

# Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness | Feb. 15 – 26, 2024 | Trip Report | by Mason Flint



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**Tour Participants:** Julia, Richard, Bill, Sarah, Emily, Stephen, and Benjamin



Guyana truly is a land of unspoiled wilderness and still off the radar for most travelers. Guyana, about the size of Utah, has less than 800,000 people and is one of the least populated countries in the world with about 10 people per square mile. Nearly half of the population live in the heavily developed low-lying coastal plain near Georgetown where we spent the first two days of our trip. After leaving the coast, we spent the rest of the trip in two central provinces that together have less than 4% of the population, less than 1 person per square mile. Even those numbers are skewed because most of the people to the south live in or around Lethem, our last stop, on the border with Brazil. In the week after we left Georgetown, we didn't see a single gas station, retail store and few people away from the lodges where we stayed or those driving by on the only north/south road through the country.



Guyana is in a region called the “Guianas” that sits atop the Guiana Shield, a 1.7 billion-year-old geological formation. The Guianas is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world with many endemic species. The region as a whole has more than 3,000 vertebrate species and more than 13,000 species of vascular plants (40% endemic). Guyana’s biodiversity is still considered , for the most part, intact. Although much smaller than neighbors like Brazil, Guyana remains one of the most densely forested countries in the world with rainforests covering nearly 90% of its landmass. Guyana has as many as 2,300 vertebrate species including around 900 species of birds.

The country has natural regions with unique flora and fauna. The low-lying coastal plain is swampy, covered by mangroves and dense wet savanna vegetation and is frequently inundated by high tides and the rivers that cross it. During our two days near the coast, we looked for birds confined to the coast region including Hoatzin, Rufous Crab Hawk and the near-endemic Blood-colored Woodpecker.

The plain rises gently southward toward a deeply eroded fringe of the highlands that cover parts of Venezuela, northeast Brazil, and Suriname. Rainforest-covered hills, which rise to 2,000 feet, slope down to scrublands and savanna vegetation that extend into Brazil. In this region, where we spent most of the trip, we hoped to see birds not found near the coast including Potoos, Crimson Topaz hummingbird, Guianan Puffbird, Guianan Toucanet, Pompadour Cotinga, and endangered or extremely range-restricted birds such as Sun Parakeet, Rio Branco Antbird, and Hoary-throated Spinetail.

The third region, the westernmost part of the country, is a much higher part of the Guiana Shield. Although generally flat, the plateau reaches higher than 9,200 feet at Mount Roraima where the borders of Guyana, Venezuela, and Brazil meet. Mount Roraima, and other nearby table-top mountains nearby, are called Tepui’s (“house of the gods” in the Pemon language of the indigenous people who inhabit the area). These uplands are dissected by many river valleys that empty into the Atlantic. The flow of these rivers is interrupted by countless rapids and some of the world’s most famous waterfalls including Angel Falls in eastern Venezuela and Kaieteur Falls in Guyana. This region is particularly rich in endemic birds with at least fifteen endemic species. Alas, this region is mostly roadless and only accessible by trail or plane. We were fortunate to make one stop in this region at Kaieteur Falls, Guyana’s only National Park where we hoped to see Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock, the rarely seen Orange-breasted Falcon, and the endemic Golden Rocket Frog.



## Thurs., Feb. 15 Arrivals in Georgetown and Local Birding

Most of the group arrived at the hotel *very* early this morning and slept in before we moved to the Cara Lodge, our home for the next two nights. Some in the group headed out for a short city tour while Mason and Bill remained at the lodge to wait for Stephen's arrival. We all gathered together for what turned out to be a tasty...but not speedy...lunch at the lodge. The extra time allowed us to get acquainted and discuss plans for the trip. We learned that, despite living on different coasts, Richard and Julia had birded in Ecuador with Emily who had traveled extensively with Sarah...and also knew Benjamin. This made remembering names less difficult for a significant part of our group.

Joined by Gary, our Guyanese guide, we headed out mid-afternoon to visit Georgetown Botanical Gardens. The gardens provide a refuge from the surrounding city for local people and a very good birding spot for visitors. In less than two hours, we got a taste the coastal birds of Guyana. In addition to several common neotropical birds including Smooth-billed Ani, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, and the seemingly ever-present Blue-gray and Palm Tanager, we saw a handful of Guianan Shield specialties and others. Highlights included Black-necked Aracari, our only Toco Toucan of the trip, White-bellied Piculet, the near-endemic Blood-colored Woodpecker, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, and Turquoise Tanager. We also got our first taste of the heat and humidity that we'd experience for much of the trip, so we retreated to the Cara Lodge to freshen up before dinner.

