossy-black Thrush	+	+	
Black-hooded Thrush	+	+	
Chestnut-bellied Thrush			+
Pale-breasted Thrush	+	+	
Black-billed Thrush		+	
Cocoa Thrush		+	
Bare-eyed Thrush		+	+
White-necked Thrush	+		
Tropical Mockingbird	+	+	+
Bicolored Wren			+
Stripe-backed Wren	+		+
Paramo Wren		+	
Moustached Wren	h	h	
Rufous-breasted Wren	+	h	
Rufous-and-white Wren		h	
Buff-breasted Wren	+		+
House Wren		+	+
Mountain Wren		+	
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren	+	+	
Southern Nightingale-Wren	h		
Long-billed Gnatwren	+		

English name	1	2	3
Tropical Gnatcatcher			+
White-winged Swallow			+
Brown-chested Martin			+
Gray-breasted Martin			+
Brown-bellied Swallow		+	
Blue-and-white Swallow		+	+
S. Rough-winged Swallow		+	+
Barn Swallow			+
Paramo Pipit		+	
Andean Siskin		+	
Red Siskin		+	
Yellow-bellied Siskin	+		
Dark-backed Goldfinch		+	
Tennessee Warbler		+	
Tropical Parula	+		
Yellow Warbler	+		+
Chestnut-sided Warbler		+	
Blackburnian Warbler		+	
Bay-breasted Warbler	+		
Cerulean Warbler		+	+
Black-and-white Warbler			+
American Redstart	+	+	
Northern Waterthrush	+		+
Slate-throated Whitestart		+	+
White-fronted Whitestart			+
Citrine Warbler		+	
Black-crested Warbler		+	
Golden-crowned Warbler		+	+
Three-striped Warbler	+	+	
Rufous-collared Sparrow			+
Yellow-browed Sparrow			+
Moustached Brush-Finch			+

English name	1	2	3
Slaty Brush-Finch		+	
Ochre-breasted Brush-Finch	+		
Red-capped Cardinal			+
Bananaquit	+	+	+
Blue-backed Conebill		+	
Black-faced Tanager		+	
Magpie Tanager			+
Common Bush-Tanager	+	+	
Superciliaried Hemispingus		+	
Fulvous-headed Tanager		+	
Guira Tanager	+		
White-shouldered Tanager			+
White-lined Tanager	+	+	
Hepatic Tanager		+	
Summer Tanager			+
White-winged Tanager	+		
Crimson-backed Tanager			+
Silver-beaked Tanager	+	+	+
Blue-gray Tanager	+	+	+
Glaucous Tanager			+
Palm Tanager	+	+	+
Blue-capped Tanager	+	+	
Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager		+	
Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager	+		
Trinidad Euphonia		h	h
Thick-billed Euphonia	+	+	+
Golden-rumped Euphonia			+
Orange-bellied Euphonia		+	+
Blue-naped Chlorophonia			+
Golden Tanager	+	+	
Speckled Tanager		+	+
Bay-headed Tanager	+	+	

English name	1	2	3	
Burnished-buff Tanager	+		+	
Blue-necked Tanager		+		
Beryl-spangled Tanager	+	+		
Blue-and-black Tanager			+	
Black-capped Tanager		+		
Black-headed Tanager		+		
Blue Dacnis	+	+		
Green Honeycreeper	+	+		
Red-legged Honeycreeper		+		
Swallow-Tanager		+	+	
Plumbeous Sierra-Finch		+		
Orange-fronted Yellow-Finch			+	
Saffron Finch		+	+	
Grassland Yellow-Finch			+	
Blue-black Grassquit	+			
Gray Seedeater		+	+	
Yellow-bellied Seedeater		+	+	
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater		+	+	+
White-sided Flowerpiercer			+	
Bluish Flowerpiercer		+		
Masked Flowerpiercer		+		
Dickcissel			+	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			+	
Buff-throated Saltator	+	+		
Grayish Saltator			+	+
Orinocan Saltator				+
Crested Oropendola	+	+	+	
Russet-backed Oropendola	+	+		
Yellow-rumped Cacique	+		+	
Yellow-backed Oriole		h		
Yellow Oriole			+	
Troupial				+

English name	1	2	3		
Oriole-Blackbird				+	
Yellow-hooded Blackbird				+	
Red-breasted Blackbird			+		
Eastern Meadowlark		+	+		
Carib Grackle	+		+		
Shiny Cowbird		+	+		
Giant Cowbird		+	+		
Total of species					
	seen	162	206	192	Total: 400
	heard	6	17	1	Total: 14

Also seen:

Red Howler Monkey, Tropical Red-tailed Squirrel, Capybara, White-tailed Deer, Giant Anteater, Savannah Fox, Long-nosed Armadillo, Collared Peccary Pink Dolphin, Anaconda, Green Iguana, Spectacled Caiman, Orinoco Crocodile, Side-neck Turtle, Tegu Lizard.