

Trip Report: Orchids of Colombia

Dates: July 22 - August 6, 2026

Participants: Fred and Jan Anderson, Sandra Block-Brezner, Kay Klumb, Arun and Kelly Mandagare, Rae Ann Meyer, Jonathan Riley, Maryetta and Michael Scuito.

Tour Leaders: Sebastián Vieira-Uribe, Saúl Ernesto Hoyos Gómez

OCA Representatives: Spiro Kasomenakis, Mary E. Gerritsen

Colombia has long held a special fascination for orchid enthusiasts. With habitats ranging from tropical lowland forests to cool Andean cloud forests and high-elevation páramo, the country supports an extraordinary diversity of orchids and is recognized as the most orchid-rich nation in the world. For our journey, the goal was to experience some of that diversity firsthand—to explore the mountains and forests where genera such as *Cattleya*, *Cyrtorchilum*, *Dracula*, *Epidendrum*, *Lepanthes*, *Masdevallia*, *Maxillaria*, *Oncidium* and many others grow naturally, and to see these remarkable plants as part of the broader landscape. Along the way, we encountered not only an exceptional variety of orchids, but also spectacular scenery, abundant wildlife, and the warmth and character of Colombia itself.

July 22: Arrival in Colombia

Our tour began in Bogotá, Colombia's capital, which sits high in the Andes at about 2,600 meters (8,500 feet) above sea level. The city spreads across a broad plateau beneath the steep green mountains that rise along the city's eastern edge. The cool highland climate can be a surprise to visitors expecting tropical heat, and the surrounding mountains are often softened by clouds and mist. For travelers interested in orchids and other Andean plants, Bogotá is an ideal starting point, lying within easy reach of exceptionally diverse cloud forests and mountain habitats. Our guides, Sebastián and Saúl, met everyone at the airport and made sure we had taxis to our hotel. We stayed at a lovely boutique hotel, the BH La Quinta, and enjoyed a delicious welcome dinner at a nearby restaurant.

July 23: A day in Bogotá

Our first stop for the day was the Jardín Botánico de Bogotá José Celestino Mutis, particularly interesting for anyone visiting Colombia to see orchids. Named for José



The group at the Bogotá Botanic Garden. Left to Right: Felipe Espinosa, Jonathan Riley, Sandra Block-Brezner, Sebastián Vieira, Maryetta Scuito, Michael Scuito, Spiro Kasomenakis, Arun Mandagere, Kelly Mandagere, Mary E. Gerritsen, Rae Ann Meyer, Fred Anderson, Jan Anderson, Saúl Hoyos.

Celestino Mutis, the Spanish physician and botanist who led the famous Royal Botanical Expedition of New Granada in the late 18th century, the garden occupies about 20 hectares and maintains 34 living plant collections. Its particular scientific emphasis is on the flora of Colombia's high Andean forests and páramo ecosystems, making it quite different from a conventional tropical botanical garden. The large public greenhouse structure was quite unusual, featuring the different habitats of Colombia: the páramo, tropics, and cloud forests. There were also a few orchids and bromeliads in the greenhouses, but we encountered more on a nearby walkway that led to the orchid collection. For lunch, we enjoyed some typical ajiaco, a thick soup made with chicken, corn, and potatoes, along with cream and avocado. This is apparently one of Bogotá's best known traditional dishes!

The afternoon was spent at the gold museum (Museo del Oro), a wonderful introduction to Colombia's pre-Hispanic cultures. It is operated by a bank (Banco de la República) and houses an extraordinary collection of ancient goldwork, ceramics, stone, and other archaeological objects made by the indigenous societies from many regions of Colombia. Room after room displayed exquisitely crafted gold ornaments, masks, pendants, ceremonial objects, and offerings. The highlight was the famous Muisca Raft, an intricate gold representation of a ceremonial offering on a sacred lake and one of the objects most closely associated with the legend of El Dorado.

To top off our "Day in Bogotá" we rode the gondola to the top of Monserrate, the mountain that rises dramatically above the eastern edge of the city. At 3,152 meters (10,340 feet), its

summit is considerably higher than Bogotá itself and is crowned by the Basilica of the Fallen Lord of Monserrate, the focus of a pilgrimage tradition dating back to the 1600s. We rode the teleférico—the cable-car gondola—up the steep, forested mountainside, watching Bogotá spread out beneath us as we climbed. At the top, the panoramic view revealed the astonishing extent of the city across the Andean plateau, while the surrounding high-elevation forest provided a glimpse of the natural vegetation that once covered much of the region. It had started to drizzle when we reached the top, so we made our way to Casa Santa Clara, an old elegant wooden house that is now a restaurant specializing in Colombian food. Casa Santa Clara also has an especially interesting history. This wooden house originally stood in the Usaquén area of Bogotá and was dismantled and moved piece by piece to the summit of Monserrate in 1979. There are colorful stories that the house itself was originally brought from France, although contemporary accounts disagree on whether it actually was imported or simply built in Bogotá in a Parisian style. Either way, the house is now a distinctive landmark on the mountain. The combination of the old house, the cool mountain air, and the extraordinary panorama made the restaurant itself almost as memorable as the food. We spent the night at the BH La Quinta, Bogotá.

