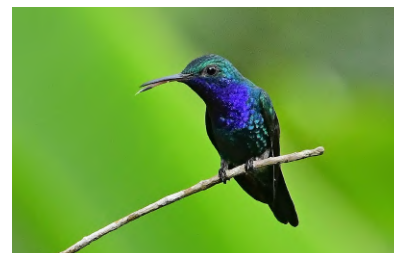
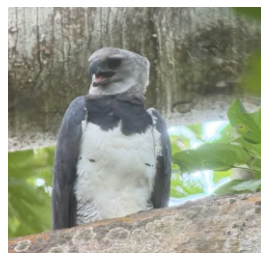
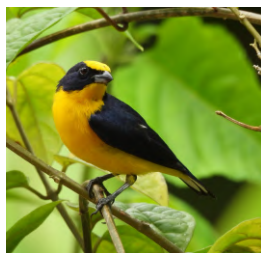


# Panama: 3 Great Lodges | July 6 – 17, 2025

## Trip Report | by Rick Weiman



**Local Guides: Eliecer Rodriguez (Canopy Camp & Lodge) and Jorge Pineda (Canopy Tower), and Naturalist Journeys host Rick Weiman, with participants: Richard, Sharon, David, Diane, Paul, Sheila, and Daphne**



### Sat., July 6 Arrivals in Panama City

The group all arrived at different times today and made their way to the Riande Hotel close to Panama City's Tocumen International Airport, with Rick and Richard arriving the prior day. Most of the group met for some welcome drinks and introductions, followed by our inaugural dinner in the Riande's restaurant, except for



Daphne who had a later flight. We were joined by our local Canopy Camp guide Eliecer (Eli) Rodriguez which was a nice surprise. We got to know each other a little bit and went over the plans for the tour and the following morning. Then it was off to bed early so we'd be ready for the start of our exciting tour the next day.

### **Sun., July 7 Lake Bayano | Tortí | Canopy Camp**

After breakfast at the Riande Hotel we loaded up the gear into the van and headed east to the wilds of the Darién Province. This trip was long enough to allow for stops on the way. On the highway by Tanara we had a Gray-lined Hawk on a wire as well as our first of many Black Vultures and Western Cattle Egrets. We passed some land with rows of teak trees, an important wood crop, and were told they take about 30 years of growth before harvest time. A gas station break yielded us 13 species including Yellow-headed Caracara, Yellow-crowned and Thick-billed Euphonias, and a Sapphire-throated Hummingbird. As we drove, we spotted some birds in a rice field so we made a quick stop and added six immature Little Blue Herons, 20+ Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Smooth-billed Anis, and two Great Egrets.

We then passed through an arch indicating we were entering the Madugandi indigenous village inhabited by the Guna tribe. We visited an area by the Lake Bayano Bridge, where we parked and met the Guna landowner who knew Eli well and welcomed us. Bayano Lake is man-made, built in the 1960's for hydroelectric power. We spotted a pair of Bat Falcons on the bridge before walking down a trail to get closer to the lake's edge. A close Cooi and Striated Heron were both stalking fish and frogs near the shoreline and in the lake was an Anhinga and several Neotropic Cormorants, as a Wood Stork flew overhead. The forest by the edge of the lake was active and gave us good looks at a male Barred Antshrike, two Common Tody-Flycatchers, Southern Beardless and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulets, and four tanager species: Palm, Blue-gray, Plain-colored, and the colorful Crimson-backed. Before leaving we added a Streaked Saltator, and on a small island of grasses near the lake's edge, a Pied Water-Tyrant, and a Green Kingfisher. A wonderful start to our trip with 40 species at this stop.

Continuing our way along the Panamerican Highway, we stopped for lunch at the Portal Avicar Restaurant in the town of Tortí. In addition to the delicious food, the restaurant had several hummingbird feeders we could easily view from our outdoor table. We counted several Black-throated Mangos, White-necked Jacobin, and Rufous-tailed and a Snowy-bellied hummingbird, plus a bonus Yellow-crowned Euphonia. After lunch we made a quick stop at a bakery for some guava pastries and pineapple jam filled empanadas, and passed a field with a hovering White-tailed Kite over it.





