



www.retornophototours.com

Testimonials — Birds and Wildlife Photo Tours



MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

As Director of Retorno Photo Tours, I warmly invite you to join a journey that combines outstanding photography with real impact. We provide smooth, secure logistics so you can relax and shoot, reliable sightings, excellent bird and wildlife photo opportunities, and comfortable accommodations with delicious meals.

We know Colombia well and partner with local, Afro-descendant, indigenous, and other communities to run responsible tours that protect and restore habitats. Join us to capture unforgettable images and help build a better future for Colombia.

David Casas

www.retornophototours.com





Conrad Dickinson

President Northumberland Wildlife Trust

From: England

Tour: Harpy Eagle Nest Expedition

Location: Colombian plains.

Style: Bird Photography

Number of days: 5

Date: April 2026

WEB Page: <https://www.nwt.org.uk/>

I would just like to thank David for his help in photographing the Harpy Eagle.

By way of background I have been recognised as a bird photographer in numerous International competitions including Bird Photographer of the Year. Over the years I've worked with over 50 photography guides. I have to say that David definitely ranks in the top 3 of quality guides.

David was VERY attentive and professional in every aspect. We had 3 logistic issues (non of David's making), on the trip and David was simply amazing in sorting out these problems seamlessly.

David recognised the "needs", of Western travellers and the camping accommodation was of a high standard, together with the food preparation.



Shannon Hobbs

From: USA

Tour: ChocoBiogeographic

Location: Western Colombian.

Style: Bird Photography

Number of days: 7

Date: April 2026

INSTAGRAM and FACEBOOK: @shannonhobbsphotography

Retorno Photo Tours — A Review by Someone Who Now Walks with a Slight Limp and Has Made Friends with the Colombian Military ★★★★★ (4/5 stars) Let me begin by saying that David Cassis and Retorno Photo Tours have ruined me. Completely and utterly ruined me — for ordinary life, for backyard birding, for any destination that isn't Colombia. I have now traveled with David twice, and I will almost certainly go again, because apparently I am the kind of person who learns nothing from experience. I mean that as a compliment. The Birds Spectacular. Full stop. My December trip to the Bogotá region delivered the Spectacled Bear and the Bogota Rail — two bucket-list encounters that I still can't quite believe happened. Then in April I returned with David to the Coffee Axis, and friends, the birds were absurd. Absurd in the best possible way. The kind of absurd where you keep lowering your camera to just... look. With your actual eyes. Like a person who didn't pay for a plane ticket specifically to see these things through a lens. David knows this country the way most of us know our own neighborhoods, and his eye for finding birds — and positioning photographers to capture them — is genuinely exceptional. If you are serious about wildlife photography and Colombia is on your radar, Retorno Photo Tours belongs on your shortlist.

The Accommodations: A Love Letter to Insects Now. Let us talk about the rooms. I want to be measured here, because I am a nature photographer and I understand that we are, by definition, in nature. I have made peace with the outdoors. What I was less prepared for was the indoors also being the outdoors. Several of our accommodations appeared to have hosted significant insect gatherings prior to our arrival — and while the living guests had largely moved on, their departed companions had been lovingly preserved in place. On the floors. In the corners. As a kind of artistic installation, perhaps. A memorial. I will simply say: if you are the type of traveler who requires your room to have been swept within the current calendar year, perhaps flag that in advance. If, on the other hand, you view a deceased moth collection as ambiance, you will feel right at home. The Road: An Ode to My Bursitis One of our destinations required two full days driving an unpaved road through a national park. The scenery was breathtaking. The birding was extraordinary. My hips, however, have filed a formal complaint and are still processing the experience — two weeks later and I am walking like I lost an argument with the Andes, which, to be fair, I did. The bursitis flared, the IT bands staged a protest, and various other muscles I had previously taken for granted joined the picket line. I'd gently suggest to David that one day on this particular road might deliver ninety percent of the reward at fifty percent of the orthopedic cost. Something to consider — especially for those of us who are, let's say, seasoned travelers of a certain vintage. (I'm 59. I earned the right to say that.) The Military Incident: A Story I Will Tell For The Rest of My Life Here is something nobody mentioned in the pre-trip briefing: the Colombian military patrols that road. Regularly. In force. Nature, as I have noted, offers no facilities. As a 59-year-old woman navigating a remote unpaved road with no restrooms, one eventually reaches a point of negotiation with one's own biology. I had reached that point. I found what I believed to be a discreet location. I made my arrangements. Reader, the military arrived. More than a dozen officers. Professional, kind, and — I choose to believe — deeply committed to not acknowledging what they had almost certainly just witnessed. What followed was one of the more delightful and unexpected encounters of my birding career: introductions were made, laughs were shared, and photographs were taken. I have now bonded with members of the Colombian armed forces under circumstances I could not have scripted if I tried. No regrets. In Summary Retorno Photo Tours delivers on what matters most: extraordinary access to Colombia's birds, a guide who is passionate and deeply knowledgeable, and photographic opportunities that will make your shutter finger very, very happy. Bring your own broom, request the smoothest road option if your body has opinions, and — for the love of everything — ask about the military patrol schedule before making any roadside biological decisions.

