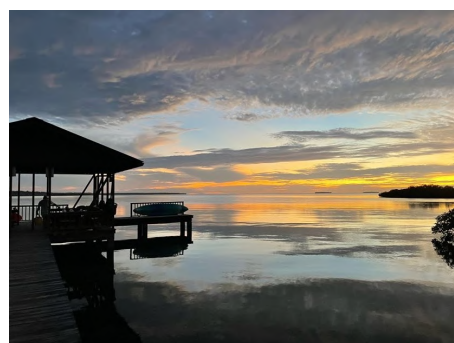


Western Panama: Tranquilo Bay Trip Report | October 14-21, 2024 Mt Totumas Extension October 21-25, 2024 by Robert Gallardo



With Naturalist Journeys guide Robert Gallardo, local guides Roger Morales at Tranquilo Bay and Reinaldo Rodriguez and Mt. Totumas, and participants Ted, Kim, Jack, Mariha, Mark, Tom, Susan, Kevin, Dana, and Barrie



Panama has always been known for its man-made canal, as it links the commerce of the world. It also harbors an amazing biodiversity as it connects the continents of North and South America. Flora and fauna have been using this land bridge for millions of years and is the only country in Central America to boast over 1,000 species of birds. Tucked away in the extreme northwestern corner of the country is a very special place called Bocas del Toro, riddled with islands of many sizes. On one of those islands, just a short boat trip from the airstrip, is the Tranquilo Bay lodge. This trip was designed for one to come, unpack once, and enjoy the varied activities offered in the area. This includes two trips to the mountains in the lower highlands to look for many regional endemic species. This year, ten guests from across the U.S. travelled there to enjoy the sunsets, flocks of parrots, delightful cuisine, and good company.



The optional extension to Mount Totumas is designed to explore a small area in the Talamanca highlands and see numerous endemics. It offers hummingbird and fruit feeders which are always packed with birds. Several trails also lead out into the surrounding cloud forest.

Oct. 14

Today our adventure started. Everyone stayed at the Radisson that night and in the morning a few of us did some bird watching in front of the hotel. There are many species of birds that find their northern range limit around the Canal area, so we were hoping to see a few of them before heading out to the Caribbean. A pair of Tropical Mockingbirds was seen perched on the hotel roof. Near the front gate, a pair of Ruddy Ground-Doves was perched in a dead snag. To our surprise, a pair of Yellow-crowned Parrots was found perched atop the hotel roof. On any Panama tour we rarely get to observe this species, so this was quite the special sighting. A couple Red-crowned Woodpeckers were busy tapping in the Guanacaste trees. Atop a short tree we spotted four Orange-chinned Parakeets. One final tiny denizen spotted was a Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet. It was a fun way to start the trip.

After our bird watching, we had breakfast and a bit later we would all meet up in the lobby. Our van was waiting for us and in no time at all we reached the Albrook airport, got checked in, and boarded the plane. The short 45 minute flight took us over some high mountains then down to the Caribbean lowlands. In no time we landed in Bocas del Toro where we were met by Tranquilo Bay staff and then departed on two boats to the lodge.

We arrived at TB and were greeted by Jay (one of the owners) at the dock. We had our first tasty lunch, then Jay gave an introduction to the lodge. Roger, our expert local guide, was also there. Afterwards, everyone was shown to their rooms and we had a little downtime.

After it cooled down a bit we all met up in the gardens to begin our seven days of wildlife viewing. Starting in the gardens was an excellent way to 'ease' into the bird watching. Migrants from North America were moving through and some were already there to remain for many months. We found several Veery, many Swainson's



Thrushes, and a few species of wood-warblers including Prothonotary, Bay-breasted, and Tennessee. Some Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Red-eyed Vireos, and the infamous *Empidonax* flycatchers were also present to round out the set of migrants. Many of these were feeding on the small fruits of numerous *Miconia* shrubs. Short-billed Pigeons were also observed feeding in some *Cecropia* trees. Also eating the *Miconia* fruits was the orange-colored form of the White-collared Manakin and a Red-capped Manakin. Bananaquits would be a constant companion nearly every day and would be seen feeding on the nectar of Porterweed flowers. A few Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds were also spotted. A real stunner that was seen was a Purple-crowned Fairy which is quite fond of a small, yellow-flowering tree.

We also got our first view of Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and we would see them daily on the lodge grounds, especially in *Cecropia* trees. It was a great way to end our first day in paradise.

That evening, several of the darling Panamanian Night Monkeys came in to the restaurant to feed on bananas. We would be able to see them on other nights as well. Panama is the northernmost range for any night monkey species, so seeing these nocturnal denizens was quite special.

Oct. 15

Today marked our first trip to the mainland which meant we were going to see many different species of birds and other wildlife. We got an early start and headed to the mainland on the boats. Near the dock at Punta Raton there was a lone Yellow-crowned Night-Heron as well as Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, and Neotropic Cormorants perched on pilings. High up in a tree was a lone Wood Stork. We boarded our spacious Coaster bus and just down the road made our first stop. The area was filled with water buffalo and cattle pastures with scattered trees, wetlands, and pockets of trees. It is always packed with birds so we stopped and spent some time walking a stretch of the road.

