

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF CITIES

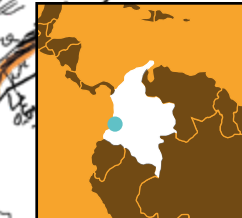
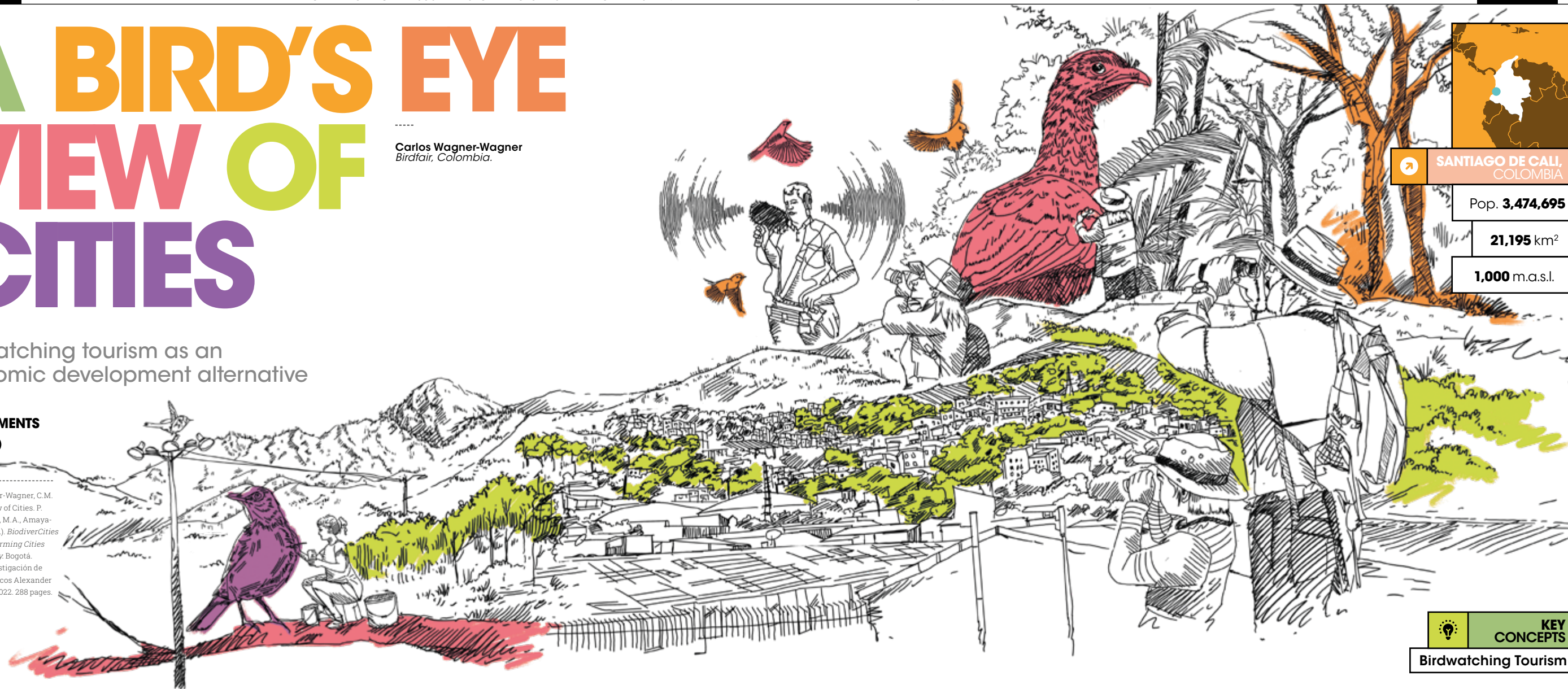
Carlos Wagner-Wagner  
*Birdfair, Colombia.*


Birdwatching tourism as an economic development alternative

## COMMITMENTS

2 3 5

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 SANTIAGO DE CALI, COLOMBIA
Pop. 3,474,695
21,195 km <sup>2</sup>
1,000 m.a.s.l.

 KEY CONCEPTS

Birdwatching Tourism

**The Colombia Birdfair is an event that, in addition to promoting interest in birdwatching and conservation, also promotes birdwatching tourism as a rural economic development and conservation strategy. The fair has shown that birds transform lives and are the perfect ambassadors to learn about and conserve nature.**

In Santiago de Cali, better known as Cali, Colombia's third-largest city, the Colombia Birdfair is held annually, an international fair that brings together around 150,000 people and 83 institutions, organizations, and companies involved in **birdwatching tourism** and bird conservation in the country. Although its first version was organized in 2015, the event's origins

can be traced to 2004, with the declaration of the San Antonio cloud forest and other surrounding ecosystems as Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). This milestone spurred interest in bird conservation among the local community and was the first step in an empirical process of birdwatching tourism over several years.

