



## Suggestions for birdwatchers visiting Venezuela

Whether you are traveling with us, with another operator or by yourself, we have compiled these suggestions in order to help you for a successful birding experience in Venezuela (and many other neotropical countries).

Venezuela is a bipolar country where 60% of the population inhabits 40% of the territory. Life in the cities is frenetic while in the interior is very calm. Birders must avoid staying in Caracas. Although oil is the primary source of income, Venezuela was an important producer of coffee and cocoa in the past. Therefore, if you wish to bring some souvenirs, there is a great variety of chocolate and coffee, not to say our famed rums.

Here we list a number of issues to take in consideration when visiting Venezuela. Birders are invited to print this document and to share it with fellow birders. We kindly request readers to send their trip report and birdlist to post it in our web site ([www.ascaniobirding.com](http://www.ascaniobirding.com)).

### » Arrival and transfer to Hotel.

Unless you are not flying to Caracas (i.e. Valencia and Maracaibo) you will be landing in Maiquetia airport, some 20 miles N of the capital city. Maiquetia is a modern airport although you have to follow the basic security procedures. For example, if you requested a transfer to your hotel, you don't have to ask the person waiting for you: "are you going to take me to hotel...?". You rather need to ask him to what hotel is he taking you. If he responds the right one then you know that you are with the right person. On the other side, if you did not request any service and you're going to manage your own transfer, we must advice that there will be dozens of people offering transfer to Caracas at low fare or to exchange your money to local currency. You have to keep in mind that dealing with them puts you in a serious risk! Always use the booth to exchange money and request transfers with the official cab line. The cab line is right at the entrance of the airport and usually there are black Ford Explorer vehicles. Be aware that Caracas is distant from the airport and if you happen to get there in rush hour or the evening of a Sunday it may take more than 2 hours to reach the hotel. We strongly suggest fellow birders to use a hotel near the airport.

## » **Water.**

This is always an issue no matter where you travel around the world. Since each one of us reacts differently, the best is to know your body limits regarding the local water. It is safer to keep bottled water with you for the night and use it even to brush your teeth. Most lodges and hotels will assure that water is safe, but taking the risk may affect your birding opportunities the day after. It is a custom in Venezuela to store water in tanks, and there are living things (such as frogs, insects, etc), therefore do never drink the water out of the faucets. Birders should seriously consider the suggestions above when visiting the states of Falcon, Merida, Trujillo and Vargas. In the field, always have a water canteen available. Getting dehydrated is more common than what you expect!

## » **Birding along the roads.**

Neotropical birders sure know that accessing a driving license in South America does not mean good driving skills! Therefore, be always aware that many drivers are aggressive when holding a steering wheel. This is particularly important in Henri Pittier national park since the road goes from the city of Maracay to the nice beaches of Choroni and Ocumare. If you hear a loud low frequency hunk you must get out of the road immediately. If you are with a group, it is easier if everybody moves to one side of the road, not both sides. Also, bear in mind that you may not listen the second vehicle coming from either side of the road after the first has gone, so check before stepping back again to the road.

## » **Checkpoints.**

It is usual to find checkpoints along the road. If you are driving, you must slow down and never raise your binoculars even if the best bird is there. It is better to ask for permission before you bird around the checkpoint (or even avoid it).

## » **Documentation.**

When arriving to Venezuela you will receive a card called "tarjeta de ingreso". You must keep it because it will be requested when leaving the country. Also, when you are birding in the field, always carry your passport with you and never leave it in the hotel. It is also a good idea to bring a photocopy of your passport and pack it along with your luggage. The only areas where you do not have to bring your passport to the field are the large ranches and isolated regions (Junglaven) of the country.

## » **Local people.**

Unless you are expecting to spend years working with a conservation project in Venezuela, we highly recommend that you do not show bird nests or roosts to local people. By doing this you're exposing the bird to a great risk. Instead, you can show the plates of the book and interact with their knowledge, local names and bird-related stories.

## » **Using tape recorders.**

We request international tour leaders and birders to use the tape recorders for playback with limits. Birds as Tapaculos, Wrens and Flycatchers keep calling for a long while after playback and we don't really know how much damage we're causing with it.

### » Using the bug repellent.

Most commercial bug-repellents have some amount of "deet". This is written in the label as "N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide". There are usually two presentations, liquid and spray. Fellow birders must be aware that "deet" ruins the fabric of binoculars, melts plastic and can damage tape recorders, parabolic dishes and other equipment. It is a good idea to spray the repellent away from other fellow birders and equipment and clean your hands before you take your binoculars.

### » Using your credit card.

It is always better not to leave an open voucher in the hotels unless you are traveling with a local operator. Likewise, it is better not to use ATM machines in Venezuela. This will increase the possibilities of fraud in your account. Most places will accept US\$ and some won't accept travelers check or personal checks. The best to do is pay the extra expenses with credit card once you leave the hotel.

### » Spotting birds and sharing our passion for birds.

If you are birding with a group, be aware that not every one has the same capabilities to find birds. If you happen to be faster than others, give them the option to stay on a prime site. Be patient, remember that the angle you may have is not the same angle fellow birders have. This is especially important when birding inside the forest with rich understory. Once you see the bird you are only starting your process of learning. Being still gives the bird the chance to act as they normally do. This is what makes birding magical.

### » Choosing the right date to visit Venezuela.

We are strong believers of a year-round birding possibilities in the tropics of America, but being Venezuela a South-American country, there are dates you must avoid visiting my country. What I mean is the holidays and what we call here "bridges", which occur when a holiday is in the middle of the week, and people take all the days in between. First, you should avoid coming to Venezuela in Easter week or during Carnival. Second, if you are visiting Henri Pittier national park, you should avoid being there at weekends, or any of the following dates: New Year's Eve, April-19 th , June-24 th , July-5 th , October-12 th and Christmas time. If you are visiting Southeastern Venezuela, you should also avoid August and December, especially because of the problems with gasoline supply. If you choose the Andes (Pico Humboldt trail) you must be aware that on December 25-th and January-1st st the access road collapses with the amount of vehicles. A final suggestion: always ask your local operator if the dates are OK to visit the area. Believe us, it makes a huge difference!

### » Playing the safe side.

If you are holding binoculars, cameras and recording equipment, there is no way you can blend with the local people. Do your best to keep your belongings inside a bag pack when at the airport or in the cities. Very important: people who bring standing briefcases should keep an eye all the time on his hand luggage. We encourage fellow birders to rather use bag packs and not standing cases.

### » Other suggestions.

Do never leave values (jewelry, money, cameras) exposed in your room. When packing consider bringing alarm clock, a small flashlight, a small towel and bug repellent.

**Currency:** Bolívar

**Electric current:** 110 volts (Two legs USA plug-type)

**Visa:** Not required for most countries. Valid passport for 6 months is required.

**Time:** Eastern standard time.

Finally, we encourage fellow birders not to discuss topics about the political situation of our country openly unless you are prepared for a long conversation with Venezuelans. Avoid arguing about these issues because the positions are very divided almost by 50-50. Always remember that diminishing the position of others may offend them even if you did not wish to do it.

**We wish you a great birding experience!**