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Panama Trip Report January 15-23, 2013

Guides Peg Abbott of Naturalist Journeys and the Canopy team: Carlos Bethancourt of the Canopy Tower, and Danielo Rodriguez of the Canopy Lodge.

Pat Owens of Naturalist Journeys came along to assist, sharing good times with 12 participants: Lynn, Rob, Julie, David, Jim, Margie, Fred, Linda, Janice, Lynda, Nancy and Alex.



Tuesday, Jan. 15

Metropolitan Park / Soberenia National Park: Semaphore Hill / Canopy Tower



Our tour was scheduled to begin after lunch, but as everyone had arrived the day or several days before, Peg suggested a morning outing to Metropolitan Park to get in a nice walk after a day of flying. We took taxis from the hotel, stopped by headquarters to pay our fees, and entered at the trail that goes to El Mirador, for a fine view of the city.



Metropolitan Park is Panama's Central Park, equally attractive for birding. Indeed our very first bird was a singing male Yellow-tailed Oriole, wow! Two hummingbirds frequented the same tree, a Rufous-tailed and a lovely Snowy-bellied male that was kind enough to pose. Ruddy Ground Doves explored the

trail at our feet, while a familiar call from home rang out, that of a Great-crested Flycatcher. We wanted to get up to the viewpoint in the time we had, about two and a half hours, so we agreed to stop at the more obvious species. Jim spotted a Hoffmann's Three-toed Sloth in a flowering Bombax tree right away, and Rob, Lynn and Alex stayed with it long enough to watch it uncurl from its position and crawl down the tree. It was a male, with a leathery orange-colored plate on the back, and we could see its face



and claws. Coming back down we had looks at a very cooperative pair of White-shouldered Tanagers, some North American migratory warblers including Chestnut-sided and Bay-breasted, a Plain Xenops and a Squirrel Cuckoo. The cuckoo's loud call, rich russet color and gaudy tail caused a few gasps – we were off and running on the wildlife quest for a great week ahead!

An independent coach driver picked us up for the transfer to Canopy Tower, and he showed off the scenery on the causeway next to our hotel before heading out. The innovative building that will house the new biodiversity museum, designed by architect Frank Gehry, is yet to be completed, but its many colored roofs fan out like macaw wings, quite striking on the narrow causeway that shelters the city harbor. It will be called the Bridge of Life Museum of Biodiversity. We look forward to seeing exhibits inspired by Smithsonian research in the region entitled, "Living Network", "Oceans Divided", "Human Prints", "The Great Exchange", "The Bridge Emerges", "Panamarama" and "Biodiversity Gallery".

<http://www.panamaqmagazine.com/Biodiversitymuseum.html>

On the causeway, we saw a Sanderling and Little Blue Herons, Neotropical Cormorants, and Snowy Egrets on the rocky shore. Above us soared Magnificent Frigatebirds, Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls. We had a fine view of the city, an impressive skyline by any world standard.

We were at the Canopy Tower by lunch, a delicious one of two pastas with fresh salad, and banana cake for dessert. People enjoyed a chance to wander through the novel architecture of our radar-station turned eco-hotel, and a chance to unpack. Lynn said,



"How nice to stay in one place for four nights!"



Before we could get in the door, however, we stopped for fine views of hummingbirds, the common ones here being White-necked Jacobins, Blue-chested Hummingbirds, and Violet-bellied Hummingbirds, and for Janice and Linda who stayed back from the walk to photograph, to have time with the less common White-vented Plumeleteer.



Our first walk with the expert and personable Carlos as guide was down Semaphore Hill, just outside the Tower. Carlos was keen-eyed and alert for any moving species, so we had a leisurely wander still productive for species, even in the quiet time of mid-afternoon. We put the scope on termite nests, wasp nests, ant nests, cecropia fruit, and then some birds – a pair of cooperative Western Slaty Antshrikes for starters,



followed by a lovely Slaty-tailed Trogon. The show-stopper was a Black-bellied Puffbird that posed for extended views. We were happy to get a ride back up the hill, where hors d'oeuvres and drinks awaited us; guacamole was featured tonight.

Dinner was a delicious chicken curry, mild in flavor, served with fresh vegetables and salad, rolls, and a nut cake for dessert.

Wednesday, January 16

Canopy Tower at Dawn / Canal Boat Ride / Summit Ponds



This morning one of our group smiled and asked, "Isn't this just the best morning of your life?" Our alarm clock this morning had been Howler Monkeys, a troop quite close, erupting in raucous cacophony while it was still dark. They continued to howl as we threw clothes on to be up on the top deck at first light. Peg was so excited she showed up with her pants on inside out, causing a good laugh.