We arrived at Canopy Camp in mid-afternoon, with plenty of time to get a short briefing on the Camp from Eliecer, move into our safari-style tents, and then relax a bit and watch the feeders set up around the dining and general meeting area. We saw quite a few hummingbird species at the feeders and garden flowers, including White-vented Plumeleteer, Pale-bellied Hermit, Long-billed Starthroat, and Sapphire-throated, Rufous-tailed, Violet-bellied, and Blue-chested Hummingbird. Many turned out to be regulars every day during our stay there. Around 3:30 we took a short walk on the local road to see a very special bird the guides had found, a resting Great Potoo. These large nightjars angle their bodies on a dead tree-branch, perfectly camouflaged during the day as an extension of the branch. Some other bird highlights included Collared Aracari, Black-cheeked, Red-crowned and Cinnamon Woodpeckers, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, and Cinnamon Becard. We also had both toucans, Yellow-throated and Keel-billed, in a leafless tree in front of the dining area. After the walk we had a bit of free time before meeting up at 6:00 for appetizers, cocktails, formal introductions, and our first species checklist, followed by a delicious buffet dinner. We then retired to our tents to the soothing sounds of many chirring insects and peeping tree frogs, and a calling Black-and-white Owl.

## **Mon., July 8 Canopy Camp | Pan American Highway Birding**

We started the day with a filling breakfast at the Camp and more birding around the feeders and gardens. Our plan was to spend the morning on the grounds of the Camp, walking and birding the main road surrounded by forest on either side. In just a few hours of casual birding we had too many bird species (70!) to list here but a few of the new ones for the tour were a pair of soaring King Vultures, several Greater Anis, Swallow-tailed, Double-toothed, and Plumbeous Kites mixed in with the kettling Black and King Vultures, and Black-tailed, White-tailed, and Gartered Trogons. We had really close looks at a Whooping Motmot and a Rufous-tailed Jacamar, and our photographers Paul, Sharon, and Rich couldn't have asked for a more cooperative male White-flanked Antwren or a perched Streaked Flycatcher.

A short walk past the tents to a vulture blind on the property was next. Here the Camp has set up an area where they lure vultures in with a pig's head or two from a Panama City butcher. Our hope was a King Vulture would show up as they often do and as we got there an immature bird flushed but did not return. We did enjoy watching the many Black Vultures tussle with each other over the enticing (to them) remains of Porky.

A short break was followed by a fresh garden salad accompanying a hot buffet lunch. We then got in the van and road-side birded parts of the Pan American Highway with stops at Vijao, the Yaviza Forest, and Santa Librada. There was a freshwater wetland at Vijao and we had wonderful looks at a pair of Black-capped Donacobius,



Fork-tailed Flycatchers, Smooth-billed Anis, and perched Blue-headed Parrots. As we continued along the highway we drove past a perched Laughing Falcon that we slowed down to admire.

At the Yaviza Forest stop we added three species of Oropendolas - Crested, Chestnut-headed and Black, and two of the large woodpeckers, the Crimson-crested and Lineated. A short distance later we stopped to put the scope on a perched Bat Falcon and were visited by a flock of Black-chested Jays and several Yellow-headed Caracaras. Our final attempt at finding new species was at the wetlands of Santa Librada, and new birds we did get like Limpkin, Wattled Jacana, Black-crowned Tityra, Lesser Kiskadee, and five fly-by Blue-and-yellow Macaws. Sharon spotted two small birds perched together that some of us thought were doves that turned out to be a pair of adorable Pearl Kites. Our first full day of birding in the Darien region did not disappoint. We returned to the lodge for our checklist and dinner. After dinner we all tried on rubber boots as we had an exciting early day planned for tomorrow where they would be needed.

## **Tues., July 9 Canopy Camp | Harpy Eagle Adventure | Night Walk**

This morning our group met early for breakfast as we had much anticipated plans to visit a newly discovered Harpy Eagle nest. While we ate in the darkness still surrounding the Camp, the Black-and-white Owl called a few times as did the Great Potoo. Eli was able to find the owl for us, perched in a nearby tree. After loading our gear into the van we drove to the end of the Pan American Highway at the town of Yaviza on the banks of the Chucunaque River. At the river were many wooden boats loaded with bananas, and our boat and captain were also there waiting for us. We had about a 20-minute journey on the Chucunaque before it met up with a tributary river called the Tuira, which we then followed for another 15 minutes or so. Of course we saw birds while on the two rivers, tallying 27 species that included our first Wood Stork, some Little Blue Herons, a Ringed Kingfisher, and Crane, Roadside, and Common Black Hawks. Several American Crocodiles and a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys were also spotted as we traversed down the river.