The idea of organizing a birdwatching tourism fair in Colombia began to take shape in 2012, following a visit by several European business people and influencers promoted by Procolombia to analyze the country's potential as an international destination for this tourism segment. Among these experts was Tim Appleton, co-founder of the British Birdwatching Fair, the first international birdwatching fair and the most important in the world.

His proposal to take advantage of the country's wealth of birdlife sowed the seed of what, in 2015, with the support of the city's private sector and some public institutions, would germinate as the Colombia Birdfair.<sup>1</sup>

While the government's birdwatching strategy is aimed at attracting the international market, the fair was the ideal opportunity to contemplate the potential of domestic tourism, particularly in the urban context. The city's suitability as a place for birdwatching, first noted by renowned expert David Lindo during his visit to the Colombia Birdfair in 2018, is supported by the more than 200 species of birds that can be observed in the urban area of Cali.<sup>2</sup>

Since its first version, the Colombia Birdfair has created a movement within civil society for

the appreciation, knowledge, and valuation of birds. At the same time, it has boosted an important birdwatching tourism economy, especially for low-income rural communities. The 19 ventures dedicated to providing services and selling products related to birds and their conservation in the city of Cali and neighboring municipalities, the small plots of land for birdwatching granted to rural communities, the change in the way of life of people and families who were displaced by violence and who were economically dependent on mining or illegal logging are some examples of the scope and transformations that have emerged from this sustainable tourism initiative that includes not only Cali's natural environments but also its urban spaces.

**A SPACE OF FERVOR FOR BIRDS**

The fair consists of three main areas: masterclasses held every night of the event, a trade show in partnership with the Ciudadela Comercial Unicentro, one of the country's most important shopping malls, and birdwatching outings in urban and rural areas. However, the fair has been so well received and the interest of the people so great that every year new activities are added to the city's program.

As of 2020, the Colombia Birdfair Chic@s was institutionalized, a space that includes children as keynote speakers and birdwatching and environmental education activities with children from the

**KEY BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING LOCATIONS**



**1**  
**Km 18**  
Chestnut Wood-quail  
(*Odontophorus hyperythrus*)



**2**  
**San Antonio Cloud Forest**  
Multicolored Tanager  
(*Chlorochrysa nitidissima*)



**3**  
**Cali River Bank (Cali)**  
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird  
(*Amazilia tzacatl*)



**4**  
**Cali Zoo (Cali)**  
Colombian Chachalaca  
(*Orientalis columbiana*)



**5**  
**Universidad del Valle Campus (Cali)**  
Scrub Tanager  
(*Stelipnia vitriolina*)



**6**  
**Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Campus (Cali)**  
Bar-crested Antshrike  
(*Thamnophilus multistriatus*)



**7**  
**Lago de las Garzas (Heron Lake) Ecopark (Cali)**  
Spectacled Parrotlet  
(*Forpus conspicillatus*)



**8**  
**Farallones Club (Brisas del Pance)**  
Green Honeycreeper  
(*Chlorophanes spiza*)



**CALI: THE CITY OF BIRDS**

+560 bird species  
(close to 30% of Colombia's birds)

- 2 Introduced
- 7 Endemic to Colombia
- 22 Threatened at a national level
- 26 Threatened at a global level
- 72 Migratory
- 487 Residents

Source: Illustrated guide to the birds of Santiago de Cali. 2019.

Source of all photos: Carlos Mario Wagner

city's working-class neighborhoods. In addition, the fair has considerably promoted the areas set aside for birdwatching. Thus, while its first edition had five zones, the last on-site edition had 15 and adapted to virtual dynamics within the context of the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

Since its conception, the fair has aimed to reach two different audiences: on the one hand, po-

tential tourist guides located in rural areas to practice birdwatching as an economic strategy, and on the other hand, national and international communities to understand the importance of bird conservation in Colombia. Since its first edition, this event has a consolidated group of guides growing every year, consisting of people from urban and rural communities and students from universities in the city, such as Universidad Del Valle, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and Universidad ICESI. To reach the general public, the fair has allocated resources to raise awareness of the importance of birds and the country's biodiversity in the media. To date, 98 interviews have been conducted on national and international television programs to promote the importance of birds in and around Cali.