Both Michael and Carlos were there with scopes, Peg added hers and soon we had the big lenses pointed at

Keel-billed Toucans, both Red- lored and Mealy parrots, and a real beauty, the Golden-hooded Tanager. In the background we heard a Slaty Forest Falcon calling, but it remained elusive, as did the "beep-beep-beep" bird, the Green Shrike Vireo. It moved about so one could get a view of a wing or a tail feather, but seeing an emerald- colored bird in the lush green of this tall second-growth forest was nigh impossible. Linda wanted to count one on someone's T-shirt, time to go to breakfast! (Of note, we had great looks at this bird later in the week...). A





Rainforest Lodge we boarded a small boat with a sunshade, and soon we were calling out the names of birds: Purple Gallinules, Greater Anis, and various herons, the favorite being a very focused Striated Heron that ate two Caribbean Yellow-faced Dragonflies before our eyes. We observed both adult and immature jacanas, got buzzed by a huge Ringed Kingfisher and had nice looks at the subtle beauty and color of Pale-vented Pigeons. An Osprey lauded over a quiet cove, elegant in form. We watched young, athletic Panamanian rowers practicing for competitions as we photographed Royal Terns at close range on buoys that marked the Chagres River.

The birding was so good close to the dock and on the Chagras River that it was over an hour before we headed out under the bridge. We timed that well, as we entered the Panama Canal with a massive Panamax ship going by, fully loaded with containers and Panama Railroad cars passing overhead. We got photos of the train from the water – fun!

It is difficult to get the perspective on size of a Panamax ship from land, but from the water, with our own boat, buoys and sailboats to compare, these ships are just massive. We saw several, the Dubai Star, one marked MOL, and several from Japan. All had tugs behind; crew members would wave back if we hailed a hello their way.



female Blue Dacnis (photo) was a close second for beauty.

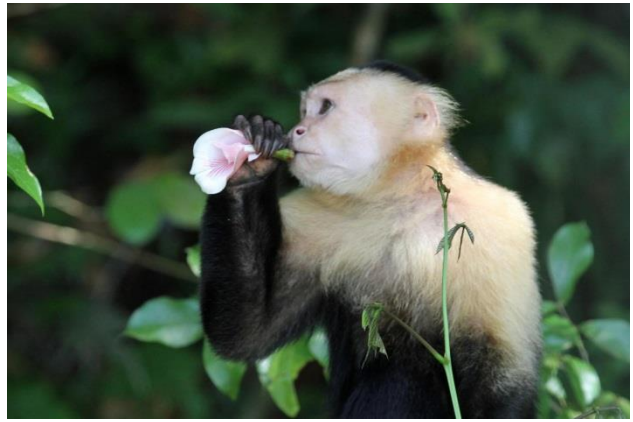
Along with eggs and fruits, yoghurt and hot cereal, we got to sample arepas, tiny corn masa cakes with a nice flavor. Fortified, we packed up and headed out for an adventure, one Peg promised to be a highlight of the trip. We drove to Gamboa in the open-air Tinamou, spotting Howler Monkeys and Keel-billed Toucans along the way. At a dock across from Gamboa



Our boat was faster, and we jetted alongside several of the giants before turning off into a green tunnel, quiet backwaters of Gatun Lake. Here we found Yellow-headed Caracaras, and Gray-lined Hawks in the same tree. For raptor agility though, Snail Kites (*photo, immature by Janice Petko*) stole the show. We got to see the immature and mature, and saw their preferred

prey, Apple Snails. We spied eggs of the Apple Snails quite abundant on stems of emergent vegetation. Cameras were clicking away for them when a Limpkin came in view, and to our delight, landed first on a tree branch we could motor over to, and then on top of small shrubs, calling. In the reptilian realm we saw Central American Sliders resting on a log, and David spotted several large Green Iguanas, as well as a Basiliscus Lizard.

Mammals sighted were two species of monkeys, Mantled Howlers in several spots, and White-faced Capuchins in a couple more. We first saw a lone male capuchin, but on another small island we saw a family group. This group is used to being fed, and while we did not offer them food, they came to the front edge of the trees to inspect us. Another boat came and went, and then we stayed to watch them. They were feeding on their own just fine, on bark, flowers and tender leaf shoots. There was a tenacious baby that kept trying to take the banana that tourists had given



the male, but the big male was not in the mood to share. Rebuked, the baby would run to the mother, find reassurance, and then start the quest again. They made bird-like sounds, and we stayed, quite captivated, until we heard the voice of a tour guide on another boat – this spot a regular place to visit from a nearby resort.