July 24. Off to the Cloud Forests and Páramo near Guasca (Chingaza National Park)

We departed Bogotá and set off for Guasca, a small Andean town in the department of Cundinamarca, about 50 km northeast of Bogotá. The elevation here is about 2,700 meters (8,860 ft), and the landscape is known for its farms, high-Andean forests and páramo. This area also acts as a major water catchment region for the capital city.

We stopped briefly at our hotel for the next few days (Hotel Finca el Recreo) and dropped off our bags. We picked up a local guide, Fredy Alexander Alfonso, and from Guasca we followed a series of rough mountain roads upward into Páramo Grande de Guasca and a regional park called Parque Natural Regional Vista Hermosa de Monquetiva, a magnificent expanse of high Andean páramo dominated by frailejones (*Espeletia*), grasses, and large terrestrial bromeliads in the genus *Puya*. We encountered our first cloud forests a few miles into the journey and began to spot many high-elevation gems, including *Pachyphyllum crystallinum*, *Fernandezia myrtilus*, *Epidendrum* (several species), *Elleanthus robustus*, *Gravendeelia chamaelepanthes*, and *Telipogon andicola*.

Going higher still, we reached a vast treeless area populated by hundreds of *Espeletia argentea* as well as a second unidentified *Espeletia* sp. There were many *Puya* bromeliads in the area, a number of them destroyed by foraging spectacled bears. Our guide, Fredy, was sure we would see one of these bears, and after walking as quietly as possible up the road, we did! This rare, vulnerable species is highly threatened due to habitat loss, so we

were lucky to see one. We also found a very odd “plant” under one of the shrubs, later identified as “stinkhorn eggs,” a type of fungus.



Telipogon andicola



Pachyphyllum crystallinum



Fernandezia myrtillos



Gravendeelia chamaelepanthes



Epidendrum chioneum



Stelis sp.



Elleanthus robustus



Epidendrum magnibracteum



Paepalanthus alpinus
(Eriocaulaceae)



Guzmania squarrosa
(Bromeliaceae)



Pleurothallis lindenii



Páramo de Guasca



Espeletia argentea
(foreground)



Gomphichis cundinamarcae
(Terrestrial orchid species)



Clathrus cf. crispus
(Stinkhorn "eggs," apparently a very rare find!)



Cyrtorchilum ioplocon

The Andean or Spectacled Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), caught in the act eating a *Puya*!





Another photo of the bear.
Photo by Spiro Kasomenakis

July 25: Guasca and the Reserva Biológica Encenillo

Today we visited Reserva Biológica Encenillo, a private reserve managed by Fundación Natura Colombia. The reserve is roughly 200 hectares and protects upper Andean cloud forest and subpáramo habitats between 2,800 and 3,200 m. The name of the reserve comes from the encenillo tree (*Weinmannia tomentosa*) a dominant species in the forest here. The reserve is known for its rich epiphyte population - orchids, bromeliads, mosses, liverworts, and lichens - and also for its abundant wildlife, including birds, coatids, armadillos, foxes, and even small wild cats.

The reserve once belonged to the Hoeck family and was used for limestone extraction but was donated by the family and established as a reserve in 2006-2007 with the goal of protecting the remaining encenillo forest and restoring the areas damaged by mining.

For our group of orchid enthusiasts, there was the dedicated Sendero Las Orquídeas (“trail of the orchids”), a winding, uphill trail toward a ridge that overlooks the Guasca and Sopó Valleys. For the hike up the trail we were joined by Karen Gil, MSc., a scientist who has studied orchid pollination, particularly in species of the genus *Dracula*. She is also

docente at the Universidad de Cundinamarca, Fusagasugá, Colombia. Karen took the time to point out and identify various orchids that we found along the trail, including *Epidendrum excisum*, *E. oxysepalum*, *E. sisgaense*, *Fernandezia sanguinea*, *Masdevallia strumifera*, *Pleurothallis lindenii*, *P. lilijae*, *P. linguifera*, and *P. phalangifera*, many different *Stelis* species, as well as a *Telipogon* species. The trail also had an abundance of bromeliads.



