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Panama Sampler:

February 4-12, 2015

Guides: Carlos Bethancourt and Woody Wheeler

Participants: Lori, Bill & Denise, Barbara Fortune & Stef, Molly, Sue, Dairne, Andy, Sheryl & Ron

Day 1: Arrive in Panama City; Travel to Canopy Tower along portion of Panama Canal



On a balmy, breezy day in Panama City, we were shuttled out of this bustling center of commerce to the Canopy Tower/hotel just an hour away. Soon we came alongside a set of locks on the Panama Canal where we stopped to watch a huge ship from Norway pass



through. Magnificent Frigatebirds, Black Vultures and Blue-and-white Swallows soared overhead. This combination of nature with the economic aorta of the Panama Canal was emblematic of our journey.

The next stretch of the road transitioned abruptly from a one-million-plus person urban area to Soberania National Park. Soon after passing by the last remnant of civilization, a modern Radisson Hotel, we entered the national park. We turned onto a narrow gravel road that wound through dense forest to the top of the 1,000 foot Semaphore Hill where Canopy Tower is situated.

To call this place unique would be station, it has been converted into a rooms were perched on the tower's rainforest. A continuous and varied monkeys and geckos permeates the enchanting and sophisticated tree



an understatement. A former radar well-outfitted eco-lodge. Our mid-level with views into the sound track of birds, crickets, atmosphere. Canopy Tower is an house.

Upon arriving we met our enthusiastic guide, Carlos. After a delicious lunch and a siesta, Carlos gathered us for a late afternoon walk. The first stop was the hummingbird feeders, where Barbara noticed a Praying Mantis. As Carlos pointed out, this mantis was hunting bugs, hummingbirds and sipping nectar. It was camouflaged to resemble a dead leaf. Although the mantis discouraged hummingbirds from visiting its feeder, they flew to the other feeders. Among the hummingbirds present were: Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, and White-vented Plumeleteer.



Keel-billed Toucan

As we continued down Semaphore Hill Road, Blue-chested Hummingbirds called incessantly, including one on a conspicuous perch. Farther down the road we saw a large red Passion Flower Blossom prior to encountering our first Toucans – Keel-billed Toucans with their gaudy lime-green accented bill. Just

beyond was another roadside attraction: a giant triangular-shaped Aztec Ant Nest attached to a tree limb 50 feet above us. Through the scope we could see tiny Aztec Ants in motion.



Carlos shows Praying Mantis Imitating Dead Leaf

Just a bit farther, Woody noticed a red form moving high in the forest canopy – a Red-capped Manakin! We enjoyed good scope and binocular views of this charismatic bird that perched cooperatively for at least five minutes. As we started back up the hill to the lodge, we first heard the hoarse tones of a Broad-billed Motmot call and then Carlos found one perched 30 yards above on a bare branch. It continually switched its double tennis racquet shaped tail from side-to-side like an old-fashioned clock pendulum.

Upon returning to the base of the Canopy Tower, Andy spotted a Bay-breasted Warbler. We also heard a Southern Bentbill repeatedly calling as we entered the tower and climbed to the top.



Blue Dacnis – photo by Lori Cohen

Once on the tower's top deck, the late afternoon – early evening birding was heating up. Short-tailed and Band-rumped Swifts flitted by at eye-level with their bat-like flights. Red-lored Parrots, a Scaled Pigeon and more Keel-billed Toucans perched high in the treetops. A brilliant Blue Dacnis perched just 20 yards away from the tower's observation deck. A Palm Tanager sang its vigorous

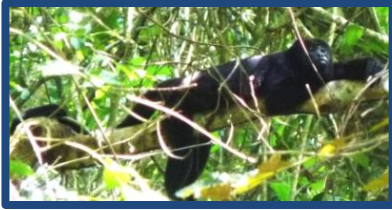
song from a nearby tree-top as the evening light cast a golden glow on its otherwise olive-drab plumage.



Palm Tanager

As evening descended, Howler Monkeys started an intimidating chorus of growling. One expected a lion to emerge from the brush. Instead a friendly-looking Mantled Howler Monkey climbed close by to the tower on an exposed tree branch. As we retired to the tower to compile our first day's list, bats flew through the open windows and overhead. Monkeys continued to vocalize and make appearances just outside the windows, upstaging our best bird listing efforts. A fine dinner of fresh foods, baked goods and homemade dessert topped off an amazing first day.

Day 2: Canopy Tower at sunrise, Chagres River & Gatun Lake Boat Tour, Ammo Ponds



Prior to dawn, Mantled Howler Monkeys announced the approaching morning with their guttural howls. At first light we gathered on top of the Canopy Tower with coffee and tea in hand to watch the sunrise and observe myriad s bird species moving through the area. Two Broad-billed Motmots called and then perched in close proximity. Then the procession of birds began in earnest: Black-headed Tody Flycatcher,

Green Honeycreeper, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, and a marvelous scope view of a Gray-headed Kite. These species and more whetted our appetite for breakfast before our journey to the Panama Canal. As we departed for the Canal in an open air vehicle, we only got a few yards down the road before Bill spotted a Nine-banded Armadillo rooting through leaves. Farther down the road, Sue found a Black-throated Trogon perched on an overhanging branch -- our first trip trogon!