Would I go again? I'm already looking at the calendar.



Gauri and Swapna

From: INDIA

Tour: Emblematic Birds

Location: Western and Central Andes, Colombia.

Style: Bird Photography

Number of days: 10

Date: February 2026

INSTAGRAM:

@feathersandwhispers @maratheswapna

****We had a splendid birding adventure with Retorno Photo Tours and David in Colombia!****

The tour was meticulously planned, covering top reserves and mesmerizing species perfectly suited for us. Amid beautiful Colombian reserves, two ladies travelling from India enjoyed a comfortable and safe birding experience. Stays were top-notch, and the delicious vegetarian food made everything even better. David expertly timed feeder and field sessions for stunning bird photographs—we had an absolute blast!

Highly recommend Retorno and David; we'll definitely return for more Colombian birds!

Swapna Marathe and Gauri Karlekar (India)



Scott Holt

From: USA

Tour: Colourful and Dazzling

Location: Caribbean and Eastern Andes, Colombia

Style: Birdwatching/Photography

Number of Days: 14 days

Date: February 2026

Smugmug: <https://scottholt.smugmug.com/Destinations/Northern-Colombia-2026>

We engaged RETORNO Photo Tours to arrange a private, two-week birding/photo tour for our family group of 8 (all older adults) to the Santa Marta and Bogota areas of Colombia.

The tour was complex in that two members of the group could only stay for the first week, so we had to pass back through Bogota to get them back to the US. All of this was handled very smoothly by David. From the first interaction in inquiring about a possible trip to the end of our visit, David was always positive, engaged, and immensely helpful. As we worked on the trip, our plans were modified, the number of participants changed, the dominant interest of the group evolved, but David was always willing to work through it. Since we were primarily on a birding trip, with photography as a secondary interest, we were guided by Miguel, with the assistance of several local guides. Miguel was a great bird guide but also very good at dealing with evolving and often quickly changing logistics. We were often in remote and rugged areas with sometimes poorly developed infrastructure, but we were always looked after very well.

We always felt safe and comfortable. The trip was an immense success, and I would highly recommend using David and the RETORNO company for your next Colombia birding or bird photography adventure.



Michael Vodiansky

From: Canada

Tour: Emblematic

Style: Bird Photography

Number of Days: 10

Date: February 2026

INSTAGRAM: @fotorequest

Our bird photography tour in Colombia from Medellín to Cali was outstanding from start to finish.

The variety of species and photo opportunities exceeded all expectations—every day brought incredible close encounters and perfect shooting conditions.

Our guide, David Casas, was extremely professional and highly experienced. His deep knowledge of bird behavior and habitats made all the difference in getting great shots.

The lodges were comfortable, well-located, and ideal for early starts in the field. I highly recommend this tour to any serious bird photographer looking for an unforgettable experience in Colombia.