## Fri., Feb. 16 Mahaica, Georgetown Botanical Gardens

We started most days early to beat the heat but today was one of two *particularly* early starts. Our goal was to arrive at Mahaica by sunrise which meant quick coffee and departing the lodge at 4:15! We completed the 90-minute drive on time and just before sunrise were treated to good looks at a Laughing Falcon perched on a wire above the road. We drove another mile or two where we were met by Narish, our boatman and host for the next three hours. Before loading onto the boat, we saw a Little Cuckoo the first of many Hoatzin, Guyana's bizarre national bird. We spent about two hours on the boat, slowly moving up the river. Our first full day, most of the birds were new for the trip but a few were only seen (or heard) at Mahaica including Greater Ani, American Pygmy-Kingfisher, Carib Grackle, Barred Antshrike, and Silvered Antbird. The "heard only" Silvered Antbird was particularly frustrating because they were seemingly everywhere and, at one point, just feet away from us but remained unseen. Other highlights included Long-winged Harrier (only seen nearby the same day and surprisingly near Manari several days later), Green-tailed Jacamar, and Red-capped Cardinal.



We were then treated to a nice meal of Indian food at Narish’s home with views of river and surrounding fields. After getting our fill, Narish took us back across the river to our van and we headed back to the coast. Along the way we saw Limpkin, Snail Kite, Savanna Hawk, at least 20 Crested Caracara in one field, Amazon Kingfisher, and White-headed Marsh Tyrant.

Our next stop was on the coast at Enterprise. By the time we arrived it was 11:00 and getting hot. We spotted a distant Royal Tern, many waders including several dozen Little Blue Heron and a Cocoi Heron that Stephen spied in the distance. Gary peeled off and walked down a rough track next to mangroves and called us to see one of the most sought-after birds in Guyana: Rufous Crab Hawk. This range restricted bird is only seen very close to the coast from north-central Venezuela to northeastern Brazil and can be difficult to find. We got good looks and at least a few decent photos.

We made one more stop at the Georgetown Seawall before returning to the Cara Lodge for lunch and a siesta. Highlights included several shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpiper), Scarlet Ibis, and Yellow-chinned Spinetail.

Having learned our lesson, we pre-ordered our lunch at Cara Lodge which speeded things up and gave us more time for siesta. Before the group headed back to Georgetown Botanical Gardens late in the afternoon, Emily, Mason, and Benjamin arranged a short trip to a nearby store to stock up on a few items including an umbrella for Emily, handkerchiefs for Benjamin, and sandals for Mason. Benjamin tried but failed to get a return on investment on his dozen hankies. Our second visit to the Botanical Gardens was more relaxed now that more of the birds were familiar to the group. We got better looks at Blood-colored Woodpecker and saw several other birds including White-chested Emerald, a pair of mating Red-shouldered Macaw, and Burnished-buff Tanager.

Before dinner (also pre-ordered!), everyone took their bags down to the lobby so they could be driven down to Surama overnight because the next morning we would fly by small plane to Kaieteur Falls and then on to Surama.

## **Sat., Feb. 17 Kaieteur Falls, Surama**

We got our first glimpse of the mostly untouched wilderness soon after departing Correia airport for the short flight to Kaieteur Falls. The flight passed over the Essequibo, the largest river in Guyana, into mostly untouched rainforest. We saw evidence of mining operations here and there but the region west of the Essequibo is almost



entirely roadless. Less than an hour after take-off, the pilot banked the plane and gave us views of the falls before landing on the dirt landing strip.

Kaieteur Falls, only accessible by air (or a *very* long walk through dense jungle), is in the only national park in Guyana. The waterfall drops 741 feet, nearly four times that of Niagara Falls. Our visit was during the dry season, so the flow rate at the falls was around 500 cubic feet per second (cfs). During the rainy season, the average high volume is 23,400 cfs, making it one of the most powerful waterfalls in the world.

We spent about two hours at the falls, split between admiring the scenic beauty and the birds and other wildlife. Shortly after leaving “Kaieteur International Airport” we saw our only Racket-tipped Thorntail of the trip. Minutes later we came across an accommodating Rufous-crowned Elaenia that perched up close to the group. After entering a wooded area, Gary turned down a narrow trail and we soon had our first looks at Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, another Guiana Shield endemic. We saw six or seven of these bizarre cotingas perched and occasionally moving around at close to eye level. We didn’t see any females and the males didn’t appear to be displaying but may have been in the early stage of establishing a lek for breeding.