We then drove the rest of the short distance to the dock to begin our boat trip. While waiting for the boat to arrive, there was a lot to see: Wattled Jacana, Great Egret, Common Moorhen, Brown Pelican, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Ringed Kingfisher, American Wigeon, Mangrove Swallow and a Tropical Kingbird. As we launched our boat onto the



Chagres River and Gatun Lake, many more bird species appeared: Tricolored, Little Blue, Great Blue, Green and one that even Carlos had not seen here before: a Cooi Heron. To complement the many Heron sightings, we also saw three species in the Rail and Coot family: Common Moorhen, Purple Gallinule and American Coot. Stef dubbed this experience a "Cootenanny."

Molly found our first Anhinga, and we encountered two more egrets: Snowy and Cattle to complete an egret trifecta. Soon afterward, Carlos pointed out several Smooth-billed Ani and a Lesser Kiskadee. We then entered the Panama Canal where we immediately came into view of huge ships carrying oil and containers from countries as varied as China, Norway, France and Moldavia. At water level in a smaller boat, one can immediately grasp the scale and significance of this canal to world trade. Our boat motored down a stretch of canal as we saw construction crews dredging and excavating to enlarge it to accommodate even larger ships than the ones we saw (which were huge). Carlos pointed out a giant crane purchased from post-World War II Germany and the oldest bridge over the canal, built in 1907.



White-faced Capucin

We then turned off the canal into a side channel where we came upon a troop of seven Mantled Howler Monkeys feeding on leaves in the trees and shrubs overhanging the water. We were only 15 feet away! Just a short distance from here, Lori spotted a White-faced Capuchin (a type of monkey) high in the canopy. He appeared to be the sentry for the group. We pulled our boat close to shore as he and half-a-dozen other Capuchins came down closer to investigate. The young ones played nearby, occasionally dipping their tails into the water and then licking them to get a drink. Carlos said they drink this way to minimize the risk of being eaten by crocodiles that inhabit these waters. He also pointed out the largest Capuchin who he identified as the alpha male was perched high above the troop, watching over the proceedings with a furrowed brow.



Geoffrey's Tamarin

Following the fascinating monkey show, we were entertained by Snail Kites catching and eating the Apple Snails that comprise the bulk of their diet. At this point we heard birdlike screeches which turned out to be coming from Geoffrey's Tamarins. These small, colorful, pug-faced monkeys came to within six feet of us, swinging gracefully in the trees and chattering as they went. We continued to find yet another mammal: Proboscis

Bats roosting underneath a piece of wood overhanging the lake.



Snail Kite clutching snail

On our way back we found two Yellow-headed Caracaras: an adult and juvenile. The juvenile made persistent food-begging calls, while the adult vocalized back (scolding?). It was a beautiful view of the two engaging in typical family behavior for many species, including our own.

We then pulled into the dock and had no sooner stepped off the boat when several more species of birds came into view: Golden-headed Tanager, Common Tody-Flycatcher and a Yellow Warbler. As we drove back up Semaphore Hill, Denise spotted a small, stocky black and white bird perched overhead – a Black-breasted Puffbird. This brought us back to Canopy Lodge after an amazing morning of birds, mammals and Panama Canal history.

Back at the Canopy Tower, we had lunch then took a siesta during a refreshing early afternoon rain storm. By the time the storm broke, it was time to head out birding once again, this time to a place with a name that might suggest low expectations – Ammo Ponds. To use a bad pun, those expectations were soon blown out of the water.



Seconds after stepping out of the van at the ponds, we were greeted by a brilliant Blue Morpho Butterfly. Then Carlos spotted a Baltimore Oriole. Meanwhile, a Black Iguana climbed atop a cement road barrier and arched its back and tail in an impressive display. Orange-chinned Parakeets chattered noisily as they flew overhead and fed in tree tops nearby. A Rusty-margined Flycatcher and Yellow-tailed Oriole perched atop a nearby fence providing great looks.

When the Rusty-margined Flycatcher flew into a nearby tree, it was immediately harassed by a Black-throated Mango Hummingbird. Once the hummingbird had chased it away, we notice that it was guarding its nest in the same tree.

Meanwhile, a Black-mandibled Toucan flew overhead and perched, followed soon after by three Keel-billed Toucans calling often and noisily. Their gaudy colors were absolutely eye-popping. In addition to their lime green accented bill and crimson rump, they even have coral blue feet – truly a designer bird.



Black-throated Mango

In a moist ravine leading into the wetlands, we saw a Northern Waterthrush bobbing its tail, along with two Lesser Kiskadees and several Crimson-rumped Tanagers. Back across the road, Bill spotted a Buff-throated Saltator. One tree over, a Squirrel Cuckoo flew into clear view, its russet tones shining in the late



afternoon light. Just below it, Carlos pointed out our first Southern Beardless Tyrannulet. As we were departing from this fabulous birding spot, a White-tipped Dove walked out on the pathway to our vehicle.

We headed back to Canopy Lodge to compile our impressive day list and enjoy another fine meal. This day was absolutely fulfilling in terms of birds, natural and human history. In fact, I think some of us were in a mild state of shock just trying to comprehend what we had seen and experienced in just one day.