The morning passed quickly as we explored beyond the resort route, and soon we zipped back across the main channel of the Panama Canal, viewing the Titan Crane, the Gamboa dredging station, and one of the original lighthouses.



Lunch, back at the Canopy Lodge, was chicken with cilantro-lime sauce, again very mild but delicious. Jim, Peg and a few others added the hot sauce to it, which was HOT, a habanero-type, yum!



Again we had a delicious salad, this one with fresh pears and a pear-citrus dressing.

In the afternoon we headed for Summit Ponds, perhaps a bit early as it was hot and sunny on arrival, but two of our gang wanted to go to the Animal Rescue Center (commonly called the Summit Garden Zoo) and we wanted to get them there in time. It was slow in the bird realm as we started, but we kept to the shade. We found some of the edge-habitat type birds, including three species of seedeaters. Some noisy Red-throated Ant Tanagers made their presence known, and we found a mixed flock as we broke out into the clearing. Tropical Gnatcatchers and Plain-colored Tanagers were present and in a nearby fruiting tree, Clay-colored Robins appeared by the score. The Chestnut-headed Oropendolas stole the show, coming and going to their long, hanging nests. Two Giant Cowbirds were also on hand, already entering nests that had yet to be fully constructed. Carlos spotted a Bat Falcon which he got in the scope, as well as Orange-chinned Parakeets.

Two species bearing the name Boat-billed could not have been more different, Boat-billed Flycatchers uttered their loud distinctive calls, and down at the twin ponds we had scope views of several nesting Boat-billed Herons. At one point one of the herons flew across the pond and alerted us to several much closer, so the



photographers had a bit to work with to capture images of this secretive, nocturnal species, a prize! Central American Sliders rested atop stumps casting perfect reflections, and above them flew an Amazon Kingfisher. In the smaller pond we spotted a Green Kingfisher. It was while walking back to the birdmobile that we could not believe our luck – trees above seemed to be draped with charismatic species. First we had a Barred Woodcreeper, one of the larger species of its clan, and into the same branch came a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers (photo). As we focused on them, Keel-

billed Toucans started to enter the scene, one – two – three – four – five – Linda and Peg saw up to eight in one tree! They displayed for each other, two especially so, and in the brilliant light of late afternoon they absolutely shone with beauty. They bent in wild positions, interacting constantly. We watched them for ten minutes or more – such fun! Linda said, “I’ve never seen so many birds in one day!”



At the lodge we had an amazing beetle as we waited for our ride. We had a good mammal day as well, encountering Central American Agouti at the ponds, and on our night drive, a Kinkajou, two Two-toed Sloths, and several Common Opossum. We tried to be

quiet, but erupted in laughter as David and Julie took a hit straight on. One of the opossums let loose a shower of urine on high, and it beamed on down to these two. It was an odoriferous event, one Carlos said was a night-drive record. We then tried to draw in some of the local owls, getting a distant answer from Choco Screech Owl. Common Potoo was a heard-only tonight as well, but everyone was thrilled to hear its mournful notes uttered with such a melancholy flair. This had been one full and wonderful day! Dinner was sea bass, with mixed vegetables including chayote, rolls, and lemon soufflé for dessert.

Thursday, January 17

Discovery Tower / Pipeline Road / Miraflores Locks



Several people today were heard to say, “Carlos, I love you!” Of course he is charming and talented, but the reason for such profuse expression was that he started taking several of the small cameras, and teaching digiscoping to people. This started yesterday, when the toucans were dancing above us in the trees and the Crimson-crested Woodpecker cocked its brilliant cap to a royal blue sky. Today he focused in on Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, Fasciated Antshrikes, and more.

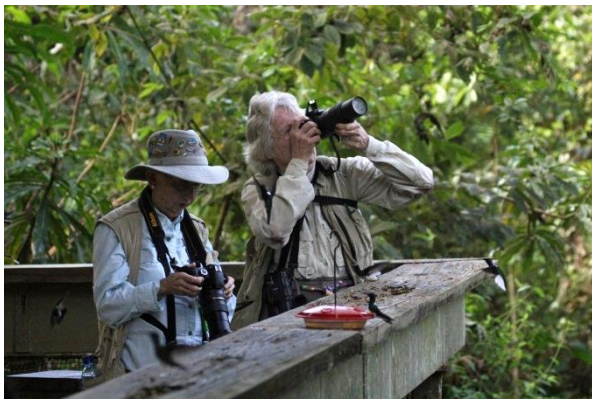
We left early at Peg’s urging, to be ready at dawn to climb the Discovery Tower, there to stand above a fine view of lowland rainforest below us, 360 degrees-all-around. We made it just in time to watch the sunrise as it cast its golden glow onto bromeliad gardens of the sky.



