

Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness Species List | March 27-April 8, 2025 With Naturalist Journeys



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Summary:

Our Naturalist Journeys tour of Guyana was a spectacular success, with 340 bird species recorded across 61 families. We explored an extraordinary range of habitats—primary and secondary rainforest, white sand forest, riparian corridors, agricultural fields, savannas, coastal mudflats, mangroves, and wetlands.

Among the many highlights was watching Hoatzins—those strange, prehistoric wonders—feeding on moco-moco leaves along the Mahaica River. On the Atlantic Coast, we had close-range views of a Rufous Crab Hawk and admired Scarlet Ibis glowing as they moved across the mudflats. In the Georgetown Botanical Gardens, we found our first Guianan Shield endemic: the Blood-colored Woodpecker. As dusk fell over the city, Blue-and-yellow Macaws shook palm fronds, and a Toco Toucan’s bill glowed in the golden light—capping our urban birding in tropical style.

Near Surama, we were treated to excellent views of the bizarre and charismatic Capuchinbird, while its cotinga cousin, the Screaming Piha, filled the forest with its iconic, haunting cry. On a hike to a Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek, we found a female on a mud nest and three males glowing brilliant orange among the forest shadows. The rainforest shimmered with hummingbirds like Fork-tailed Woodnymph and Black-eared Fairy, while the canopy revealed dazzling blues from Spangled Cotinga and Blue Dacnis, perched side by side in striking contrast.

Among the many antbirds we encountered, the Ferruginous-backed Antbird and an unusually confiding White-bellied Antbird stole the show. Nocturnal highlights included Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, Spectacled Owl, and Black-banded Owl. And our persistence paid off when we finally spotted a vocalizing Amazonian Pygmy-Owl hidden in the rainforest foliage. Oropendolas and caciques, along with other New World blackbird species like the Orange-backed Troupial, brought colorful flair to the forest canopy.

Woodpeckers were both plentiful and striking—standouts included Chestnut, Cream-colored, and Spot-breasted Woodpeckers. Woodcreepers moved cryptically along trunks, while colorful parrots, trogons, aracarís, toucanets, motmots, manakins, puffbirds, tanagers, jacamars, tityras, and barbets contributed to the kaleidoscope of Neotropical splendor—a vibrant testament to the conservation and ecotourism work of the Macushi people of Surama.

Deep in the Iwokrama Rainforest, we were privileged to observe a recently fledged Harpy Eagle—an awe-inspiring emblem of Guyana’s intact forests. And then, on our return journey by river, an Ornate Hawk-Eagle stunned us with a dramatic appearance, landing beside our boat.

At Karasabai, Sun Parakeets dazzled with all the colors of sunrise and sunset. We learned the hopeful story of how this community is leading efforts to bring these endangered parrots back from the brink.

The Rupununi Savannah delivered a suite of classic open-country species: Crested Bobwhite, Burrowing Owl, White-tailed Hawk, Buff-necked Ibis, and towering Jabiru. Falcons were well represented, too—Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras, a thrilling Bat Falcon, and a striking Aplomado Falcon clutching prey in its talons.

Along the caiman-haunted banks of the Rupununi River, we watched Pied Plovers skitter among Southern Lapwings, as vultures soared, kingfishers dove, and a Rufescent Tiger-Heron landed beside our boat.

In riparian forest along the Ireng River, we trekked with a dedicated local researcher in search of two critically endangered, range-restricted species he’s working to protect: the Rio Branco Antbird and the Hoary-throated Spinetail—both seen well.

On our final day, thanks to a change in plans, we crossed into Brazil and enjoyed bonus birding at a lakeside spot where we added Roseate Spoonbill and Hepatic Tanager to our growing list.

This journey was a celebration of avian diversity, wild beauty, and grassroots conservation—a deep dive into one of South America’s last great wildernesses. The memory of these birds, these landscapes, and the inspiring people we met will stay with us for years to come.

BIRDS:

340 species were recorded, of which 15 were heard only and 1 was introduced.

The eBird link below details the 340 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you’re new to eBird, be sure to click “Show All Details” on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness | March 2025 | eBird Trip Report](#)

The following is a list of the mammals and other species we were fortunate to observe during our tour.

MAMMALS: (21)

Red-rumped Agouti (*Dasyprocta leporine*): Seen several times on the tour. The agouti serves as an important food source for many predators. Its burrows also play a key role in shaping the ecosystem: as the agouti hoards seeds like those of the Brazil nut tree, it buries them in its burrows, creating a network of “seed banks” that contribute to forest regeneration and diversity.