Day 3: Gatun Locks, Achote Road, San Lorenzo National Park, train trip back along Canal

Today we set out before first light for the Caribbean coast of Panama. We arrived in the bustling port city of Colon at daybreak. From here we crossed over Gatun Locks as three huge ships queued up to pass through the next lock as part of their 52-mile journey through the canal. After crossing to the other side of the Canal, we saw two new bird species: a Red-breasted Blackbird and a Broad-winged Hawk. Soon afterward, we re-entered the rain forest and turned onto Achote Road – a world famous birding destination. At a roadside rest stop, we encountered our first Flame-rumped Tanagers. A short drive later, we walked through a stretch of mixed woodlands and wetlands and started birding in earnest. Barbara spotted a White Hawk soaring above. Both Masked and Black-crowned Tityras appeared directly across the road from us in the same tree and a Panama Flycatcher perched nearby.



Spot-crowned Barbet

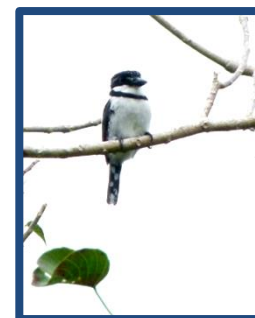
As we sauntered along this peaceful country road that had more human foot traffic than car traffic, more bird sightings occurred. Carlos excitedly called us over to see a pair of Spot-crowned Barbets sitting side-by-side in a bare tree branch. Several groups of Blue-headed Parrots flew overhead. Andy found a Tropical Gnatcatcher perched in a long vine.



Panama Flycatcher

Carlos got highly-animated once again when he first heard then found two Black-chested Jays. We all enjoyed very good looks at these birds with their crisp black and white plumage. A Black-cheeked Woodpecker perched confidently on an open branch allowing everyone to enjoy prolonged views.

While the birds were providing lots of stimulation, Molly and Lori also took note of Small Postman and Julia butterflies. A colorful Bay Wren called from the brush providing challenging but rewarding looks for most of us. A Streaked Saltator, Plain-colored Tanager and Cocoa Woodpecker all made appearances that we were fortunate to witness. Molly found a Pied Puffbird perched conspicuously in a nearby tree. Andy found a Plain Xenops that Bill photographed and Carlos confirmed.



Pied Puffbird

Following a snack of coffee cake and fresh fruit, we moved on to a place where several Yellow-rumped Cacique nests hung like woven baskets. We watched these colorful birds fly into these nests and make adjustments to them. It is remarkable how birds like caciques, orioles and oropendolas can build such sturdy nests that withstand the elements and the comings and goings of their respective families. And they build these nests with their bills and feet!

Our final stop before lunch was in a lush wooded area adjacent to a boat launch on Gatun Lake. Here Carlos called in a Golden-hooded Manakin. Although it responded to the call several times, we were unable to see it this time. However, we did find a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth clasping its baby high in a tree top. A Common Black Hawk circled above, and we found a Spotted Sandpiper flying along the shoreline and two Southern Lapwing perched on top of a large rock in the lake.

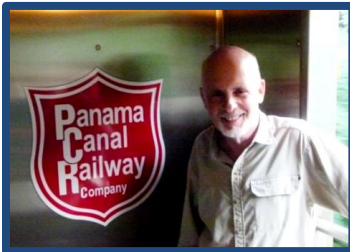
It was time for lunch at a marina with sail boats from near and afar. Quite a few people came from their boats to eat at the same restaurant. We had a very nice seafood meal to fortify us for more birding and sight-seeing in the afternoon.



Denise surveys Chagres River at San Lorenzo

Our first stop after lunch was the scenic, historic San Lorenzo Park. This old Spanish fortress is perched high on a bluff overlooking the mouth of the Chagres River where it enters the pastel blue waters of the Caribbean Ocean. We watched Chestnut-headed Oropendolas tend to their hanging nests here, occasionally driving off a Giant Cowbird attempting to enter and lay its egg in their nests. Several Southern Rough-winged Swallows and a Ringed Kingfisher perched on snags.

On the way to the train station for our return trip by rail along the Canal, Bill found a highly productive mud puddle in a construction area that had Great and Lesser Kiskadee, Saffron Finches and a Yellow-bellied Seedeater.



Andy on Canal Train

Sometimes you find birds where you least expect them. Carlos pulled over to show us two Gray-headed Chachalacas. Woody found a Savanna Hawk. We



compiled our long list of bird, mammal and butterfly sightings while waiting for our train. The train itself took us on a pretty route through wetlands and waterways alongside the canal all the way to Panama City. During the ride we enjoyed cold drinks and snacks as the historically-restored train took us to our destination. Carlos amazed us with his ability to identify birds, often high in tree tops or flying at a distance as our train whizzed by them at 60 mph.

After disembarking from the train at Panama City, we returned via a relatively short drive to the Canopy Tower where dinner was waiting for us. Shortly after dinner everyone headed for bed after a full day.



Long-billed Hermit

Day 4: Canopy Platform, Discovery Center, Summit Ponds

At daybreak we ate breakfast to the chorus of Mantled Howler Monkeys, or as one of our group said "a howler opera." While waiting to board the truck to our morning walk, Long-tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, and

Violet-bellied Hummingbirds visited the feeders.

