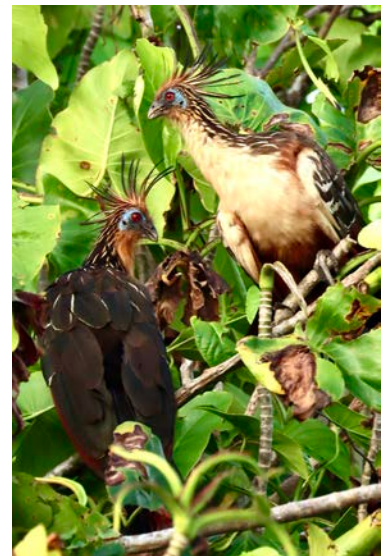


# Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness | Oct. 21 – Nov. 2, 2023 | Trip Report | by Andrew Haffenden



**With guide Drew Haffenden, local guide Neil Allicock and with participants: Hans, Jean, Lori, Ian, Dawn, Bill, Lysa and Mort.**



Guyana is one of the last frontiers of natural history touring, with fewer nature tourists than almost any other country. On this tour although we stayed at all but one of the best located and most popular ecolodges we saw no other birders at any of our lodges or in the field, and two general tourists at one lodge. We had virtually the entire nature and birding sites of the country for just us eight. Guyana is still 87% undisturbed rainforest



with savannah, wetlands and mangrove forest accounting for another 10%. No species are known to have gone extinct in Guyana and only a few are on the IUCN Endangered Species list, mostly due to very restricted range, such as the Golden Rocket Frog in the Kaieteur area. In short, visiting Guyana is like going back two hundred years from a naturalist's viewpoint - but with better lodging and transport! Our tour took us from the capital Georgetown on the coast, where the Mahaica River provides one of the best opportunities to see Hoatzin anywhere in South America, to the lush Iwokrama Rainforest and the dry Rupununi Savannah of the south on the Brazilian border. By the end of the tour we had tallied 305 species plus 11 more heard only and 2 seen by guide only, which is nearly 40% of Guyana's bird species, plus 14 mammals, 10 reptiles and insects. A highlight of the tour was meeting with and learning about the Macushi, one of the main Indigenous groups, by staying in a Macushi village that has built a very nice ecolodge for birders and is our expert birding guide's own home.

## **Sat., Oct. 21**

## **Georgetown | Promenade Gardens | Welcome Dinner**

It was a long journey from Miami for several of us. First our plane was delayed in Miami due to a mechanical issue. This was finally fixed, and we departed for Georgetown, our already late night arrival now being an hour or more so. However About 40 minutes before our expected landing the pilot announced a hydraulic leak and out of "an abundance of caution" we were diverting to San Juan. Yes, San Juan Puerto Rico. This surprised many of us as we thought we were much further into our flight than this. And we were, as it took about an hour to get to San Juan, so given our position where we turned around – seen on a flight tracker app – which was a little south of Trinidad, some 250 miles from Georgetown but 750 miles from Puerto Rico. That hour meant we had actually turned around an hour earlier but were not told. On arrival we had to collect our checked bags then told someone would meet us at the carousel, which didn't happen. But eventually we found out to go to the check-in desk where we would get a hotel voucher. The only clerk there was clearly overwhelmed – understandably – as passengers from a full 737-Max8 started lining up. Fortunately, Lori and Hans had carry-on only and were already near the head of the queue. I took advantage of this to tell the clerk that we were a group together and needed to stay that way, so our remaining six came up to the desk – at least 60 minutes saved! The process was still very slow, but we thought ourselves lucky as we could now go to the airport hotel, just a few minutes away in the same building. Questionable, as check-in was agonizingly slow – although there were only about 10 total people in front of us we didn't reach the desk until more than an hour after getting in the check-in line. Finally in our basic rooms a bit after 2am we slept until meeting in the breakfast area at 7am – our flight was going to be at 9.30am. However the plane couldn't be fixed and we waited for a new one to arrive, finally getting to Georgetown about early afternoon. An hour and a half later we got to Cara Lodge, checked in and had a very late lunch. Quite the journey!





As we had a very early morning to come, we only did a short walk to and around Promenade Gardens, which usually provides some nice birds to start our tour, but it was surprisingly quiet. But we did get a few usual suspects – Palm and blue-gray Tanagers, Orange-winged Parrots flying overhead, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Pale-breasted Thrush, Violaceous Euphonia, Ruddy Ground-dove, Smooth-billed Ani, Snail Kite and Crimson-crested Woodpecker among others. Unfortunately, the field next to the park had been recently mowed, depriving us of several species partial to feeding in the usually rank grass. We then returned to our hotel for our welcome dinner – the pepperpot was particularly good – we retired early in anticipation of our 4.30am departure for the Mahaica River.

## Sun., Oct. 22

## Mahaica River | Hoatzin | Botanic Gardens

After coffee or tea at the hotel at 4.15am we bundled into our comfortable van and drove to our small boat dock on the Mahaica River, about 1.5 hours away. As we covered the last part of the journey the light was breaking, and the sun rose. As the day lightened birds started being seen along the road, but we didn't want to stop and miss early morning on the river; birding the road would be for the return journey. Getting to the river early is essential for good viewing of our main target, the dinosaur like – well, actual – Hoatzin. Once we were at the dock we piled out to see what was about. As is usual while waiting for our boat to cross from the boatman Narish's house a couple of Hoatzins were seen in the distance, and bins and cameras strained to get good views of them. Neil and I were not so interested, as we knew that within 10 minutes or so on the river we'd be seeing them from as close as 20ft, in good numbers, as we did. A quick trip across the river for a bathroom stop provided a nice view of a Bat Falcon in a dead tree, White-winged Swallows flying, Great Kiskadee and a Striated Heron, then we headed upriver. Almost immediately the first Hoatzins were seen, and heard, and we spent fifteen minutes or so getting great looks and photos. All were in the Moca-moca (*Montichardia arborescens*), from near the water to high up. This plant, part of the Arum family, is the main food and protective habitat of the Hoatzin in Guyana. While it has an edible fruit used by local indigenous and other people, Hoatzins eat the leaves. This is a unique diet; no other bird is exclusively a leaf eater. To aid this diet, and making this bird even weirder, its crop has become a rumen-like fermentation chamber, unique among birds. (So it is likely the Hoatzin does not just feed on plants, but also bacteria - about half of mammalian ruminant dietary protein comes from digesting the bacteria.) The "rumen" has led to a local name in some areas – stinkbird – due to the methane produced. The precise taxonomic placement of the Hoatzin is still in flux; it is the only species in its Order and the relationship to other Orders is undetermined. As the day gets hot, they retreat lower in the tall Moca-moca where though they might be heard they are very difficult to actually see. A much-desired bird and a lifer for half



the party. But Hoatzins aren't the only bird on the river, as we saw 38 other species as well. Highlights were Little Cuckoo, Long-winged Harrier, Ringed, Amazon and American Pygmy Kingfishers, the limited distribution White-bellied Piculet, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, eight beautiful Yellow Orioles, and the unique Black-capped Donacobius, one of my favorite birds and other whose taxonomic position is a bit of a mystery. A Black-crested Antshrike provided wonderful photo opportunities which were taken advantage of by Bill and Lysa. Guianan Red Howler Monkeys were seen climbing about. After about 90 minutes we turned back to Narish's for breakfast, which was Indian style with fruit, curry and roti. We then started back for Georgetown, birding from the vehicle along the way. Ruddy Ground Doves were plentiful, as were Wattled Jacanas in the ditches of the rice paddies, the main crop in the area. Crested Caracaras, Yellow-crowned Parrots, Tropical Kingbirds, Shiny Cowbirds, Carib Grackles and ubiquitous Smooth-billed Anis were also seen. As we approached a known area for Rufous Crab Hawk eyes were peeled by Neil, Rensford our driver and me, and Neil was the first to see it on a utility pole. It turned out to be very unconcerned, and we were able to come out from trying to blend in with the van to position ourselves for outstanding views and excellent photos. In the distance a Laughing Falcon was spotted sitting in a dead tree, and a Black-collared Hawk was nearby. Even a Magnificent Frigatebird flew over. We eventually drove on, very satisfied with our morning so far.

