

## Colombia – January 2026



Colombia is well-known for its birds, but it is also a great country for mammals. With over 500 mammal species, it ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in South America, with only Brazil and Peru having more documented species. It's a fairly easy country to get around with many airports and roads. Once known as a dangerous place to visit due to drug related conflict, Colombia is emerging as a fairly safe tourist destination in South America.

After guiding a birding tour that ended in Miami, I made a quick trip to Colombia to try and see the Northern Oncilla at Mirador El Roble as well as some birds. I initially tried to arrange the lodging at Mirador El Roble myself through WhatsApp, but it got a bit confusing with the language barrier, even with Google translate. I enlisted the help of Manakin Nature Tours, who I've worked with a lot on birding tours, and they were able to make all arrangements for me. I traveled solo, felt safe the whole time, and only had very minor issues with my limited Spanish.

### January 21: Miami to Medellin to Jardin

I flew out of Miami on Avianca at 5:30 AM and landed in Medellin at 9:00 AM. I easily found my driver and we headed to Jardin, about 4 hours from the airport with traffic. After some tacos in Jardin, I headed to Jardin de Rocas Reserve to see a Cock-of-the-Rock lek. After about an hour there and great views of the birds, we continued on a windy, dirt road further up the mountain to Mirador El Roble. I was greeted by the owner, Lucia, who showed me to my room. They have built a small lodge on the property with three rooms, each on its own floor. It is a bit rustic and does not have heat, but the rooms do have ensuite bathrooms. I was the only one staying at the lodge the entire time I was there. I did some birding in the afternoon, had a great meal cooked by Lucia, who told me the Oncilla usually shows up a bit before sunrise. With that information, I went to bed with high hopes of seeing my target cat the next morning.

### January 22: Mirador El Roble

It was chilly overnight with light rain and I headed down to the feeders behind the main building around 5:45 AM to wait for the Oncilla. In the meantime, there were several species of hummingbirds, Great

Thrush, Gray-browed Brushfinch, Blue-capped Tanager, and a few others coming into the feeders. A little before 6:30 AM, the **Northern Oncilla** arrived and perched on a log. It remained on the log, only shifting position when someone came out to fill the bird feeders, for about thirty minutes. Once it was fed, it took the raw chicken and disappeared in the brush down the hillside. A few **Andean Squirrels** were hanging around in the area as well.



Northern Oncilla



Andean White-eared Opossum

I spent most of the day birding, both with Martin, Lucia's son, and on my own. When the clouds cleared for a bit, the views in the area are spectacular. After dinner, Martin asked if I wanted to go out and look for owls. Just before we left, an **Andean White-eared Opossum** appeared at one of the fruit feeders beside the house. We watched it briefly and then headed off on Martin's motorbike (no easy feat with binocs and camera gear) a little way down the road. After about an hour in the forest, we ended up with great views of White-throated Screech-Owl. It was raining by then, so we headed back to the lodge.

#### January 23: Mirador El Roble

I got up early again to look for the Oncilla, but it never showed. I spent most of the day birding around the property and on the road. In the evening, Martin and I went out again looking for owls. The Opossum was at the feeder again before we left. We saw another opossum while walking along the road. No owls, so we headed back to the lodge. I checked the feeder by the house and noticed something moving up in the tree. It was crawling down the tree and eventually rested on a branch. I later figured out it was a **Frosted Hairy Dwarf Porcupine**, apparently not common.



Frosted Hairy Dwarf Porcupine



White-throated Screech-Owl

January 24: Mirador El Roble to Jardin to Medellin

I had planned on leaving the lodge at 7 AM to visit a birding reserve in Jardin and then head to Medellin for an early flight the next morning. The oncilla had other plans for me as it showed up just as my driver arrived. I spent another twenty minutes watching and photographing the cat before we left and headed down to Jardin.

I spent the morning at Los Guacharos Reserve for birding. While eating breakfast with a nice view of the feeders, two **Black Agouti** ran under the feeders and disappeared off the property. After breakfast, I headed down a trail to the river to see some Oilbirds. Along the way, there were Cock-of-the-Rock, Black-chested Jays, an Andean Motmot, and White-capped Dipper.