Paca (*Cuniculus paca*): This large, nocturnal rodent was captured on Ann’s trail camera at night. The distinctive spotted coat of this shy, elusive rodent provides excellent camouflage in the forest underbrush. Known for their strong burrowing abilities and unique vocalizations, pacas play a crucial role in their ecosystem as seed dispersers, contributing to forest regeneration.

Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*): Seen at a wetland on the Rupununi Savannah. The largest rodent in the world, this creature was a charming sight as it foraged near the water’s edge. The social nature of capybaras often leads them to gather in groups. Although we only caught a glimpse of two from afar, the sight of these rodents of unusual size highlighted the rich biodiversity present in the wetlands of Guyana.

Common Opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*): This nocturnal marsupial was captured by Ann's trail camera at night at Atta Rainforest Lodge. It has a prehensile tail and sharp claws for climbing. Omnivorous, it feeds on fruits, insects, and small animals.

Proboscis Bat (*Rhynchonycteris naso*): Hundreds of these flying mammals were seen as we boated along the Burro-Burro River. Known also as the Long-nosed River Bat, this species is easily identified by its distinctive, elongated nose and habit of roosting in large groups on tree trunks or branches overhanging water. Their excellent camouflage and stillness during the day make them nearly invisible, blending seamlessly with the bark—a fascinating adaptation to avoid predators. But when disturbed by our boat, they took to the air en masse, giving us great views.

Bulldog Bat (*Noctilio leporinus*): One of these big brutes flew past us when we were looking for nighthawks at Surama. Recognizable by its broad, bulldog-like nose and large, muscular body, it is a skilled fisher. These bats use their specialized hunting technique, skimming the surface of water to catch fish with their sharp claws. They are also known for their distinctive, echoing calls.

Fruit Bats (family Pteropodidae): Seen roosting at Rock View. Fruit bats in Guyana, such as Pallas's Long-tongued Bat (*Glossophaga soricina*) and Greater Fruit-eating Bat (*Artibeus lituratus*), are essential pollinators and seed dispersers in tropical ecosystems. They feed on fruits, nectar, and flowers, playing a key role in maintaining forest health by spreading seeds and aiding in plant reproduction. These bats are often large with keen senses, adapted to navigate through dense forests at night.

Bat Species identified by Echo Meter biosonar analysis: **Lesser Doglike** (*Peropteryx macrotis*), **Greater Doglike** (*Peropteryx kappleri*), **Big Free-tailed** (*Nyctinomops macrotis*), and **Lesser Free-tailed** (*Chaerephon pumilus*).

Common Squirrel Monkey (*Saimiri sciureus*): This agile primate, a favorite food of the Harpy Eagle and known for its lively social behavior, was a delight to see in the open at Moca-Moca.

Guyanese Red Howler (*Alouatta macconnelli*): Frequently heard with its deep, resonant calls echoing through the forest, this striking primate was seen well along the Mahaica River. Its powerful vocalizations, which can carry for miles, and its vibrant reddish-brown fur make it an iconic presence in the rainforest.

Guiana Spider Monkey (*Ateles paniscus*) Also known as Red-faced Spider Monkey and Black Spider Monkey: This elusive primate, renowned for its extraordinary agility and long limbs, was spotted in the forest canopy near the Cock-of-the-rock lek we hiked to. Though the shy nature of these primates kept us from observing them closely for a long period, glimpsing them and then knowing they were in the treetops above us as they shook the limbs, added a thrill to our exploration, a reminder of the mysterious life that thrives amid the dense jungle canopy.

Brown Capuchin (*Sapajus apella*): This adaptable and curious primate was closely observed at Moca-Moca. Known for its intelligence and dexterity, the Brown Capuchin captivated us as it ate Cecropia fruit and skillfully leaped among branches. Notably, these primates exhibit remarkable tool use, often utilizing sticks to extract insects from crevices and even using millipedes to deter pests with their defensive chemical secretions. Their agile movements highlight a key distinction between New World primates, which are predominantly arboreal and often possess prehensile tails, and Old World primates, which typically spend much of their time on the ground.

Wedge-capped Capuchin (*Cebus olivaceus*), also known as the **Weeper Capuchin**: This highly intelligent monkey, seen fleetingly in distant treetops and not as closely observed as the Brown Capuchin, is named for the dark wedge-shaped patch on its head. Known for its expressive vocalizations and complex social behavior, it lives in large troops, forages for fruit, insects, and small animals, and has been observed using tools—an indicator of advanced cognitive abilities.