Our next stop was an outlet for one of the canals through the seawall where we could usually get a view of the mudflats if the tide was right. Unfortunately, though well under half tide no mud was visible, but there was a small pond which we checked out. It was quite productive, with Common Gallinules, Semipalmated Plovers, Southern Lapwings, Greater Yellowlegs, White-rumped Sandpipers, a Semipalmated Sandpiper, and Little Blue and Tricolored Herons. A Gull-billed Tern flew over, recently split from its congener in Asia and Australia, and, much wanted by a couple of people, a flock of 11 Scarlet Ibis flew over then wheeled back giving us great views against the blue sky, two Snail Kites and another Rufous Crab Hawk rounded out this spot, where we hadn't walked more than 50 yards from the van. We then returned to Cara Lodge for a break and lunch. So far, it was agreed, a spectacular start to our tour.

At 4pm, when the heat had eased off a bit, we drove the short distance to Georgetown's Botanic Gardens, though it is more leisure oriented than botanical study oriented now, and especially on the weekend. However, large trees, ponds with lilies and other bird-friendly vegetation makes the gardens a prime birding area, and this afternoon they did not disappoint with 29 species seen in about 90 minutes. Highlights included Green-rumped



Parrotlet, Red-and-green Macaw, though these became a daily sight until we were in the drier Rupununi, Red-shouldered macaw, Guianan endemic and very range-restricted Blood-colored Woodpecker, colorful Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Violaceous Euphonia, always stunning Yellow Oriole, the often difficult to find Wing-barred Seedeater and Northern Mouse-colored Tyrannulet. This latter well-epitomizes the Duncan Rule, as proposed by a friend who would be on the following Guyana tour: “the longer the bird name, the smaller the bird.” Yellow-headed Caracara, as would be the case throughout the tour, were common, and a nice find was a Zone-tailed Hawk, this time not with his usual companions, Turkey Vultures. Two Striped Cuckoos were a welcome addition to our list, as was a very much hoped for bird, Festive Parrot. The Botanic Gardens offers the best chance of seeing this bird in all of Guyana. As it was getting dark we headed back to Cara, for checklist and dinner. Tomorrow we would fly to Kaieteur Falls, one of the highlights of the entire tour.

## **Mon., Oct. 23                      Georgetown | Kaieteur Falls | Surama**

Our 9.30am flight to Kaieteur Falls meant breakfast at 6.30 leaving at 7.30 even though the airport was only 15 minutes away, but this would be termed “sleeping in” compared to all of our other days during the tour. On arrival we had ourselves and our bags weighed, carry-on checked by security then sat around in the small waiting room until our flight was ready to board. Our aircraft was a Cessna Caravan, with just 14 seats and a ceiling that only a Hobbit could love, and once we had belted ourselves in, we rolled down the runway and took off. Very quickly we left the buildings of Georgetown and then saw nothing but rainforest, the Essequibo River, Guyana’s largest, some small waterways and three small goldmining areas during our 150-mile flight. We touched down at the gravel airstrip at Kaieteur Falls which has no other access unless you want to make a 2-day guided hike through rainforest on undeveloped tracks and then make a 4-to-8-hour trek up from the valley floor to the plateau in 90% humidity and 85-to-90-degree heat with no breeze. Kaieteur Falls are the jewel in the 242 sq.mi Kaieteur National Park, Guyana’s only true National Park. It is home to both the Guianan Cock-of-the Rock and the endemic Golden Rocket Frog, only found within the park and even then only within an area of less than 8 sq.mi. around the falls. It is dependent upon a species of Giant Bromeliad, found on the high plateaus of Guyana and Venezuela, where it spends its entire life, using the leaf wells to lay eggs and raise tadpoles. We first checked in at the ranger station – the government restricts the number of annual visitors to the falls to maintain the pristine nature of the park and only some 9,000 people visited in the busiest year pre-covid (Yellowstone received 950,000 visitors just in July); in our two hours there we saw three other visitors, and it was the weekend. We were guided by Ranger Francine whose village is about 20km upriver from the falls with only a





walking trail or canoe paddle connecting to the Falls. It is a 15-minute walk from ranger station to the falls along track and over the ancient sandstone and conglomerate rock of the Guiana Shield, some two billion years old – the Appalachian mountains are just 480 million. Francine was a wealth of knowledge about the area and a keen spotter of birds. Along with the Giant Bromeliad there were other odd-looking trees, many exhibiting the stunted smaller size of cloud forest flora. Fascinating though were the considerable areas of Red Sundews growing on the rock, immediately adjacent to lichens. Two very different lifestyle plants growing together. We tarried a bit along the path, for birds, frogs and of course the Golden Rocket Frog. but none were seen. They were likely deep down in the bromeliads as most of the branch pockets were dry due to the lack of rain. After much searching one male was finally found at the falls lookout and very well photographed by Bill. The falls themselves were spectacular, dropping some 740 ft to the first step, then another 80ft to the continuing Potaro River. Unfortunately, here was reduced water falling, and the falls were only about 150ft wide, another victim of the unusually dry months. About 100 White-collared Swifts were flying about, sometimes behind the waterfall where they roost, and 30 White-tipped Swifts could be made out far below, just above the river. Also along the way we saw a Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock deep in the forest, a bird in everyone's top three targets, enabling everyone to get photos. A second bird was also seen. Rufous-crowned Elaenia, a very localized bird usually in white-sand forests but also at altitude on tepuis was searched for and found. Several Cliff Flycatchers sat on trees and flew about, and right at the falls we got excellent close views. A Silver-beaked Tanager and three Purple Honeycreepers were also noted. After two hours we headed back to our plane, tucked ourselves in and took off for Surama, about 40 minutes away and once again all the way over mostly pristine rainforest.

As we approached Surama the forest gave way to a green valley, with the village buildings dotted around near the very small airstrip. Our landing was smooth, and we quickly deplaned and were bussed to our ecolodge ten minutes away, on the outskirts of the village. Refurbishment of the main building had been since my last time here, opening up the upstairs area complete with hammocks and a bar in place in the downstairs dining area. This turned out to be a favorite foraging area for Peter's Lava Lizard and one or two could always be seen there. Not as common, Giant Ameiva was also usually around the buildings at ground level. Being in a valley the topography produced a pleasant cooling breeze, and the open sides to the upstairs caught it perfectly. A delightful place to relax during the heat of midday. We were welcomed with a refreshing drink and selected our benab (round cabin based on the traditional Macushi building) and then lunch was served. As would be the case



throughout the tour the food was excellent, based on traditional Macushi style with modern touches, always fresh and plenty of it. Natural freshly made juices from a variety of tropical fruits always accompanied meals. Later in the afternoon we went to an area known as Lana Swamp, which though now dry would have two or three feet of water over it during the wet season. Our goal was Great Potoo, a bird the size of a Great Horned owl, but which was very difficult to find due to its cryptic plumage and broken branch-like positioning. Despite the Potoo's best efforts our sharp-eyed guide Neil and local Surama guide found the bird. A Tawny-bellied Screech-owl was heard in response to its call when trying to induce other birds to fly in, but despite it being close we could not get eyes on it. We then returned for the checklist and dinner, then retired to our fans and mosquito nets for a good night's sleep, although the resident geckos were up and about. On my way to my room I cast a flashlight over the grassy area to check for Pauraques; sure enough two sets of bright white eyes told me the resident birds were there.