Guzmania squarrosa



Epidendrum oxysepalum



Pleurothallis killipii



Pleurothallis linguifera



Pleurothallis galeata



Masdevallia strumifera



Stelis sp.



Fernandezia myrtillus



Epidendrum excisum



Pleurothallis roseopunctata



Epidendrum sisgaense



Lepanthes caudatisepala



A rosier form of *Epidendrum excisum*



Pleurothallis lilijae



Some of the wonderful lichens in the forest



The mossy Trail of the Orchids



View from the top of the reserve



View from the top of the reserve

July 26. More Páramo, Hummingbirds, and Orchid-Rich Old Trees in Pastures

We started off the day by heading to another part of the páramo, this time up one of the paved roads. Karen Gil also joined us today. As we climbed higher, it became very cold, rainy, and foggy. We made a brief stop on the roadside to photograph a few orchids (only a few of us even got off the bus), then made the executive decision to quit this miserable effort and visit a nearby hummingbird garden. I did manage to get one decent photo of a tiny *Draconanthes* that we found on the road bank. This genus is only found in páramo habitats.



Draconanthes aberrans

The “hummingbird” garden is known as the Reserva Natural El Zoque. It lies right at the transition from the upper Andean forest into the páramo. The name “Zoque” is apparently the Muisca (indigenous) word for páramo. A small stream runs through the reserve, and when we climbed up the trail that followed the stream (sort of), we quickly came into more open páramo vegetation. During our explorations we found a few orchids, including *Otoglossum* cf. *candelabrum*, *Oncidium luteopurpureum*, and *Masdevallia strumosa*.



Otoglossum cf. *candelabrum*



Oncidium luteopurpureum



Glowing puffleg

Eriocnemis vestita

Photo by Arun Mandagare



Green-crowned brilliant

Heliodoxa jacula

Photo by Arun Mandagare



Masdevallia strumosa



Epidendrum zipaquiranum

After exploring the reserve, we headed to another area called “El Triunfo/Adolfo Rios”, but after a quick bathroom stop, we were delayed by a “bike jam”, a large bicycle road race that continued on the surface roads. After a 2 hr rest with coffee and cakes, we were finally able to resume our exploration. As we headed to higher elevations, we eventually reached an area that had huge old remnant trees in cow pastures that were covered with all sorts of orchids. My GPS app indicated that we were at about 2,930 meters (9,600 ft). We found numerous *Stelis*, *Epidendrum scutella*, *Cyrtorchilum porrigens*, and *Oncidium gloriosum* in full bloom.



Oncidium gloriosum, at the top of a very tall tree



Cyrtorchilum porrigens



Epidendrum scutella



Oncidium gloriosum

Our goal was a much higher elevation on the road, but an inadvertent wrong turn took us up the wrong track, and by the time we corrected the mistake it was getting quite dark. The place we were trying to reach was known to have several *Telipogon* species; alas, when we finally arrived, all the plants we found were in spike (perhaps if the light were better we might have found one or two in flower). We did find a large *Cyrtorchilum weirii*, which was difficult to photograph in the declining light. We soon returned to our hotel, dropping Karen off along the way.



Cyrtorchilum weirii

July 27: Heading Back to Bogotá, and a Tour of the Salt Cathedral

We started off early to visit the Guatavita Lagoon, a lake nestled within a volcanic crater, only to discover that the park was closed on Mondays! Undeterred, we returned to Bogotá, stopping for lunch at a popular but very meat-oriented Colombian style barbeque restaurant that served immense portions! Bellies full, we set off for a popular tourist destination, officially entitled the Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, an extraordinary underground church carved into the tunnels of a salt mine about an hour north of Bogotá. Descending deep beneath the mountain, we passed through a series of dimly lit chapels representing the Stations of the Cross before reaching the vast main cathedral, where enormous crosses and cavernous chambers have been sculpted directly from the salt rock. The dramatic lighting, rough mineral walls, and immense underground spaces felt both surreal and solemn, and also reflected the long history of salt mining that shaped the town of Zipaquirá. At the end of the tour were a number of gift shops (and coffee), and the group enjoyed shopping for emeralds and souvenir items carved from salt. We returned to our lovely boutique hotel, the BH La Quinta, for one last evening before heading off to the airport (at 5 am) for our flight to Medellín the following morning.

