

Panama: Intro to Tropical Biodiversity With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



October 1 – 9, 2022

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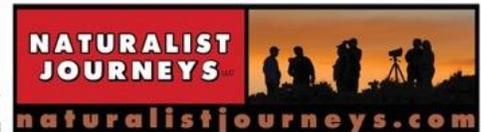
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Tropical environments and ecosystems hold amazing wonders and are extremely diverse compared to their temperate counterparts. When you first step into a tropical forest, you may be overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, and smells around you. In Panama, with very little driving, we are within close reach of many distinct biomes and ecosystems teeming with plant and animal life. Location, elevation, and climate influence these environments and the plants and animals within and are all part of an intricate and delicate web of interactions. From the towering canopy above to the soil beneath your feet, there is life lurking around every nook and cranny.

Naturalist Journeys teams up with our colleagues at The Canopy Family to once again offer a special Tropical Rainforest Biodiversity tour, featuring guest scientists Dr. Howard Topoff and Dr. Carol Simon, formerly of the City University of New York and the American Museum of Natural History, as they share their expertise on tropical environments and biodiversity! Howard and Carol reside in our home office town of Portal, Arizona, and have led a number of past tours for us including to Trinidad and the Galapagos. They are knowledgeable, fun, and dedicated to helping you see this incredible environment in a whole new way.

Spend time exploring the forests in search of birds, mammals, frogs, insects, and fascinating trees and plants. Almost every day there is an informative and entertaining presentation on a wide variety of tropical biodiversity topics. Top birding guides from the Canopy staff join Howard and Carol on outings. Lodging is at the world-famous Canopy Tower, surrounded by the lowland tropical forests of Soberania National Park, and the fabulous Canopy Lodge, in the picturesque foothills of El Valle de Anton, both perfect locations for exploring tropical ecosystems.

Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Panama Biodiversity Tour with Carol Simon & Howard Topoff
\$3190, from Panama City
Airport is Tocumen International (PTY)

Tour Highlights

- See Red-ored Parrot, Keel-billed Toucan, and Palm and Golden-hooded Tanagers right from Canopy Tower
- Watch Geoffroy's Tamarin, Mantled Howler, and Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth in the surrounding forests
- Search for Broad-billed Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Gartered Trogon, South American Common Toad, Northern Tamandua, and more along Plantation Road
- Spend time at the Summit Botanical Gardens, which houses more than 100 non-releasable animals — a great way to study many species difficult to see in the wild
- Walk the famous Pipeline Road, which boasts over 500 species of birds, as well as hundreds of mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and even more insects and trees and plants
- Visit the BioMuseo along the Amador Causeway in Panama City, and explore its several halls that focus on the biodiversity of the isthmus of Panama
- Explore by boat on Gatun Lake, looking for Lesser Capybara, West Indian Manatee, and more
- Enjoy an afternoon at the Panama Canal, learning its history and watching cargo ships go through the locks
- Enjoy time at the Canopy Lodge, with cool mountain breezes and incredible birds on feeders and trails
- Learn about the herps that live in Panama's forests during a presentation by guide Carol Simon called "Poisonous Reptiles and Amphibians of the Rain Forest"
- Visit Cerro Gaital to learn more about the butterflies of the region, from the large Blue Morpho to the pretty little Passion Vine butterflies

Itinerary



Sat., Oct. 1 Arrivals in Panama City

Welcome to your Panama rainforest biodiversity workshop! You are met at the airport and transferred to the Canopy Tower Eco-lodge, just a 45-minute drive through Panama City to the lush lowland rainforests along the Panama Canal. After you enjoy a cold drink, we suggest you make your way up to the observation deck overlooking the vast forest canopy of Soberania National Park. The great raptor migration is underway, consisting of mainly Turkey Vulture and Swainson's Hawk, with a mix of at least twenty other species. On a single day in 2014, it was estimated that two-million raptors passed over the narrow Isthmus of Panama. Raptors conserve energy during their long migrations by riding warm columns of air that form only over land. Thus the migrating birds are forced together over the isthmus and easily seen.