As soon as we got off the bus it was literally non-stop action and it was difficult to keep up with all the bird activity. Three Keel-billed Toucans were in a nearby tree and were joined by two Roadside Hawks. Several Green Ibis were foraging in the wet, short grass along with several Southern Lapwings and Northern Jacanas. A pair of Gray-headed Chachalaca was low in some distant palms. Scanning other trees revealed a group of Pale-vented Pigeons sunning and preening, and right in the middle of them was a migrant Rose-breasted Grosbeak. A group of the whimsical Groove-billed Anis joined in as well. Amidst the bewildering number of flycatcher species was a pair of Yellow-

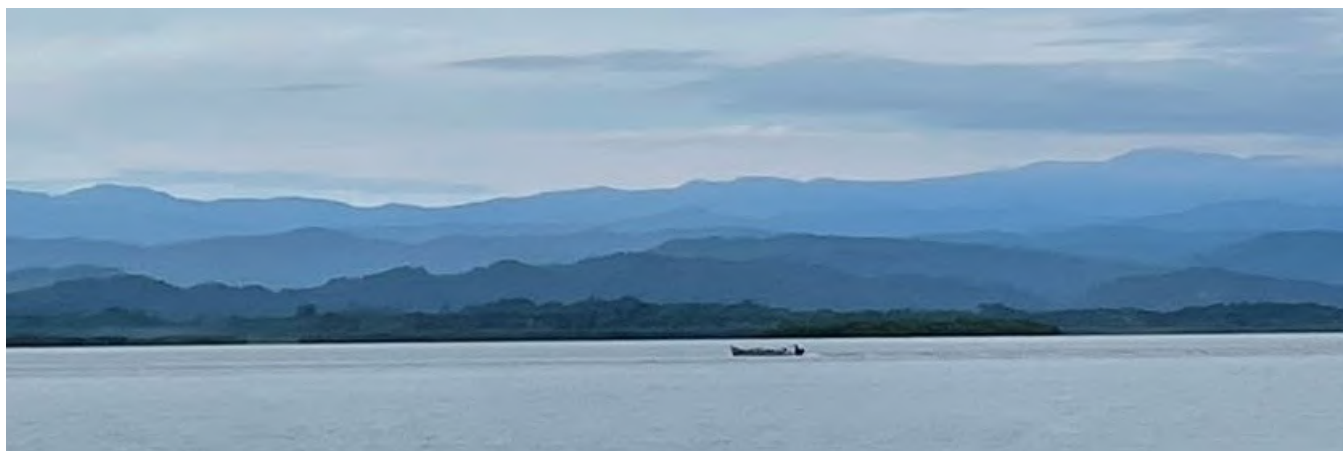


bellied Elaenia, one of which came in very close for great views. The minute, warbler-sized Common Tody-Flycatcher also made an appearance. Small groups of both the Red-lored and Mealy Parrots also flew past, each emitting its squawking sounds. One of the few resident wood-warblers to see be seen on this part of the trip was the Olive-crowned Yellowthroat and one came into a nearby shrub for scope views. Present were also Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers, but to brighten up that family we also saw Scarlet-rumped and Golden-headed Tanagers. As it started to warm up, migratory raptor species started to rise from the surrounding lowlands. We saw several Swallow-tailed Kites as well as a small flock of immature Mississippi Kites. Some one million Turkey Vultures from North America also migrate and we would see amazing numbers of them. We spotted a singing Cinnamon-bellied Saltator before we started to move on.

We had only moved a little ways when Roger spotted a Pinnated Bittern very close to the road. This was one of the prized sightings of the day. For quite some time it kept its long neck pointed upward and we got great views of this otherwise shy bird. On the road was a pair of Yellow-headed Caracaras, and in a field were some Red-breasted Meadowlarks. We were off to an incredible start.

We began to climb up the foothills and the great raptor migration began to fill the sky. There were kettles upon kettles of Broad-winged Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, and Turkey Vultures. Numbers were well into the tens of thousands and the spectacle was amazing. From where we were, they would continue along the Caribbean slope then cross over to the Pacific side once more near Panama City before continuing on to South America. We made our way further up the mountain and at one point that overlooked a deep canyon we saw a soaring White Hawk.