Frederic Izquierdo

From: France - Canada

Tour: Emblematic Bird

Style: Bird Photography

Number of Days: 7

Date: November 2025

Instagram: @fredwildlifephoto

Last November, I went on a week-long tour with Retorno Photo and **I could summarize it with great birding, great company and good food.**

The tour was tailored and organized to maximize the photographic opportunities with beautiful birds including endemic species. It brought me to amazing remote locations I would not have been by myself, where people cared about the conservation of biodiversity and the experience of their guests. As a private tour, I spent the week with David. He is a great host, very knowledgeable about birds and photography. It was enriching to talk about the country, the different locations and the support he wants to bring to communities. I had a great time and I would warmly recommend his services.

En novembre dernier, j'ai fait un tour d'une semaine avec Retorno Photo et je pourrais le résumer avec superbes observations, très bonne compagnie et bonne nourriture. Le tour était sur mesure et organisé pour maximiser les opportunités avec de magnifiques oiseaux, incluant des espèces endémiques. Le tour m'a amené dans des endroits reculés ou je ne serais pas allé par moi-même, où les gens se soucient de la conservation de la biodiversité et de l'expérience de leurs invités. Étant un tour privé, j'ai passé la semaine avec David. C'est un super hôte, avec énormément de connaissances sur les oiseaux et la photographie. C'était enrichissant de parler du pays, des différents endroits et du support qu'il apporte aux communautés. J'ai passé de très bons moments et je recommande chaleureusement ses services.



Paul Janosi

From: Canada

Tour: Emblematic Bird

Style: Bird Photography

Number of Days: 12

Date: December 2025

Instagram: @pauljanosiphotography

Colombia is a must-visit destination for bird photographers. The country offers stunning scenery, vibrant culture, and exceptionally warm, welcoming people.

Working with David Casas truly elevated my experience. He is a highly professional and passionate local guide whose knowledge and dedication made every day memorable. Retorno Birds and Wildlife Photo Tours was, without a doubt, the most responsive and well-organized tour company I have ever worked with.

Colombia is home to the greatest bird diversity in the world, with over 1,900 species, including more than 170 species of hummingbirds. During 12 days of photography, I was able to capture images of 125 different species. Some highlights included the Ruby Topaz Hummingbird, Rainbow-bearded Thorntail, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Andean Motmot, Black-billed Mountain Toucan, Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Multicolored Tanager, White-bearded Manakin, and the Oilbird. I highly recommend traveling with Retorno Birds and Wildlife Photo Tours, and I am already planning my return trip to Colombia with them.



Murali Subramanian

From: India

Tour: Emblematic

Number of days: 10

Style: Bird Photography

Date: July 2025

INSTAGAM: @murali_nature_photography

"We did a trip with David and Retorno in July of 2025 and our expectations were beyond exceeded.

It was a trip to see the iconic birds in Colombia starting in Medellin and ending in Cali. We loved, savored and devoured every moment and morsel of this trip. David is an incredible host ensuring that we felt safe and welcome at every instant of the trip. He ensured that all our dietary preferences were met by himself researching recipes and sharing them with the reserves. The food we had was extremely tasty and would convert anyone to veganism, even though this is the first time most of these places were making vegan food. One of the resorts actually had homemade granola which is something we had never tasted before. David was with us the entire trip- from airport to airport and we never felt any misapprehensions or worried about any safety issues. The places David chose for us to stay will forever stay in our minds. These are beautiful small reserves set in the Andes mountains- simple yet sufficient and sometimes sumptuously luxurious. Imagine waking up in the morning and stepping into the balcony to see the clouds swirling above the peaks of the Andes mountains and listening to an orchestra of thousands of birds. We saw rare birds like motomots and cuckoos right from our balcony every morning- we felt privileged to be part of the reserve and it certainly felt like a slice of heaven. Most of the reserves that we stayed in had well separated rooms and you felt like you were the only people in the reserve, and sometimes we were. The places we stayed in Colombia were the best we have experienced amongst all our travel over the world.

