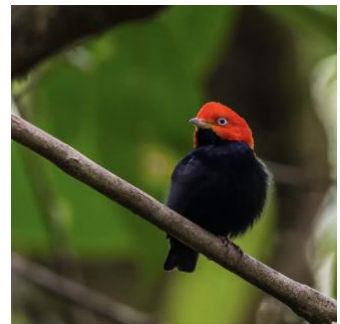
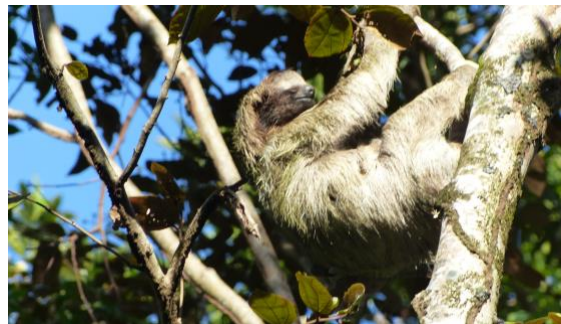
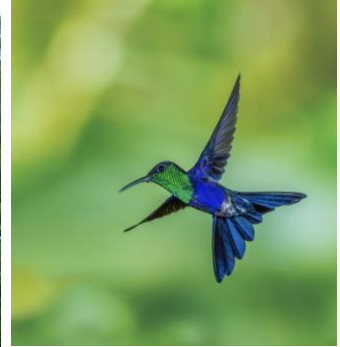


Western Panama: Tranquilo Bay

Mar. 18-25, 2023 | Trip Report | by Greg Butcher



With Guide Hugo Santa Cruz and Greg Butcher, and participants Aida, Claire, Dayna, Judy, Karen, Mario, Samuel, Stanley and Stewart



Fri., Mar. 17 **Arrival | Panama Canal**

Most of us arrived at our hotel (Radisson Panama Canal) in the afternoon and joined a 5 pm bird walk on the hotel grounds and on a path along the Panama Canal. When we flew in, we could see a lot of boats in the Pacific Ocean, waiting to get into the Canal, and it was fun to get close to some in back of our hotel. We had a nice mix of coastal and tropical birds. The canal attracted 30 Magnificent Frigatebirds and 10 Brown Pelicans. We found our first hummingbird – Rufous-tailed – parakeet – Orange-chinned – and parrot – Yellow-crowned. Probably the prettiest bird we saw was Crimson-backed Tanager. We saw some migrants from North America – Baltimore and Orchard Orioles and Northern Waterthrush. After our first taste of Neotropical birding, we headed down the causeway to Mi Ranchito – seafood Panama style, served overlooking the canal. It was a great beginning!

Sat., Mar. 18 **Panama City to Tranquilo Bay**

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We took a commercial flight from Panama City's Albright domestic airport to the small Bocas del Toro airport on Isla Colon near the Caribbean coast, where we met several of the Tranquilo Bay staff members. We zipped through town, so we only got House Sparrows, Morelet's Seedeater, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, but the boat ride to Tranquilo Bay produced a Pomarine Jaeger, Brown Booby, Brown Pelican, and several Magnificent Frigatebirds. The boat landed at the dock in the mangroves, and we climbed the steps to the lodge, where we were greeted by a couple of North American migrants – Prothonotary and Tennessee Warblers – and the friendly staff at the lodge – and lunch! Except for a couple of all-day mainland trips, we met every afternoon at 3:30 or 4 to bird the grounds near the lodge. The garden was especially birdy every afternoon. Our rarest bird today was Black-crowned Antshrike at the edge of the forest. Resident hummingbirds included Rufous-tailed, Crowned Woodnymph, and Stripe-throated Hermit, a shy species that could usually be found by looking low and around the edges. Golden-collared Manakins had a lek in the forest, but came out to the garden to feed. The common Euphonia was White-vented. Our first Tanagers were Tawny-crested and Plain-colored. We saw Blue Dacnis and Green Honeycreeper almost every afternoon. One of the members of our tour had a keen eye for sloths, so we saw multiple Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths every afternoon in the garden. Unfortunately, not everyone in our group was able to climb the tower at dusk, but for those of us who did, it was a wonderful experience. All the tower birds could be seen from the garden, but it was great to be at eye level with two Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts, 40+ Red-lore Parrots, 2 Mealy Parrots, 4 Blue-headed Parrots, 12 Montezuma Oropendolas, and one Giant Cowbird.

Sun., Mar. 19 Road between Punta Robalo & Canazas (Mainland)

We hopped in the boat after an early breakfast and headed to Punta Robalo on the mainland. It pays to pay attention on the boat rides because today we had a pod of Common Bottlenose Dolphins swimming along beside us. The area around the mainland dock produced Whimbrels, Royal Terns, one Sandwich Tern, herons and egrets, and swallows and martins. We added Golden-hooded and Palm to our Tanager list, and the Honeycreeper here was Red-legged. Our best early bird was Green Ibis; we saw four. For most of the morning, we drove through wet brushy grassland, picking up Cocoa Woodcreeper at a forest edge, Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, and Thick-billed Seedfinch. At lunchtime, we picked up our first big kettle of migrating raptors, with 500 Turkey Vultures, 100 Swainson's Hawks, and 10 Broad-winged Hawks. A lagoon behind a supermarket had a rookery with 40 Cattle Egrets on nests. After lunch, we picked up four White Hawks and one Gray Hawk, a Laughing Falcon and a Bat Falcon. It was interesting to see several species today that live on the mainland, but not on Bastimentos Island, where the Tranquilo Bay ecolodge is located.