Reddish-brown Bearded Saki (*Chiropotes sagulatus*): We had superb views of this striking primate along the Rupununi River. Recognizable by its thick, bushy tail and distinctive reddish-brown fur and beard, this saki is an agile canopy dweller that travels in groups, often leaping through the upper forest layers in search of seeds, fruits, and insects.

Red Brocket Deer (*Mazama americana*): One very confused member of this species was seen wandering around on the road near Atta Rainforest Lodge at night. This shy, reddish-brown deer found in Guyana's rainforests feeds on leaves and fruits and is mostly solitary. Active at dusk and dawn, this small deer's quiet, elusive nature helps it avoid predators like jaguars. It plays a key role in maintaining forest balance by browsing on plants.

Southern Tamandua (*Tamandua tetradactyla*): Captured on film at Atta by Ann's trail camera. This medium-sized anteater with a prehensile tail and sharp claws forages for ants and termites, using its long snout to reach into nests. Known for being arboreal, it spends much of its time in the trees, making it an excellent climber. Despite its relatively small size, it's an efficient insectivore, playing a vital role in controlling insect populations.

Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*): On the Rupununi Savannah, we enjoyed an astonishing three sightings in one day of this iconic mammal. Easily recognized by its long snout, bushy tail, and large body, it feeds primarily on ants and termites, using its sharp claws to tear open insect mounds. These formidable claws also serve as a powerful defense against predators like jaguars. To protect its claws while walking, the anteater moves on its knuckles. Solitary and often nocturnal, it relies on an exceptional sense of smell to locate food. Though it has few natural enemies, the species is considered vulnerable due to habitat loss and hunting.

Ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*): This medium-sized wild cat strayed onto a road near Surama while we were owling in the dark. We mostly saw its eyeshine and body shape. With its strikingly beautiful golden coat marked by dark rosettes, the ocelot is an elusive nocturnal predator. It primarily hunts small mammals, birds, and reptiles.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: (15)

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*): This large herbivorous lizard known for its vibrant green color can grow over 5 feet long, including its tail. An excellent climber, it is often seen basking in trees, and feeds primarily on leaves, flowers, and fruits. At Georgetown Botanical Garden, one walked through our view while we were watching Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks perched on a tree limb.

Peter's Lava Lizard (*Tropidurus hispidus*): This adaptable, ground-dwelling lizard was frequently seen basking on rocks or darting across sunlit clearings. Males were especially eye-catching, performing head-bobbing displays to defend territory and attract mates.

Giant Ameiva (*Ameiva ameiva*) Also known as Green Ameiva: Seen around Atta Rainforest Lodge boasting vivid green coloration, this streamlined lizard, also known as the Amazon Racerunner, or Jungle-runner, is notable for its impressive speed.

Gold Tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*): This large lizard was seen by some members of our group at Surama Junction when it emerged from the shrubbery. Renowned for their intelligence and social behavior, Gold Tegus are one of the few lizard species that exhibit parental care, with females guarding their nests and young, making them particularly interesting for studying social dynamics and evolutionary adaptations among reptiles. Remarkably, like mammals and birds, tegus exhibit REM sleep, indicating a high level of cognitive complexity and suggesting that their brains function like those of more advanced vertebrates.

Black Caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*): Observed in the Rupununi River, their eyes poking above the water. As one of the largest reptiles in the Amazon Basin, the Black Caiman plays a vital role as an apex predator, helping to maintain the balance of its ecosystem. Infamous for the "death roll" they use to dispatch prey, these fierce crocodylians also have a sensitive side, gently carrying their young in their toothed jaws.

Spectacled Caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*): Observed on the Burro-Burro and Rupununi Rivers. This smaller caiman is known for its distinctive bony ridge between its eyes, giving it a "spectacled" appearance.

Cuvier's Dwarf Caiman (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*): Seen several times on the Burro-Burro River. The smallest living crocodylian species, it rarely exceeds 5 feet in length. Found in rainforest streams and flooded forests of South America, it's known for its tough, armored scales and relatively shy nature. Unlike larger caimans, it often hunts at night, feeding on fish, amphibians, and invertebrates.

Cane Toad (*Rhinella marina*): Native to Central and South America, Cane Toads are notorious for their impact on ecosystems where they have been introduced, often outcompeting local species for resources and preying on native fauna. However, in the Iwokrama Rainforest, where we observed these native amphibians, these large toads play a complex role as both predator and prey, contributing to the food web.

Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*): Recognized for its distinctive night calls and ability to climb smooth surfaces, this species native to sub-Saharan Africa served as an effective insect predator in the ecolodges we stayed in.

Smoky Jungle Frog (*Leptodactylus pentadactylus*): One of the largest frogs in the Americas, this creature lets out a loud scream when threatened. It also secretes a noxious, sticky substance to deter predators.

Tropical Racer (*Mastigodryas boddaerti*): Garey pointed out this fast-moving, non-venomous snake commonly found in a variety of habitats across northern South America. Known for its speed and agility, it actively hunts during the day, feeding on lizards, frogs, and small birds.

Amazon Scarlet Snake (*Pseudoboia coronata*): We saw this strikingly colored, non-venomous snake on the road twice near Surama. Though it is harmless to humans, its reddish hue and banding help it mimic more dangerous snakes, offering protection through deception. Mostly nocturnal and secretive, it preys on small vertebrates.

Common Lancehead (Fer-de-lance) (*Bothrops atrox*): We saw this highly venomous pit viper from our van on a road near Surama. Found throughout the lowland rainforests of northern South America, the notorious Fer-de-lance is one of the most dangerous snakes in Amazonia, responsible for more snakebite incidents than any other species in the region. This cryptic ambush predator blends seamlessly into leaf litter and uses specialized heat-sensing pits to detect warm-blooded prey. “Fer-de-lance” means “spearhead” in French, a nod to the snake’s sharply pointed head. Despite its danger, it plays an important ecological role in controlling rodent populations.

Water False Coral Snake (*Hydrops triangularis*): This snake appeared to be dead in the road near Rock View Lodge but came to life when Steve picked it up by its tail. This beautifully banded, semi-aquatic species lives in flooded forests and along riverbanks. Though its striking coloration mimics that of venomous coral snakes, *Hydrops triangularis* is non-venomous and specializes in hunting eels and other fish—an unusual diet among snakes. With its smooth scales, laterally compressed body, and affinity for water, it’s wonderfully adapted to life in the riparian world. Its vivid mimicry is a textbook case of Batesian mimicry, warding off predators by posing as something far more dangerous.

Rat Snake (Species unknown): At Manari Ranch, a long, glossy gray snake that slithered through the grass by the tortoise pen was called a rat snake by Garey and Lissa. We didn’t manage to take a photo, so the precise identity of this handsome serpent will remain a mystery.

OTHER ANIMAL TAXA:

Blue Morpho Butterfly (*Morpho peleides*): Seen near Surama and Atta a few times. An iconic symbol of the rainforest, the Blue Morpho is celebrated for its iridescent blue wings, which can reach up to 6 inches across or more. This butterfly is not only a striking visual presence in the rainforest but also plays a role in pollination and serves as an important part of the food web.

Longwings (*Heliconius spp.*): These striking butterflies, frequently observed during our tour, are renowned for their vibrant colors and distinctive wing patterns. By playing a crucial role in pollination, their interactions with flowering plants illustrate the complex relationships between species in the intricately connected ecological web of the Neotropics.

Leafcutter Ants (*Atta spp.*): Observed marching in a line near Atta Rainforest Lodge that seemed endless. Countless ants were carrying plant matter to feed the fungus that they cultivate in their nests to sustain them, as they have been doing for many millions of years. These creatures developed a form of agriculture long before humans existed on this planet.

Bullet Ants (*Paraponera clavata*): Known for their incredibly painful sting, bullet ants are among the most notorious insects in the world. Their name comes from the intense pain that feels like being shot, lasting up to 24 hours. These ants are formidable due to their large size and aggressive behavior when disturbed. Despite their painful sting, they play an important role in the ecosystem as both predators and scavengers, helping to maintain the balance of the forest floor. In the jungle around Atta Rainforest Lodge, we were extremely cautious around these powerful ants, observing them from a safe distance.

Tarantula Hawk (*Pepsis grossa*): This strikingly large and powerful wasp was observed from a safe distance at Moca-Moca. Known for its vivid blue-black coloration and potent sting, it preys on tarantulas, paralyzing them with strong venom. The wasp then drags the tarantula into a burrow, where it lays an egg on the spider’s abdomen. The larvae hatch and feed on the still-living spider, ensuring a fresh food supply as they grow.