We reached a spot where year after year it has produced a lot of productive bird watching. There are many native figs that fruit at this time of year and attract a wide range of fruit-eating birds. Today would be no exception. Even before the fig tree action, we found a perched Double-toothed Kite on a large snag. Within a short time, a small flock of the regionally endemic Sulphur-winged Parakeets came zooming through. Unfortunately, they landed just out of sight. They came through one more time before disappearing. A Wedge-billed Woodcreeper was spotted moving up a nearby tree. This is the smallest, and easiest, woodcreeper to identify in the region. The fig tree action started to pick up and we were able to a nice variety of species. Many were buried deep inside the trees so spotting them was a challenge. Some of the showier species included Bay-headed Tanager, Emerald Tanager, and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. Robert spotted a preening Speckled Tanager and got the scope on it for everyone to see. Roger



recognized a lispy sound originating from the nearby ravine. It belonged to the Dusky-faced Tanager and a small group appeared low in the vegetation. We rarely see this species on this trip so we were most fortunate. We found a couple of preening birds including a Mistletoe Tyrannulet and female Olive-backed Euphonia. Right as we were getting ready to leave, a Long-tailed Tyrant appeared nearby and we got great views of it. Good numbers of Gray-rumped Swifts were also foraging low and would top off the list for that incredible spot.

As we climbed higher we spotted our first White-collared Swifts foraging swiftly above us. We reached the turnoff to a road that follows the ridgeline along the Palo Seco reserve. This is always a favorite spot to have lunch and continue bird watching. After a short lunch break, we searched the nearby forest to see what was stirring. A skulking Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush made brief appearances in the thick understory and flew over us before disappearing. Roger spotted a perched Green-fronted Lancebill and everyone got scope views of it. This showy hummer boasts a humungous bill. The clouds started rolling in but we continued up the road. A shy Silvery-fronted Tapaculo called from the nearby dark embankment and would remain hidden. A pair of the handsome Slate-throated Redstarts appeared, showing us their bright yellow bellies. Northern races have dark orange bellies. A small flock of Pale-vented Thrushes came racing off the hill and we got brief views. Also appearing was the handsome male Tawny-capped Euphonia. Another prized bird showed up, being the regionally endemic Golden-bellied Flycatcher. It first perched in a nearby tree, but the fog made it difficult to appreciate its markings. We reached a shrub that produces small, red-and-white flowers at this time of year. We waited to see if anything would show up and our patience paid off. A handsome male Snowcap appeared several times.

It was time to make our way back to the lowlands and catch our boat back to Tranquilo Bay. At the gas station stop, Roger spotted a soaring King Vulture over a cattle pasture. What a wonderful sighting for the days' list! During dinner time, two Derby's Woolly Opossum showed up to feed on the bananas. It is such a lovely marsupial. After dinner, several of us found a Gray Four-eyed Opossum that was dining on American Palm Oil nuts at eye level. Our mammal list started to grow.

Oct. 16

Today would mark a new adventure and bring us different animals. We boarded Jay's new two-story pontoon boat and our group would be the first from Naturalist Journeys to use it. We cruised slowly over to the nearby Popa Island. The first thing we spotted was a pair of Yellow-throated Toucans that perched in a tall tree. After a bit of searching, we found our first Snowy Cotinga. It was a female and she was perched high in a distant tree. At



a spot we almost never see cotingas; we found a male that was perched low. As we approached it, he disappeared into the forest. Not long after that, we found our first Common Black-Hawk of the trip and a Bat Falcon that was soaring high. We made landfall on the island to see what we could find. In a patch of blooming *Calatheas*, we found a handsome Band-tailed Barbthroat and it perched nicely for scope views. Some loud knocking caught our attention and belonged to the giant Pale-billed Woodpecker. A male/female pair was spotted foraging high in the canopy and we were afforded multiple views of them. Right after the woodpeckers, we found a male/female pair of Slaty-tailed Trogons. We were on a roll!! At a wet spot in the forest we saw two color forms of the tiny Strawberry Poison Dart Frog; one green and another bronzy. From a nearby swamp two Uniform Crakes called and remained hidden from view. We got back on the boat and found a male Mangrove Yellow Warbler to top off the morning's bird list. A lone Common Bottlenose Dolphin was foraging in one of the waterways.

Back at the lodge, a troop of White-throated Capuchins came in to have their lunch; a bunch of bananas put out by Jay. They would be seen daily there.

After some downtime, we all went out for a walk on the grounds. Short-billed Pigeons were seen feeding on *Cecropia* fruiting bodies. The minute Stripe-throated Hermit was observed feeding on Porterweed. A pair of Blue-headed Parrots landed in a nearby tree and we got scope views. Both Manakins were seen again. From the tower, we spotted a White-browed Gnatcatcher, Tawny-crested Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, and several Blue Dacnis. It was another wonderful day in paradise.