Then the bird show began. Into the near canopy flew a group of Blue Dacnis, the green-clad females posing particularly well. We watched nearby White-shouldered Tanagers, and a real treat as one of the “close-in” species was seeing the way-too-cute Pied Puffbird on several perches. One limb that lacked leaves seemed to keep attracting species, and on it we scoped both Cinnamon Woodpecker and a

fantastic Double-toothed Kite, which stayed for quite some time. A Squirrel Cuckoo was great to see in its entirety, our last view having been glimpses of various body parts between many leaves at Metro Park. We had great looks at Blue-headed and Red-lored Parrots, Scaled Pigeons, Short-tailed Swifts and Gartered (Violaceous) Trogons. There were several bromeliads in bloom, an impressive array of butterflies, and just grand beauty to see. The group saw a quick view of





Blue Cotinga, flying by showing off its electric plumage just before descending for coffee and a break. Alex and Peg who lingered behind got to see it come in to the dry branches that hosted so many interesting species of the day.

Below the Visitor Center was open, welcoming us with some delicious Panama coffee. Several of the group purchased interpretive pamphlets on birds, trees, and other subjects, laminated for use in the field. The hummingbirds at close range were spectacular: White-

necked Jacobins the most numerous, joined by Violet-bellied Hummingbirds, Violet-crowned Woodnymphs and a single Long-billed Hermit. On a large Heliconia flower below the deck, we all got good looks at Band-tailed Barbthroat. Rob, Nancy and Janice had fun with their cameras here.



Carlos urged us on, for there was still Pipeline Road to explore. The Canopy Tower was great to send us out today in four-wheel drive vehicles, showing that extra effort that really makes our stay worthwhile. We were able to pass through the gate, accessing some of the areas with larger trees. We hopped out to see an army ant swarm, but the forefront was too far ahead, off the path, and the hoped-for attendants were gone. With luck Carlos heard a species quite difficult to see, and with patience and his uncanny ability to mimic, we all had scope views of Streak-chested Antpitta – wow! We also had fun watching young Howler Monkeys play within the security of their troop. We encountered a flock with Dot-winged Antwrens and Fasciated Antshrikes, Long-billed Gnatwrens and Bay-breasted Warbler. David and Julie spotted a remarkable insect, a Walking Stick as long as Peg's shoe! This was a thrill for our entomologist, Alex. The morning passed quickly and all too soon it was time to return.



Lunch was a Panamanian stew with rice, fresh greens, and guava turnovers for dessert. We could easily get used to this life of great nature, camaraderie and enjoyable eating!

In the afternoon, most of the group went with Carlos to see how ships navigate through the Canal, with a close up view of Miraflores Locks and a visit to the museum there. They watched several large ships come through, and listened to commentary on how ships are positioned, how the trains work to help, and how many gallons of fresh water are required to move them through. The museum here is innovative and interactive and with Julie's inspiration, several of

the group tried some simulated driving of a boat through the locks, and Janice got photos of everyone in 3-D glasses along for the ride.

Peg and Alex stayed back to spend time up on the observation deck, entertained by a pair of courting Short-tailed Hawks, one each of dark and light phase. They walked down Semaphore Hill and were able to spot a King Vulture, and they encountered a mixed flock which held Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Dusky



Antbirds, Dot-winged Antwrens, one shy Thrush-like Schiffornis, and other species. A curious Rufous-bellied Wren checked them out near the bottom of the hill. They met the group returning from Miraflores for a ride back up the hill.

The staff had scurried to make a BBQ ready



for us, and we lost no time in gathering for cocktail hour, a delight to have outside as the setting sun turned the forest aglow. A great way to end the day, with perfect temperatures and no insects to bother us, just time to relax and enjoy each other ahead of dinner.

The staff really knocked themselves out for this and we enjoyed taking their photographs at the grill. We had chicken, sausages, beef, potato salad, fresh veggies, and for dessert, a creamy chocolate pie.

Friday, January 18 Achioté Road / Fort San Lorenzo / Panama Railroad



Today was one early morning, and we teased Carlos that it had better be worth it! We left in the dark, heading over to the east side of the country, to a place that has recorded some of the highest counts ever on single-day Christmas Bird Counts (over 300 species). Achioté Road has good tracts of intact forest and we were able to see numerous species as they crossed from canopy to canopy over the road.