Even though the drive to the Discovery Center and Canopy Platform was short, Sue and Andy alertly found a new mammal on the way: A White-nosed Coati. The minute we hopped off the truck to walk, two Golden-collared Manakins made their characteristic wing-snap sound.



This time, several of us saw them!

We then started our climb up the 172 steps to the top of the Canopy Platform. This platform was built four years ago from recycled materials from the Panama Canal. Its purpose is to do as we were doing- to promote nature appreciation and ecotourism.



Sheryl and Ron on Canopy Platform

As soon as we arrived on top, people started calling out bird species. Woody spotted a Yellow-backed Oriole, a perched Great Black Hawk and a soaring Crane Hawk. Carlos found Black-mandibled and Keel-billed Toucans, a Purple-throated Fruit Crow, Red-lored and Blue-headed Parrots, and a Lineated Woodpecker. Then he focused in on a distant perched indigo blue bird – a Blue Cotinga! We all enjoyed prolonged looks at this spectacular bird.

After descending from the platform we only ambled a few yards before Carlos called in several Song Wrens. Their remarkable resonant song matched their distinctive beauty. A few steps down Pipeline Road, Andy spotted a White-whiskered Puffbird that we all saw clearly thanks to Carlos's expert scoping ability.

To celebrate such a successful, memorable early morning, we had snacks and drinks prior to visiting the Discovery Center. This interpretive center with a large sheltered deck and hummingbird feeders is an ideal place to find hummingbirds, including the diminutive and distinctive Rufous-crested Coquette that Bill spotted. Fortunately for all of us, it kept flying to the same perch.

During the remainder of this already eventful morning, we walked a portion of the renowned (for birding) Pipeline Road. Only a few steps down the road it started delivering. Encouraged by Carlos' calls, Scarlet-rumped Caciques flew overhead and perched nearby. A Southern Bentbill flittered through the brush and eventually perched long enough for us to see it well.

Carlos then took us on a walk off-road into the forest to search for the Streak-chested Antpitta. Several of these hard-to-find birds responded to his whistled imitations, but none came out. However, other species did emerge, including a pair of Black-throated Trogons and a Black-striped Woodcreeper.

When we returned to the road, Andy had another bird sighting to report: a Dot-winged Antwren. Thankfully, it came out again for all of us to see. Soon after, while standing on a small bridge over a slow-flowing stream, a White-flanked Antwren, a Checker-throated Antwren, and an Olivaceous Flatbill moved

through the same series of close-in shrubs and small trees. Carlos pinpointed and identified them all as they foraged through heavy brush.

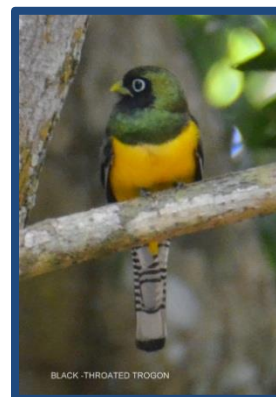


Photo by Ron Wachter



Sue and Dairne relax on Canopy Tower

At this point, it was time to head back to Canopy Lodge for lunch and a siesta before embarking upon a afternoon birding and natural history outing. On the way home, Woody and Molly spotted a second Black-breasted Puffbird. It seems that there are sightings along nearly every short stretch of roadway here in this biodiversity hotspot of the world. In fact, because it lies on a land bridge that was formed between two continents

three million years ago, Panama experienced what is known as a “great biotic interchange.” The biodiversity here is readily apparent to anyone with their senses engaged.

Following siesta, we were prepared to depart for our next destination, Summit Pond. As usual, we had a hard time getting out of the parking lot, due to an outstanding sighting there. Barbara spotted a Double-toothed Kite perched on a large branch only 50 yards from the Canopy Lodge entrance. In our scopes we saw this bird so clearly that we could make out the birds’ namesake double tooth.



Crane Hawk – photo by Bill Drucker

Once aboard the open-air vehicle for our ride down Semaphore Hill, as usual we did not get very far before another sighting. This time, it was a Crimson-crested Woodpecker. We admired this large majestic woodpecker as it hammered its way up a palm tree. While seeking a better spotting scope angle, Carlos stopped dead in his tracks. He found a Crane Hawk perched low 15 feet away, directly across the road from the woodpecker. We all had astoundingly good views of the hawk, to the point that we could see into its crimson eyes as it glared at us.

Eventually, we drove the rest of the way but not before Sheryl and Andy saw a White-nosed Coati just as we were approaching Summit Pond. As soon as we got out of the truck, we saw a Great Blue Heron perched at the far end of the pond. Then Carlos found an Amazon Kingfisher on a mass of tree branches suspended over the pond. Nearby a Green Heron sat, and not far behind, one of our target species, the Boat-billed Heron. Soon after, we found eight more perched on the far end of the lake. Then Carlos found a Ringed Kingfisher that was soon joined by another. Not long after that, a Pygmy Kingfisher assumed the former perch of the Amazon Kingfisher.



Boat-billed Heron - photo by Bill Drucker

To add to our bonanza of kingfishers, a Green Kingfisher perched close to us. Incredibly, all of these kingfishers were in the same pond.