Our adventure was only beginning as we then piled into three 4x4 vehicles driven by locals who led us through small towns like El Real and some dirt roads to a farm in the village of Birre Numero Uno. Here we met Alberto and his wife who had discovered the new nest on their property by observing the pair of eagles flying back and forth carrying sticks to a large tree. We were told we were the first lucky group to ever visit the nest. We donned our rubber boots and filled our water bottles and embarked on a 1 km hike through muddy fields and recently hacked jungle paths, crossing several small streams. Along the way we passed a tree with five Black-tailed Trogons in it enjoying each other's company. In the distance we had views of the Serranía de Pirre mountain range and Mount Pirre which at 5,400 feet is the highest point in the Darien region.



It was hot and humid and we were all a bit sweaty when we arrived at the nest site, but our anticipation and excitement for what might lie ahead made that seem like a minor inconvenience. The nest was there, a huge structure of sticks about 80 feet up in the tree, but no birds were in sight. As we learned the birds were still in the process of nest building so no egg had been laid yet. Eli thought he saw movement on the far side of the nest tree so we moved to a different vantage point and there it was, a magnificent adult Harpy Eagle perched on a branch directly above us. We quietly set up our two scopes and took turns admiring, photographing, and digiscoping the majestic bird. It stayed there for the entire hour we watched it, even calling several times for its mate, who sadly did not show up while we were there.

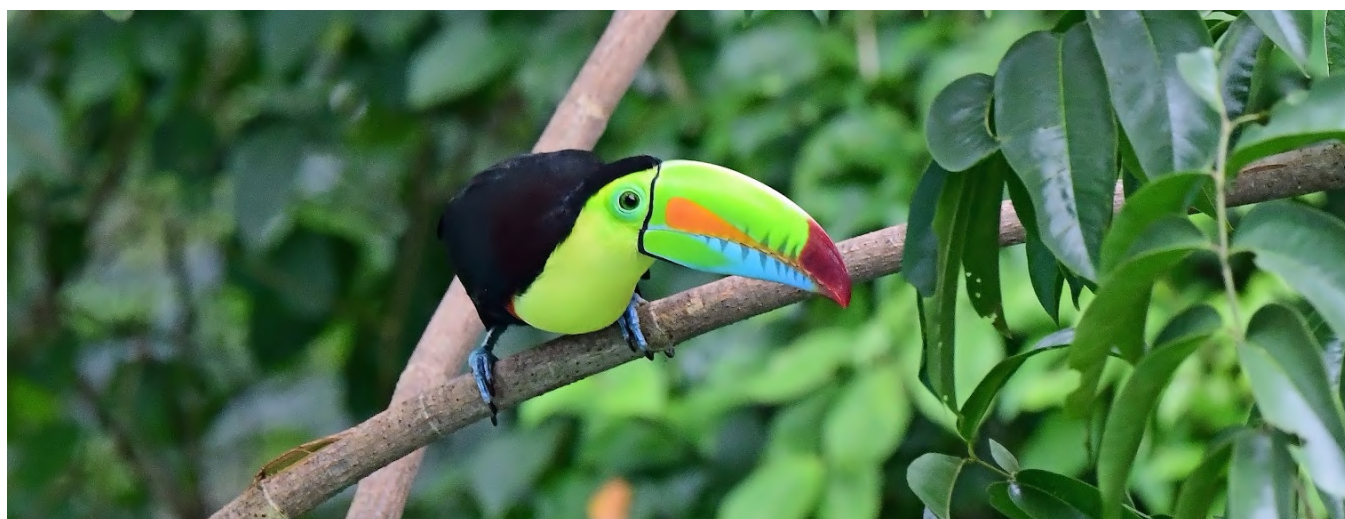
As we were packing up to hike back several birds were singing around us that included a Checker-throated Stipplethroat, a Southern Bentbill, and a Spotted Antbird. The Antbird was the most cooperative as he showed up and perched above our heads, continuing to sing close enough for cell phone photos and videos. Eli and Alberto found a few herps on the way back, including a Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog, a Leaf Litter Toad, and a Brown Anole. We completed the return hike to the farmhouse, almost losing a boot or two along the way, and then enjoyed a picnic lunch under their shady gazebo. Here we met Luna, the owner's cute beagle-mix puppy, and a gentle older dog who shall remain nameless. During lunch several of us saw a large black bird fly up into a distant tree and after getting the scope on it determined it was a not often seen Red-throated Caracara. We later heard several of them calling from the forest. We also added a Red-breasted Meadowlark, White-shouldered Tanager, Black-bellied Wren, and our only Yellow-headed Vulture of the tour during lunch.

