

Location



Introduction

The Republic of Colombia is a country in South America, with insular regions in North America (including some islands, but whose cultural ties are with their respective coastlines). The Colombian mainland is bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the north, Venezuela to the east and northeast, Brazil to the southeast, Ecuador and Peru to the south and southwest, the Pacific ocean to the west and Panama to the northwest. It shares maritime borders with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Colombia's coastline is 3,551 km long. It is the only country in south America with coastlines and islands along both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Colombia is a 'megadiverse' country in terms of biodiversity, with the highest number of species per square kilometre of any country in the world. It has a tropical climate along the coast and eastern plains, being cooler in the highlands. Due to the Intertropical Convergence Zone and the topography of the Andes mountains, Colombia can in some areas experience two rainy seasons, with a dry season generally from December to March and from June to August, and the rainy season in April and May and then from September to November. In northern Colombia there is generally only one dry season from May to October. The Pacific coast, heavily rainforested, is remote and more sparsely populated, with some indigenous communities. The main towns cannot be accessed by road. Indigenous communities live in several areas throughout the country. 87% of the country's inhabitants live in the Caribbean region.

Armed groups operate in several areas in Colombia.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Caribbean Sea LME

Pacific Central-American Coastal (LME)

Habitats

The Caribbean coast is generally low-lying, with sandy beaches and dunes and some swamp areas (but also contains the country's tallest peaks in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range which are 42km from the coast). The Pacific coast has several barrier islands, extensive mangrove swamps and in the southern part many estuaries interconnected by tidal channels, with sandy and muddy tidal flats.

Pacific coast:

- ➔ Coral reefs are found in Humboldt Bay near to the town of Punta Piña and further south around Gorgona island, 200km north of the border with Ecuador.
- ➔ Mangroves are found throughout most of the Pacific coast (less so in the north than in the south).

Caribbean coast:

- ➔ Coral reefs are found on the northern Caribbean coast near Cartagena, around Isla de Tierra Bomba and the Baru peninsula, also further south in the Parque Nacional Natural Islas Corales and off Isla Fuerte.
- ➔ Mangroves are found in many areas: in the far northeast, close to to Venezuelan border, around Bahia Tukakas, on the northern tip, around Bahia Hondita and the Parque Nacional Natural Bahía Portete Kaurrele. On the eastern bank of the Magdalena river, near the city of Barranquilla, mangroves are found extensively around the Ciénaga (swamp) de Pajal. On the part of the central caribbean coast which faces northwest, mangroves are found along the coastline north and South of Cartagena, stretching as far down as the Caño la Balsa (especially at the outflow of the Sinú river), as well as around the Brazo Leon Rio Atrato, close to the border with Panama.

Seagrasses are found along the southwestern Caribbean coast, including around Cartagena.

Biodiversity Hotspots

Pacific coast

➔ National Parks

Parque Nacional Natural Sanquianga – an estuarine delta on the southern Pacific coast with multiple rivers with mangroves, sandy and muddy beaches and intertidal flats, this site has very high concentrations of

shorebirds and seabirds. It is important for reproduction of the Cormorant (*Nanopterus brasilianus*), as the only known breeding colony in Colombia for gull-billed tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) and for the migration of shorebird species in the Colombian Pacific. Resident birds include herons, migratory species include gulls, pelicans and frigatebirds.

Olive Ridley sea turtles (VU) nest here.

Parque Nacional Natural Gorgona, 30km offshore from the Sanquianga NP above, this site hosts over 70 species of birds. The most important breeding colonies of southern brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis murphyi*) and the Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster etesiaca*), an endemic subspecies of the eastern tropical Pacific, are found here. The islands are an important resting place for frigate birds (*Fregata magnificens*) and the Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxi*) and several species of migratory gulls and shorebirds use the beaches.

Parque Nacional Natural Ensenada de Utría – part of the Chocó Biogeographic area, this park has a large coastal strip and the Utría inlet, a large lagoon surrounded by beaches and mangroves. Brown wood-rail (VU) has been recorded in the park and the Utría inlet is recognised worldwide as a breeding location for Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Killer whales (orcinus orca) and sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) also breed here. The park hosts Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), often found near wetlands, and neotropical otters (*Lontra longicaudis*).