We continued toward the first of two viewpoints of the falls where we enjoyed the spectacle. Sarah notably stayed well away from the nearly 800-foot unfenced cliff while others posted closer for photos. Many White-collared Swift flew around over our heads. We heard and caught glimpses of infrequently seen White-chinned Swift as they occasionally flew out from behind the falls. Kaieteur Falls is one of the best places to see the Golden Rocket Frog, a species endemic to Guyana that spends its life in water collected in a giant bromeliad. Dry conditions made finding them tricky this year but most in the group got glimpses of one.

A light but steady rain began to fall just as we started making our way back to the airstrip, speeding up the walk for some of the group. We stopped briefly at the visitor center to hydrate before hopping back onto the plane for the short flight to Surama. After checking into our “Benab’s” – simple round thatched rooms, we enjoyed a delicious lunch before taking a much needed siesta. A few of die-hards walked from the lodge toward the Borro Borro Trail under the hot sun and saw several birds including Swallow-winged Puffbird, Piratic flycatcher and Grassland Sparrow.



After temperatures cooled down, we loaded up in the van and drove a short distance down the Surama entrance road. We saw a Tiny Tyrant-Manakin that perched up briefly before we stopped for a short walk into a dry forested area. Gary pointed out mud on the tree trunks that was above our heads, a reminder why we visit Guyana during the dry season. The guides kept mum about the target for this stop until they spotted it – a Great Potoo! The bird briefly raised its head to give us a look before resuming its nap, perhaps dreaming of nighttime bug hunting in a few hours. We loaded back into the van and drove a short distance to another short walk into the forest where Gary found a gorgeous Spotted Puffbird. Our last stop was on the edge of a beautiful meadow where we stayed until dark. The meadow, which was surrounded by trees and had a small pond, provided a veritable feast of birds. Highlights included two Jabiru, Green ibis, Savanna Hawk, Amazon Kingfisher, a flock of Orange-winged Parrots, Brown-throated Parakeet, Red-bellied and Red-and-green Macaws, and six Cayenne Jay. Just before we drove back to the lodge for dinner, we saw a Lesser Nighthawk perched next to the van.

## **Sun., Feb. 18                      Surama, Burro Burro Trail, Rupununi Road**

Today continued a familiar pattern with early breakfast and birding, mid-day lunch and siesta, and late afternoon birding. This is typical for hot low-elevation places in the neotropics but was particularly necessary because of hotter than normal temperatures for most of our trip. We walked from the lodge to the Borro Borro trail at sunrise. Our energetic group walked the full loop – about six miles – to the Borro Borro River and back to the lodge in about six hours. Soon after entering the forest, we heard Screaming Piha, a bird we heard almost constantly in forested areas but only saw once or twice. We saw a Double-toothed Kite and then we heard the eerie call of the Capuchinbird. This strange and not classically “beautiful” cotinga can be difficult to see but everyone eventually got decent looks at 2 or 3. While we walked, Gary pointed out markings made on the trail by a Jaguar, and we saw Tapir tracks in the dried mud.

Next, we started listening and looking for Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo, one of the most sought after birds in Guyana. This shy species forages (surprise!) on the ground and is notoriously difficult to see with less than 300 sightings in eBird. We soon heard their distinctive bill snapping not far from the trail but catching sight of one proved difficult. Gary played a bit of their gruff hotting call to try to lure one closer but only Gary and Richard and maybe one or two others in the group caught a glimpse. The rest of us had to be satisfied by “heard only.” Further down the trail we heard Black-tailed Trogon and got nice looks at a Green-backed Trogon. Occasionally



testing our patience, we heard and saw a few skulking “ant-things” including White-flanked Antwren, Guianan Warbling Antbird, and Rufous-capped Antthrush. White-browed Antbird remained heard only.

We were happy to reach the river to rest and the opening in the forest made it easier to see the birds. While we hydrated and snacked, Julia spotted a Paradise Jacamar and we saw other birds including Streaked Flycatcher, Guira Tanager, and a Spectacled Caiman peeking up above the waterline. On our walk back to the lodge we spotted a Blue-throated Piping-Guan and a Great Jacamar and Lorendo, guide in training and artist, pointed out a few Weeper (Wedge-capped) Capuchin monkeys.

After another tasty lunch and siesta, we took our first drive down to the Rupununi Road, the only route from Brazil to the coast and Georgetown. In 2023, construction of new bridges over the many streams along the road had just begun. This year, most of the bridges were completed. The dirt road will eventually be paved, bringing needed economic development to Guyana, but Gary expressed concern about the impact on the environment and the local way of life.