After lunch was finished, we said our goodbyes and retraced our adventurous steps back to the Canopy Camp, arriving in the late afternoon. We took the rest of the afternoon off which was a good plan as a well-timed heavy rain started to fall an hour or so before checklist time. After dinner a few of still had the energy for a night walk on the grounds of the Camp with Eli. We found both a Mottled Owl and another (or the same) Black-and-white-Owl, and several new species of frogs, a Yellow-headed Gecko, and some interesting insects.

### **Wed., July 10 Canopy Camp | El Salto Road | Quebrada Félix**

We spent the morning before and after breakfast birding the garden and feeder area. Besides many of the same hummingbirds, Bananaquits, and Thick-billed Euphonias, we had really nice looks at a male Orange-crowned Oriole, an Ochre-ored Flatbill, Forest Elaenia, Bright-rumped Attila, and a Red-rumped Woodpecker. As we were loading up into the van several Swallow-tailed Kites flew overhead. We drove to the quiet El Salto Road where





we did our usual road-side birding where we'd walk a few hundred yards and bird and then hop into the van to move to a more productive spot when things got slow.

Some highlights of our morning were a visit by a troop of Geoffroy's Tamarins, in addition to more Mantled Howler Monkeys, including a mom with her baby in tow. Over 40 species of birds were seen too, including Purple-throated Fruitcrows, White-necked Puffbird, Gray-headed Chachalacas, the beautiful Blue Ground Dove, and several stunning male Blue Cotingas and Blue Dacnis. It was a good tanager morning as well as five species were observed starting with Gray-headed, Blue-gray, Palm, Plain-colored, and Golden-hooded. Daphne missed the Golden-hooded, which was a lifer for her, but our story isn't over yet. On the way back to the Camp we stopped along the highway to photograph a Barred Puffbird perched on a wire. We added some Brown-hooded Parrots, a Boat-billed and Streaked Flycatcher, and a Variable Seedeater as well. Arriving back at the Camp, we had time to freshen up before lunch and then enjoyed an early afternoon rest period.

Later in the afternoon, we drove to another Dairen hotspot called Quebrada Félix. More roadside birding ensued with various stops along more open terrain giving us 49 species of birds in just over 2 hours. Some highlights were a pair of Squirrel Cuckoos and a perched and singing Striped Cuckoo, 3 different Puffbirds, a Spot-breasted Woodpecker, and an Aplomado Falcon that we watched fly from a fence post near us to a distant tree. Seeing several Spectacled Parrotlets nuzzling each other in a tree put smiles on our faces as did the flycatching antics of a Long-tailed Tyrant. We also added a new macaw species to the list as four Chestnut-fronted Macaws loudly called as they flew by. We returned to the Camp to clean up, then gathered for our nightly checklist, cold beers, appetizers, and another filling buffet style dinner. Since it was our last night at the Camp, we settled our bills for expenses incurred during the stay, then we turned in for final packing and a good night's rest.

## **Thur., July 11 Canopy Camp | Reserva San Francisco | Canopy Tower | Night Excursion**

Sadly, this was our final morning at Canopy Camp. Most of us got up early to spend time in the garden and watching the feeders. Before breakfast we had seen almost all the same six or seven species of hummingbirds, including a White-necked Jacobin. Our favorite leafless tree gave us a toucan trifecta as we had Keel-billed, Yellow-throated, and Collared Aracari (technically a miniature toucan) all in the same tree. We also added a new bird for the Camp, a Plain-brown Woodcreeper, before enjoying our breakfast as the staff kindly collected our luggage. There was a bit of excitement before we left however as one of the staff failed to notice that a fairly large Panama Blonde Tarantula had climbed onto his back. We gently removed it (after taking a photo of course)



to the laughter of the women working in the kitchen as they watched things unfold. We then loaded into our van for a log day of driving that would end at our next Canopy Family lodge, the Canopy Tower.