→ RAMSAR Sites

Delta del Río Baudó – the estuary of the Baudó river on the Pacific coast, comprising flood banks, sand beaches, shrub-swamps and swamp forests. Species found in aquatic habitats here include neotropical Otter (*Lontra longicaudis*), the rodent paca (*Cuniculus paca*) and Jaguar (*Panthera onca*).

→ IBAs

Delta del Río San Juan is an estuarine delta north of the city of Buenaventura made up of 5 main rivers, with mangroves, flooded jungle sand, mudflats and wetland habitats. The site has huge concentrations of pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) which gather to feed in the area and it provides an important resting and feeding site for other seabirds such as boobies, frigates and cormorants. Hundreds of individuals of migratory plovers, sandpipers and gulls have been observed. Olive Ridley turtles (EN) nest here.

→ IMMAs

Gorgona-Tribuga-Malpelo IMMA is an area stretching from Cupica Gulf in the north to Sanquianga NP in the south and including the offshore Malpelo Ridge area to the west. It is the main marine protected area in the country and is known for a diverse range of marine mammals including 18 species of whale and two of dolphin.

Caribbean coast

→ RAMSAR Sites

Ciénaga Grande, Isla de Salamanca and Sabana Grande RAMSAR biosphere reserve, a large wetland complex (also an IBA) between the cities of Cartagena and Barranquilla, is a coastal estuarine system with 20 lagoons, several rivers and extensive mangroves (the largest stand on the Caribbean coast). The site encompasses the Salamanca Island Parkway, an area of islands with creeks, marshes and mangroves. Salamanca is a set of several small islands in the bay formed by sediment accumulated from the Magdalena river delta, linked by small channels, making up a barrier that separates the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta from the Caribbean sea. The area is important habitat and winter breeding ground for many migratory birds, including blue-winged teal (*Spatula discors*) in their tens of thousands and buff-breasted sandpiper (*Calidris subruficollis*). Several species of cormorant, duck, herons and egrets are also regularly seen. Birds migrating from North America include blue-winged teal (*Anas discors*), residents include pied water-tyrant (*Fluvicola pica*), Muscovy duck (*Cairina moschata*) and the white-faced whistling duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*). The world population of Sapphire-bellied hummingbird (*Chrysoronia lilliae*) (EN) is found within the mangroves of the Ciénaga. For reptiles, the area supports American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), and the yellow-bellied slider turtle (*Chrysemys scripta*).

→ IBAs

Zona deltáica-estuarina del Río Sinú is an estuarine complex and delta of the Sinú River, dominated by mangroves (one of the largest stands in the Colombian Caribbean) also with swamps, mudflats, channels, sandy marine and riverine beaches and wetlands. Almost 300 bird species have been observed, including abundant nesting colonies of White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), Red-bellied Heron (*Agamia agami*) and several other heron species.

In Cispata Bay there is a stable population of the Tucuxi (*Sotalia fluviatilis*).

Complejo de Humedales Costeros de la Guajira – Is a corridor of 211km in length along the coast in northern Colombia on the western edge of the La Guajira peninsula, with wetlands, marshes, swamps, peat bogs, marshes and slow moving freshwater bodies. It includes the Santuario de Flora y a Fauna Los Flamencos, which has a number of large lagoons. More than 100 species of aquatic birds have been observed, including the Caribbean Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) which can number in the thousands. Other species which

congregate here include heron, egrets, roseate spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*), cormorants, crane, wattled jacana (*Jacana jacana*), western sandpiper (*Caladris mauri*), marbled godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) and the laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*).

The area is also important for American crocodiles (VU) and loggerhead (VU), hawksbill (CR), leatherback (VU) and green turtle (EN).

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

→ At risk birds

Both coasts of Colombia attract many seabird species, including tropic birds, stormpetrels, shearwaters, cormorants, booby, gulls and jaegers, as well as huge numbers of migratory wading birds. Breeding species include terns, cormorants, pelicans, booby, ibis, heron and flamingos.