During our days birding along the road, traffic was light with trucks and a few passenger vehicles passing occasionally. Today we spent most of our time near one of the new bridges, one that Gary called “Thunder Bridge.” We saw several birds including Black Nunbird, White-throated and Channel-billed Toucan, Red-necked Woodpecker, Black Caracara, Bat Balcon, Blue-headed Parrot, Black-tailed Tityra and several Green and Crested Oropendola. As daylight faded, we heard the sounds Cinereous, Little, and Variegated Tinamou, and Common Pauraque and a Short-tailed Nighthawk flew over and we heard Common Pauraque. When darkness set in, Gary called in a White-winged Potoo, our second Potoo of the trip and a life bird for many in the group. Satisfied, we loaded up into the van and returned to Surama for dinner and headed to bed early.

## **Mon., Feb 19                      Surama, Harpy Eagle Trail, Borro Borro Night Walk**

After an early breakfast, we headed back down the Surama entrance road, stopping to look for an Ornate Hawk-Eagle that had been seen constructing a nest. The Hawk-Eagle failed to appear but we saw a pair of Purple-throated Fruitcrow and a Painted Tody-Flycatcher. After reaching the Rupununi Road we turned and spent a couple of hours birding near Thunder Bridge. We heard a Great Tinamou and saw several birds included Spix’s Guan, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Pied Puffbird (sadly, not Mason!), Black-spotted Barbet, Green and Black-necked Aracari, four Psittaculidae including Golden-winged Parakeet and Caica Parrot, and Fulvous-crested Tanager.



We reached the Harpy Eagle Trailhead, forewarned by Gary that the eagles had not been nesting there in recent years. But this was another spot where we might see Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo and other birds. Again, the ground-cuckoos were there but seeing them was challenging. Gary and Julia and one or two others saw one. A few in the group were also lucky to see a Gray-winged Trumpeter. The rest of us kept a stiff upper lip and were satisfied with other good birds including White-crowned Manakin, a pair of Pompadour Cotinga, and a lovely Paradise Tanager.

We made a quick stop at Surama Junction to see a mixed colony of Yellow-rumped and Red-rumped Cacique before returning to Surama for lunch and, you guessed it, a siesta! After resting up, we headed back to the Borro Borro Trail. Some of may have been a bit concerned that Gary might be planning to walk the full loop again. Instead, we walked less than two miles to a bridge over a dry riverbed with plans to wait until dark for the return. On the way out we saw Squirrel Cuckoo and our only Guianan Puffbird of the trip. While we waited at the bridge, we heard Red-legged Tinamou (our fourth Tinamou of the trip) and Red-throated Caracara. After dark, we walked slowly back toward Surama lodge until Gary paused to play for Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl. Soon, one curious bird flew down and posed close to the group at eye-level for several minutes before we continued to the lodge. On the way, we heard a Common Potoo, our third potoo of the trip. We enjoyed a simple but tasty dinner and a delicious cake made by the lodge staff to celebrate Emily's birthday.

## **Tues., Feb. 20                      Surama, Rupununi Road, Atta Rainforest Lodge**

We started the day early birding close to the lodge before breakfast where we saw Spix's and Blue-throated Piping-Guan, our first Crane Hawk of the trip, Black Caracara, Finsch's Euphonia, and others. After packing up and loading into the van, we started the short drive toward Atta Rainforest Lodge, our home for the next two nights. On the drive down to the Rupununi Road, we spotted our only Gray-cowled Wood-Rail of the trip. Our first stop was a roadside trail just past the Ranger Station on the Rupununi where Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock are frequently seen. The trail is mostly flat until a short but somewhat steep climb that passes through a cave open on both ends to a perch that looks down into the forest. Soon, a beautiful male Cock-of-the-Rock popped into view, giving everyone good looks. While Mason and Bill waited for the group they heard what was probably a Gray-winged Trumpeter but didn't see one. On the walk back to the van we added Black Nunbird, Cinerous Antshrike, and Buff-throated Woodcreeper.

We arrived at Atta before noon, checked into our comfortable rooms, and we just started to relax on the benches by the dining area when we heard a Black-faced Hawk! The great lodge guides soon found it, perched





low in a tree on the edge of the lodge clearing, giving everyone great looks. After the excitement, we had lunch and got back to relaxing. Some in the group returned to their rooms for a siesta and others saw on the benches to take in the beautiful spot. A habituated Black Curassow soon appeared, walking calmly past Emily, Sara, and Benjamin. Long-tailed Hermit, Gray-breasted Sabrewing, and Glittering-throated Emerald visited the feeder and Green Oropendola flew by and called from nearby trees. After temperatures dropped (some !), we birded the lodge grounds nearby where we saw Great Jacamar, Black-necked Aracari, Golden-headed Manakin, Black-tailed Tityra, and heard the drumming of Red-necked Woodpecker.