Oct. 17

Our day started with a new adventure as we set out to a site that had not been visited much. A new paved road was carved into the forest and provided access to the lowlands. We took a boat over to the village of Nueva Esperanza and were met by a Coaster bus. Just a short drive away we stopped alongside the road to see what was stirring. It didn't take long for Roger to hear something really good. It was a Pied Puffbird calling from way up in the canopy. After some patience, it appeared and we were able to see it in the scopes. In the distance, another prized bird was calling; the Purple-throated Fruitcrow. A male/female pair slowly made their way toward us and perched in plain sight. We were able to see the stunning purple throat of the male. We stopped a bit further down the road and found a perched Gray-headed Kite; this always being a prized sighting. Originating from the forest was a cricket-like sound that belonged to the minute Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, one of the smallest flycatchers in the Neotropics. It came into view and we got incredible looks through the scopes which is uncommon for this



species. A lone Keel-billed Toucan came in and we got to see it in the scopes as well. Calling from deep within the forest was a Rufous Motmot; the largest species in the Neotropics. Unfortunately, it taunted us and remained hidden. Another surprise appeared alongside the road. It was a male White-winged Becard foraging amidst a tangle. The most common species of woodcreeper was also calling nearby; a Cocoa Woodcreeper. It worked its way up a large tree, foraging for insects. Calling from an overgrown, dark road cut was a blue-colored form of the Strawberry Poison Dart Frog. It was warming up quickly and the bird activity started to slow down.

Close by was the Green Acres Chocolate Farm and we just had to go visit. Gary was there and he gave us an introduction into the world of chocolate. After a taste-test, many of us bought some of his products. We had a bit of time to go on a short walk before lunch so we walked up the trail into the cacao plantation. A Long-billed Hermit was seen nectaring in a *Heliconia* thicket. The star of the show, however, was the Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog and this is the only spot on this trip where we could see it. It didn't take long for Roger to find two at the base of a large tree. We all enjoyed this charismatic species. Calling nearby was a Streak-headed Woodcreeper which we also got to see. Roger's keen eyesight spotted something high in the subcanopy of a very large tree nearby. It was a group of four Brown-hooded Parrots. This species tends to be quite shy and fly away at the presence of people, so we were lucky to see them with the aid of a scope. It was already nearing lunchtime so we headed back to the lodge.

In the afternoon everyone had the choice of exploring the lodge grounds, go swimming or snorkeling, or just relax on their decks. Most of the cabins have large *Miconia* bushes in front of them and had birds feeding in them all day.

After dinner, we offered a night walk which always gives the opportunity to see a whole different world. Down in the mangroves we found a small Spectacled Caiman by the edge of the water. We searched for a Common Potoo but none were to be found. As we were going back up the stairs we found another Derby's Woolly Opossum that sat in plain view for some good photos. Back at the restaurant, we checked out the palm that was bearing fruits. A Gray Four-eyed Opossum quickly scurried away, but something else remained. There were two Tome's Spiny Rats. These are huge rats covered with spines. What a great sighting! We continued on to a nearby artificial pond



and found numerous Red-eyed Tree Frogs. These colorful rainforest denizens are always a treat to see. And so ended another wonderful day.

Oct. 18

One of the trip highlights is the boat ride along the Snyder Canal. This hand-dug channel parallels the beach for several miles and connects to the Changuinola River. We zipped over to the canal where the new pontoon boat was awaiting us. A large flock of Olive-throated Parakeets greeted us and landed nearby. As soon as we boarded, Robert spotted a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail foraging along a nearby mudflat in the mangroves. We began our nature cruise and saw numerous adult and immature Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. Warblers, tanagers, and flycatchers constantly flew across the channel. A ways down, Alvaro spotted something just above us. It was a Short-tailed Nighthawk on its day roost. This is typically a hard bird to find in the region and was a great sighting. We stopped to scan a field and Robert spotted a small Boa Constrictor on a branch right next to the boat. A ways further we made a stop to see a dark red color form of the Strawberry Poison Dart Frog. From the second floor, Robert spotted a second small Boa and finally something he really wanted to find for everyone; a Green Basilisk. He spotted a bright green male perched on a low-lying palm leaf. We stopped so everyone could get photos of this very cooperative lizard. Another great bird we all wanted to see was the tiny American Pygmy Kingfisher and Roger spotted one. It kept low inside the mangroves but everyone got to see it. A nice surprise was the sighting of a Royal Flycatcher which now belongs to its own family. It was found next to a nest it likely used during the past breeding season. Roger then spotted something 'great' high up in the canopy. It was a Great Potoo on a day roost. As we approached the river, a second one was seen at a regular roost. It's not often two of these are found in one day. We came upon a handsome Amazon Kingfisher and got great views of it as well.

We eventually reached the river and began to see Mangrove Swallows which are almost always found around bodies of water. A large group of Black-necked Stilts, Blue-winged Teals, and one Lesser Yellowlegs were resting along the bank. We cruised up the river and saw a lot of wading birds, including our first Tricolored Heron. At one spot we found a flock of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that lifted up out of a small wetland. Toward the end of the ride upriver we saw a male and female Snail Kite. We pulled over into a shady area and had a relaxing lunch.