→ At risk reptiles

Sea turtle presence in Colombia has declined significantly due to harvesting, however five species of marine turtles are found along the coasts. On the Pacific side, green (EN) and Olive ridley (VU) nest and feed, as well as Hawksbill (CR) which are more rare. Nesting season runs from July to December for Olive Ridley. On the Caribbean coast, a large nesting colony of leatherbacks (VU) is known. Loggerhead (VU), hawksbill and green are also known nest and feed but in smaller numbers (greens are the least common). Caribbean nesting is between March and September, peaking in May to August. Hawksbill nesting is sparse but widespread on many km of Colombian beaches. Protected beaches in the Gulf of Darién are the core the world's 4th largest leatherback nesting population.

American crocodiles (VU) are found in Colombia although data is limited. Other reptile species found in aquatic habitats that could be susceptible to oil impacts include the snake Boa constrictor, toads and amphibious turtles.

→ At risk mammals

Numerous species of whales are regularly seen off Pacific Colombia, often being clearly seen from the coast. The Gorgona-Tribuga-Malpelo IMMA area provides wintering habitat for reproducing and migrating humpback whales from their southern hemisphere subpopulation (*Megaptera novaeangliae australis*). Sperm whales (VU) are recorded in the area, along with melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*), False killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*) and Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*). Dolphin species include pantropical, bottlenose, striped, common, risso's and rough-toothed dolphins.

On the Caribbean coast, sperm whales (VU) humpback whales are known, as well as common bottlenose, atlantic spotted and rough-toothed dolphins are known. The freshwater dolphin Tucuxi (*Sotalia fluviatilis*) has a stable population in Cispata Bay on the Caribbean coast (as well as in the Amazon river).

West Indian manatees (VU) are found in all major rivers and along the Caribbean coast. Other mammal species found in aquatic habitats in Colombia that could be susceptible to oil impacts include Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) and neotropical otters (*Lontra longicaudis*).

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

Colombia's oilfields are all onshore, with one tanker terminal at Tumaco on the Pacific coast close to the Ecuadorian border and 6 on the Caribbean coast.

Several marine oil spills have occurred in Colombia. In 1976 the tanker Saint Peter sank off Punta Manglares causing an oil spill of some 10,000 tonnes offshore from the Ecuador-Colombia border. In 1983 the Eptanissos spilled 330 tonnes of crude into the Caribbean. In 1996 the Daedalus spilled 430 tonnes of crude in the Tumaco inlet and small spills of fuel oil were caused by the LPG carrier Touraine off Cartagena in 2001 and the coal carrier Alma Mata in 2003 at a terminal in Santa Marta. No reports of oiled wildlife exist. Oil spills from inland pipelines are common due to ageing infrastructure and sabotage. In 2018, a 550 barrel spill inland affected large areas of the Magdalena river east of the city of Medellín, after which 1300 animals were reportedly rescued.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

- d CLC Convention 69
- d CLC Protocol 76
- CLC Protocol 92
- d FUND Protocol 76
- FUND Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 2003
- LLMC Convention 76
- LLMC Protocol 96
- OPRC Convention 90
- HNS Convention 96
- HNS PROT 2010
- OPRC_HNS 2000
- BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Lima Convention and its Agreement on Regional Cooperation to Combat Pollution of the Southeast Pacific by Hydrocarbons and other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency
- Operative Network for Regional Cooperation among Authorities of South America, Mexico, Panama and Cuba (ROCRAM)
- Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region
- The Protocol Concerning Co-operation and Development in Combating Oil Spills in the Wider Caribbean Region (the Oil Spills Protocol)

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

The 'Plan nacional de contingencias frente a pérdidas de contención de hidrocarburos y otras sustancias peligrosas' was first developed in 1999 and updated in 2021. Responsibility for its implementation lies with the Dirección General Marítima Autoridad Marítima Colombiana (DIMAR).

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

DIMAR is responsible for marine oil spill response, with spills in port being managed by harbour masters, under the authority of DIMAR. Elsewhere the Navy and Coastguard would coordinate the response, in collaboration with DIMAR. Under the national oil spill contingency plan, DIMAR has technical authority to respond where there is no responsible party, where their response capacity is overwhelmed or where they may need extra support.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ Formal guidelines?

There is no reference of a formal oiled wildlife response plan in Colombia. The Ministry of Environment, who adopted a National Programme of conservation of marine and continental turtles in 2002, would likely get involved in decision-making and carrying out a wildlife response. As would the Corporaciones Autónomas Regionales (CARs), local environmental management authorities. CARs are responsible for combatting wildlife trafficking and arrange for some trafficked birds to be sent to the National Aviary.