## **Tues., Oct. 24                      Surama**

Our usual early breakfast started the day, but before that two Lesser Nighthawks made their final flights of the night. As we prepared to start on our walk a White-throated Toucan lit in a tree allowing good scope views. By 6.15 we were out birding a trail leading from the lodge through semi-open habitat into seasonally flooded forest and the Burro Burro River. High on a dead branch was a bird we would become very familiar with, Swallow-winged Puffbird, with several seen nearly every day of the tour. Both Pale-vented and Scaled Pigeons were seen flying or in trees. Red-and-green Macaws and Orange-winged parrots flew over, a small flock of Brown-throated parakeets landed in a distant tree and two Mealy Parrots gave us a chance to note their more even and quicker wing flap and the lack of yellow on their cheek, separating them from Orange-winged. Wedge-tailed Grass-finch was a target bird in this open area, and finally one popped up and allowed us good views for some ten minutes as it moved around. Plain-crested Elaenia and a Short-crested Flycatcher were seen, along with Blue-gray and Silver-beaked Tanagers. Once in the forest the avifauna changed, as did our search method. Ant-things – wrens, birds, shrikes – are mostly skulkers, difficult to see but often calling, so ear birding was paramount. Fortunately guide Neil is a superb ear-birder, with excellent hearing and very knew both chips and calls. Naturally we were hoping for an ant swarm, the best way to find the birds that depend on insects disturbed by the ants as they



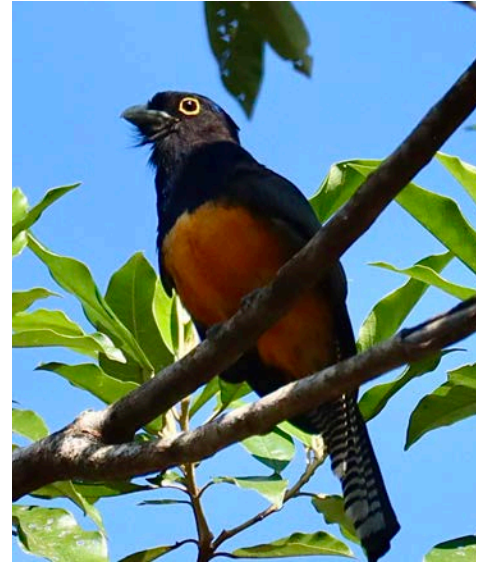


rush along their trails. During our hours on this trail a smaller ant swarm was seen and with this and elsewhere a good collection of these skulkers were found. Possibly the best for all of us was the White-plumed Antbird, rather gaudy for an antbird with its vertical white plumes. By the end of the walk, we had tallied 16 individuals of this group, including White-flanked Antwren, and Gray, Ferruginous-backed, White-plumed, Rufous-throated and Common Scale-backed Antbirds. As noted by Neil, the last is not at all common and was a good find. A Spix's Guan was dimly seen in the leaves. Two Black-tailed Trogons gave us decent looks as did Green-backed Trogons. Two Guianan Red-Cotingas, though neither would sit still, allowed everyone to count this bird, a lifer for all, and several of the group managed good looks. Our big miss however was the number one target – Capuchinbird. Although we heard one calling, we could not entice it to come closer, despite a lot of work by Neil.

Unfortunately, a second attempt at the next trail along was also unsuccessful, with heard only again the best we could do. Other birds on this walk were Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Cayenne jay doing their usual race through the treetops, stop then quickly move on. Two Yellow-rumped Caciques flew over in the open area, and an often difficult to find White-crested Spadebill was added to our list. Somewhat tired after our several hours of birding we returned to the lodge; the last part of the walk through the now very hot open area was avoided as Rensford drove to meet us at the edge of the forest; the air-conditioned van was very welcome!

After lunch we had a break, other than Hans who went for second hike along the same trail arriving back just before time to head out on our afternoon activities. We then set off for a busy and varied afternoon and early evening. At the meeting house of the Surama Young Birder's group, we stopped at the heavily vegetated pond behind. Two Zigzag Herons are at least partially resident here. Zigzag Heron is monotypic, the smallest heron at





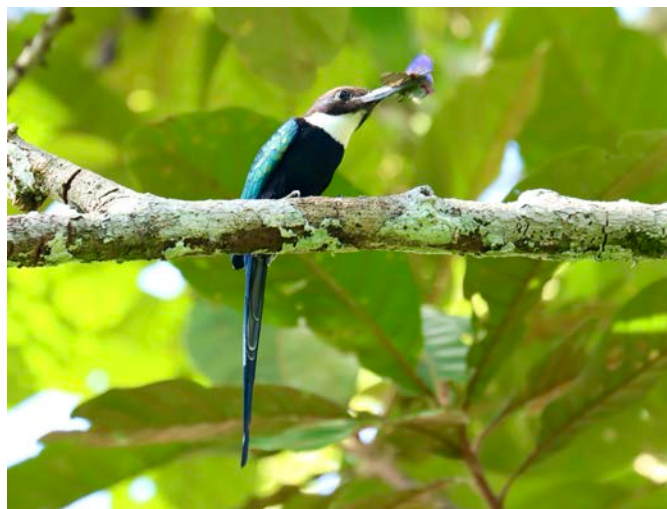
11-13", little is known about it and is one of the most difficult of the herons to see. We met Craig, a member of the group and up and coming bird guide who led us to the pond. As we arrived Neil caught a glimpse, but we could not find it again; it had furtively slipped further back into the vegetation. We then continued our birding along the Surama access road, stopping at a small creek popular with birds. We quickly got Tropical Mockingbird, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Roadside hawk, Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara, Finsch's Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Silver-beaked, Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers, with parrots flying over and Brown-throated Parakeet landing nearby. Neil had seen Ash-throated Crake here before, so we played the call, and we pretty quickly heard some movement in the grass. After about five minutes a head poked out, then the crake ventured most of the way out, allowing for great views and even photos. We then moved a little way along to a track through an open area of Savannah studded with small straggly trees, preferred habitat for White-naped Xenopsaris, another monotypic genus and related to the tityras. After careful searching two were seen; the trick is to look for an Eastern Kingbird which they resemble. Plain-crested and yellow-bellied Elaenias, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Great Kiskadee and Tropical Kingbirds were also seen, and both Red-and-green and Scarlet Macaws flew over. We had one last bird to find, Spectacled Owl, which was known from an area on the road back into Surama. Sure, enough with a few minutes of arrival it flew into playback, and we got great views and photos. Very satisfied with our day we head back to the lodge for another excellent dinner.