From the canopy observation deck you can view many stunning tropical birds but mammals and reptiles are present too. It's common to see Geoffroy's Tamarin, Mantled Howler Monkey, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, and Green Iguana in the rainforest canopy. Green-and-Black Dart Poison Frog have been seen just outside the front doors of the Tower, along with mating Turnip-tailed Gecko. Tungara Frog call loudly there and you can often find their foam nests nearby. It is an exciting place to stay.

Before dinner you meet your Canopy guide and guest scientists. During cocktails you can enjoy the first of Carol and Howard's many multimedia presentations, entitled "Introduction to Tropical Rainforests." Get ready for a great week!

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (D)

Sun., Oct. 2 Plantation Road | Summit Gardens & Harpy Eagle Exhibit

As we awaken to the roars of Mantled Howler Monkey in the distance, breathe in the fresh air and make your way up to the observation deck at dawn. This is the best time of day to observe the canopy, not only for the beautiful sunrise but also as bird activity is at its peak. With warm coffee or tea in hand, we watch for Red-lore and Mealy Parrots, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Masked Tityra, Green Honeycreeper, and dozens of other species of birds as they actively communicate and feed in the treetops.

After breakfast, we board one of the Canopy Tower's specialized nature-watching vehicles and head slowly down Semaphore Hill Road, scanning the understory of the forest for animals such as the Central American Agouti and White-nosed Coati.

The Canopy Tower is surrounded by 22,000 hectares of lowland tropical rainforest of Soberania National Park, adjacent to the Panama Canal and mighty Chagres River. It is the perfect setting for our first morning. Just a five-



minute drive away, enjoy an introductory walk along Plantation Road, one of the trails of Soberania National Park.

Walking through the forest with its towering forest giants (Ceiba and Cuipo trees), we spend the morning searching for animals, from tiny leafcutter ants on the ground to large raptors in the treetops. Broad-billed Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Gartered Trogon, South American Common Toad, Northern Tamandua, and much more can be found along this trail. The rainforest is so full of life! After our morning walk we return to the Canopy Tower in time for lunch.

In the afternoon we visit the Summit Municipal Park and Botanical Gardens. Here are both wild and enclosed animals. Roaming freely we can find Central American Agouti, Central American Ameiva, Laughing Falcon, Tropical Mockingbird, and Crimson-backed Tanager, plus hundreds of species of other birds.

We visit some of the enclosures that house Panama's native fauna. In the 1960s, Summit Botanical Gardens started receiving injured and non-releasable animals from all over Panama. Now, this facility houses over 100 animals, including macaws, spider monkey, Tapirs, Jaguar, Puma, and Panama's national bird, the Harpy Eagle. We stop to visit a non-releasable Harpy Eagle living at this wildlife refuge. It is a great opportunity to see some species that are rather difficult to encounter in the wild in Panama.

Back at the Canopy Tower, we meet at cocktail hour for Howard and Carol's early evening presentation. Almost every day our guest scientists choose a talk that fits the day, depending upon what was seen and participant interests. Possible topics include primates, social insects, reptiles and amphibians, tropical botany, animal coloration, animal communication, butterflies, the Panama Canal, and bird brains. Our scientists wish they could give them all (it is their goal to give eight!) but after all we do want to spend significant amounts of time in the field! Carol and Howard are with us ALL the time, however, and a lot of information is transmitted informally. For dinner we can expect an enjoyable blend of Panamanian and international fare.

After dinner we take a short night excursion, riding in one of the open vehicles. We listen for owls and potoos and scan the trees with a spotlight for Western Night Monkey, Kinkajou, Olingo, and other nocturnal wildlife. If the weather doesn't cooperate, we reschedule for another evening.