First, we made a pit stop at a little coffee shop, enjoying some hojalitas (homemade donuts) and fresh coffee, and a bit of village life. We watched a man saddle his horse and, noticing our curiosity, waved us over to show us a semi-tame parrot roosting in his mango tree. Laundry hung from the rafters like an

outside closet and roosters walked around a dog asleep in the street. This part of Panama has a strong Caribbean influence and a decidedly more relaxed pace of life.



With one noted exception – the DEVILS. We could call this day “birding with the devils” as between scope views of some great birds we dodged brightly painted buses roaring by at notable speeds. We set up our scopes, moving them aside when traffic would come, and despite the commotion, we found a lot of great species, several out in the open in plain view. At a small stream crossing, we found Rufous-breasted Hermit coming and going to its nest, and a bit further down the road had good looks at White-breasted Wrens. A highlight of the morning was getting scope views of two rarely-sighted raptors: a Hook-billed Kite and a Tiny Hawk.

We walked two trails in addition to

our time on the road, searching successfully for Black-chested Jays and Golden-hooded Mannikins. On the longer of the two trails, we had good looks at one of the cutest birds of the trip, a very tame Spotted Antbird nearly at our feet. At the end of the trail we found a male and female Black-throated Trogon working on a nest, the female perched vertically as she enlarged a woodpecker hole by chewing.



What a day! We kept seeing more and more, including quick views of a troop of very active Geoffrey’s Tamarins, smart-looking small monkeys that make bird-like chirps as they communicate in dense forest. The leaf patterns and astonishing greenery told us we were in the tropics, as did the sweat we built up by 11 AM. Butterflies became very active as noise from the birds died down.



We headed for lunch and a break in air-conditioning, enjoying meals at a marina nearby. They grilled fresh fish, with cooked vegetables, yum. It was fun to watch people from around the world living the yachting life, many of them speaking French, Dutch, and German, showing us the global appeal of Panama and its Canal.





In the afternoon we visited the World Heritage Site of Fort San Lorenzo which dates from the 1500's. A major bridge on the road had washed out, and they had just opened a rather primitive detour. Jim pointed out the road break was marked by just a few rocks and a bit of ribbon – glad we tried this by day! We would learn from our historian the next day that the place once had 88 long-range cannons, a state-of-the art revolving gun mount. We walked across its moat, eyeing the rock sentinels and now-crumbling masonry.



The setting for Fort San Lorenzo is spectacular, at the mouth of the Chagras River. We found a Common Black Hawk, both Crested and Yellow-headed caracaras, and to our surprise, a Nine-banded Armadillo, digging on the lawn as we walked back. In all of her time afield, this was Alex's first sighting of Armadillo and she and the others had a big smile. In this area we also saw Gatun Dam, and new construction in the original canal area dug by the French, due to open as a third shipping channel by August of 2014, in time for the Canal's hundredth birthday.



The next stop was the train station for the Panama Railroad, on which we crossed the isthmus to get back to "home". We crossed under the Gatun Locks, quite an experience to look over to gates that hold back massive amounts of water. Magnificent Frigatebirds and Osprey take advantage of currents released to feed on stunned fish – we enjoyed their antics while waiting our turn to cross.



There was a bit of a mad scene as we boarded the train, due in part to a group of fifty Frenchmen for some reason allowed to board first. They took over the dome car and had a rowdy time. We also elbowed in there, and hearing so much laughter, Julie was our emissary, going over to ask what was so funny. They just enjoyed their time all the more with her, and soon were singing and chanting as we pulled into the final station.

The train is beautiful, with polished wood, historic light fixtures and a friendly staff to serve up drinks and snacks. We had fine views of Gatun Lake and its many vegetated islands. Our bus driver was at the station to pick us up, and we returned to a last enjoyable dinner at the Tower.



Saturday January 19 Canopy Tower / Costa de' Oeste for Shorebirds / History in Panama City



We woke to the sounds of Howler Monkeys once again, and up on the observation deck, coffee in hand, we put the scopes on a male which was howling, in clear view atop the spreading arc of a tree. We also scoped Mealy Parrots, a beautiful Blue Cotinga, and several Keel-billed Toucans. Carlos spotted a feeding Green Shrike Vireo and many finally got views of this vocal but elusive species. Nice to have it close enough to see the blue nape and yellow throat which contrast vividly with the base color of electric green on this fine bird. Carlos returned to see us off, and Yara from the office came to visit us, and to drop off Patricio, a lively local guide who would make Panama's history and place in the world come alive.