We loaded into the vans with the Atta Lodge guides on the roof and drove the bumpy entrance road down to the Rupununi Road. Near the entrance we saw our first Guianan Trogon of the trip, a Marial Guan, several parrots including Red-fan and Scarlet Macaw, and Dusky Purpletuft. Some in the group caught glimpses of Red-billed Pied Tanager. We made a handful of stops south of the Atta entrance road where we saw Sunbittern, Mealy Parrot, Black-chinned Antbird, and Buff-breasted Wren. Not long before sunset, we stopped where gravel excavated for bridge construction created a wide spot in the road and soon caught sight of two or three Crimson Topaz flitting around high up in treetops. Great bird if not great looks! We saw a non-habituated Black Curassow before darkness set in. After dark, we begin our search for night birds. Soon, we heard and then got good looks at Black-banded Owl, our second owl for the trip. Then we saw a Long-tailed Potoo, our fourth potoo of the trip. After a long day, a calling Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl wasn't enough to delay our return to the lodge for dinner and bed.

## **Wed., Feb. 21                      Atta, Rupununi Road**

We started with a very early breakfast and then a walk to the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway. We had been warned that the canopy walkway was closed for repairs but were happy to learn that one entrance was open. We took our time walking up the steps to the walkway and took turns walking out to the towers. While at the tower we saw new birds for the trip including Waved Woodpecker, Golden-sided Euphonia, Collared Puffbird, and Yellow-green Grosbeak. On the trail and around the lodge we added others including Black-eared Fairy, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Double-tooted Kite, Black-spotted Barbet, Green Aracari, White-throated Toucan, Rufous-bellied Antwren, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Pompadour Cotinga, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin, and Violaceous Euphonia.

After lunch, most of the group took a siesta. Those who skipped or shortened their siesta were treated to fly-by looks at a Tiny Hawk, our only sighting for the trip, before we headed back down to the Rupununi Road. Again, we made a few stops not far from the Atta entrance road. During our first stop we saw a Greater Yellow-headed

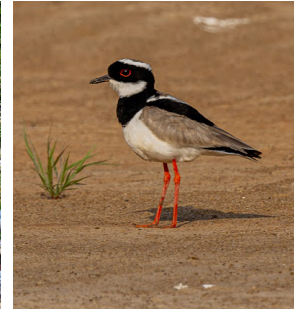
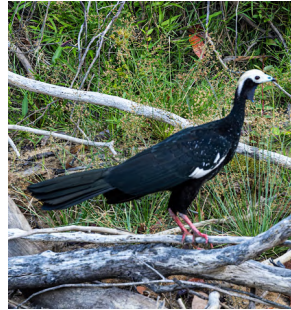


Vulture and Lemon-chested Greenlet. At another we saw another Great Jacamar, closer looks at a Purple-throated Fruitcrow, and Spotted Tanager. When we stopped a bit further south, we saw an Amazonian Pygmy-Owl, our third owl for the trip. A mile or two further south, we added Coraya Wren and Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper. As the sun was setting, we returned to what we coined the “BB Owl LT Potoo” spot we visited the day before. This time we didn’t see the owls or potoos but did see another Crimson Topaz and several parrots including Blue-headed, Blue-cheeked, Mealy and Scarlet Macaw. We returned to Atta for an alfresco dinner in the lodge clearing and early bedtime.

## **Thurs., Feb. 22                      White Sand Forest, Rupununi Road, Rock View**

As usual, we started with an early breakfast before loading up to drive north on the Rupununi Road to the White Sand Forest. White sand forests are a rare type of subtropical forest with distinctive plant and animal species. They typically have clay soils and nutrient poor white sands. Their origins aren’t well understood but they’re believed to be fragments of coastal dunes that were separated from the ocean over millions of years. Although just a few miles north of Atta, we made the trip to look for a birds not seen elsewhere in Guyana. On the way, we saw our first Pied Plover of the trip by the side of the road. We made two stops in the white sand forest area. At the first we saw a small flock of Golden-winged Parakeet, glimpses at a Black-throated Antbird, and a Cinnamon Attila, but didn’t find our main target. At our next stop we saw a pair of Green-backed Trogon, Black Nunbird, Waved Woodpecker, Bat falcon, a flock of Painted Parakeet, and Southern White-fringed Antwren...but still didn’t find our main target. We turned around and began to head back toward Atta but made one more stop where we walked down a narrow trail through the forest. The forest was lovely and interesting but not particularly birdy. We saw our second Paradise Jacamar and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet of the trip. We turned around and walked slowly back toward the road and the van when...*finally*...one of the Atta lodge guides called out Bronzy Jacamar! Although not strictly a white-sand forest specialist, Bronzy Jacamar is very local and best seen in this type of forest in Guyana. It took a bit of work to get everyone on the bird perched still in the forest but all were happy as we returned to Atta to pack and head south toward Rock View.