We were pleased to see how clean and well maintained the entire country (at least the places we visited) were. The restrooms, even the ones on the highway used heavily, were always clean. We didn't see a single piece of trash anywhere in the entire country. The main and side roads were always in good shape and getting around took time because Colombia is a big country but was always comfortable.

David also has an amazing network of local guides and you get the best, special and rarest sightings- seeing birds that it may be impossible to see otherwise such as antpittas and toucans.

The people in Colombia are incredibly friendly and hospitable- everyone had a big smile and a warm hug and was incredibly welcoming. They were definitely the warmest set of people we had met- from the owners of the reserve who's passion for nature you could feel in their properties, to the random strangers who always asked us if we were enjoying our time.

Oh the birds- we knew Colombia was a bird dense country boasting 100s of species of hummingbirds but our mind was blown by the sheer color, number and diversity of birds we saw. We took over 10,000 GB worth of photos and will spend many months going through them. We saw species that we had never seen before like antpittas and saw species that we had dreamt of for years like the cock of the rock. We saw a tonne of hummingbirds and tanagers and were always in great positions to get wonderful photos of them.

David, apart from being a great guide and a great human, is also a great photographer and ensured that we had the best lighting, bokeh and angles to get the best photos. We saw a tonne of endemics and some of the prettiest tanagers that we have seen. We saw some spectacular hummingbirds and hopefully have some print and frame worthy pictures of them in flight. We saw extremely rare species that we had never even heard of like oil birds and the elusive and hyperactive manakins. Colombia is bursting with birds and in some places it seemed like birds were just falling off the trees. All the reserves have feeders for tanagers and hummingbirds so you can guaranteed spectacular sightings and photo opportunities.

In some of the places, we felt like absolute royalty. We spent a day on the top of a mountain with David, a guide and a masterchef. We were pampered with the best food and coffee and the best opportunities for bird and mammal photography. That experience is pasted into my memory and is one of the best wildlife and nature experiences of my life. Our trip was full of such special experiences and i often wondered how Colombia is not overrun with tourists given how beautiful its reserves are, how friendly its people are, how tasty its food is, how pristine the nature is, how spectacular the birds are, how well organized and planned the reserves are and how every experiences is geared towards your satisfaction. Colombia is a hidden gem and tourism is still not heavy- go now, go fast and go with David and have one of the most memorable trips of your life. Our trip was even more spectacular than we even dared dream of and this will reside in our memory for a long time and we can't wait to return to another part of Colombia to begin the journey all over again."



Shannon Hobbs

From: Washington, USA

Tour: Dazzling

Style: Birdwatching Photography

Number of Days: 4

Date: December 2025

INSTAGRAM: @Shannonhobbsphotography

After years of photographing birds close to home near Washington, DC, I started to miss the thrill of discovery that first drew me into bird photography. Traveling with Retorno Photo Tours in Colombia completely reignited that sense of wonder.

What impressed me most was how willing they were to design a custom itinerary around my goals. Together we focused on some truly challenging species, including the elusive Andean bear, the Bogotá Rail, and several endemic birds of the Bogotá region. Their deep local knowledge and patience made experiences possible that I never would have achieved on my own.

One unforgettable moment was watching a female Andean bear and her cub quietly cross the road just yards away in Chingaza National Park. Another was photographing the incredibly secretive Bogotá Rail out in the open—something few photographers ever get the chance to do. Beyond the wildlife, I really appreciated Retorno's mission to support local communities and promote conservation through responsible tourism.

If you're looking for a photography experience that goes beyond the usual hotspots and focuses on meaningful wildlife encounters, I highly recommend Retorno Photo Tours.

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Gilberto López Espina

From: Cuba -USA

Tour: Emblematic, Dazzling and colourful

Number of days: 28+

Style: Bird Photography

Date: February 2025

INSTAGRAM: @glopezespina

"Except for those times I was guiding tours, I've spent my entire professional career photographing by myself. However, the logistics of traveling through the Colombian Andes created immense challenges since the best photographic locations are very remote and extremely difficult to find.