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 3 Pipeline Road | Smithsonian's BioMuseo

After optional early time on the observation deck, head down to a hot breakfast at the Canopy Tower's third floor dining room, surrounded by the forest canopy just outside the open windows. Then, we board our vehicle



once again and head out to the world famous Pipeline Road—once an access road built during WWII to serve a pipeline installed as a precautionary measure for the Panama Canal. About 20-minutes’ drive, this area is surrounded by mature secondary lowland forest and protected within the boundaries of Soberania National Park.

Pipeline Road boasts incredible biodiversity—over 500 species of birds have been recorded in these Caribbean slope forests, as well as hundreds of mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and even more insects, trees, and other plants. As we walk the first part of the gravel road, we watch for five species of trogons, Whooping and Rufous Motmots, Cinnamon and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, three species of manakins, hummingbirds, raptors, peccaries, lizards, frogs, butterflies, insects, and more. It’s hard to decide whether to look up or down!

We hope to come across a swarm of army ants, where many species of birds attend the feeding frenzy! Howard is an army ant specialist, and we can look forward to his very entertaining talk on social insects. Central American Whiptails and Striped Rocket Frogs may be seen along the road. Our list from the morning alone will no doubt be extensive! After a full morning in this superb forest, we will make our way back to the Canopy Tower for lunch.

This afternoon we visit the impressive BioMuseo, situated along the scenic Amador Causeway in Panama City. This spectacular and unique building, designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry, features several halls focusing on the biodiversity of the isthmus of Panama—from its geological beginnings through to modern day culture, the great faunal interchange over the land bridge and other fascinating exhibits. Our visit no doubt opens our eyes further to the incredible biodiversity of Panama. And don’t forget your binoculars; we may see Brown Pelican and Magnificent Frigatebird flying over the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal.

Back at the Canopy Tower, we meet in the lounge for cocktails and appetizers before dinner and if time permits, Howard and Carol choose a talk from their extensive repertoire.

Accommodations at Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 4 Cerro Azul | Chagres National Park

Today we depart very early in the morning, to beat the Panama City traffic, for a visit to the home of Jerry and Linda Harrison, both field biologists for the Canopy Family. They are enthusiastic biologists who have studied



birds, botany, butterflies, and all aspects of natural history for more than 35 years. Cerro Azul is a mountainous part of Panama Province.

At their home we enjoy hummingbird and tray feeders, where we can ID at least eight species of hummingbirds. Regularly occurring here are Rufous-tailed, Blue-chested, and Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds, plus White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Long-billed Starthroat, both Stripe-throated and Green Hermits, plus a chance to see the beautiful Violet-capped Hummingbird, a near-endemic. Other colorful birds are attracted to the garden and feeders as well.

Then, it's off to the El Cantar River Trail, famous for regional endemic plants. Here, we are introduced to a special flora, especially the miniature orchids we should find—all easily overlooked by the casual observer. Elsewhere we look for butterflies and other insects and discuss how a plant's "strategy" from pollination to fruit dispersal requires remarkable adaptations. After lunch at this lovely home, we may explore the Maipo trail, where other natural history discoveries await.

Accommodations at the Canopy Tower (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 5 Boat Tour on Gatun Lake | Miraflores Locks | Canopy Lodge

As always, we can enjoy early morning hours on the observation deck where we find one of Canopy's great bird guides scanning the forest surroundings with a scope. After breakfast, we board a small, covered boat for a spectacular outing on the Panama Canal. Most of the Canal is actually an artificial lake, Gatun Lake, and our tour takes you from Gamboa—just 15 minutes from the Canopy Tower—to the edges and inlets of this large lake.

We first start exploring the edges of the mighty Chagres River, where Common and Purple Gallinules, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Amazon Kingfisher, and Spectacled Caiman may be found. Along the way to Gatun Lake along the Panama Canal we pass huge cargo ships and ocean liners; American Crocodile may be seen basking along the beaches and we should spot Common Basilisk, also known as Jesus Christ Lizard (for their ability to run across the water). We visit hidden coves and beautiful inlets with fascinating fauna and flora, and search for White-faced Capuchin and Mantled Howler Monkey along the water's edge.