## **Wed., Oct. 25                      Surama**

After a filling breakfast and good coffee, we drove out to bird the forested part of the Surama road, noting two savannah Hawks on the fence around the airfield as we started. The usual suspects were seen along the more open areas, but we didn't stop as we wanted to get as much forest birding in as we could before the day heated up. Sure enough over about two hours the birds piled up, some 21 species total, many new for the tour. A highlight was a King Vulture soaring overhead with a few Black Vultures. Two Purple-throated Fruitcrows flew back and forth across the road allowing very good views, two Guianan Trogons were seen well, and our first Amazonian Motmot joined the show. A kettle of 21 Hook-billed Kites circled up and away and a Gray-headed Kite stayed long enough for a positive ID. As we drove Neil told Rensford to stop, and we got out. Neil had seen a Green Vine Snake in a tree overhanging the road when driving in from Surama where he stayed each night, and sure enough it was in the same place. Incredibly hard to see even when the laser pointer was right out it was quite the feat for him to see it originally! We watched our first Paradise Jacamar have an insect for breakfast, and always popular Channel-billed Toucans sat in the open for us. A Red-rumped Agouti sat on the road ahead, finally scampering off when we got close. Smaller birds also popped up along the road, including Pale-tailed Barbthroat, Guianan Tyrannulet, Violaceous Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper and two tanagers – Flame-crested and Yellow-backed. In response to a what's that bird question to a strange call Neil responded Guianan Spider Monkey! Shaking leaves and a couple of dark moving clumps was all we got for searching. We heard them twice more on the tour but did not see them. However, we did see a small family of Wedge-capped Capuchin Monkeys. For such a large monkey they can disappear easily. Our first and only Grayish Mourner was a good find, as was a Golden-collared Woodpecker. A very good morning of birds! The day was warming up, but Neil had another bird in mind for us. We drove on to the Rupununi road and walked a short trail just a mile or so south. Neil knew of a roost area for a Long-tailed Potoo so in we went. We were in luck, the potoo was on one of the broken stumps Neil had seen him on before. A beautiful bird, browner than other potoos and, naturally, a very long tail. He sat there while we spent our time with binoculars, scope for both viewing and digiscoping, and camera. He did acknowledge our presence by opening at least one eye, but that was the totality of his reaction. A great end to our morning's birding. We then drove back to Surama for lunch, first stopping at the Surama Primary School to donate some school supplies that Mort and Lysa had brought.



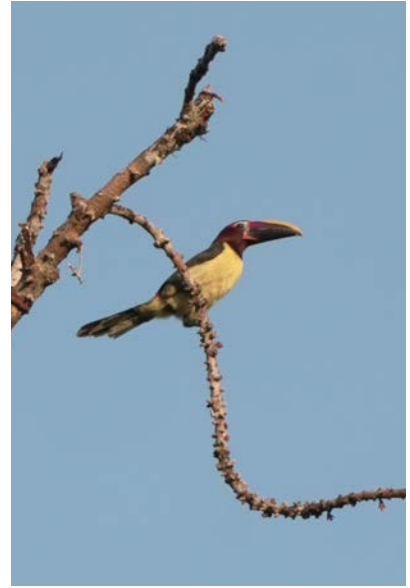


After our usual afternoon break, we drove out to an agricultural area where members of the community has created a nice performance area, bounded by both rainforest and cassava and plantain plots. I'm not sure if it was intentional but this nicely showed how the Macushi fit in with the rainforest, just using only as much as they need while letting the forest thrive. We then enjoyed some dances performed by younger community members; the dances told both historical stories and more modern ones about conservation and the courtship display of the Cock-of-the-rock. You could tell some of the performers took advantage of this cultural show to get some close contact with their actual or hoped-for admirers. We also learned about tool and hammock making and had a general question and answer session. It was very informative and a great interaction with the local Macushi. After the performances we birded in the general area, with good looks at a White-bellied Antbird forging, two Gray-crowned Flatbills, two Buff-throated Saltators and the highlight, three Red-throated Caracaras that flew into a tree not too far off. Noisy as usual, the scope enabled excellent views of these birds that sometimes act and somewhat sound more like a troop of monkeys than birds.

As it got close to sunset we headed out to a bridge on the Rupununi Road, the road connecting Georgetown and Lethem. Our target Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, which roosted at this site. While we looked for the bird Fishing and Freetail Bats flew around. Although both male and female hummingbirds flew around, they did not want to stop for definitive views. Finally, one did, a male, and we got good enough views to identify the bird, but not to see its brilliant coloring well. We then head to a second bridge for another target, White-winged Potoo. As it got dark our tour started a new tradition; Rensford produced a bottle of award-winning El Dorado rum and we drank a toast, or two, to the birding so far. We then listened for the potoo, which called then came closer in response to playback, however despite our guides' efforts it would not come into a place where we could see it. We then returned to the lodge for the checklist, which was growing fast, and another excellent dinner. Tomorrow we were to head off to our next lodge, Atta, only 20 miles away, and Neil kindly allowed us to have a more normally timed breakfast, a thing greatly welcomed.

## **Thurs., Oct. 26                      Surama | Atta Lodge**

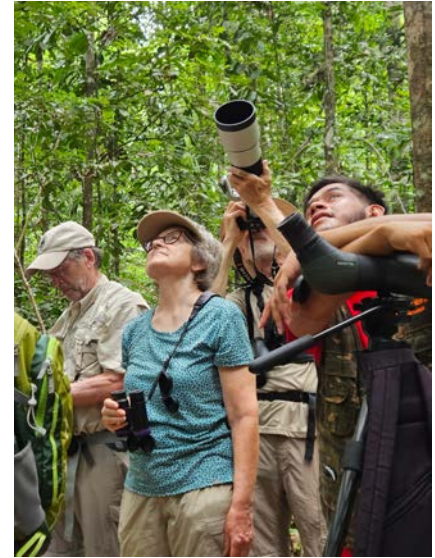
This morning we returned for a short time to the Burro Burro trail, and an adjacent one, hoping for Capuchin Bird, but no luck. Atta Rainforest Lodge is about 40 miles from Surama in the Iwokrama Reserve and after thanking our Surama guides and lodge staff we headed out, birding along the way. On our way we also had no luck at the Zigzag Heron pond either, so not a great start to the day! Our next stop was a few miles along the Rupununi road when activity was seen in some flowering and fruiting trees. Birds were flying back and forth for



about 100 yards along the road, and often too many to concentrate on just one or two. Most were pretty high in the canopy, so birding was a challenge, but we managed to record 16 species in a little over half an hour, including some pretty impressive ones. At first the single, female type Pompadour Cotinga held top place, although three Spangled Cotingas came close. But the out of the blue an Ornate Hawk-eagle flew in and just sat in a tree in full view for five or six minutes. Apparently, we were not the only ones attracted by the activity. Dacnises and tanagers mobbed him a bit, but he was unconcerned, eventually flying off at his leisure. Although Naturalist Journeys has been doing two or three tours per year to Guyana since 2015 the hawk-eagle had not made it onto the printed checklist, just a write-in. Other birds seen in this canopy feeding flock were Black-Spotted Barbet, Green Aracari, Black-tailed Tityra, a first and only Pink-throated Becard, Boat-billed and Yellow-throated flycatchers, Epaulet Oriole, and Flame-crested and yellow-backed Tanagers. Two Great Black hawks were seen perched, and an Orange-breasted Falcon, at first thought to be a more usual and likely Bat Falcon, was perched in a very distant tree. Rainforest birding is like this, things are slow when suddenly the canopy is alive with birds. As is usually the case though, eventually the birds filtered off, and we continued on our way to Atta. This, the main road, is just red dirt, unpaved for most of its length and with numerous one-lane wooden bridges over the many creeks. Though it was in good condition when we were there, it can get notoriously muddy during the wet season. Vans, trucks and motorcycles occasionally barrel past blowing up dust; most local drivers slow down when they see people. The road was however decorated with Swallow-winged Puffbirds perched high and a couple of resting Great Black Hawks. A few miles along we entered the Iwokrama Forest, a 1,435 sq. mi. protected reserve and home to the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation. This area is pristine rainforest with a few small areas of savannah on the western edge. There is a gated checkpoint across the road to prevent removal of wildlife or trees.