Afterwards, we cruised downriver and made landfall near the river's mouth. We walked part of the beach and found numerous migratory shorebirds including Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, Willet, Black-



bellied Plover, and two Caspian Terns. We then made our way back to the two boats where we began our cruise. We rode over the nearby Bird Island to see yet more special birds. As we approached, we could see the white birds that trailed long tails. Red-billed Tropicbirds were everywhere. Some would fly into active nests and others would apparently just fly by a hidden nest then fly away. Also nesting were Brown Boobies and there seemed to be fewer this year. Jay pointed out a Red-footed Booby chick that hatched there. A great find! We cruised to the other side of the island and began to make our way back to the lodge, but not before running into a small flock of feeding birds. Amidst the Black and Sandwich Terns were ten Brown Noddies which topped off a great list of species for the day.

The seas were calm which made for an enjoyable ride back to the lodge. The remainder of the day was spent relaxing and exploring the gardens.

Oct. 19

We would set off on our last off-site excursion today. We departed early again and headed over by boat to the mainland. Angel was waiting for us with the Coaster bus. We took off and drove straight through the lowlands with the idea of getting up to the foothills earlier. We reached our first stop in a wooded ravine where a small river rushed down the hillside. Something close to a dropoff caught our attention. It was a Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer feeding on some small, pink flowers from an epiphytic plant as well as some shrimp flowers below. Some birds started moving into a nearby tree and then the action really picked up. We spotted a Snowy-bellied Hummingbird which is a species more typical of the highlands. Then, a pair of the handsome Cinnamon Becard came in and perched close to their old nest. Some 'dazzlers' started to appear including the Speckled Tanager, Emerald Tanager, and Bay-headed Tanager. They departed as quickly as they appeared. Many of these are mid-elevation species and we were in the right area to see them.

We moved up the road and stopped again where the native figs grew. We spotted some good birds right as we got off the bus. Roger found a woodpecker climbing a branch amidst the foliage. It turned out to be a Rufous-winged Woodpecker which is a really good sighting for that area. A few Pale-vented Thrushes and one White-throated Thrush were feeding on figs. There were more Speckled and Bay-headed Tanagers as well as Scarlet-thighed Dacnis in the fig tree along with a Spotted Woodcreeper. A Tropical Parula also joined the crowd. Just as we were going to leave, Roger heard a White-ruffed Manakin which turned out to be a female.



We continued up to the Fortuna reservoir and crossed over to the Pacific side of the country. In the distance we could see the Pacific Ocean. We stopped along the road to see what was stirring. It was already getting quiet, but a female Purple-throated Mountain-gem did appear. A resident Red-tailed Hawk was also seen soaring low overhead.

We reached a small village called Hornito and we stopped to have a picnic lunch. In a wooded ravine we would see Yellow-bellied Seedeaters, a male and female Garden Emerald, female Red-crowned Woodpecker, a pair of Thick-billed Euphonias, and Lesser Goldfinch. These were species that occur mostly on the Pacific slope of the country. As we were scanning the ravine, a familiar sound came from behind us. It was that of the Lesson's Motmot, and it was spotted just inside the forest on the other side of the road. Everyone loves a motmot.

We began to make the return trip, but turned off onto the Palo Seco ridgeline road one last time. We checked out the red flowers hoping to find some different hummingbirds, but none were to be found. From behind, called another motmot, this time belonging to the Broad-billed. This one was quite cooperative and landed right in front of us. A double-motmot day!!!

We continued down the mountain and Roger wanted to make one last stop. From the window bus he could already hear what he was looking for. Several Dull-mantled Antbirds were calling on both sides of the road. We walked down a little path and patiently waited. One came from our left and perched on a low, mossy branch. A snazzy antbird with red eyes. An awesome way to end the trip to the mountains.

We made our way back to Punta Robalo where our boats awaited us. A quick 45 minute boat ride and we were back at the lodge. Our species list had grown considerably this day.

Oct. 20

Our last day at Tranquilo Bay finally caught up to us, but not before we could discover some more birds and other wildlife. During breakfast, Robert spotted something colorful on the banana feeders hanging over the handrail. There were three Shining Honeycreepers which was a real treat and excellent way to start the day. A couple of male White-necked Jacobins were also buzzing around.



We started a walk in the gardens by the cabins and caught up to the Bronzy Hermit. It was feeding on some ornamental shrimp flowers. As we entered the forest, an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher made a brief appearance. A Bright-rumped Attila called from high in the subcanopy and was seen only briefly. Deeper in the forest we spotted a few Dot-winged Antwrens that were foraging very high in the subcanopy. Deeper into the forest we heard a high-pitched scream high in the canopy. With a lot of patient searching we discovered that it was a Semiplumbeous Hawk. What an excellent sighting! In a low-lying wet area we were able to see yet another dark orange color form of the Strawberry Poison Dart Frog. What an amazing variety we were able to see on this trip. As we continued, a Chestnut-backed Antbird came in and we were happy to see this interior rainforest species. Toward the end of the hike, we sat by a little stream and watched as a Crowned Woodnymph came in to bathe. A curious male Tawny-crested Tanager also came in and perched in plain view. Such a wonderful bird with a bright gold-colored mohawk. As we neared the cabins, two Wood Thrushes appeared to top off the morning's list. It rained most of the afternoon.