Helicopter Damselfly (Family: Pseudostigmatidae): As beautiful as the tarantula wasp is dangerous, this insect was observed on the Harpy Eagle trail near Surama. These stunning tropical damselflies earn their name from their unique hovering flight pattern, which resembles the mesmerizingly precise movements of a helicopter.

PLANTS:

Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*): The beautiful pink flowers of this plant were seen in ditches around Georgetown. Introduced from India for cultural purposes, this species highlights the rich cultural diversity of Guyana.

Monkey Ladder (*Bauhinia glabra*): This nitrogen-fixing liana, a woody vine that climbs trees in tropical forests, often twists into whimsical shapes among the shadows. By enriching the soil through its symbiotic relationship with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, this species supports plant growth and biodiversity. Lianas like this play a crucial role in tropical ecology by providing habitat and food for wildlife, enhancing forest diversity, and connecting canopy layers, thereby contributing to the structural complexity and overall biodiversity of the forest.

Capadulla (*Doliocarpus dentatus*): This woody vine, with long, slender stems that climb and wind around other vegetation in the forest, is notable for its medicinal and cultural significance. In some Indigenous traditions, the sap is consumed as a drink, believed to have aphrodisiac properties.

Silk Cotton Tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) Also known as **Kapok** or **Ceiba**: This emergent tree species, towering above the forest canopy, is notable for its impressive stature and flared buttressed roots, which provide stability in the shallow, nutrient-poor soils of tropical rainforests. These buttresses help support the tree's massive trunk and prevent it from toppling during heavy winds or tropical storms. One of these magnificent giants held the nest of a Harpy Eagle along the Burro-Burro River, exemplifying the tree's significance as a nesting site for large birds of prey and its role in the diverse ecosystem of the rainforest.

Purpleheart (*Peltogyne spp.*): Highly valued for its durable and beautiful wood, Purpleheart is important for woodworking and crafts, making it a sought-after tree in local economies.

Greenheart (*Chlorocardium rodiei*): This hardwood tree is significant for local people, providing materials for construction and boatbuilding, while also playing a crucial role in the forest ecosystem.

Mora (*Mora excelsa*): Towering above the canopy in Guyana's rainforests, the Mora tree is one of the region's giant hardwoods. Its straight, massive trunk and buttressed roots provide habitat and support for countless organisms. The dense wood is highly valued, but its ecological role is perhaps even more important—mora forests are rich in biodiversity and help stabilize soils along rivers and lowlands.

Wamara (*Swartzia leiocalycina*): This striking rainforest tree, known for its dense, durable wood and its role in traditional Macushi culture, grows into giants with flared roots.

Cecropia (*Cecropia spp.*): A genus of fast-growing pioneer trees with thin trunks and large, palmate leaves, Cecropias thrive in disturbed areas and produce fruit that is an important food source for various bird species and other animals. These trees have a fascinating mutualistic relationship with ants: in exchange for shelter and food, the ants protect the Cecropias from herbivores, demonstrating the interconnectedness of tropical ecosystems.

Miconia (*Miconia spp.*) Also known as **Melastoma** (of the Melastomataceae family): Shrubs of the Miconia genus are known for their distinctive venation, featuring prominent parallel veins that create a mesh-like or checkerboard pattern. Common in tropical forests, these plants produce berries that are a favorite of manakins and other frugivorous birds. Their broad, velvety leaves are not only eye-catching but also famously soft—earning them the nickname “jungle toilet paper.”

Heliconia (*Heliconia spp.*) Known as **Lobster Claws** and **False Bird of Paradise**: Brilliantly colored, the waxy bracts of this plant genus hide tubular flowers perfectly suited to hermits, whose long, decurved hummingbird bills are adapted to reach the nectar deep within. These plants and their hummingbird pollinators have evolved in tandem, forming a classic example of coevolution in the Neotropics.

Achiote (*Bixa orellana*): We painted our skin with this plant. Its spiny, reddish pods contain seeds coated in a bright orange-red pigment known as annatto, traditionally used as a natural dye for food, textiles, and body paint. Indigenous peoples have long valued annatto for both culinary and cultural purposes.

Balata or Bulletwood (*Manilkara bidentata*): We saw the scarred bark of these towering tropical hardwoods—evidence of past tapping for latex. Renowned for its extremely dense, reddish-brown wood, balata is valued in heavy construction. It also yields a white latex that was once widely used as a rubber substitute and is now shaped into figurines for the tourist market. Several of us purchased these wildlife carvings at the end of the tour—supporting local artisans and carrying home a tangible reminder of our Guyana adventure, which at times felt like a strange and wondrous dream.