On arrival at Atta we got our rooms and settled in, very nice rooms with a fan, outdoor shower, comfortable beds and a relaxingly comfortable sitting area in the main building. This is open to the lawn and forest (and therefore birds) on three sides. All this and good food makes it my favorite lodge of the tour. The lodge is 100%





solar run. Unlike many solar-based lodges the batteries are sufficient to allow power throughout the night. The main feature of the lodge though, and the reason it was built as worker accommodation, is the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway. Comprising three platforms and four suspension bridges for a total length of about 550 ft. and a height between 60 and 100 ft. From the walkway there is no sign of anything human, just pristine old growth rainforest. It is a fifteen-minute walk along a jungle trail from the lodge, with steps cut into the hillside part of the trail to the first platform. After settling in we explored the immediate grounds independently before lunch. The resident but wild family of Black Curassows wandered around looking for food. The family has been a fixture here for many years. Atta is named for the Macushi word for hammock, as it was originally designed as a hammock camp, but eventually cabins with beds were built to satisfy the need of birders and other visitors. An alternate name could well be Pai-pai Shou, the Macushi name of the Screaming Piha. While these were occasionally heard at nearby Surama, they are a constant sound of the rainforest at Atta.

After lunch Hans and Lori along with a guide from Atta visited the walkway while the rest of us concentrated on the lodge grounds until our afternoon birding, which was to be out on the main road finishing after dark with some spotlighting. Titchi Roberts would be our local guide while at Atta, along with Neil of course. Once again, a good variety of birds was seen along the road, with five species of parrots, including new to the tour Painted Parakeet, Black Nunbird, both Green and Black-necked Aracaris, Golden-collared and Yellow-throated Woodpeckers, Squirrel Cuckoo and the sought-after Dusky Purpletuft. As evening approached, we made our way to a bridge known to be a roosting area for Crimson Topaz, a hummingbird hard to find away from its roost due in part to its preference for feeding high in and above the canopy. A male and a female topaz did show up, flitting about, but neither would sit in light for any length of time, though the male did stay in one place for a couple of poor back-lit photos. From our topaz bridge we drove a couple of miles to another bridge in search of a high priority bird, White-winged Potoo. Though known from a band across northern South America it is patchily distributed, poorly known and seldom seen. As we waited a new tradition was born – instead of the usual soft drinks with our snacks as we waited Rensford produced a bottle of El Dorado rum – the multiple award-winning Guianan rum – and small glasses (well, plastics) for a round of toasting our tour. Even those who didn't drink rum tried some, and all were pleasea



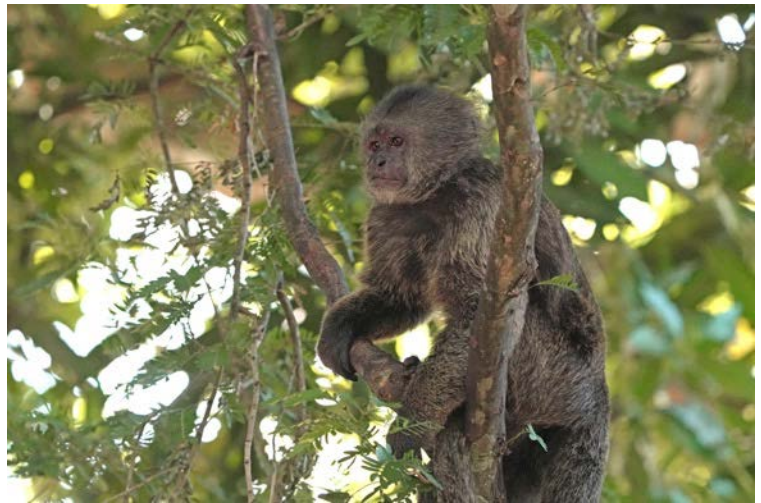
ntly surprised how smooth and tasty it was. Several had to confirm their original opinion with a second glass, and thanks to Ian we discovered how well it went with ginger ale. As it darkened a potoo was heard calling, and our hopes rose. Finally, the bird flew again, to a tree where we did get to see it, not long enough for photos but decent looks. On the return journey Neil sat on the roof with a spotlight while I spot lit lower down in the forest through the window. Banging on the roof brought to us stop as Neil had found a Common Potoo on a stump, so we all got out for a good view. Dinner was being set out when we arrived, so we ate, then did the checklist. The numbers were mounting!

## **Fri., Oct. 27**

## **Atta Lodge**

Usually, it's an early start for the Canopy Walkway, but Neil was told by the local guide that it was pretty quiet early, and the birding was better a little later. So, we had breakfast first, still earlier than the official time, rather than just coffee and a snack with the real breakfast when we returned. So, after the quickly eaten breakfast we walked the trail to the walkway. It starts with 150 mostly wood steps up to the first bridge, which was easily managed by all. The best viewing is usually at the second platform, soon at a time we made our way to it. Screaming Pihas called as we walked along the trail, though as usual went unseen. The forest along the trail is pristine, and several very large trees were admired; of interest to a couple of us were Purplehearts, a beautiful wood-working and feature timber found at specialty lumber suppliers in the US. Our group kindly self-sorted into faster and slower walkers for the ascent of the 150 steps to the first bridge. Only one person at a time is allowed on the bridges, and a maximum of eight on the platforms. Things were quiet, but the view and the sounds of the surrounding forest across to the mountain ridge was stunning. Including the trail, where we didn't stop for birding so we could get to the walkway we had views of both Long-tailed and Reddish Hermits, Black-eared Fairy, Channel-billed Toucans, a beautiful Black-spotted Barbet and three species of woodpeckers – Yellow Tufted, Red-necked and the stunning Cream-colored. A Blue Morpho butterfly flew by, always a delight with its blue scintillating, even in the shadow of the forest. As it stayed quiet, we headed down to bird a couple of the trails, hopefully for more activity and possibly a Capuchinbird, but only Ian got a quick glimpse with heard only for the rest of us. Among other birds actually seen were both Rufous-throated and White-chinned Sapphires, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Marail Guan briefly and Slate-colored Grosbeak. Golden-headed Manakin and White-crowned were heard but not chased down. We returned to the lodge for lunch and our afternoon break-personal birding until our afternoon outing. This time was always very useful as tanagers, aracaris, toucans, toucanets, parrots and raptors were always seen, often photographed during "this birding at your own pace including sitting down or lazing in a hammock" time of the day.