→ Response objectives and strategy

No reference.

→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

The Autoridad Nacional de Licencias Ambientales (ANLA) may get involved in decisions on strategy and permitting for oiled wildlife response.

→ Impact assessment

The Asociación Nacional de Organizaciones Ornitológicas (RNOA) is a cooperative association between 24 NGOs and institutes that study birds in Colombia. One of their members, Calidris, study aquatic birds and coordinate national waterbird census data gathering with support of RNOA members. Both RNOA and Calidris

would likely get involved in impact assessment activities for birds following an oil spill.

→ **Notification and early response**

No reference.

→ **Wildlife responders**

A number of organisations are involved in protection and conservation of terrestrial species, who may get involved in the event of an oiled wildlife incident. This includes WWF Colombia, WCS Colombia, Fundación Wild Colombia and the JustSea Foundation. La Funcación Tortuga, involved in conservation and environmental education around sea and continental turtles may also get involved. There are several wildlife rescue and rehabilitation facilities operating in Colombia, but they generally work with terrestrial species. Inland, northeast of the city of Medellín, the NGO Cabildo Verde has a rehabilitation unit where neonate neotropical otters can be rehabilitated.

→ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

The National Bird Conservation Strategy, developed by a coalition of organisation including the Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt, the RNOA, the Audubon society, among many other stakeholders, has recently been updated for 2021-2030.

The national oil company Ecopetrol has mutual cooperation agreements with state oil companies in Venezuela and Ecuador.

→ **Permanent facilities**

The National Aviary outside Cartagena is a rehabilitation centre and zoological park which houses some wading bird species.

→ **Current processes**

No reference.

Documentation and references

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Appendix 1

→ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Waved Albatross / *Phoebastria irrorata* / CR / Resident/Migratory /
Galapagos Petrel / *Pterodroma phaeopygia* / CR / Resident/Migratory /
Black Petrel / *Procellaria parkinsoni* / VU / Resident/Migratory /
Pink-footed Shearwater / *Ardenna creatopus* / VU / Resident/Migratory /
Chimney Swift / *Chaetura pelagica* / VU / /
Grey Plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / /

Marbled Godwit / *Limosa fedoa* / VU / /
Hudsonian Godwit / *Limosa haemastica* / VU / /
White-rumped Sandpiper / *Calidris fuscicollis* / VU / /
Buff-breasted Sandpiper / *Calidris subruficollis* / VU / /
Short-billed Dowitcher / *Limnodromus griseus* / VU / /
Lesser Yellowlegs / *Tringa flavipes* / VU / /
American Flamingo / *Phoenicopterus ruber* / LC / /
Blue-winged Teal / *Spatula discors* / LC (winter in their thousands) / Migratory / November-April
Sapphire-bellied hummingbird / *Chrysuronia lilliae* / EN / Resident /

➔ **At risk reptiles**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Leatherback turtle / *Dermochelys coriacea* / VU / Resident/migratory /
Green turtle / *Chelonia mydas* / EN / Resident/migratory /
Loggerhead turtle / *Caretta caretta* / VU / Resident/migratory / Nesting suspected, limited observations
Hawksbill turtle / *Eretmochelys imbricata* / CR / Resident/migratory /
Olive ridley turtle / *Lepidochelys olivacea* / VU / Resident/migratory / Nesting july to december
American crocodile / *Crocodylus acutus* / VU / Resident /

➔ **At risk mammals**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Sperm whale / *Physeter macrocephalus* / VU / Resident/migratory / Breeding (Pacific)
Humpback whale / *Megaptera novaeangliae* / LC / Resident/migratory / Breeding July-November
Neotropical otter / *Lontra longicaudis* / NT / Resident /
Tuxuci / *Sotalia fluviatilis* / EN / Resident (Cispata Bay) /
Pantropical spotted dolphin / *Stenella attenuata* / LC / Resident/migratory /
Sperm whale / *Physeter macrocephalus* / VU / Resident/migratory / Suspected to be breeding (Caribbean)
West Indian manatee / *Trichechus manatus* / VU / Resident /