Luckily, **a friend gave me information about David Casas, from Retorno Photo Tours. What a pleasure to work with another human being whose sole interest is to get wonderful images.**

The custom tour he created was spectacular and focused on the emblematic birds of Colombia. Along with his incredible knowledge of the species and where to find them, the joint venture was a truly unforgettable experience. Highly recommendable to any serious photographer who is searching for an expert and a very accommodating guide."

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Akhil Vinayak Menon

From: India

Tour: Emblematic Birds

Number of days: 14

Style: Bird Photography

Date: November 2024

INSTAGRAM: @akhilvinayakmenon

“I recently joined Retorno Photo Tours on a bird photography trip to Colombia, and it was an outstanding experience from start to finish.

As one of a small group of six, I was impressed by how well-planned and executed the entire trip was. The guide arranged by Retorno was not only highly knowledgeable about the incredible variety of birds in Colombia but also had an excellent rapport with the group, making every moment enjoyable and insightful.

The attention to detail, seamless organization, and commitment to providing a memorable experience truly stood out. I would wholeheartedly recommend Retorno Photo Tours to anyone looking to combine their passion for photography with unforgettable travel. I'm already looking forward to joining another trip in the future to uncover new destinations and capture more incredible bird species! Highly recommend!

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Emil and Lily Vacek

From: TORONTO, Canada

Tour: Emblematic

Number of days: 11

Style: Bird Photography

DATE: November 2024

INSTAGRAM: @emilv_photography, @lily.vacek

"We love birds. Bird photography is our passion. We have watched a lot of YouTube videos about Colombia's nature and birds and wished we could go there. We were a bit worried about the safety since a lot of people in Canada do not think Colombia is a safe place to go to. Emil (emilv_photography) and I (@lily.vacek) decided to book a private bird photography tour with David Casas of Retorno.phototours and hoped for the best.

David made us feel very safe. He was a most wonderful host and we felt like we have always known him. He introduced us to his country, culture, people and, of course, all those wonderful birds he promised he would.

He was very professional, knowledgeable about the birds, locations and worked very hard to find us all the birds that were listed on the Emblematic photo tour. All locations that we visited with David offered lots of birds and we had plenty of time to photograph each and every one of them numerous times.

The icing on the cake was the photo opportunity at La Florida Bosque when Ornate Hawk Eagle showed up in the tree looking for food. David and Emil climbed to the top of the very steep hill to be closer to the bird and got the photos and videos that were out of this world. Thank you David. We would love to go back to Colombia and join David on another photo tour soon.

David truly knows how to take care of his guests that are looking for unique bird photography experience".



Carlos Pache

From: España

Tour: Emblematic

Number of days: 14

Style: Bird Photography

Date: March 2024.

Instagram: @carlospache1974

"Mi primera experiencia con David, de RETORNO, fue simplemente espectacular.

Nos dirigió en un fantástico tour geográfico por las mejores localizaciones de aves que se conocen en Colombia para ello empleo toda su experiencia para que mi compañero y yo nos trajimos más de cien especies de aves difíciles de localizar y fotografiar, sin lugar a dudas recomiendo encarecidamente a este guía en Colombia para mi próximo viaje".



Cielo Millán Álvarez

From: Colombia

Tours: Emblematic, Dazzling, Majestic.

Number of days: +16

Style: Bird Photography

Instagram: @el.cielo.fotografia

"Llevo más de tres años realizando viajes icónicos por Colombia haciendo Tours Fotográficos de Aves y naturaleza con Retorno lo que me ha llevado a conocer excelentes lugares del País donde ha cumplido con todas las expectativas propuestas en las especies que hemos ido a buscar para fotografiar.

Conociendo regiones maravillosas del país con viajes seguros e inolvidables.

Además cabe resaltar el conocimiento que tiene de las reservas que se visitarán, de la planeación de las especies locales que posiblemente se pueden avistar y fotografiar la utilización de servicios locales y guías de la zona. Lo que hace que Viajar con el Retorno sea una de las mejores experiencias y opciones de fotografiar la exuberante Avifauna Colombiana".



Birds and Wildlife Photo Tours

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