Patricio wove the story of Spanish settlement and conquest in Panama, and then fed into the story tales of the pirate Henry Morgan, and a good deal about the years of the American involvement in the Canal Zone. Worries abounded in the twenty year period of transition, as the USA handed over management of the Canal in full. Rather than a fiscal

drain as feared, Panama can proudly say that today the Canal is a money maker, and very much central to Panama's economy and world view.



Driving back to Panama City we passed a lot of the Canal features, both Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks, and the French cemetery, a symbolic tribute to those who died in the first era of building the canal, when disease was rampant and risks ran high for all involved. Patricio explained the transition from the US Army's Southern Command base to today's City of Knowledge, and talked a lot about his own life and varied careers.

We walked among the ruins of Panama Viejo, an amazing historic site now under preservation. Peg recounted that twenty years ago it was barely safe to visit and falling apart rock by rock, while now there is a museum, a handicraft market, and a great promenade from which to scope shorebirds and wading birds on the mudflats.

It was a fairly high tide and the birds

were in close. Southern Lapwings were fun to see, showing off their glistening plumage. Linda spotted a Whimbrel feeding close, and with patience we tallied up quite a list: a Roseate Spoonbill, Caspian, Sandwich, and Royal terns, most of the herons on the Panama list, Black-bellied Plovers, Willets, Marbled Godwits and a little group of Red Knots. Absent were the smaller "peeps" but we did scope a large flock of Short-billed Dowitchers.



Patricio took the group through the museum, explaining and enhancing text of the exhibits. We all had a chance to visit with a variety of artisans next door (the YMCA handicrafts market being closed) and several purchased molas, baskets, tagua nut carvings, and beaded or woven bracelets.

From here we went to lunch at a delightful restaurant near the Cathedral in Casco Viejo, a section of Panama City that is being transformed. It too was once almost in ruins, but entrepreneurs are bringing the



beautiful Spanish Colonial buildings back to life, turning them into apartments, boutique restaurants and hotels, and shops. The restaurant was artsy and bright, with delicious food, served in a convivial atmosphere.



Today was Nancy's birthday – what a fun way to spend it, waking with Howler Monkeys and then exploring a vibrant city. We had an hour or so of free time to walk the historic section, see the waterfront and circle through the excellent Panama Canal Museum here.

By 3:00PM we were on our way to Canopy Lodge, looking off to the rise of mountains and seeing a change from lowland rainforest to Pacific Dry Forests before our eyes. Traffic was impressive as we made a left turn into a

grocery and ATM, doing a few chores of life for the group en route. People enjoyed going into a grocery to see the varieties of foods and prices. Our route was on the Panamerican Highway, turning back inland from the coast just beyond Santa Clara. Views of mountains, farms and villages kept our interest, and Julie livened things up by playing a few tunes on her iPhone.

We got to the Lodge in time for bird activity at the feeder to be in full swing. Before our eyes were such



beauties: Flame-rumped and Crimson-backed tanagers, Thick-billed Euphonias, and Buff-throated Saltators. The Clay-colored Robins seemed to be dominant. What fun to share some wine and hors d'oeuvres and watch such a lively bird show! We met Danielo, our guide for the days ahead, and the



owner Raul Arias de Para and his delightful wife Denise.

The staff knew of Nancy's birthday and we celebrated it with some little Panamanian gifts for her and a cake – fun!



Sunday, January 20
Cara Iguana

Las Minas Road / El Valle Market /



This morning most were up to watch the bird show again, this time with a Rufous Motmot and several Agoutis among those species indulging us. Danielo put out fresh bananas, and soon several Dusky-faced Tanagers came in, as well as a Tennessee Warbler. A Rufous-capped Warbler liked the feeder closest to the porch, so we got exceptional views of this colorful species.

After breakfast, we packed up and headed higher in elevation, driving and stopping a few times for birding before walking the Las Minas road. Fred, Pat and Lynda of our gang took off for a hike, while the rest of us crawled along at a birder's pace, finding Blue-throated Toucanets and Orange-bellied Trogons right off the bat.

The latter posed for some nice photos, though Peg had to dive down the embankment to aim for a decent shot of the male. We went into some deep woods to try for Black-crowned Antpitta, and a few lucky ones of our group got to see it well. It is an elusive one! All got good views of Red-crowned Ant Tanagers, Plain Antvireos, and Tawny-crested Tanagers. A flock of Tawny-crowned Euphonias were busy eating small fruits in a tree by the road.



As we got out into the open, it was very windy, dashing our hopes of finding Wedge-tailed Grassfinch. We did enjoy the views, the lush forest, and some bright butterflies including many Banded Peacocks. David's hat blew off in the wind, ending up in a precarious spot. He decided on the "better part of valor" and we left it, knowing we'd be at the market

after lunch and able to replace it. The morning passed quickly.