Before lunch at the Tower, Carol and Howard present their very informative talk about the building and running of the Panama Canal. You won't want to miss this one!

After lunch, we take our bags and bid farewell to the Canopy Tower, heading for the Miraflores Locks of the Panama Canal. The canal is truly one of the wonders of the modern world. The Miraflores Locks are the first set of locks on the Pacific side of the canal. They operate 24-hours a day and have changed very little since 1914



when the Panama Canal opened. The Panama Canal is an engineering marvel, and opened up a new route for shipping ocean-to-ocean. Over 14,000 ships and boats pass through the Canal annually. At the Miraflores Visitor Center we visit the four-floor museum and (hopefully) watch large container ships pass through the locks from an observation deck.

After our visit to the locks, we continue to drive west along the Pan-American Highway, passing by Pacific dry forest and scrub fields, at times with great views of the Pacific Ocean. Along the way, we keep our eyes open for Crested Caracara and other roadside birds.

We arrive at the Canopy Lodge just in time for dinner, noting the cool, fresh air and the moist tropical forests around us.

Accommodations at the Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 6 Walking La Mesa & Las Minas Roads | Visit to Mario Urriolla's Reptile Facility

Early risers can enjoy checking out the feeders near the outdoor dining area. There is an abundance of hummingbirds, including Long-billed Starthroat, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Garden Emerald, and Black-throated Mango feeding among the verbena in the gardens. Thick-billed Euphonia, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Flame-rumped Tanager are common on the property. Central American Agouti also forage in the garden. A stream flows near the building and Common Basilisk bask on the rocks there every day. With a little patience you *will* see one run across the water.

After breakfast at the lodge, we continue our biodiversity tour along several roads, searching mainly for birds and insects. La Mines Road follows a ridgeline, with sweeping vistas of forested mountains, speckled with grasslands and small fincas. The views from the higher elevations are fantastic, and on a clear day near the summit, both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans can be seen! The road is lined with sensitive Mimosa, a plant that closes up quickly when touched. It is a great place to see some of the most beautiful tanagers, including Black-and-yellow, Bay-headed, and Emerald, as well many other birds. With luck we may encounter a group of feeding Northern Emerald Toucanet. It is also a great place for butterflies, as many skipperlings, satyrs, ticlears,



hairstreaks, and clearwings flutter along the roadsides. We get back in time for lunch on the lodge's open-air patio, with a rushing stream beside.

After lunch we meet again to drive to a nearby area where we are almost always successful in getting great views of Spectacled Owl. Next we head out to meet Mario Urriola, a native of El Valle who has extensive experience and knowledge about the reptiles of the area. Mario is the owner of "El Serpentario Maravillas Tropicales," a reptile facility in El Valle, which houses various species of snakes and lizards that can be found in the area. Up-close looks at some of these difficult-to-find creatures is paired with an informative narrative about local species. Mario is an important figure in the area for both education and conservation. Carol also has a strong interest in reptiles and amphibians and one of the presentations examines those that are poisonous or venomous.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 7 Exploring the Highlands at Altos del Maria

Departing after an early breakfast at the lodge, we're off into the highlands of Altos del Maria. With the sunrise ahead of us, we climb into the mountains along the Continental Divide east of El Valle. Often engulfed by cloud forest mist, Altos del Maria sits at an altitude of 3,600 feet. Today we can find highland forest birds, including Black-crowned and Streak-chested Antpitta, White Hawk, Barred Forest-Falcon, Spotted Barbtail, Tufted and Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Orange-bellied Trogon, and the tiny yet stunning Snowcap. We hope to see a tiny Western Pygmy Squirrel working away in the treetops, too. Plants are not to be ignored and this is a good place to see the large white Sobralia orchid.

Carol's favorite walk is here, on a paved path along a narrow, riparian canyon through a lush-forested realm. One Naturalist Journeys group spied a Tayra here! After a picnic lunch in the field, we return back to the Canopy Lodge by mid-afternoon. It should be a good evening for one of our presentations during the cocktail hour.