July 28: Flight to Medellín, Yarumal, and Feeding the Hummingbirds

After a very early start, we flew to Medellín, met our new driver, and almost immediately, stopped at a roadside restaurant for a quick breakfast. We had a fairly long drive (about 3 hrs) ahead of us, going west from the airport toward Medellín then north through the city and up toward Santa Rosa de Osos and finally to Yarumal, our destination for the day. Yarumal is a mountain town (elevation 2,350 m) in northern Antioquia, approximately 120 km north of Medellín. The town itself had steep, narrow streets, and it was a challenge to get to our hotel, Hotel Alcatraz. It was an old, eclectic building with several flights of stairs just to get to the “lobby”, and a bizarre collection of odd-shaped rooms that seemed to have included en suite bathrooms as an afterthought. A step down from our lovely Bogotá hotel! However, it was the “best available”, so we made do.

After dropping off our luggage, we headed to “El balcón de los colibries”, a beautiful country finca with a lovely garden planted with many hummingbird friendly trees and shrubs. Owned by Yovany Ochoa, the finca was purchased in 2012, when it was essentially a country property with cow pastures and virtually no vegetation other than grass. Yovany has assembled a garden and home that was a true bird sanctuary. He has documented about 120 different species visiting his property, and 20 of them were hummingbirds (colibries). The balcony feeders were positively buzzing with hummingbirds, probably over 100 different birds at any one time, with several different species represented. Yovany had

prepared little jars with the hummingbird mixture in it that we could hold in our hands, and everyone was amazed that they could hand feed a hummingbird.



Multiple hummingbirds



Maxillaria cf. triloris



Kelly hand feeding hummingbirds!



Hand feeding a hummingbird

(Photo (and hand) by Jonathan Riley)

July 29: A Visit to the SalvaMontes Reserve near Yarumal

After a leisurely breakfast at the “Restobar” (the only restaurant in town with a parking lot), we were picked up by two 4WD vehicles that would take us over the rough road into the SalvaMontes Reserves (see map below), in particular the Reserva Natural Los Magnolios.



Waterfall



Overlooking part of the Los Magnolios Reserve

From the nursery, the group continued down the road, looking for orchids and other interesting plants along the way. We were accompanied by Sthefany Giraldo, the Director of Communications for SalvaMontes, and both Sebastián and Saúl were kept busy pointing out various plants, and the occasional bird.



Tree nursery



Tree nursery



Elleanthus robustus



Wettinia kalbreyeri

As we made our way down the road, we found *Sobralia minutiflora* (originally thought to be a new species endemic to the reserve but later found to have been described previously), *Epidendrum aura-usecheae*, *Prosthechea crassilabia*, and a *Maxillaria* (syn. *Cryptocentrum*) species.



Epidendrum aura-usecheae



Sobralia minutiflora



Los Magnolios Reserve and the OCA logo!



Prosthechea crassilabia

A small group set off down a forest trail to see some other notable features of the reserve. The trail led down a steep and slippery slope, across a small stream, over the “bog of no return” (very swampy and an easy place to leave your boots behind), and then finally to a somewhat flatter trail through the forest. We saw a magnificent specimen of *Miltoniopsis vexillaria* (very rare in the wild), several *Stelis* sp. and *Platystele* sp., *Ophidion*, a *Houlettia*, and *Dracula chimaera*. Importantly, we saw the enormous *Magnolia guatapensis* that was the impetus for creating this reserve. The rangers routinely collect its seeds for propagation in the tree nursery we saw earlier.



Exploring the forest trail



Miltoniopsis vexillaria in a tree high above the trail



Ophidion pleurothallopsis



Dracula chimaera

After a strenuous walk back up the trail, we joined the rest of the group at the home of the rangers (Liberdo Cuartas and Luz Dary Echavarria) for a little birdwatching along with refreshments and a small meal. We also met Mauricio Mazo, Director of Conservation for SalvaMontes. Then it was back to Yarumal to clean up and head to sleep.

July 30: Depart Yarumal, visit Quebrada El Oro, and the Boutique Hotel at Venecia

To avoid the slow breakfast of the previous day, the group met at a little coffee shop down the street from the hotel and enjoyed buñuelos colombianos, a typical Antioquia breakfast. These deep-fried doughballs puff up when fried and were delicious with our morning coffee. Then it was off to Quebrada El Oro, a foggy, mid-elevation area. *Quebrada* literally means a small river or mountain stream and, by extension, the ravine through which it flows. The upper watershed lies in cool, extremely humid Andean cloud forest, with elevations in the protected portions ranging roughly from 1,650 to more than 2,200 m. Today parts of the watershed are protected by SalvaMontes, including Reserva Natural Terrarana, which protects the headwaters, and Reserva Natural La Selva de Ventanas, through which the Quebrada El Oro flows.