And so we wrapped up another successful Tranquilo Bay trip with a wonderful group of participants. We did a recap that evening and everyone shared their highlights of the trip.

Oct. 21

Today our group split into two. Six participants would return to Bocas for their flights back to Panama City, while four participants and I would continue on for the Mount Totumas extension. We all met for breakfast and said our 'good-byes' and went on our way.

Mount Totumas Extension

The Mount Totumas extension was designed to give participants a taste of the incredible diversity of the Talamanca highlands and the La Amistad national park shared between Panama and Costa Rica. This mountain range boasts numerous regional endemics and we would see 14 of them while there. At the same time, we would savor the splendid cuisine prepared by their cooks and enjoy cool nights.



Oct. 21

We reached the mainland after departing Tranquilo Bay by boat then boarded our van. We went up and over the mountain again and reached David then started our climb up another mountainous road. We reached the town of Volcán situated just downslope from the Barú Volcano. There, we met the drivers and boarded two 4WD trucks and up we went. We climbed to an elevation of 6,000 ft. until we reached the Totumas lodge, situated at the edge of the national park. We were met by Jeffrey, the owner, who waited for our arrival before departing. He was off to the States to see a new grandchild.

The lodge is situated on the side of mountain overlooking a deep valley. It is surrounded by towering mountains and peaks, all covered with cloud forest. The Pacific lowlands were far below. It is breathtaking to say the least. We had our first tasty meal and were greeted by a male Red-headed Barbet on the fruit feeders right outside the door. After the meal, we went outside and met Reinaldo, our expert local guide. We began to see some of the action on the overlook deck before some light rain set in. Silver-throated Tanagers literally covered some of the feeders, along with Common Chlorospingus, and both sexes of Flame-colored Tanager. These would be constant companions during our stay there. Crawling around amidst a flowering nightshade bush with orange flowers was a male and female Slaty Flowerpiercer. We would start to get familiar with many of the hummingbirds that whirled about. Sizes ranged from the giant Violet Sabrewing to the minute Scintillant Hummingbird. Other species include the Lesser Violetear, Green-crowned Brilliant, Magenta-throated Woodstar, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, and Snowy-bellied Hummingbird. A lovely White-naped Brushfinch was also spotted in the ravine below the main deck. It was a nice introduction to some of the many highland species we would encounter during our short visit there.

Oct. 22

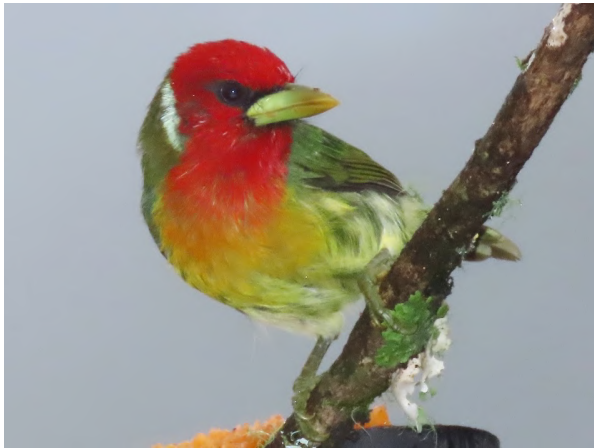
Our first full day at Totumas would be incredible and packed with a lot of great sightings. Reinaldo showed up and today we would stretch out the legs a bit with some hiking. We went up the Quetzal Trail that wound up a river canyon. The first highland species we encountered was a lone Gray-breasted Wood-Wren and it came creeping into view. Some buzzing caught our attention in the understory. It was a Green Hermit feeding on some red *Heliconia* blooms. The canopy of the towering cloud forest was getting warmed up and with it all the insects. A high pitched lisp caught our attention from high above us. We spotted the bird it was coming from; a Yellowish



Flycatcher. We got the scope on it before it moved on. We then came across a mixed flock in the sub-canopy and there was a lot of action. There was a Spotted Woodcreeper and Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, the latter being strictly a highland species. A pair of small 'shadows' were also creeping up the trees. It was two Spotted Barbtails! These have the appearance of a squat woodcreeper. Some smaller birds were also moving about, foraging on insects. Robert spotted a prized highland endemic; a Flame-throated Warbler. We were so glad to see this colorful bird. A lone Golden-crowned Warbler was also seen along with a resident Brown-capped Vireo. On our way back down we found a Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner foraging amidst dead leaves for insects. To top off the list for that trail was a White-throated Thrush. The day was off to a great start!

