

Wings and whiskers: a bird and mammal adventure in El Beni, Bolivia

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Fancy an avian adventure through enchanting landscapes into the heart of Bolivia, where the dusty trails and hidden marshes of El Beni unveil their secrets? From Trinidad to places rarely frequented by tourists, such as Santa Ana de Yacuma and Exaltación, join the author in a quest filled with avian wonders, unexpected wildlife encounters and a search for the rare and globally threatened White-winged Nightjar.

All photos were taken by Rob Jansen (robjansenphotography.com) in departamento El Beni, Bolivia, during September 2022.

1 Greenlet sp. *Hylophilus* cf. *amaurocephalus*. A potential new species to science from El Beni, Bolivia.

>> BIRDING AT THE CUTTING EDGE EL BENI, BOLIVIA

Bolivia is a country relatively unexplored by birders. Only a handful of local birders—mostly expats—get to see much of the avian diversity and beauty the country has to offer. As Bolivia is largely off the birder-beaten path, it can be a bit more challenging to rent a vehicle or find accommodation accustomed to our needs. On the plus side, there are some great parks and lodges focussing on birds and nature. Moreover, the country has some justifiably popular tourist sites (think of the stunning Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flats, high in the Andes). Many birders

visiting Bolivia travel with an established bird-tour company. Often included in their itineraries are the lowlands around Trinidad, in the north-central department of El Beni. Here are some interesting localities that Romy Jansen-Houtzager and I birded independently during September 2022.

Trinidad, El Beni: gateway to avian wonders

Trinidad, officially known as La Santísima Trinidad, is the capital of dpto. El Beni and boasts



many hotels, restaurants and other comforts needed to comfortably bird the area. The surroundings of Trinidad offer many amazing birds. This section identifies several excellent locations for birding.

Of particular intrigue, El Beni's tropical seasonally flooded savannahs are home to perhaps a dozen avian taxa suspected by renowned birders in Bolivia to be cryptic species, but have yet to be thoroughly studied (see, e.g., Hennessey 2018). Among these is a bird that we presently label as Large-billed Seed-Finch *Sporophila*



El Beni's savannahs harbour perhaps a dozen avian taxa suspected to actually be cryptic species. These include three seedeaters: **2-3** Large-billed Seed-Finch *Sporophila crassirostris* (**2** male, **3** female); **4** White-bellied Seedeater *S. leucoptera*; and **5** Rusty-collared Seedeater *S. collaris*.