We returned to a feast, traditional fare for Panamanians on Sunday, sancocho, alongside a most delicious salad of organic greens from the lodge's farm. Sancocho is made from a variety of root vegetables and corn, with a rich chicken broth poured on top of them – yum! Coconut flan was dessert, rich and creamy.



After lunch and a siesta, a few were so captivated by the sense of peace at the lodge they stayed in for the afternoon, wandering the garden, birding and capturing images of Green Kingfishers, the Green Heron that frequents the pond, and the cast of characters at the feeders.



The rest of us went to town to the market, still lively with activity in the mid-afternoon. It was fun to look at the many, ample varieties of vegetables, from eggplants to young cabbages to bundles of cilantro and new potatoes. A huge section held plants for the garden, including many starts for orchids, begonias and bromeliads. Some of the vendors were as colorful as their wares. There were bags of beans, various chiles, lentils, and spices and a large section of handicrafts – not of high artisan quality but, as this is not a

touristic market, those affordable for a family outing to the country.



Some returned to the lodge after the market, but Danielo promised a good afternoon of birding and we were thrilled with what we saw. Highlights included seeing the Tody Motmot in binoculars and scope – quite a project and proof of all our patience, but worth the wait! Julie had the Lodge's Tody Motmot T-shirt on for good luck.

We also saw two species of owls, a pair of large and impressive Spectacled Owls, and a roosting Tropical Screech Owl. We liked this owling by day! We found a few other species, including American Redstarts and Red-crowned Woodpecker. Jim also found a very large Garden Spider with intricate patterns.



We had time to relax and compare notes once back “home”. Dinner was beef filets with a chayote and cheese casserole, rice and peas, cooked vegetables and salad. Yum!



Monday, Jan. 21 La Mesa / Fred and Pat on the Zipline Adventure / Trails of the Canopy Lodge



We met this morning for coffee, the bird show at the feeders including a star attraction, the Rufous Motmot, and then by van took off for higher ground. We drove up past the chicken farms we'd started from yesterday. We walked along the road, and then ventured off the road to walk on trails of a farm. It was fun to see the various crops and the rich soil, obviously enhanced with chicken dung, plentiful and close by. There was taro and mustard greens and potatoes and corn, behind this a stunning forest where mosses, ferns, bromeliads and

orchids covered every inch of structural plants of the forest. Even large ferns and tree ferns were festooned with epiphytes.

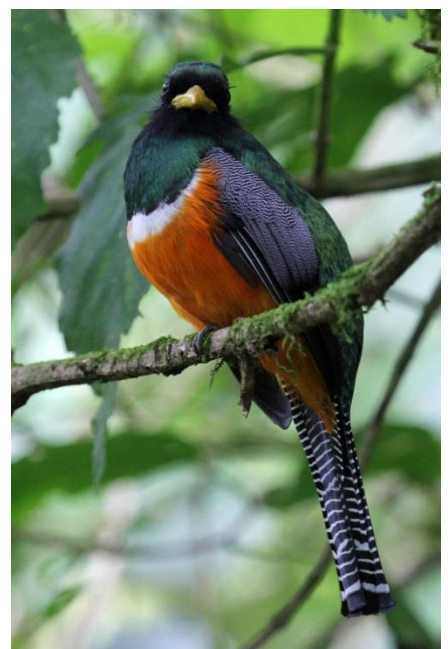
Within this realm we watched Green Hermits and Band-tailed Barbthroats come in to feed on large Heliconia flowers, near which, with luck, we stumbled into a mixed flock. We found ourselves in the midst of a veritable bird explosion, and it took a lot of hand and eye skill to sort



through the lightning-speed action. A Bright-rumped Attila posed for us amid the fury, framed by moss-laden branches. We saw Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Plain Antvireos, Slaty Antwrens and a thrill for all – close and continued views of a pair of Song Wrens. Danielo worked very hard to get us all views of this frenzy, though even he had to abandon attempts to get things in the scope as the flock moved so fast through the forest.



Back at the vans, Rodrigo was waiting with trail mix and bananas and cold drinks for us, nice after walking much of the morning. We recounted our sightings, and all felt a highlight of the morning was the chance to observe a close-in pair of Orange-bellied Trogons. The female remained more



secretive and posed within a cloak of moss-clad branches, while in contrast, the male was bold and perched in the open, letting everyone who wanted to photograph him – cameras large or small – wow.