Our first stop was at Surama Junction where we had stopped briefly to see Red-rumped and Yellow-rumped Cacique a few days before. This time we stopped for a delicious home-cooked meal of curry, beef, pork, rice, mixed vegetables, and cassava prepared by the mother of Redford, our trusty driver. From there we drove straight to Rock View Lodge where we were served cool drinks while checking in and...you guessed it...took an afternoon siesta. A few in the group enjoyed dips in the cool swimming pool before we met for tea and cookies and departed for an afternoon excursion into the Rupununi Savannah.



The Rupununi Savannah spans 5,000 square miles of mostly untouched grasslands, swamplands, and forested mountains between the Rupununi River (where we'll go tomorrow) and the border with Brazil and Venezuela. The savannah is divided north from south by the Kanuku Mountains. On the last day of our trip we visit Moco Moco Village which sits at the base on the mountains. On the drive south Stephen and Mason saw a Buff-necked Ibis, a bird the rest of the group would get much better looks at the next day. Our first stop was a dry forested area close to the Rupununi Road. We saw new birds for the trip including Great Black Hawk and Pale-legged Hornero, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-margined Flatbill, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Ashy-headed Greenlet, Gray Seedeater, and Buff-throated Saltator. Our next and last stop before returning to Rock View was at a wetland area a few miles further south. We added more new birds for the trip including Crested Bobwhite, Aplomado Falcon, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Plumbeous Seedeater.

At Rock View we showered and gathered for drinks and a lovely dinner, entertained by the outgoing lodge owner.

## **Fri., Feb. 23**                      **Rupununi River Boat Trip, Rock View**

As usual, we started our day with an early breakfast before heading out. Our destination was the Rupununi River, just a few miles from the lodge. We were met by two motorized canoes manned by local people who know the river. Due to recent drought conditions, the water level on the river was much lower than last year but still easy to navigate. Over the course of 4-1/2 hours we saw 62 species of birds, many new for the trip, including Crestless Curassow (often very difficult to see), Solitary Sandpiper, Large-billed Tern, Anhinga, Osprey, White-tailed Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Amazonian Antshrike, Amazonian Black-Tyrant (another hard-to-see species), Spectacled Thrush, and Grassland Yellow-Finch. The non-avian highlight was a small group of Giant Otter close to the shoreline.

Anticipating our last *very* long day of the trip tomorrow, we took it easy this afternoon. We returned to Rock View and had a nice lunch and siesta before gathering for afternoon tea and cookies and walk around the lodge area. We started close to the lodge, taking advantage of the shade trees. A Buff-necked Ibis barely noticed us as it fed in the grass as we walked by. Several birds including Northern Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Orange-backed Troupial, and the ever-present Blue-gray and Palm Tanager flitted around. After exiting the lodge gate, we found a very cooperative Blue-tailed Emerald and our first Ochre-lore



Flatbill of the trip. When we reached the airstrip, we enjoyed expansive late afternoon views and birds including our best looks at Grassland Sparrow and an Eastern Meadowlark.

We returned to the lodge to freshen up and enjoy dinner before heading back to our rooms to pack for an early departure.

## **Sat., Feb. 24                      Karasabai, Manari**

Our goal for today was to reach Karasabai not long after sunrise with hopes of seeing the endangered Sun Parakeet. That meant waking up in time for coffee at 3:30 AM and departing Rock View by 4:00 and everyone was on time and ready to go. The first part of the trip was....dark. Our first stop was shortly after turning north off the Rupununi Road toward Karasabai where we paused to enjoy the sunrise over the lonely landscape.

We paused on the rough road and enjoyed the pre-dawn light, surrounded by grasslands and next to the only tree within a mile. Soon we heard a mix of sharp, dry, buzzy sounds of Fork-tailed Flycatchers in the tree above us. As it got lighter, they started flying out of the tree in 1's and 2's...and then many more. We ticked 115 in our eBird checklist. Then we saw Buff-necked Ibis and a Savanna Hawk flying by and saw our only Bearded Tachuri and first Red-breasted Meadowlark of the trip.