For we orchid people, this area has considerable historical importance. Carlyle Luer, Rodrigo Escobar, and their colleagues explored the forests around Quebrada El Oro extensively, particularly during the 1980s, and many different orchids were collected or

described from here. For example, the type specimen of *Lepanthes trichocaulis* came from Quebrada El Oro at about 1,820 m, while *Trichosalpinx ectopa*, *Pleurothallis glabra*, and *Stelis mystrion* were all collected there at about 1,850 m during a 1989 expedition involving Carl and Jane Luer, Stig Dalström, and Walter Teague. The surrounding forest remains exceptionally rich in orchids, particularly miniature pleurothallids, as well as bromeliads, ferns, mosses, and other epiphytes. SalvaMontes notes that several species new to science have also been discovered in the Terrarana reserve in recent years. Our guide Sebastián was a co-author on all the descriptions! These new species are *Lepanthes sabinadaleyana*, *L. cissyana*, *L. dougdarlingii*, *L. pembertonii*, and *L. hwangiae*. The last two *Lepanthes* were named in honor of two OCA members and generous sponsors who supported SalvaMontes, Robert Pemberton and his wife, Joanne Hwang Pemberton.

When we first arrived, we were met by the local campesino who cares for part of this area. He had planted several *Magnolia polyhypsophylla* seedlings from the nursery, and some of them are now taller than Sebastián! We explored two areas: a somewhat higher, open road and a lower road next to the stream. We found quite a few different orchids, including *Campylocentrum* sp., *Comparettia falcata*, *Cryptocentrum* sp., *Dichaea* sp., *Epidendrum fimbriatum*, several species of *Lepanthes*, *Macroclinium* cf. *xiphophorus*, *Masdevallia nidifica*, *Maxillaria aurea*, *M. meridensis* (syn. *M. longicaulis*), *Sobralia lacerata*, and *Pleurothallis colossus* (out of bloom). We also found a nice orange gesneriad (*Resia umbratica*) and several *Chamaedorea* (possibly *linearis*) palms.



Resia umbratica



Maxillaria meridensis



Macroclinium cf. xiphophorus



Comparettia falcata



Sobralia lacerata



Masdevallia nidifica



Maxillaria (Cryptocentrum) cf. escobarii



Epidendrum fimbriatum

After we had pretty much exhausted the possibilities along the road, we climbed back into our bus and set out on a long trip, first back to Yarumal, then back through Medellín (and its horrendous traffic) and up the other side of the valley, heading to the small town of Venecia, where we stayed in a lovely, although still under renovation, boutique hotel called Hacienda La Amalia.

I almost forgot to mention our unusual lunch! We stopped at a restaurant with an odd wooden corridor down the middle of the dining area. The back of the restaurant was surrounded by stables, and we guessed these were somehow related to the corridor. After our meal, the doors leading from the stables opened up, and a amazing display of horsemanship began. The owner rode his prancing horse up and down the corridor, with its legs performing an amazing four-step. From this we learned that the horse was a special (and very valuable) Colombian breed called Paso Finos. They descend from Iberian horses brought to the Americas by the Spanish, including smooth-gaited Spanish Jennet-type horses, Andalusians, and Barbs. Over centuries in Colombia they were selectively bred for an exceptionally smooth, natural four-beat gait, which made them ideal for traveling long distances over steep, rough mountain terrain. Paso Finos tend to be relatively compact, elegant horses with an arched neck, lively carriage, and remarkable sure-footedness. Their chief attraction to a rider is that there is very little vertical bounce, so they can be exceptionally comfortable to ride. We would encounter these horses again in Jardin, where it is the custom to ride the horses parade-style through the cobbled streets and around the Parque Principal on special summer evenings!



A Paso Fino horse strutting its stuff in the restaurant!

Photo by Saúl Hoyos

Back to the hotel...Hacienda La Amalia was the site of an old coffee farm with an interesting history. It was founded in 1888 by José Ignacio de Márquez and his wife, Amalia and was one of the pioneer large scale coffee producers, with over 120,000 coffee trees as well as extensive plantings of sugarcane. After her husband's death, Amalia took over management of the estate and developed it into one of the country's most productive coffee plantations, an exceptional achievement for a woman in the early twentieth century. La Amalia became so important to the local economy that it even issued its own currency, minted in France for use on the estate. The growth of the hacienda also helped stimulate the settlement that eventually became the town of Venecia. The plantation fell into decline about 1969, and little remains of the old agricultural enterprise apart from the main house. The property is now being repurposed and restored as a historical/tourist destination. Staying here was like landing in paradise after the clunky Hotel Alcatraz in Yarumal!

July 31: Cerro Tusa and the Route to Jardín, Cock of the Rock.