We then saw several Greater Ani moving through the riparian vegetation on the near shore of the lake. Watching the Anis move along the lake led us to a Gartered Trogon perched high in a tree across the road. More sightings followed: a Collared Aracari, Prothonotary and Yellow Warblers, Summer Tanager, and a Snowy-bellied Hummingbird. Adding to the already impressive bird show at the pond, we saw several Tropical Slider Turtles along the shore, a large Green Iguana and a Variegated Squirrel high in the trees.

As we headed back up Semaphore Road, Ron heard loud and raucous parrot vocalizations from above. When we asked Carlos to stop the vehicle and take a look, we found Mealy Parrots feeding in the tree tops. As we made the final approach to the Canopy Tower, we saw a Central American Agouti. But we weren’t done yet. While enjoying a barbecue dinner outside on a raised deck, we heard haunting calls coming from two directions. Sheryl surmised that these could be tinamou calls. When we asked one of the lodge guides about this, she confirmed this and played their call for us. Indeed it was a Great Tinamou call that punctuated yet another wonderful day of bird and wildlife-watching.

Day 5 – Canopy Tower, Semaphore Hill Road, El Valle Lodge

We started the day where we left off last night -- on top of the canopy tower. Last night we watched the stars, the planet Jupiter and its four visible moons through a scope, and a brilliantly illuminated bridge

spanning the Panama Canal with boats passing underneath. Early this morning atop the tower, we were serenaded once again by the haunting sound of distant Great Tinamous. As day broke and birds started appearing, Sheryl found a Black-breasted Puffbird perched on a tree at eye level. A Green Honeycreeper flashed its brilliant plumage nearby. Mealy, Blue-headed and Red-ored Parrots flew noisily in the distant treetops, sometimes perching in places where we could scope them.

Following this lovely ongoing display of birds, wildlife and scenery, we walked down one flight of stairs to our breakfast. While we were eating, a Palm Tanager and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher flew inside the tower. They joined Little Mastif Bats and House Geckos as species often found inside the Canopy Tower at various times. The geckos made frequent chattering sounds. After breakfast, we packed our belongings and birded on foot down Semaphore Road Hill. Even though we had driven this stretch several times, and seen quite a few species of birds and wildlife there, walking the road revealed many more species, including a few rarities.



Looking for Antbirds in all the right places

Just a short stretch down the road, Carlos found a Bi-colored Antbird. He then suggested that we wait in the area to see if other antbirds come by. Indeed they did! This was especially true because an Army Ant Swarm occurred nearby. Soon after the Bicolored Antbird, a Spotted Antbird arrived. Then the rarity came: an Ocellated Antbird with its beautiful blue eye patch. Carlos even got us a scope view of this reclusive, beautifully patterned bird as it moved through the shadows in thick

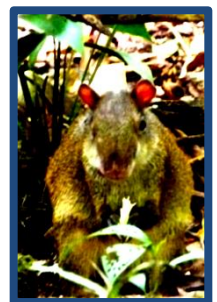
brush. Soon afterward, a Fasciated Antshrike and Chestnut-backed Antbird came to join the feeding frenzy.

Meanwhile just across the road, a gorgeous Cinnamon Woodpecker worked its way slowly down a tree snag, pecking away as it descended. Then a Plain and a Northern Barred Woodcreeper latched on to different trees around us and slowly crept up as they fed. We spent 20 minutes enjoying this show of furtive deep forest dwelling birds feasting on ants that were there by the thousands. Judging by Carlos' excitement, we were witnessing an extraordinary event. He said that birders often search in vain for some of the antbirds we were seeing today. We felt fortunate to be there, and to have him as a guide.



Black-breasted Wren

Moving gradually down the road, Molly spotted our first Rufous Mot-Mot in an opening in the brush where everyone could see this handsome, colorful bird. A few yards ahead, a Gartered Trogon was perched 15 feet above affording us excellent views in good lighting. Nearby, we found an immature Blue-crowned Manakin, a Long-billed Gnatcatcher, and White-breasted and Black-bellied Wrens. Several Central American Agoutis foraged through the same area. One ate a white flower blossom while looking at us, its pink ears erect.



Central American Agouti

Eventually, we tore ourselves away from this non-stop bird and wildlife show to head back up hill to the Canopy Tower and lunch. After eating another excellent meal, we said fond farewells to the staff and boarded the bus for our trip to El Valle. While driving through town and country for several hours, our group alertly spotted a Great Black Hawk and a Roadside Hawk.

We turned off the busy Pan American highway onto a two-lane country road that wound its way into the pine-forested hills of El Valle. Situated in a former crater of a volcano, this small city is surrounded on all sides by steep forested mountains.



Once inside the lodge grounds, we crossed a clear, mountain stream and entered an area with bird feeders filled with Gray-headed Chachalacas, Thick-billed Euphonia, Flame-rumped Tanagers, and Clay-colored Thrush. Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds moved



Sunbittern

behind the feeder. Then Woody saw a large bird moving down the stream – a Sunbittern. We watched in awe as two of these seldom-seen birds walked through the stream and occasionally hopped up on rocks.