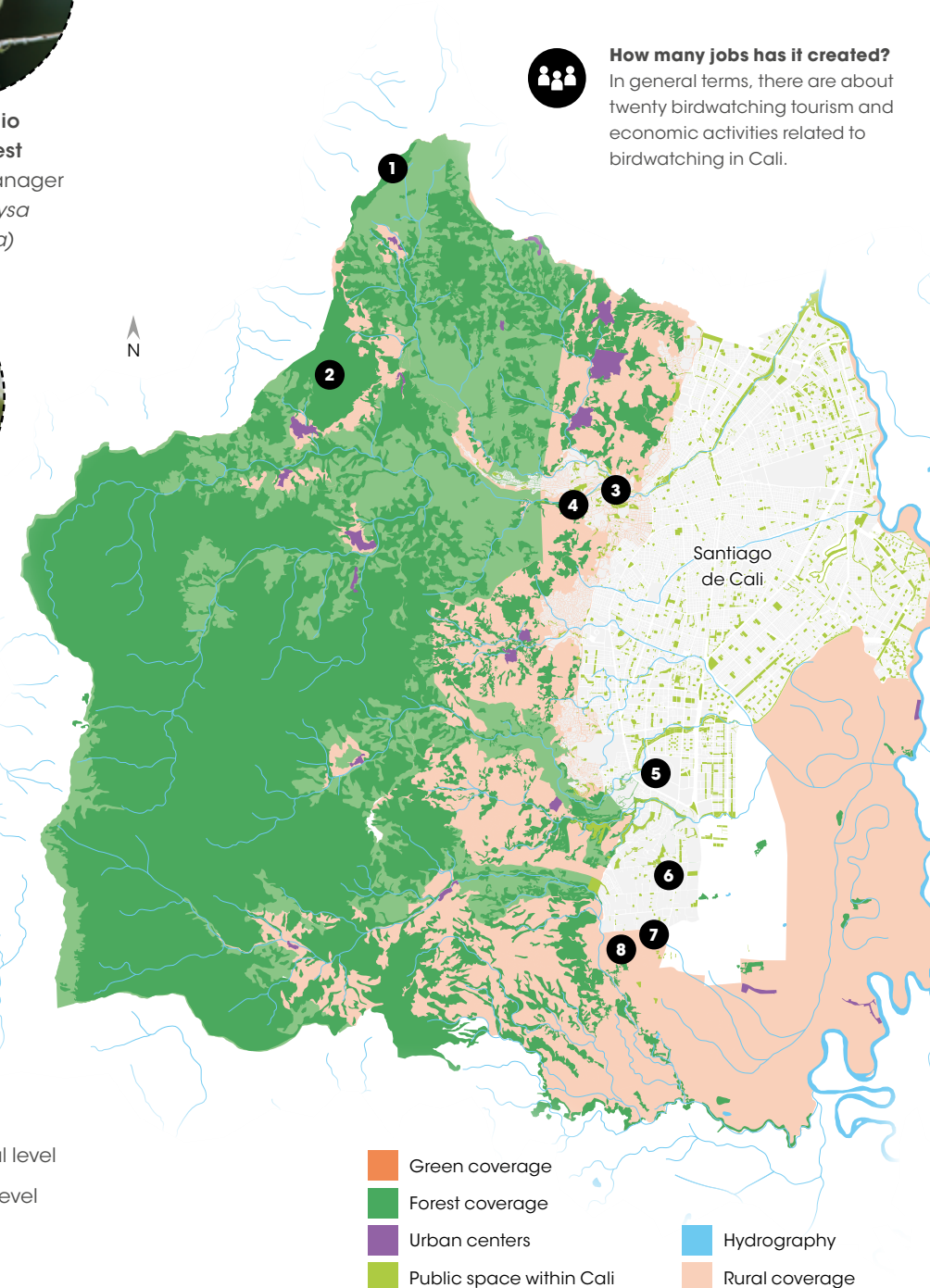
**ANOTHER WAY TO BIRDWATCH: OTHER SENSES**

Among the achievements of the Colombia Birdfair is the Colombia Natural Wealth prize, awarded for productive transformation in nature tourism, for creating the first birdwatching route for visually impaired people in South America. This route is adapted so that, through QR codes, visually impaired tourists can listen to informative texts and bird songs. It also has trained guides to assist them.

This project was backed by Luz Adriana Márquez, a consultant in inclusive tourism, and Juan Pablo Culasso, a Uruguayan sound engineer who created a virtual sound tour for blind people and the first sound guide of the San Antonio cloud forest. This model is expected to be replicated in eco-parks and urban areas of the city in the future. Information about this route and the aforementioned sound guide can be found at: <https://colombiabirdfair.com/ruta>.

**KEY LESSONS**

- ➔ Society must know about birds to empower itself and promote their conservation. A motivated and informed society can significantly change its relationship with biodiversity.
- ➔ Conservation initiatives must transcend institutions and be motivated by civil society. Diverse civil society groups have effective interests in biodiversity conservation.
- ➔ The private sector is willing to support clear, well-planned initiatives and deliver results.
- ➔ Well-planned and well-developed birdwatching tourism can impact the quality of life of people and their communities, especially local and rural communities.



**How many jobs has it created?**  
In general terms, there are about twenty birdwatching tourism and economic activities related to birdwatching in Cali.