We dropped down to a nearby fruit feeder blind that is situated in a wooded ravine. Reinaldo baited the fruit stands and in no time the birds started to move in. A lone Buff-throated Saltator was one of the first to arrive followed by a pack of Silver-throated Tanagers. A high pitched 'peeping' sound caught Reinaldo's attention. It was an Olivaceous Piculet of all things. Another regional endemic was heard nearby and ended up perching on a small fallen tree right behind us. It was a Black-faced Solitaire and we could see it through the black mesh. Robert used his Canon point-and-shoot camera's swiveling screen to snap off some great photos without ever leaving the blind. A Mountain Thrush was spotted feeding in a fruiting tree as well as a lovely Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. This spot also has a permanent sheet and light setup for attracting moths. A Slate-throated Redstart took advantage of what moths were still there and was picking some up.

From the bird blind, we did a short walk into one of the coffee plantations. Another resident Red-tailed Hawk was spotted soaring overhead. A few small birds foraging in a row of large trees caught our attention including an endemic Yellow-winged Vireo and a migratory Wilson's Warbler. Another snazzy species we found there was a pair of Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher. It is not a true flycatcher, but belongs to its own family. From there, we went to visit a different hummingbird feeder station a bit further down the road. It was raining but that didn't stop the feeding frenzy. Since there was no fruit there, the hummingbirds had full reign and it was almost chaotic. Most of the species found at the main lodge were present, but there was also a male and female White-throated Mountain-gem coming in. Both are really charming.



As the day was coming to an end we decided to return to the fruit feeder blind. A Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush popped into view then disappeared. Then, from both sides of us some Spotted Wood-Quail started to call. We waited patiently and stood very still toward the back of the blind when two suddenly appeared. We got excellent views of this otherwise secretive bird. Back at the lodge we spotted several Northern Emerald Toucanets in a tree above the building. What an incredible day at Mount Totumas.

That evening, we were given a presentation by an American who has been studying the mice there for several years. He basically presented Jeff's trail cam videos from different parts of the property. It was amazing to see Mountain Lion, Tapir, and Jaguars all thriving in those cloud forests.

Oct. 23

Our second full day at Totumas would bring us even more surprises. After breakfast, we drove down the entrance road a ways to explore mid-elevation forest and a river crossing. Right away we found a lovely Barred Becard and it came in close for a good look. We got a better look at a Dark Pewee which was sallying out for insects. An 'angry' chatter caught our attention. It was coming from a nearby Smoky-brown Woodpecker and we were able to see this small species. Before continuing on, we spotted another regional endemic; a female White-tailed Emerald. We walked along the road and saw a Long-billed Starthroat and Green Hermit feeding on a flowering banana plant. Nearby was a Yellowish Flycatcher perched very low and we got wonderful views of it. An interesting and resident member of the vireo family was also seen; a Rufous-browed Peppershrike. At one point, we came across a small mixed flock and amidst them was a lovely male Golden-winged Warbler. A Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant was calling nearby but taunted us and remained hidden. Calling from inside the forest was a Gray-headed Tanager which got Reinaldo excited as this species is more common in the lowlands. We waited patiently until it came into view. What a handsome bird! Toward the end of the walk we heard three Lesson's Motmots tell-tale 'whoop-whoop' call. We were finally able to track one down for everyone to see. On the other side of Panama is the Whooping Motmot which emits a single 'whoop' call. We started the drive back up and stopped at the river crossing. Sitting atop large boulders were several Torrent Tyrannulets which constantly sallied out after insects. What a cute and tiny gray-and-black flycatcher.

We returned to the lodge for lunch and a bit of rest. In the afternoon we returned to the Quetzal trail to see what was stirring. It was very quiet but Reinaldo spotted a bird for which the trail derives its namesake. It was a young



Resplendent Quetzal and Reinaldo was able to get the scope set up in the middle of forest in order to get a frontal view. The enigmatic bird sat there patiently while everyone enjoyed it. It was a spectacular way to end the day.

Oct. 24

Our last day at Totumas would provide us with another glimpse into this wonderful cloud forest. After breakfast, we had a little time to revel in the scenery below the lodge's deck. A Brown Violetear made a brief appearance the other day but few got to see it. Today, it returned and we got better looks. A female Yellow-bellied Siskin also came in, being new for the list. A lone, male White-nosed Coati was coming in to the fruit feeder and stealing the chunks of papaya. Kind of made it difficult for the birds to come in!

Reinaldo showed up and we headed out to a different trail. The Big Tree Loop heads up into pristine cloud forest habitat and if one went far enough, the Costa Rican border can be reached. We didn't plan on going that far today. These forests are generally cool and quiet, and today was no exception. We reached a small clearing where a bench was located. It was also quiet until Reinaldo heard a soft vocalization. It turned out to be a White-fronted Tyrannulet and it came in very close for scope views. This highland flycatcher used to be called the Rough-legged Tyrannulet and has a limited distribution in Central America with disjunct populations in the highlands of South America. It was a great find. We started to return to the lodge area when we heard a cackling sound. It turned out to be a female Resplendent Quetzal that was perched in a seeding tree. No doubt it was there feeding. We scanned the trees to see if there were any more quetzals or even a Black Guan. There was nothing else so we continued.