We checked into our attractive quarters, and then walked through the grounds with Carlos. Lori and Molly found a stunning Bay-headed Tanager; Stef, a Tennessee Warbler. A Rufous-tailed Hummingbird perched patiently while we watched and photographed it. A Yellow-billed Cacique flew overhead. A cool breeze accompanied by the constant sound of the rushing stream made this new lodge feel very welcoming. We compiled our daily list in the open air “living room” and then had another excellent dinner topped off by homemade banana cake. This place looks to be another sensational base for our continuing natural history adventures.



Day 6 – El Valle Lodge grounds, La Mesa Road, Canopy Adventure Trail, Cara Iguana Road

This morning we awoke to sounds the rushing river, Gray-headed Chachalaca chatter and several species of wrens with resonant songs. Our punster, Stef, referred to these songs as “wrenditions.” A Rufous Motmot perched in the tree tops near our room provided a burst of color in the morning. The feeder area was occupied with chachalacas, Broad-billed Euphonia, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Collared Aracari (6), and a Red-crowned Ant Tanager.



Collared Aracari



Yellow-faced Grassquit

As we prepared for our morning outing, the birds just kept coming. Andy found a Spot-crowned Barbet. Molly noticed a Masked Tityra; and Stef, a Buff-throated Saltator. Finally, we boarded the van and headed uphill. We passed through a semi-agricultural area with a tiny village with and equally tiny grocery/general store. We wondered how it stayed in business. Beside a small, colorfully painted chapel, we started birding. Carlos found a Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-faced Grassquit and heard a Black-headed Saltator, which Stef alertly spotted.

Lori noticed a different kind of warbler from all of the others – a Black-and-white Warbler foraging in a bush near us. Sue spotted a Mourning Warbler, and Andy, a Tawny-capped Euphonia. A Stripe-throated Hermit fed on nectar in flowers nearby. Molly found a Plain Antvireo working shrubs in the area. Ours was a group of excellent spotters!



Silver-throated Tanager - photo by Ron Wachter

As we strolled further along the tree lined road, there was a conspicuous large clump high in the trees that turned out to be several Three-toed Sloth cuddled together in a mass. Andy called us over to see a group of Silver-

throated Tanagers moving from one side of the road to another, their silver throats in sharp contrast to their yellow heads.

A Bat Falcon soared overhead, as did a Roadside Hawk, both causing a temporary hush and stillness among the other birds that could be prey.

When the smaller birds became active once again, Carlos heard, found and patiently pointed out a Spot-crowned Antvireo, Scaly-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Paltry Tyrannulet and a Plain Antvireo. These reclusive and subtly-colored birds were the icing on an already satisfying “cake” of birding in this beautiful new area.

Following an early afternoon siesta during the heat of the day, we set out in the late afternoon to continue birding and exploring the local environs. While crossing the stream near the lodge, Bill spotted a Louisiana Waterthrush steadily bobbing its tail. A Basilisk Lizard loafed on a large boulder in the stream.

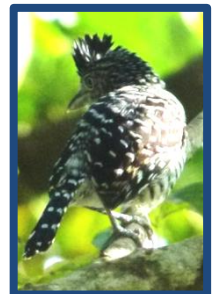
A short distance up the lodge road we came to the Canopy Adventure Trail center. Here they offer hiking and zip lines in a scenic gorge complete with the impressive “El Macho” waterfall. Our mission here was to try for a pair of Mottled Owls seen earlier in the day. We hiked in a short, scenic stretch and then Carlos asked us to be quiet while he searched for the owls. Soon he returned with the excellent news that they were still present. We all enjoyed scope views of the two owls as they warily looked back at us with their placid dark eyes. In the same area where the owls were perched, Woody noticed a hummingbird perched on a low branch – a female Crowned Woodnymph – a fine look at this new trip species.

Continuing up the road from the Canopy Trail Center, we paused near landscaped grounds with a wall of floral shrubs. Here a Lesser Elaenia and Yellow-crowned Euphonia flitted through a tree festooned with Bryophytes. Eventually with patience and expert scoping by Carlos, everyone had a chance to see these small, attractive birds.



Lineated Woodpecker -
photo by Ron Wachter

Heading further up the road, Lori spotted our first Whooping Motmot perched on a low branch in all of its colorful glory. As we hiked along the road it climbed higher into a wooded landscape. A Barred Antshrike called repeatedly and perched conspicuously to guard its territory on both sides of the road. A Lineated Woodpecker climbed up a diagonal tree in beautiful late afternoon light. Two pairs of Red-crowned Woodpeckers were visible above in higher branches.



Barred Antshrike

Then Carlos tried hard to call out a Tody Motmot. Although we never saw or heard it, we did hear the wavering call of the Little Tinamou. When Carlos returned to pick up the van, we all walked a bit further, with Barbara leading the way. As she crested a small hill, she saw an amazing wildlife sight: a Jaguarundi, its long tail a prominent field mark as it disappeared into the brush beside the road. This remarkable sighting capped another fantastic day.

Day 7 – El Chiru/ Rice Fields/Santa Clara Beach/El Valle

In order to arrive at the optimal time for bird activity in the El Chiru and Rice Field area, we departed before daybreak. As we were driving up the pass over the lip of the dormant volcano crater where El Valle is situated, a Common Pauraque flushed from the side of the road and was temporarily illuminated by our headlights for our first sighting of the day and our first nightjar of the trip.