The Atta access road and the Rapanui road was once again our choice of birding location for the late afternoon. We walked part of the access road to the main road, using the time to get better at the usual birds both by sight and sound. A female Tufted Coquette was a nice find. Although female coquettes do not have the head finery of the males, being much more similar to other female hummingbirds, their coquette status is established by their small size and especially the white or beige band across the upper tail coverts, unique to coquettes and present in both males and females. Other birds seen included Red-necked Woodpecker, Gray Antbird, Screaming Piha finally seen and new for the tour Ringed Woodpecker and Black-headed Antbird. Most people saw a Blue-backed Tanager, which we'd be searching for at all locations so far. Also new for the trip were a couple of Barn Swallows flying at the creek. As a final touch some owling gave us wonderful views of a Black-banded Owl.

## **Sat., Oct. 28                      Atta Lodge | Rock View Lodge**

Today we were moving to Rock View Lodge so we packed early, had breakfast then headed out. Titchi our Atta guide was coming with us, we'd drop him back on the way to Rock View. One of the more interesting habitats of the Guianan Shield is white sand forest, also found in Amazonia, a low and more open, drier forest than the rainforest covering most of the Guyanas. These small patches with their poorer soil and largely different flora also support several birds that rarely venture out of them. An unexpected mammal, Crab-eating Fox, was seen on the road, at first at a good distance but it walked towards us for a while before sauntering into the forest. As we drove the usual Swallow-winged Puffbirds and Pale-vented Pigeons flew over. We made several stops along the road adjacent to the forest, but little of note was around, certainly not the hoped for specialties. Short-tailed Swifts and Fork-tailed Palm-swifts flew over, and a selection of the usual suspects during roadside birding were moving, but little else. This was the same when we walked a trail inside the forest, an eerie silence and lack of activity. Fortunately, a nice view and photos of a Black-faced Hawk made up for the lack of birds, at least to some extent. This was put down to the dry months prior, and personally in three previous tours I have never seen things so quiet. Giving up we drove to our next location, a trail leading into a Cock-of-the-rock lek area, dropping Titchi off at the Atta Road. While the birds would not be lekking yet one or two were usually around. We reached the rock outcrop and under an overhang a couple of two freetail bats were hanging; on the other side we saw a nest attached to the rock wall. The mud it was made from matched the rock so well it was all but invisible in the gloom. As predicted there were two birds present, and the most territorial and reliable one came in quite close to where we were perched against a rocky outcrop. Not only did it sit quietly it flew even closer to the ground, and started cleaning up its lek area, removing leaves and small sticks. The second bird stayed further away down the hill. After about twenty-five minutes the near bird flew down the hill as well, and we left.



Stunning photos were got by all the photographers, better even than the good photos taken at Kaieteur Falls. On the way back Neil saw a Cream-colored Woodpecker, “cream” belying the rich buttery yellow of all of the bird’s plumage except the brown wings. Our bird was at a nest hole, and we were able to view it at our leisure. It was a female, same over-all color of the male but lacking the red patch below the eye. An Amazonian Motmot was also seen, a woodcreeper too quick for positive identification and a Green-back Trogon called. It was getting late in the morning as we reached Surama Junction, the intersection of the main and Surama roads. This was our lunch spot, Rensford’s mother’s house and also a rest stop for travelers. She is a wonderful cook and engaging person, and the meal reflected both, with a wide variety of choices plus delicious home grown and squeezed juices, including Soursop juice, from trees just outside the window. We had a little time before lunch was ready, so birded in the yard and along the Surama road for a short way. Palm, Blue-gray and Silver-beaked Tanagers were bouncing around, along with a couple of species of euphonias. I saw an Epaulet Tanager but it flew too quickly for anyone else to get on it. Looking along the road we managed to get a bird we missed – a small group of Gray-winged Trumpeters walked out onto the road. A couple of Glittering-throated Emeralds were working the bushes, and a Roadside Hawk called in the distance. A Channel-billed toucan flew over and two Black-necked Aracaris sat in a tree a little way away. By now lunch was ready and we were ready for it!

We then headed south, and after a few miles very quickly transitioned through ecotonal forest into the much drier and open Rupununi Savannah, in which habitat we would spend the rest of our tour before returning to Georgetown. The small towns and villages were community owned, also by Macushi, but much of the land was in the hands of cattle ranchers whose history went back to the first English settlers, though other nationalities were also represented. The Rupununi region provided much of Guyana’s income in the early days, with sugar on the immediate coast providing the rest. A marshy area still held some water, and a stop was made as we saw birds there. Very quickly we added Jabiru, Cocoli Heron, Buff-necked Ibis, Savannah Hawk, Crested Caracara, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, (By checklist time our day included Savannah, Roadside, White-tailed and Black-faced Hawks; when the vultures were included we thought this was a good tally. But it paled compared to the 10 species of raptors we would see the next day) and Fork-tailed Flycatcher, a bird that was seen multiple times every day until we flew out, sometimes exploding from bushes in flocks of five to ten. Our home for the next two nights was Rock View Lodge, originally a ranch and center for the ranching community, as a place for cattle herders to stay during their long journey from the south, the only store, but more importantly, the only bar in the region. The current owner bought it in the early nineties and built the first ecolodge, where we stayed. The





bar and store still operate today. It also, almost incongruously, has the only swimming pool in the region, quite a welcome cooling relief in this hot climate. After being welcomed by cold, iced lime drinks, Colin showed us our rooms. We then had an orientation tour of the property, the birded and relaxed until 3.30pm, and time for afternoon tea. Colin's English upbringing made sure this British tradition was kept up, though we made it a little earlier so we could get afternoon birding in. We were not the only guests invited for tea, Pico, a Wedge-capped Capuchin who wandered onto the property about ten years ago and stayed, also came for a biscuit (cookie) or two, continually chattering away as is his way. Our birding took us back to the Wowetta area where we added Gray Kingbird, Smooth-billed Ani, Southern Lapwing, American Kestrel, White-winged Swallow, Red-breasted Meadowlark and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater to our day. Returning to Rock View we walked out onto the runway, now only used for occasional charter flights in search of grassland birds and nighthawks. Unfortunately, both man set and wild grassfires had occurred alongside the runway, leaving mostly near bare and blackened ground, not good for birds. Pale-vented Pigeons still flew over, but without the insect load the usual number of nighthawks were reduced to just a few. Regardless we managed to get at least one of each of Nacunda, Lesser and Least (in size order), all seen well enough to note the distinctive sizes, flight styles and wing patterns. It was then time for checklists with happy hour courtesy of Rock View, and a wonderful dinner at a quite formally set table.

## **Sun., Oct. 29                      Rock View Lodge | Rupununi River | Faraway Farm**

A predawn breakfast this morning as we wanted to get an early start on what likely would be one of the birdiest days of the tour, a boat trip on the Rupununi River. We were not disappointed. Our boat was an aluminum version of the traditional large canoes, adapted and modified in the Brazilian style for transport of goods, though ours had multiple bench seats, and we sat two abreast. Unlike more traditional canoes they are very stable, but still with a very shallow draft, ideal for the shoaly rivers of the region. We started off at 6.30 and returned about 10.30am with a 52 species bird list. As well as the main channel of the river we poked into a couple of backwaters which were very productive. Five species of herons were seen, the expected Cocoi and Capped Herons, less common Rufescent Tiger-heron and Boat-billed Herons and hoped for but difficult Agami Heron. Hawks seen were Roadside, Gray-lined and Great Black plus an Osprey. Ringed, Amazon and Green were our kingfishers. Pale-vented Pigeons sat in trees and flew over, along with the ever-present Swallow-winged Puffbirds. Smaller birds included Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Black-tailed Tityra, Forest Elaenia, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Tropical Gna