The landscape in this region is dominated by Cerro Tusa, a triangle-shaped volcanic mountain and one of the most distinctive landmarks of southwestern Antioquia. Formed by volcanic activity nearly eight million years ago, the mountain was also an important sacred

landscape for pre-Hispanic peoples. Ancient paths, caves, offering sites, and ceremonial stones surround its base, while a natural rock formation on the mountainside is known locally as the “Face of the Goddess.” Today Cerro Tusa is protected as an archaeological and natural park, preserving both its striking landscape and the evidence of the people who regarded the mountain as a sacred place.



Face of the Goddess



Holding coca leaves in our fingers, we have a moment of spiritual reflection accompanied by Pablo's haunting flute

Photo by Saúl Hoyos



Cerro Tusa (the triangle-shaped mountain in the center)

Photo by Saúl Hoyos

Our first stop for the morning was the Parque Arqueológico Natural Cerro Tusa, where we were met by Pablo Aristizabal and his girlfriend, Laura. Pablo is an accomplished musician as well as an archaeologist, and he was our spiritual guide for our visit. We started the tour by climbing atop a large step-like rock that had been used for ceremonial purposes by the pre-Hispanic peoples. To calm the spirits, we all held coca leaves in our hands and had a few moments of quiet concentration, accompanied by some flute music! We then climbed down and proceeded to explore different parts of the park. Throughout, Pablo kept pulling yet another instrument (always some type of flute) out of his carry bag, and he played many different tunes for us, in addition to explaining various aspects of this archaeological park. A definite change from our usual method of orchid hunting, but a fascinating cultural detour. We also got some great photos of the “Face of the Goddess.”

From Cerro Tusa we then headed toward the Cauca River valley and the westernmost mountain range in Colombia, the Cordillera Occidental. This route took us through some beautiful country, finally terminating in Jardín, the “capital” of coffee growing in Antioquia. We had a special four-o-clock appointment with a friend of Saúl’s named Luis Orlando Marulanda. Luis owns the Reserva Natural Jardín de Rocas, a special viewing area where bird watchers can see the spectacular Andean cock-of-the-rock.

I think everyone was able to get excellent photos. The birds were not too far away, and there were several males jumping from one branch to another above us. Afterward, a few of us



Passiflora jardinensis

shopped for souvenirs, and then it was back to town to check in at our hotel “Casa Passiflora.” This charming boutique hotel housed in a traditional nineteenth-century Antioquian home was just a short walk from the main plaza. Named for the local passionflower, *Passiflora jardinensis*, the house retains its old tiled roof, wooden doors, thick earthen walls, and central courtyard. The rooms were lovely, modern and very comfortable.

With a little time to kill before dinner, we all went out and explored Jardín, one of Colombia’s best-preserved heritage towns and a popular destination because it combines a remarkable, traditional, town center with spectacular Andean scenery. Its central Parque El Libertador (full of outdoor cafés, music, and tourists) is surrounded by brightly painted houses with carved wooden balconies and doors, while the massive gray-stone Basílica Menor de la Inmaculada Concepción provides a striking contrast.



Basílica Menor de la Inmaculada Concepción



The spectacular male Andean cock-of-the-rock, *Rupicola peruvianus*

August 1. Orchid Reserves: Reserva Orquídeas of the Colombian Orchid Society and the Private La Libertad

For the next two days, our van driver had some time off. Sebastián and Saúl had engaged two 4WD vehicles to transport us into the mountains above Jardín. The road out of town was paved but soon decayed into a rough and very bumpy, narrow, winding track that climbed steadily out of town toward Riosucio.

Reserva Orquídeas, our first stop, was high in the mountains above Jardín. It was established in 2016 by the Sociedad Colombiana de Orquideología as a permanent refuge for some of Colombia's extraordinary orchid diversity. The roughly 200 hectare property protects a well-preserved Andean cloud forest ranging from about 2,400 to more than 3,100 m elevation and connects directly with the much larger protected forests of the Cuchilla Jardín-Támesis. Orchids, bromeliads, ferns, and mosses cover the trees in the perpetually moist forest, and scientific surveys have explored its biodiversity. Appropriately for a reserve created by an orchid society, even species new to science have been found here, including the recently described *Lepanthes alegria*. Unfortunately Covid and post-Covid economics meant the reserve ran into some funding problems, and there were also clearly some problems with the “preservation” concept, as a number of non-native orchids (e.g a few pleurothallid hybrids and, gasp, even Asian Paphiopedilums) had been placed next to the trails winding through this reserve. Although there were quite a few native species that could be easily photographed, most had been mounted on trees or plaques along the trail rather than growing naturally. We did see some nice species of *Cyrtochilum*, *Epidendrum*, *Ida*, *Masdevallia*, *Maxillaria*, *Oncidium*, *Ornithocephalus* (formerly *Sphyrastylis*), *Pleurothallis*, *Restrepia*, *Scaphosepalum*, and *Stelis*.