After loading back into the van, we began to see dozens of Barn Swallow zooming above us and then...Giant Anteater! Everyone piled out of the van and got decent looks at one walking in the distance. We were happy. We piled back into the van and drove for a few more minutes when we saw another anteater. This time, the magnificent creature was closer, walking closely through the grass feeding. Giant Anteaters are...giant. They are up to 7 feet long and males weigh as much as 100 pounds. Their size, elongated snout, bushy tail, and distinctive brown and white fur make them unforgettable. After the anteater disappeared into the grass, we gobbled down a picnic breakfast and continued on our way toward Karasabai Village.

Karasabai is an indigenous village of Macushi Amerindians in the south Pakaraima Mountains. The road follows the Ireng River which forms the border between Guyana and Brazil. The area has an edge-of-the-world feel to it. Drought conditions made for a browner than normal landscape, but the area still had a stark beauty. We wound our way north, driving slowly on the rough road. On the way we passed a marshy lake where we saw a Limpkin and Jabiru. We passed a handful of simple houses near the village area, stopped to pick up a local guide/ranger, and continued north into the hills above where we stopped to search for the Sun Parakeet.



Sun Parakeet is a stunning golden-orange bird with an orange-red face and belly. It has been extirpated in much of its range and can now only be seen in a small part of west-central Guyana and Roraima in northernmost Brazil. The total population is probably fewer than 2,500 individuals and was erroneously believed to be extinct in Guyana in 2004. There are now estimated to be around 400 in Guyana. After unloading from the van, we started looking and listening for the parakeet. We saw other birds including Little Cuckoo, Glittering-throated Emerald, Plumbeous Kite, White-flanked Antwren, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, and Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant. The local ranger headed off the road into the brush to search and came back with a smile, asking us to follow him. We walked a few hundred yards through the dry woodland until we stopped and saw two Sun Parakeets perched above. We spent about 15 minutes quietly observing the birds which didn't seem to care about our presence. After getting our fill, we headed back to the road, pausing briefly to look at a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, our fourth owl species for the trip.

We drove back down toward the village and stopped at Kezee Eco-Lodge. Kezee was commissioned in 2018 to promote economic development in Karasabai through eco-tourism. The lodge has a few simple huts with beds and bathrooms and a dining area and is designed to attract travelers who want to see the Sun Parakeet. While they prepared our lunch, we searched for bits of shade and birds. We saw a Peral Kite, Great Black Hawk, much closer looks at a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, and a pair of Black-crested Antshrike.

After lunch, we started our trip back to the Rupununi Road and Manari Ranch, our last lodge before returning to Georgetown and heading home. Fatigued, we made just a few stops. We saw our only Double-striped Thick-knee of the trip while still on the Karasabai road. Not long after getting back to the Karasabai Road we came across a covey of Crested Bobwhite close enough for photos. We stopped at a culvert under the road. When Garyh peeked in, a sleepy Giant Anteater exited the other end and headed into the grass. While crossing a small pond, we were surprised to see a Giant Otter that swam just below us. We arrived at Manari Ranch late in the afternoon. There were birds – Glittering-throated Emerald, Yellow-crowned Parrots, Red-bellied Macaws, and Bicolored Wren – but we mostly just relaxed under the portal before dinner after a great day.

## **Sun., Feb. 25                      Takutu & Ireng Rivers**

After our usual early breakfast, we loaded into three SUV's driven by local guide Jeremy and two colleagues. The SUVs were needed to drive rough roads to the confluence of the Ireng and Takutu Rivers on the border with Brazil. This area is mixed grasslands and wetlands with scattered trees except by the rivers which are edged by



dry forest. In the rainy season, the roads we traveled are usually impassable because of high water. As we drove north from Manari ranch, we saw Limpkin, Jabiru, a Savanna Hawk perched on the ground, Long-winged Harrier (surprising so far from the coast), and Aplomado Falcon.

We arrived at the Takutu River at 7:00 am and started our search for the Hoary-throated Spinetail, a critically endangered bird restricted to the small area of gallery forest along the Guyana/Brazil border. Seeing this skulking bird can be difficult – there are less than 300 sightings reported in eBird. Last year, after hearing but not seeing the bird in nearby bushes, Mason looped around and gently encouraged it to show itself to the rest of the group but never saw it himself.

As we walked across thick dried mud left behind after the prior winter floods, we spotted a Solitary Sandpiper, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Chestnut-vented Conebill (new bird for the trip), and White-naped Zenopsis. As we approached the river, Jeremy quieted the group, pointing into low bushes where we saw a rufous bird with a white throat bordered by black – the Spinetail! Everyone got good looks and even a few photos.