We returned once again to the Quetzal Trail and found a small covey of Spotted Wood-Quail feeding at the trailhead. Reinaldo puts ground corn there for them. We watched them for awhile. What a wonderful species! We walked up the trail and Reinaldo found a male Collared Trogon, perched in plain view. We searched for this species during the main tour as well as the past few days and now we finally had one. It hung around for extended scope views. We came across another small mixed flock and got another look at a Flame-throated Warbler. How could one get tired of seeing this one? Down another side trail, a Slaty Antwren was heard and we got brief looks at it before dropping down into another coffee plantation.



After lunch, some participants went out with Reinaldo and hiked part of the Bajareque Trail. There was a substantial ascent up toward the national park border and they nearly reached 2,100 meters above sea level. They were able to get good looks at the Buff-rumped Warbler which is typically associated with lower elevations. They were also fortunate to find another immature male Resplendent Quetzal, a pair of Prong-billed Barbets, a Red-faced Spinetail, Ochraceous Wren, and a group of ten Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers. What great finds! Reinaldo also showed them one of many species of minute orchids, belonging to the genus *Lepanthes*.

And so ended the extension to Mount Totumas, this wonderful place-in-the-sky. We did a final checklist and called it a day.

Oct. 25

We departed Totumas at 6am and began the descent down the hill. Right below the lodge we found a Common Pauraque and flushed it up with the trucks. As we were approaching the city of David, a lovely Savannah Hawk came soaring in right toward our truck. It was nice, final addition, and surprise, to our list.

Favorites for the main trip:

- Ted-Seeing all the different species of kingfishers. Trip set up really well and liked small group size. Really liked the Pygmy Kingfisher.
- Kim-The “whole group was very refreshing.” Local guides were extraordinary and very patient. Red-capped Manakin.
- Jack-Shining Honeycreepers at breakfast. Nicest group of individuals. Really appreciated Roger and Astrid’s patience.
- Mariah-The food was amazing. Yellow-headed Caracara and Pied Puffbird.
- Mark-Bird Island was awesome. Pontoon boat ride on Snyder Canal. Boat drivers were great. Green Honeycreeper. White-throated Capuchins.
- Tom-Boat ride on Snyder Canal. Great lodge staff. Pygmy Kingfisher and Blue Dacnis.
- Susan-Enjoyed group dynamics. Good group size. Snorkeling. Bird watching on the tower in the late afternoon with Robert and Tom. Pinnated Bittern and seeing the Northern Jacana in flight.

- Kevin-Lodge, staff, and guides were great. Great group dynamics. Boat ride on Snyder Canal. Bird Island amazing. Seeing the Crested Caracara trying to steal the fish from the Osprey. Green Honeycreeper.
- Dana-Amazing group. Empowered to be able to continue doing these trips. Pontoon boat rides. Trip beyond expectations. Cinnamon Becard, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and both motmots.
- Barrie-Roger did an excellent job. Popa Island excursion Great group support. Green Kingfisher, Green Honeycreeper, and both motmots.
- Roger-Boat ride on Snyder Canal. Purple-throated Fruitcrows and Broad-billed Motmot.
- Astrid-Palo Seco forest. Speckled Tanager and Emerald Tanager.
- Robert-Finding the Green Basilisk and two boas.

Favorites for the Totumas extension:

- Tom-Resplendent Quetzals, Violet Sabrewing.
- Mark-Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Yellow-faced Grassquit.
- Kim-Emerald Toucanets, Buff-rumped Warbler, Resplendent Quetzals. Seeing high elevation ecosystem. Digiscoping abilities by Reinaldo.
- Ted-Squirrel Cuckoo, Golden-browed Chlorophonia.
- Reinaldo-Gray-headed Tanager, Spotted Wood-Quail.
- Robert-Red-headed Barbet, White-fronted Tyrannulet, Spotted Wood-Quail.

PHOTOS: Partial Group (Dana London - DL), Tranquilo Bay (Susan W.), Violet Sabrewing (Robert Gallardo - RG), Red-crowned Woodpecker (Tom K - TK), Summer Tanager Female (TK), Summer Tanager Male (TK), Great Kiskadee (TK), Barred Antshrike (TK), Scenic (SW), Crimson Backed Tanager (TK), Basilisk (DL), Scenic (Mariha Kuechmann - MK), Green Basilisk (TK), Blue Dacnis (Mark Rozycki - MR), Amazon Kingfisher (MR), Lesson's Motmot (DL), White-faced Capuchin (Barrie London - BL), Dart Frogs (DL), White-spotted Clearwing (RG), Two-toed sloth (DL), Slate-throated Redstart (RG), Snowy-bellied Hummingbird (RG), Lesser Violetear (RG), White-throated Mountain-gem (RG), Red-headed Barbet (RG), Female White-throated Mountain-gem (RG), Spotted Wood-Quail (RG), Bird watching below Totumas lodge (RG), Replendent Quetzal (RG)