The second stop was **La Libertad**, a privately protected cloud-forest property in the upper part of the *vereda* Quebrada Bonita, about 12 km above Jardín, close to the road toward Riosucio. The forests in this sector are generally above 2,500 m elevation and lie within the much larger Distrito de Manejo Integrado Cuchilla Jardín-Támesis.

The reserve was established by Paul Muylaert, a Belgian conservationist who spent considerable time in Colombia. Mr. Muylaert died unexpectedly in 2019, but after his death, his family visited the property and decided to continue his work. Again, most of the orchids we saw here were secured to plaques and branches (apparently, he had started by collecting branches and orchids that had fallen in the forest). However, the reserve protects a large tract of primary forest that is rich in orchid diversity. The resident rangers had made some sandwiches for us, and we spent the remainder of the afternoon photographing the orchids in the reserve, then made the long journey back to Jardín for another great meal.

Photos from the Reserva Orquídeas



Oncidium (syn. Odontoglossum) luteopurpureum



Oncidium (syn. Odontoglossum) mirandum



Epidendrum porphyreum



Masdevallia amanda



Maxillaria eburnea



Ida cf. castanea (syn. *Lycaste longipetala*)



Ornithocephalus escobarianus
(syn. *Sphyrastylis escobariana*)



Restrepia escobariana



Scaphosepalum lima



Scaphosepalum odontochilum



Acianthera polystachya



Cyrtorchilum divaricatum

After we arrived at La Libertad, we left our packs at the ranger's house and set off to explore. There was a large shade structure that housed several seedlings (mostly trees) from the surrounding forest. Beyond that, a trail led into the woods. A small building memorializing Mr. Muylaert was the first thing we encountered, but soon we were on a forest trail. At the entrance to the trail was a large *Gongora* sp. with its spectacular descending inflorescence.

Photos from the La Libertad Reserve



Gongora gratulabunda
Photo by Sebastián Vieira



Cyrtorchilum cf. funis



Lepanthes acarina



Another tiny *Lepanthes mucronata*.



Platystele consobrina



Masdevallia hortensis



Scaphosepalum antenniferum



Anguloa clowesii



Meriania nobilis



Epidendrum rhodovandoides

August 2. The Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve and Heading back to Medellín

The Reserva ProAves Loro Orejiamarillo (Yellow-eared Parrot Reserve) is in the mountains above Jardín, Antioquia, in the *vereda* of Ventanas along the road toward Riosucio, Caldas, about an hour from Jardín. ProAves established the reserve in 2006 to protect high-Andean cloud forest and, particularly, habitat for the Yellow-eared Parrot, *Ognorhynchus icterotis*. ProAves lists the reserve with an elevational range of about 2,700–3,170 m (8,860–10,400 ft), extending from very wet montane forest toward the páramo transition. About 97% is described as natural forest.

The story of the Yellow-eared Parrot is one of Colombia's more remarkable conservation successes. The bird is closely associated with the enormous Quindío wax palm, *Ceroxylon quindiuense*, Colombia's national tree, which provides important roosting and nesting sites. By the late 1990's, habitat destruction, removal of wax palms, and other pressures had reduced the known parrot population to only about 81 birds. Conservation work led by ProAves included protecting forest and palms, installing artificial nest boxes, planting wax palms and other native trees, monitoring nests and populations, and an extensive education campaign with local communities. ProAves now reports more than 3,500 Yellow-eared Parrots, and the status of this species has improved from Critically Endangered to Vulnerable.

The reserve protects much more than parrots. ProAves lists spectacled bears (*Tremarctos ornatus*), deer, and a variety of high-elevation birds, as well as populations of *Ceroxylon quindiuense*. It is also botanically interesting—the reserve specifically promotes its orchids, and it contains *Passiflora jardinensis*, a passionflower endemic to the Jardín area. The orchids were what we came to see, although Arun spent the entire visit photographing the birds. We also saw the *Passiflora* in bloom (see the photo with the description of Casa

Passiflora). Perhaps fittingly for our last day “in the wild,” we saw more blooming orchids (although some were very tiny) than on all of our other treks on this tour combined! In addition to the orchids, we also found a black *Anthurium*, a red *Bomarea*, *Cavendishia*, mistletoe, and even a lovely begonia. What a wonderful reserve!