When we arrived in the open agricultural fields near El Chiru, Andy spotted a Fork-tailed Flycatcher and an Aplomado Falcon. Soon afterward, Woody found a Golden-fronted Greenlet and an Eastern

Meadowlark. Yellow-crowned Parrots flew overhead and a White-tailed Kite perched in tree tops over the open fields. During our drive to the next stop, we saw several Wood Storks, a Plain-breasted Ground Dove (which is not plain – it has a gorgeous rosy breast), and a Crested Caracara perched on a fence post.

At the next stop we encountered several Groove-billed Ani, a Straight-billed Woodcreeper and a Plain Wren. Then in an area of heavy brush and trees, Woody spotted a Lance-tailed Manakin with its red cap flashing. It flew across the road like an over-sized bumble bee with a fluorescent skull cap. In addition to this exciting bird, we found a Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant that Carlos miraculously got in the scope; a Northern Scrub Flycatcher, and our first Yellow-headed Vulture and Streaked Saltator of the trip.

This was lively and productive birding to be sure, but more was to come soon. We drove several miles further on country roads to a large expanse of rice fields. Carlos spotted the flocks of Glossy Ibis that were flying through the fields, interspersed with White Ibis. A large but lean Coyote sat up high on a dirt covered perch and contemplated its domain above the otherwise wet rice fields. A Gray Kingbird made an appearance, as did both Ruddy-breasted and Blue-black Seedeaters.

Feeling satisfied with this stop, we headed for lunch and the Pacific Beach at Farallon. Once we arrived in a lovely private beach access location at a nice home with a large deck overhanging the beach, we settled in for birding, beach-going and lunch.

Flocks of Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Neotropical Cormorant and Laughing Gull flew overhead as we gazed over the Pacific at a sandy beach with Farallon Island nearby. A Willet probed for food near the tide line as Royal and Sandwich terns flew low to the water, occasionally diving for a sea food meal.



After a pleasant lunch on the deck we set up spotting scopes to search for birds on the island. Much to our delight, Carlos identified Brown Boobies perched offshore near the island. Then when Andy, Bill and Woody went swimming, they noticed that a booby was swimming near them, just 50 yards offshore from the beach. When they told Carlos about this, he informed them that it was a Blue-footed Booby!

We departed in the mid-afternoon to return to our cool forest respite in El Valle. On the way there we stopped at the top of the mountain pass to gaze at views of the Pacific Ocean and El Valle. We could see the former volcanic crater well from this vantage point, including the remnant cinder cone in the middle. Back at the lodge, a Louisiana Waterthrush wandered along the stream as a Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and Rufous-capped Warbler took turns bathing in a shallow pool. A Dusky-faced Tanager came to the feeder along with a Chestnut-headed Oropendola. Bird activity rarely ceases in Panama.



Starry Night Cracker - photo by
Ron Wachter

Our intrepid crew was up for a late afternoon outing as usual, so Carlos took us on foot along the road leading to the lodge. This was rewarding in short order. A Starry Night Cracker Butterfly dazzled several in our group. Violet-headed Hummingbird and Crowned Woodnymph Hummingbirds fed in Purple Verbena and perched at times in the late afternoon light. Bay-headed Tanagers fed on berries nearby.

Then Carlos began calling the bird we tried to find yesterday but only heard: The Tody Motmot. This time our target bird responded in close proximity to Carlos' recorded call. We gathered around the area, and then saw two Tody Motmots perched side by side in an opening framed by vegetation. Carlos managed to get a scope on them. One flew, but the other lingered so that most of our group had an excellent view of this furtive species. This was the grand finale of another fine day.

Day 8: Las Minas Road and vicinity; Frog museum and El Valle market

The day began with partly cloudy, cool conditions that were refreshing after the tropical heat we felt yesterday. As so often happens at the Canopy lodges, our first sighting was just steps away from the place where we ate breakfast. An Orange-billed Sparrow came to a small opening with its bright orange bill illuminated by the sun. Just as Carlos was about to start the van, an American Redstart sang from a bush beside the car port. We were on our way with two new species already seen.

We drove up a steep, narrow road to walk along Las Minas Road – an unpaved two-lane road with no vehicle traffic. Ambling uphill on this peaceful road surrounded by lush vegetation, we came upon our second new sparrow of the day: a Black-striped Sparrow. Then Sue spotted a Blue-throated Toucanet, one of several that either flew or perched in tree tops nearby. A pair of Hepatic Tanagers provided good scope views for the entire party. They were especially vivid with their dusty rose tones against the overcast skies.

On the way back down Las Minas Road, Carlos mimicked manakin sounds by making muffled hand claps. Sure enough, several responded and one Golden-collared Manakin popped out in clear view. Its golden collar emitted a luminescent glow. These small birds, with their brilliant colors, unique sounds and behavior, are very high on charisma.

As we were departing, we encountered a mixed flock with Bay-headed Tanagers, Thick-billed Euphonias and a new trip warbler that Denise found: a Blackburnian Warbler. This Neotropical migrant was familiar to Denise as a breeding bird in her suburban Chicago back yard.