Back for lunch and a nice chance to visit again with Raul and Denise, this time about their plans for a new lodge, called Canopy Camp, in the Darien, certainly to be added to our list for next year. We enjoyed very good lasagna, mixed greens including a nice sharp arugula, sautéed squashes, rice and more. No losing weight on this adventure!



Everyone enjoyed some down time, with our next adventure set for 3PM. We had hoped to go down to the local Nispero Zoo which also houses a rare frog facility in cooperation with the Houston Zoo, but it



was closed on this day. For us now, adventure called, and two of our group took the challenge, gearing up to speed through the canopy on a four-stage zip line known as the Canopy Adventure. We all decided to go along, birding our way up there along the road for a short distance. We found a bathing spot for several species of tanagers, including Tawny-crested, and on flowers at the entry gate, we observed a very tame Violet-crowned Woodnymph.

We waited for the adventurers to pass at the waterfall, a pretty vista for all. Soon the cable swung and into view came Fred, a big smile on his face, going at good speed. Then came Pat, who stalled for a moment to quickly view the waterfall off to one side, and then smile to our admiring crowd on the other before zipping along. We greeted them at the end platform, and then continued a bit of birding, waiting by the natural swimming pool before going to check on a possible roost for White-tipped Sicklebill near the

We waited for the adventurers to pass at the waterfall,



waterfall. No one was home tonight, and we voted it was time to return for drinks and dinner, and a tally of the bird list.



Tuesday, January 22 Juan Hombron / Santa Clara Beach / Pacific Dry Forests

We left early today, after breakfast at dawn, to drive to the Pacific lowlands, where we'd explore

agricultural lands, rural farm roads, a rice-growing operation, and a residential neighborhood. It took about an hour to get there, and some dozed along the way. While birding we could see people going to work by car, truck, motorcycle and bicycle, all watching the birdwatchers as we watched them.



Many of the birds were new, and we quickly saw some of the signature species of this side of the country – Yellow-headed Vultures, Yellow-crowned Amazons, Fork-tailed Flycatchers and Brown-throated Parakeets. We sought out some of the smaller residents such as Southern Beardless Tyrannulets (where did they get THAT name being the operative question...) and tried to lure in beauties like the Lance-tailed Manakin (success but only the

olive-colored female). Sharp-eyed Danielo was the one to spot the endemic species we hoped to see, Veraguan Mango, a member of the hummingbird clan which was sitting quietly before bouts of feeding on large yellow flowers. We had close views of a Roadside Hawk perched above us, while at our feet, a great variety of butterflies flitted about. There was much to see, but soon we found ourselves moving from shade to shade for the sightings. We'd gotten used to our cool mountain air!



After a bird-filled morning, including a number of water birds at the rice fields, including both White and Glossy Ibis, Little Blue and other herons, Wattled Jacanas, a Black-necked Stilt and a calling Sora, we headed to the beach. Raul Arias de Para, owner of the Canopy Tower and Lodge, shared his lovely beach house, and on the porch we enjoyed lunch while watching Magnificent Frigatebirds and both Royal and Sandwich terns. We couldn't resist the lure of the

Pacific Ocean, and soon most of our group was in the water, bobbing up and down in the gentle waves, laughing and enjoying each other's company and the day.



One van headed back up the hill, as a few had scheduled a real treat, in-room massages, and some wanted just to relax. An intrepid six went off in search of Red-legged Honeycreepers (successful) and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, finding a little rascal that called and called back but kept well-hidden in dense leaves of an enormous Mango tree, despite our efforts.

Danielo whistled himself breathless trying to lure him out, always wanting to keep us happy and see our smiles as we witness the avian riches of his region.

The week sped by for all. We'd seen close to 250 species of birds, some wonderful mammals and a lot of beautiful forests. For those coming from winter terrain, it was a welcome infusion of greenery in mid-January. For all it was a great insight into the finer workings of a tropical realm, and a chance to be introduced to Panama at many levels.



Wednesday, January 23
Departures

Morning Bird Fest /

Everyone got up to say good-bye to Lynn and Rob, who left on an earlier flight, then at 9:30 the bus came for the rest of the crew. Danielo was there to send us off, and found us an Orange-billed Sparrow to view, and then – in the scope – a preening Rufous-crested Coquette. Janice has been diligent in cataloging the birds with her camera, and this morning found success getting a good shot of Crimson-backed Tanager, such a

beauty. No one wanted to leave, and we hated to see our fun-loving, compatible flock disperse. Peg and Alex stayed on to scout Altos de Marias, another field trip offered by the Lodge.



Until the next adventure!



Photos by Janice Petko, Peg Abbott, and Alex Vargo, thank you!