Mon., Mar. 20 Isla Popa & Canal | Tranquilo Bay grounds

It's tough work birding by boat, but somebody has to do it! Boats have several advantages. You can see overhead, so we had good views of Mississippi and Plumbeous Kites, Common Black Hawk, and Yellow-throated Toucan. Birds are less afraid of people when they are in a boat, so we got close looks at Bright-rumped Attila and the outstanding Snowy Cotinga. Many species stay close to the water, so we were able to enjoy three species of Kingfisher, including the largest – Ringed – the smallest – American Pygmy – and an intermediate – Green. As the boat traveled between islands, we kept seeing Barn Swallows flying north low over the water – one by one. During our afternoon in the garden, we added White-necked Jacobin and Bronzy Hermit to our hummingbird list and Black-and-white and Chestnut-sided to our migratory warbler list. Did I mention that the meals at Tranquilo Bay are really good? And the porch has an amazing parade of mammalian visitors: Gray Four-eyed and Derby's Woolly Opossums, Crab-eating Raccoons, Night Monkeys, and a whole family of White-throated Capuchins. One of the cabins had a group of roosting White-lined Bats – luckily on the outside, not the inside, of the cabin.

Tues., Mar. 21 **Changuinola Canal and River**

We had so much fun birding by boat yesterday that we did it again today. We saw one of our rarest birds early in the morning – Nicaraguan Seed-Finch. It is found in 5 Central American countries, but it is rarely seen – despite its huge pink bill and black body (male) – and it barely gets into Guatemala or Panama. The boat let us get close! We also got close to Bay and Black-throated Wrens, but that doesn't mean we saw them. They sing loudly, but from very dark, dense places. There was a known roost of Short-tailed Nighthawk, so we got to see two side-by-side. We added an Amazon Kingfisher and a Tropical Royal Flycatcher. Much of the canal was forested on both sides, but we opened up into a marsh with a Least Bittern and great looks at a Rufescent Tiger-Heron. The canal ends at the Changuinola River, where we added a flock of Olive-throated Parakeets and a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron to add to the Rufescent we had already seen. At the mouth of the river, we found a flock of migratory shorebirds, including Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Greater Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, and Spotted, Least, and Pectoral Sandpipers.

Wed., Mar. 22 **Green Acres Chocolate Farm | Tranquilo Bay**

A farm sounds like a cultural destination, but this site has a lot of great habitat on a mainland peninsula. We added two new hummingbirds: Blue-chested Hummingbird and Blue-throated Goldentail. We had a lot of species pairs here: Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon and Collared Aracari and Keel-billed Toucan, for example. We took cover for a short rainstorm (announced both at the beginning and at the end by Howler Monkeys), but soon afterwards we were rewarded with a pair of Pied Puffbirds in a leafless tree, allowing for great scope views. I'm not sure if I mentioned it, but I love colorful birds, so I was very happy to see Black-chested Jay and Scarlet-rumped Tanager. Not all good birds come in big packages, so here's a shout-out to Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant. Speaking of small packages, we had two species of poison-dart frogs here: Strawberry and Green-and-black. We saw our only Hoffman's Two-Toed Sloth here. And the chocolate samples were pretty good too!

Thurs., Mar. 23 **Palo Seco Forest and Continental Divide**

We saved the longest drive and the highest elevation for the next-to-the-last day. Again, we took the boat to Punto Robalo and drove off in the van, stopping first at a mid-elevation stream. Our first rewards were Tyrant Tyrannulet and Black Phoebe, but much rarer was a Barred Hawk, high above the stream. Another new species for us was Gray-rumped Swift. The Palo Seco Forest hosted a number of unique species for our trip, including Brown-hooded Parrot, Rufous Mourner, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Black-faced Grosbeak, Crimson-collared Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and Emerald and Silver-throated Tanagers. There is an open road along the continental divide that produced three new species of hummingbirds, all Central American specialties: Snowcap, Black-bellied Hummingbird, and Purple-throated Mountain-Gem. We heard (close-up!) Silvery-fronted Tapaculo and Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, but we were able to see Ochraceous Wren, a bird found only in Costa Rica and Panama. A Rufous-collared Sparrow and a flock of Common Chlorospinguses provided a good reminder that we were at elevation. While we were waiting for our bird to pick us up on the shore, we looked up to see a flock of 12 Red-fronted Parrotlets zip by.

Fri., Mar. 24 **Tranquilo Bay**

We spent the morning looking for birds we had missed on Bastimento Island. The mangroves produced Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Green Ibis, and Mangrove Cuckoo. We got good looks at a Chestnut-backed Antbird and White-flanked and Dot-winged Antwrens in the forest. Several of us enjoyed snorkeling at the dock in the afternoon. We had 17 species of fish, including surgeonfish, parrotfish, needlefish, grunts, wrasses, damselfly fishes, butterfly fishes, snappers, and barracudas. They were swimming among several types of corals, sponges, feather-duster worms, sea urchins, and sea cucumbers. We returned to the tower in the garden for dusk, finding a Red-capped Manakin on our way. We enjoyed the parrots, parakeets, pigeons, and oropendolas again and added White-chinned Swifts, as our last new bird of the tour.

Sat., Mar. 25 **Return Home**

We boated back to Bocas del Toro, hopped a 9:30 Air Panama flight to Albright, boarded a van to Tocumen International Airport and then our return flights to the states. I get to go back to Tranquilo Bay in February of 2024, so I'm really looking forward to it!

Photos: Birding (Stewart Denenberg), Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Montezuma Oropendola, Red-capped Manakin, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth (Stewart Denenberg), Yellow-throated Toucan

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