Accommodations at Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 8 Butterflies & Birds of Cerro Gaital | Artisan and Fruit Market | El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center



This morning, while birding (there is always a Canopy bird guide with us) and searching for other animals in the forest, such as the deep forest Dunn's Spiny Lizard, we take a close look at the fascinating world of butterflies and insects in Central America. The biodiversity of butterflies (and moths, their nocturnal counterparts) is incredible in tropical regions around the world, and Panama alone has over 1500 species! From the beautiful metallic blue of the large Blue Morpho, to the pretty little Passion Vine butterflies (*Heliconius* spp.), tropical butterflies always get noticed. We look for eye-catching species like Mimosa Yellow, Deep-blue Eyed-Metalmark, Sara Longwing, Orange Mapwing, Togarna Hairstreak, Puerta Satyr, Common Ur-Satyr, Red-headed Firetip, and the crepuscular Yellow-bordered and Giant owl-butterflies roosting along the trails. Insight into the lives of butterflies—their life cycles, how they eat, and various methods to evade predation—are just a few of the interesting topics we explore. We return for lunch at the lodge.

This afternoon, just ten minutes down the road, we visit the artisan and fruit market in the heart of El Valle de Anton. The market is run by Panamanian artisans from Guna Yala and sell beautiful "molas"—handmade panels sewn by combining layers of fabric and showing geometric and animal designs, hand-painted wooden decorations, paintings, and jewelry. The market in El Valle is very colorful, and a great place to take photos and purchase souvenirs before returning home.

Then, it's on to El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center (EVACC), which began in 2006 in response to massive chytridiomycosis (fungus) related amphibian declines in the area. Here we can still see the Panamanian Golden Frog, which is extinct in the field. This facility has not only successfully bred the Panamanian Golden Frog, but over 40 other amphibian species, too. Their main objective is to preserve and protect nine of the most endangered amphibian species in Panama.

Tonight is our celebratory farewell dinner, which allows us to reflect upon our eight days together. We have seen and heard a lot!

Accommodations at the Canopy Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 9 Departures

This morning participants are scheduled to leave in small groups so everyone gets to the airport in time for their flights. Be aware this is a three-hour drive, and you need to be at the airport at least 2.5 hours ahead of your flight, so we recommend afternoon flights onward. We can also drop you at a nearby airport hotel if you prefer to start early the next day.

One last look around the grounds of the beautiful Canopy Lodge stays with us for a very long time! *(B)*

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive on Saturday, Oct. 1 by early afternoon—please check with us before confirming flights. Plan to depart after NOON on Sunday, Oct. 9. It is a three-hour plus drive down from the Lodge, so if you MUST leave earlier it is possible, but not enjoyable, and we'd need to charge you for an independent transfer.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$3190 DBL / \$3190 SGL, from Panama City. This all-inclusive rainforest tour includes lodging and meals at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge, bilingual professional guides, wine with dinner, group airport transfers to and from Panama City and all tours and presentations as per the itinerary. Please check with our reservations office for the times of our scheduled airport transfers to coordinate your arrival and departure times.

This cost does not include flights to and from Panama City, private airport transfers, tips and alcoholic beverages (apart from dinner).

To book this very special nature package, please contact us. Spaces are limited so book your spot now!

Photo Credits

Three-toed Sloth, Howard Topoff; Juvenile Harpy Eagle, Pat Lueders; Red-eyed Tree Frog, Greg Smith; White-necked Jacobin, Peg Abbot; Boa, Robert Gallardo; Blue Morpho Butterfly, Robert Gallardo; Capybara Family, Peg Abbott; White-whiskered Puffbird, Sandy Sorkin; Broad-billed Motmot, Naturalist Journeys Stock; Gartered Trogon, Terry Peterson; Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, James P. Smith; Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Mike Boyce; Spectacled Owl, Sandy Sorkin; Streak-chested Antpitta, Sandy Sorkin.

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