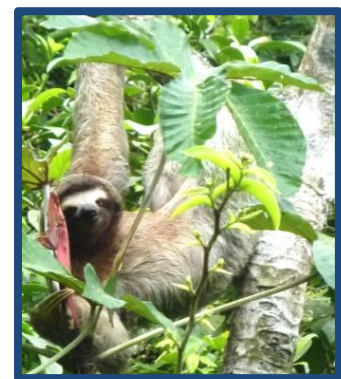
We moved to another location along a nearby gravel road with taller trees on either side. A Keel-billed Toucan flew to the top of a nearby tree and proceeded to vocalize and display its gaudy colors in an effort to establish territory and perhaps attract a mate.



Orange-bellied Trogon

Then Carlos set about trying to call in a target bird for the day: Orange-bellied Trogon. Soon he had one responding regularly to his imitation calls. We all searched diligently for the source of this sound. After about five minutes of looking, Woody found a female perched about 75 feet high in the canopy. Everyone enjoyed the scope views of this beautiful bird. This, however, was not our final nor was it our best look at this species. As we hiked into the forest listening to various antbirds, thrushes and wrens, Molly spotted another female Orange-bellied Trogon – this time only 25 yards away and 12 feet high in a branch. While we watched and photographed it a male flew in and perched nearby. After lingering for a few moments, he suddenly took flight to catch a caterpillar, which he ate right in front of us.

In the same area, Carlos found some other first-time finds, including a Green Hermit, Rufous-and-white Wren, and several Chestnut-capped Brush Finches. As we were nearing the van to return to the lodge, Andy spotted a pair of our first White-lined Tanagers. The female of this species with her rufous coloring looks like another species in contrast to the jet-black male with its one thin white line on his wing. Woody spotted a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth eating leaves. It reminded us that not all species live at a fast pace.



Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth



Golden Frog

Following lunch and a send-off ceremony for our fabulous local guide, Carlos, the other lodge guides took us into El Valle to visit the frog exhibit and to shop at the market. We saw an Endangered Golden Frog in an exhibit aquarium along with other Central American Frogs. Although some, like the Golden Frogs are endangered, at least Panama has 30% of its land devoted to conservation, and groups like Canopy Lodge promoting sustainable tourism.

Just two days prior to this trip, Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela declared the Bay of Panama wetlands complex as a protected wildlife refuge area. This is encouraging news for birds and other species in Panama.

Our group enjoyed a shopping excursion in the colorful outdoor market in the center of El Valle. We helped support the local economy and its local artisan vendors by purchasing such items as t-shirts, tapestries, head bands, coffee and hand-made (in front of us) jewelry.



Upon returning to the lodge, some opted to take a hike to a waterfall while others relaxed on their streamside porches where birds and mammals are ever-present. This place could become addictive. Our four days here passed quickly.



Raul and Denise Arias - photo by Bill Drucker

On our last evening we were pleasantly surprised to have Canopy Lodge founder Raul Arias and his wife, Denise, visit us. They joined us for dinner and later showed us film footage of all three lodges taken from the air. It was fascinating to hear the story of how Canopy Tower and the other two lodges were created. What a fitting way to conclude our journey and to encourage a return visit!

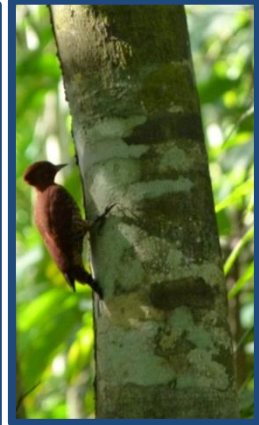
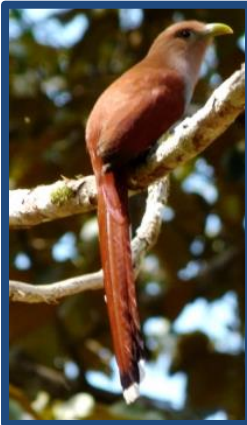
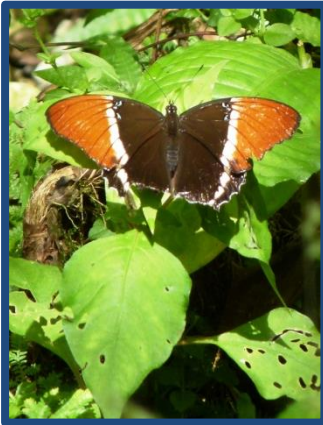
Day 9: Return to Panama City and Departures

Appropriately, a Little Tinamou serenaded us on our final morning at the lodge. Our group reluctantly departed for their hotels and/or flights home from this lovely location. The official definition of the word Panama is “abundance of fish, trees and butterflies.” Based upon our experience in this magnificent country, we might suggest adding birds to this list. Panama showcases absolutely stunning natural and human history. We were indeed privileged to experience both.



Panama City Skyline

This Trip report and all undesignated photos submitted by Woody Wheeler



Photos (L to R): Rusty-tipped Page Butterfly, Squirrel Cuckoo, Blue-gray Tanager & Red-tailed Squirrel, Cinnamon Woodpecker