Photos from the Yellow-Eared Parrot Reserve



Masdevallia heteroptera



Diodonopsis (syn. *Masdevallia*)
anachaeta



Masdevallia indecora



Masdevallia picturata



Cyrtorchilum sodiroi



Cyrtorchilum funis



Bomarea patinii



Cyrtochilum sp.



Cyrtochilum flexuosum



Lepanthes lycocephala



Lepanthes mucronata



Lepanthes rhombipetala



Barbosella prorepens



Epidendrum cf. *erosum*
Photo by Saúl Hoyos



Epidendrum posadarum



Anthurium caramantae



Begonia sp.



Maxillaria new sp.



Andreettaea samacensis



Prescottia cf. stachyodes



Maxillaria aurea

(a species we encountered many times
on the tour)

Now, completing the trail at the parrot reserve was not an easy feat. The elevation range was challenging (2,800-3,100m), the muddy and sometimes slippery path was treacherous, and the descent to the road at the end entailed numerous clammers over many difficult (and quite tall) steps, roots, and branches. But we all made it! I promised two of our trekkers (who were very proud of themselves) certificates of achievement! Congratulations Kay and Jan!



Kay Klumb with Saúl



Jan Anderson



After the parrot reserve trek, we returned to Jardín, loaded our bags into the passenger van and set off for Medellín. En route, we stopped at an indigenous village to browse some local handicrafts and enjoy a little ice cream before continuing to our final destination, the Piedras Blancas Hotel and Ecological Park, clear across Medellín in the hills above the city.

Over the next few days, we rode the gondola, or Metro Cable, down into the city, toured the Medellín orchid show and attended its welcome dinner, and explored the Medellín Botanical Garden. We also made an interesting visit to Parque Explora, which combines an interactive science museum with a large aquarium, vivarium, planetarium, and exhibits on biodiversity and natural history.

In the highlands above Medellín, we visited two famous orchid collections. The first was Daniel Piedrahita's orchid sanctuary and conservation center near La Ceja, Antioquia, roughly an hour from Medellín. Its newer public display, Alma del Bosque, is a spectacular pavilion covering about 11,000 square feet (1,000 m²), beneath a roof approximately 52 feet (16 m) high. The structure is designed to create a variety of humid, forest-like microhabitats for the extensive orchid collection.

Our second visit was to Colomborquídeas, one of Colombia's best-known orchid nurseries and living orchid collections. Located at El Retiro, Antioquia, in the cool highlands southeast of Medellín, it is run by Juan Felipe Posada Moreno. What makes Colomborquídeas particularly remarkable is its strong emphasis on native Colombian species rather than primarily commercial hybrids. A recent conservation project described the collection as containing more than 2,500 Colombian orchid species and roughly 200,000 individual plants, making it one of the largest *ex situ* collections of Colombian orchids anywhere.

We enjoyed a final dinner at one of the Crepes & Waffles restaurants, including their delicious gelatos, and all too soon it was time to say our goodbyes and head home. A few members of the group—Jan and Fred Anderson, Kay Klumb, and Maryetta and Michael Scuito—stayed on for several extra days to see the Desfile de Silleteros, the spectacular parade that marks the culmination of Medellín's annual flower festival, the Feria de las Flores.

The departure of this latter group of travelers happened to coincide with a major earthquake centered some distance from Medellín. The magnitude 7.4 quake caused substantial damage and over 300 deaths elsewhere in Colombia, but fortunately our group experienced only a temporary evacuation of the airport and a delay of a few hours before their departure.



Best in Show (Medellín Orchid Show), *tripas* well as receiving an exceptional American Orchid Society Certificate of Cultural Excellence (CCE) of 100 points (a perfect score)

Daniel Piedrahita's *Anguloa brevilabris*



L-R, Michael Scuito, Spiro Kasomenakis, Jonathan Riley, Kay Klumb, Sebastián Vieira, Mary Gerritsen, Jan Anderson, Saúl Hoyos, Arun and Kelly Mandagare, and Fred Anderson



Alma del Bosque



Huntleya fasciata, one of the many thousands of orchids in Daniel's collection



Scarlet-bellied mountain tanager
Anisognathus igniventris
 Photo by Arun Mandagare



Sword-billed hummingbird
Ensifera ensifera
 Photo by Arun Mandagare



White-booted racket-tail
Ocreatus underwoodii
 Photo by Arun Mandagare



Long-tailed sylph
Agelaiocercus kingii
 Photo by Arun Mandagare



White-bellied woodstar
Chaetocercus mulsant
Photo by Arun Mandagare



Chestnut-crowned antpitta
Grallaria ruficapilla
Photo by Arun Mandagare