tcatcher, Blue-gray, Palm and the stunning Hooded Tanagers. White-winged Swallows roosted on snags and hunted above the water along with Southern Rough-winged Swallows. Occasional Red-capped Cardinals flew over and hopped around in waterside bushes. On the way back we stopped and birded in some gallery forest lining the river, looking especially for two birds, Amazonian Antshrike and Amazonian Black-tyrant, a bird with a patchy distribution with only a few records prior to the last couple of years, though it is still rarely seen apart from the location where we saw it. Also in the riverbank forest were Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Black-throated mango, Blue-tailed Emerald, Spotted Puffbird, Green-tailed Jacamar, Golden-collared Woodpecker, Striped Woodcreeper and our first and our only Chivi Vireos, pretty much a dead ringer for Red-eyed. On the beaches we saw Large-billed Terns and the delightful and colorful Pied Plover (formerly Pied Lapwing). But even though we saw Agami Heron the best bird of the day was a Sunbittern in a backwater, quietly crooning its call and eventually coming out in the open. Very unusually it stayed around for over ten minutes, allowing excellent views, even though it did not open its wings. Across the river from the Sunbittern two Sungrebes were seen at a distance, but on the way back one was seen much better. Both Black and Spectacled Caimans were common, especially in the backwaters. Both Pied Water-tyrant and White-head Marsh Tyrant were also seen. As predicted, a very birdy morning. We headed back through the savannah to the lodge, with the usual Crested Caracaras, Savannah Hawks and Tropical Kingbirds dotted about, then at the gate to the lodge a Vermilion flycatcher waited for us.

As usual the middle of the day was personal time, due to the heat of the day both depressing bird activity and being too hot to be out in the full sun for any length of time, especially out in the Savannah where shade was hard to find. But there were birds on the grounds to keep those who wanted to bird busy. Even without going outside birding was possibly, as a sooty-capped Hermit flew through one of our rooms! Other birds on the grounds included Common Tody-flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Mockingbird, Plain-breasted Thrush, Violaceous Euphonia, Crested Oropendula, Yellow-rumped Cacique, the stunning Orange-backed Troupial, Yellow Oriole and Burnished-buff Tanager. With the other usual suspects quite enough to one busy. At 3.30 we (and Pico) gathered at the dining and recreation area for afternoon tea – fresh coffee, Earl Gray and other teas, Iced water and endless biscuits. We then headed out into the savannah to a usually wet area for wetland and savannah birds. The wetland area was nearly dry, but some birds were still present, including Jabiru, Maguari Stork, Cooi Heron, Buff-necked Ibis, White-tailed Hawk, Both Marsh-tyrant and Pied Water-tyrant, Wedge-tailed Grass-finch, Gray Seedeater, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Black-collared Hawk, Wattled Jacana and





Smooth-billed Anis. In a palm tree a small flock of Red-shouldered Macaws flew in, their overall green color and short tails belying their Macaw name, though the bare white facial skin gave it away. A Great Horned owl was heard by a few. Well satisfied with our afternoon we returned to the lodge for checklist, sundowners and a delicious dinner. Then it was off to bed, as the next day was going to be a very early start.

## **Mon., Oct. 30                      Rock View Lodge | Karasabai | Manari**

Today we were traveling to Karasabai, a Macushi community next to the Ireng River, the border in this area between Guyana and Brazil, then on to our next and final lodge Manari Ranch. Our main target this morning was the Sun Parakeet, a beautiful but highly endangered bird due to its restricted range and nest robbing and trapping for the pet trade. It's a remote area (google maps can't even find a way to get there!), with just one semi-decent narrow dirt road, often rutted and sometimes flooded, leading in, a second road is often impassable. We wanted to get there as early as possible while the parakeets are still feeding, once finished they retire into small inaccessible valleys or fly across the river into Brazil. Second on our radar were Giant Anteaters, also more likely to be seen early in the morning. In this latter quest we were mostly out of luck, only Ian saw one as it ran off into long grass. On arrival at the small lodge the community has built not currently is use we made a short stop for the picnic breakfast Rock View had prepared and to picked up our local guide Ali, who had been monitoring the birds since 2017 when a conservation program was set up by the villagers and outside conservation organizations. Rangers track the birds, do regular monitoring, nest checks and protect the birds from poaching. People who previously helped poachers are now helping ecotourists see these birds; the money from this partly funds the project and also gives the community a financial reason to protect the birds. We drove a little way along the road next to the river, then stopped to search for birds. They are usually located by sound first, and by looking for the flowering or fruiting trees they feed on. Looking around the side of the hills the orange flowers of their food tree could not be seen, nor could their calls be heard. We moved further along but the same held true. A short discussion ensued, and it was decided to go to another area about 30 minutes away to look for them. Ali had not seen them for the last few days but they had been reported from the other valley. We were joined by another ranger in a 4WD to lead the way. Eventually our van could go no further, and we hadn't seen any parakeets, so we were shuttled further along in the 4WD. Despite the lengthy time involved in this search the only view of the birds was a



small flock quickly flying over, in fact best seen by myself and Rensford; we had stayed back to leave more room for the shuttling process. Disappointed we drove back to the lodge for an excellent lunch provided by the community. There were trees around the area, and some birding was done here. In addition to the usual tanagers a Golden-crowned Warbler was new for the tour, as was Tropical Gnatcatcher, and Brown-crested and Boatbilled Flycatchers were seen. Blue-backed Manakin and Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant were also both new for the tour. We even got a new mammal, Crab-eating Raccoon. One lady told us about special hammocks that were used for childbirth, they had a whole cut in them so the baby could be delivered more easily. We then thanked our hosts (and cooks), and Eli, then started on our long drive to Manari, but birding along the way made it less tiring. A good number of birds were seen, mostly ones we had seen before, but also new ones including Crested Bobwhite, Eared Dove, Purple Gallinule, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, White-tailed Kite, Black-collared and Savannah Hawks, Streaked Flycatcher, Eastern Meadowlark. But probably the favorite sighting for most was a beautiful Aplomado Falcon flying about, often close. A stunning bird and our 7th falconid and 27<sup>th</sup> raptor for the tour. Not bad. We finally got to Manari where we were greeted with cold juice punches by Lissa the manager and settled in to our lodging. The ranch house, dating from 1926 still looks the same other than the accommodation built in 1961 after disease decimated the cattle. Margaret, the original owner with her husband Theodore, decided to offer accommodation to guests, especially during the Lethem Rodeo, the biggest in Guyana. Manari is still in the same family; Lissa is Margaret's granddaughter. After showers and rest we gathered for beers and the checklist, and when the bell rang for dinner no one hesitated. It had been a long day, and tomorrow was also an early start.