Satisfied, we returned to the SUVs and continued north, stopping along the road to look at a pair of Burrowing Owl, before reaching a trail to the Ireng River. Our target here was the Rio Branco Antbird, another threatened and difficult to see species with less than 350 sightings recorded in eBird. Long thought to be a Brazilian endemic, where it is found only along the Rio Branco in Roraima, this species was found in recent years along the Ireng River. After walking along the riverbank for a few hundred yards, we entered the dense gallery forest and followed a trail to the same spot we visited last year. After just a few minutes, we first heard and then saw one in vines close to the ground. Success!

We walked back to the SUVs and began a slow drive back toward Manari Ranch, making several short stops along the way. After lunch and a siesta, we took a walk around the Manari Ranch grounds, enjoying the Glittering-throated Emeralds from the portal, Green Kingfisher along the river, Red-shouldered Macaw, Black-crested Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and a Least Nighthawk along the landing strip just before dark.

## **Mon., Feb. 26**                      **Moco Moco**

We started our last day with an early breakfast at Manari Ranch and departed before sunrise for an hour-long drive to Moco Moco, a village and natural area near the foot of the Kanuku Mountains about 14 km northeast of Lethem. Moco Moco isn't visited on most Naturalist Journeys trips but was a wonderful way to end our trip.



We made our first stop before 7:00 AM, walking along the road that passes through wetlands and savannah before entering the forest. We saw several species including our only Plain-breasted Ground Dove on the trip, a pair of White-tailed Goldenthrout, what seemed like our 1000<sup>th</sup> Plumbeous Kite of the trip, Laughing Falcon, and White-headed Marsh Tyrant. A few miles up the road, we parked and walked a trail through lovely forest to Sky Valley Waterfall. On our way up to the falls we saw several species including Green-backed Trogon, Amazonian Motmot, Green-tailed Jacamar, Red-necked Woodpecker, three species of Woodcreeper, and our only Great Antshrike of the trip.

When we reached the falls, most of the group relaxed to enjoy the scenery while Sarah, Julia, and Benjamin walked up a bit further and found a Sunbittern, giving them better looks than the one the rest of us saw earlier on the trip. Eventually we had to head back down but the birding didn't stop. Halfway down the trail we got fantastic looks at a tiny Golden-spangled Piculet and glimpses of a Chestnut Woodpecker. Almost lost in the mix were two other new birds for the trip – Long-billed Gnatwren and Cocoa Thrush.

We loaded back up into the van for the last time and drove to Letham where Gary helped us check in and waved goodbye before we made the short flight back to Georgetown. We met for a last dinner together at the Cara Lodge before heading to bed early.

## **Tue., Feb. 27                      Departures**

Mason managed to squeeze in a couple of hours of sleep before a 1:00 AM drive to the airport to catch a flight to Panama. The rest of the group got a bit more rest before heading home for a well earned rest.

*Photo Credits: Group (Mason Flint - MF), Sun Parakeet (MF), Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (MF), Jabiru (MF), Giant Anteater (MF), Hoatzin (MF), White-throated Toucan (MF), Festive Parrot (MF), Common Tody-Flycatcher (MF), Red-shouldered Macaw (MF), Great Horned Owl (MF), Green-tailed Jacamar (MF), Guianan Red Howler Monkey (MF), Tropical Kingbird (MF), Red-shouldered Macaw Mating (MF), Blood-colored Woodpecker (MF), Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (MF), Spotted Puffbird (MF), Savanna Hawk (MF), Capuchinbird (MF), Green-backed Trogon (MF), Paradise Jacamar (MF), Painted Tody-Flycatcher (MF), Roadside Hawk (MF), Red-rumped Cacique (MF), Guianan Puffbird (MF), Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (MF), Black-faced Hawk (MF), Black Curassow (MF), Scenic (MF), Great Jacamar (MF), Waved Woodpecker (MF), Sulphury Flycatcher (MF), Scenic (Ben Walters - BW), Lodge (MF), Birding the River (BW), Blue-throated Piping-Guan (MF), Pied Plover (MF), Cream-colored Woodpecker (MF), Giant River Otter (MF), Lineated Woodpecker (MF), Buff-necked Ibis (MF), Sun Parakeet (MF), Yellow-crowned Parrot (MF), Hoary-throated Spinetail (MF), Fork-tailed Flycatcher (MF), Glittering-throated Emerald (MF), Silver-beaked Tanager (MF), Amazonian Motmot (MF), Golden-spangled Piculet (MF), Black-banded Owl (MF)*