## **Tues., Oct. 31                      Manari | Ireng River | Rupununi Savannah**

After a filling early breakfast, we changed vehicles; two 4WDs replaced our trusty van so we could more thoroughly explore the savannah. Jeremy a very capable and well-known birder drove one; I first met him in 2010 at reasonably nearby Karanambu, also on a search for our target birds which were much less known and birded at that time. Our goal this morning were two range restricted birds, the Rio Branco Antbird and Hoary-throated Spinetail. The antbird is restricted to the Rio Branco River in Brazil and its tributaries there and in the Ireng and Takutu/Mau Rivers in Guyana. The spinetail has an even more restricted distribution in the same area as it doesn't continue along the Rio Branco. Once again, our plan was to go to the target bird site and then bird the savannah afterwards. But we couldn't resist making a stop on the way out and close to the river when Jeremy stopped for two Burrowing Owls at their burrow. No-one can resist Burrowing Owls. As is usually the case the owls were cooperative, allowing photos and lengthy viewing. We then continued to the river, hoping



for better luck than with the parakeets given the drive. This time we didn't have to worry, the Spinetail was seen almost immediately, and the Antbird not long after. We continued birding the gallery forest, both in the immediate vicinity and a little further along where the Tukutu and Ireng Rivers join, then the open savannah. The gallery forest is almost surprisingly rich in species, and we picked up three more ant-things – Black-crested Antshrike, Barred Antshrike and Southern White-fringed Antshrike and three Tody-flycatchers, Slate-headed, Spotted and Common. Ochre-ored Flatbill, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Chestnut-vented Conebill and White-bellied Piculet were also seen, and a rufous-tailed jacamar was new for the list. Rufous-tailed is very similar to Green-tailed, but the bluish gray of the ventral surface of the tail feathers is replaced by rufous. A life bird for me, Pale-legged Hornero, rounded out the better birds. A Green Iguana was in a tree, a new reptile for the tour. We then headed out to bird the savannah proper.

The savannah also provided us with some nice birding. Four wild Muscovy Ducks were seen flying then landing, one in a tree. A covey of nine Crested Bobwhites was nice, giving most of us better views than yesterday. Two white-tailed hawks, one flying and one sitting at first kept our daily Savannah streak going. An American Kestrel may have been a migrant or a resident bird, as the Rupununi Savannah is the only place in Amazonia, other than the llanos and edges, where the kestrel breeds. Another Aplomado was perched then flew; naturally Fork-tailed flycatchers were abundant. Again, although an Austral migrant there is also a resident breeding population. A pair of Double-striped Thickknees stood in the shade under a small bush, a sharp-eyed find for Neil of these very camouflaged birds. Two Eastern Meadowlarks popped up. Similar, to the kestrel the savannah is the main area where there are breeding birds in Amazonia outside the llanos. This is a subspecies, currently, though for listers there is a good chance that Eastern Meadowlark is oversplit already and so the likelihood of an armchair tick one day isn't likely at this stage. The usual parrots and parakeets were seen, but no Red-bellied Macaws. A determined and lengthy hunt by Neil and Jeremy for a Bearded Tachuri came up empty-handed. Soon it was time to head back, the day was heating up and we could feel it, apparently so could the birds. Driving across the savannah we had a flock of 13 Red-bellied Macaws fly over. Back at the ranch we enjoy cold water then a good lunch. The quality of the meals throughout the tour was of a high standard, and everyone, except always lean Hans, would be taking home a souvenir of Guyana with their bodies...

The afternoon was spent on personal birding around the lodge, which can be pretty good. Painted Parakeets and Blue and Yellow Macaws are regulars, and both were seen today. Glittering-throated Emerald was the local hummer, and Southern House Wren, also seen at Surama around the benabs, was here as well. A feature bird of Manari is the large and noisy Bicolored Wren, and it a family certainly made their presence known. Brown-crested Flycatcher is a local breeding resident, following the geographic pattern of the Fork-tailed and Kestrel. There also seems to be some migrants winter in the region as well but may be from the south not north. An early evening walk out onto the airstrip produced a couple of Least Nighthawks.

## **Wed., Nov. 1**

## **Manari | Moco Moco | Georgetown**

Our final day in the Rupununi, and our last day of birding in Guyana. It definitely all happened too quickly! Our flight was not until midafternoon, so we had breakfast then headed for the Kunuku Mountains, just east of Lethem and the village of Moco Moco. The influence of the mountains brought rain in this otherwise dry area, and rainforest grew on the slopes. The mountains and foothills comprise the largest protected area in Guyana at 1.5 million acres; 99% of the mountains are forests, and lay claim to the greatest bat diversity in the world. The rainfall also allowed the local Macushi and Wapishana people to grow crops, and the region around the mountains is a major small crop growing area. Years ago, the Chinese built a small hydroelectric station on a creek to serve Moco Moco village, but it fell into disrepair and hasn't operated for years. However, the Guyana government is currently getting it back into operation. The area is a popular picnic and swimming area for the

locals. On arrival we started at a nice wetlands area, which dot the base of the range, for our final birding morning, then drove up the hill to the power station and creek area. The birding was excellent, and we even got some new species for the tour; 49 species were recorded from during the morning. Hummingbirds were the group leader, with six species. While some had seen them earlier, Reddish and Long-tailed Hermit were new for some, and Blue-chinned Sapphire for everyone as was a Lesser Kiskadee, usually seen at the Botanic Gardens but missed this time. Buff-breasted Wren, previously heard on three occasions but not seen finally was. Yellow Oriole is always a nice bird to see. A single Spectacled Thrush was also new and we finally got a Giant Cowbird, also oddly missed until now. Everyone was pleased to finally get the beautiful Turquoise Tanager, and still new but not as stunning was a Yellow-bellied Seedeater. Our final new bird was a Guira Tanager, a South American species mostly found away from the rainforest. A Black-capped Donacobius was nice to see again, especially for me being one of my favorite birds. A Brown Capuchin was a new mammal for us, which Bill and Lysa got a great photos of, and around the picnic area Peter's Lava Lizard and Giant Ameiva were seen. Finally it was time to return to Manari to finish packing our bags, have lunch then head of the airport. We checked in nearly the requested two hours ahead, got through in 20 minutes then sat in the small waiting room until our flight was ready to board for a 4.15 departure. Typically for the Lethem flights we left early; once everyone was checked in and the incoming plane refueled and luggage stowed the attitude was there wasn't much reason not to go. So we did, about half an hour early. We were in a new arrival for the Trans Guyana fleet, a Beechcraft 1900D, quite the upgrade to the Cessna Caravans with stand up head room and even tray tables. It also shortened the trip by about 10 to 15 minutes, and after traversing the jungle once again for 95% of the flight we arrived about an hour later and headed back to Cara Lodge. Most of the group were leaving at 7am from the international airport an hour away, and it was recommended to arrive 3 hours early, so a 3am departure, dictating an early dinner, our farewell one. A last checklist was done while we waited for dinner to arrive, toasts were raised to a great tour, great birds and a great and very compatible group. I was the fortunate one as I had a second group arriving the next night, and could look forward to sleeping in. The group understood that I would not be getting up to bid them farewell at 3am, my turn for that would come in another two weeks.

*Photos: Bananaquit (BE), Black-crested Antshrike (Mort Wegman-French - MWF), Glittering-throated Emerald (BE), Swallow-winged Puffbird (AH), Kaieteur Falls (JE), Guianian Cock-of-the-rock (MWF), Great Potoo (AH), Spectacled Owl (BE), Black-tailed Tityra (MWF), Guianan Trogon (BE), Cultural performance Surama (JE), Paradise Jacamar (BE), White-throated Toucan (BE), Ornate Hawk-Eagle (MWF), Painted Parakeet (AH), Green Aracari (MWF), Suspension Bridge (JE), Group Birding (AH), Black Curassow (MWF), Crab-eating Fox (AH), Capped Heron (BE), Colin's Monkey (MWF), Green-tailed Jacamar (MWF), Pied Plover (AH), Black Caiman (AH), Jabiru, Group Safari (JE), Blue-and-yellow Macaws (MWF)*