We did bird along the way and our first stop as we drove back towards Panama City was the San Francisco Reserve outside the town of Tortí. This private reserve in eastern Panama is owned by the Franciscan order and protects one of the few remaining lowland forest patches of eastern Panama. It connects with the forests of the Maje range. Of the 55 species spotted or heard here in under 2 hours, several new ones were Gray-lined Hawk, Slaty-tailed and Northern Black-throated Trogons, Black and Great Antshrikes, Double-banded Graytail, and Chestnut-backed Antbird. Near a pond on the property, we watched a pair of Common Tody-Flycatchers building a basket-like nest and had good looks at both Isthmian and Bay Wrens.

After finishing up here, we returned to Tortí for our second lunch of the tour at the Portal Avicar Restaurant. Once again we dined outdoors and enjoyed the food while watching the hummingbird traffic at the feeders. We did add one new hummer to our list when a Scaly-breasted Hummingbird joined the festivities. Before we departed, Diane found a large pale colored tree frog on the side of a building near the restaurant. A little research told us it was a Rosenberg's Gladiator Tree Frog, one of Panama's largest amphibians at 70-90 mm in length. It gets its name "gladiator" from the sharp spikes on its hands and combative behavior against other males during reproduction.

After lunch that included a pear and watercress salad followed by fresh tilapia, we traveled non-stop past Panama City to arrive at around 4:00 PM at the famous Canopy Tower. It was built by the US Air Force as a radar tower in 1965 and purchased and refurbished into an eco-lodge by the Canopy Family in the late 1990's. It resides in the center of Soberania National Park. After arrival, we unloaded the luggage and went to our assigned rooms on various levels of the tower, then met our Tower guide Jorge Pineda who gave us an introduction to tower life over fresh juice and banana cake. We had time for a little birding before dinner so we went down to the hummingbird feeder stations for a bit and added two new birds, a Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermit. Our old friends the Snowy-bellied and several other now familiar hummers were there as well.





We then ascended up to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor where the library and dining area were located and climbed the stairs to the roof of the tower. The name Canopy Tower comes from the fact that the tower sits on a hill and you are literally above the tree canopy level, with a 360° birds-eye view. To the distant east we could see the tall modern buildings of Panama City and closer to us were views of large ships navigating the Panama Canal. We added a few birds to the day list such as Short-tailed Swifts, Blue Dacnis, and Mealy and Red-lored Amazons. The group then gathered for our daily checklist, and another wonderful dinner with tamarind chicken breast and a sweet chayote squash casserole (it was so yummy we asked for the recipe). Deserts are also a part of every meal, and tonight's was a delicious apple cake served ala mode with vanilla ice cream. As we ate, a Kinkajou and an Allen's Olingo came to the banana feeding station, so we all rushed over and had nice looks.

It wasn't bedtime yet however as we had a night drive on Semaphore Hill Road in one of the bird-mobiles scheduled. Jorge quickly spotted a Common Opossum followed by its smaller cousin a Woolly Opossum. Further down the road was another exciting find as a Rothschild's Porcupine was crossing a branch over the road above our heads. It stopped to peer down at us and Sharon captured a nice photo of it. Near the turn around point we found not one, but two Hoffman's Two-toed Sloths in the same tree and then a bit later a Nine-banded Armadillo scurrying near the road. We heard a Choco Screech Owl calling but could not get him to come close enough for a look. After this exciting evening we headed to bed wondering what surprises tomorrow would bring.

### **Fri., July 12 Canopy Tower | Pipeline Road | Ammo Dump Ponds**

Most of us started the day as the sun rose by climbing onto the roof of the Tower to admire one of the most famous canopy views in the Americas. There was a fresh coffee station already set up for us on the roof which was much appreciated. We heard the calls of a Great Tinamou and added Band-rumped Swifts, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, and Scarlet-rumped Caciques to our list before descending down for breakfast. We then gathered our gear and climbed into the van for a morning of birding along Pipeline Road in the old Canal Zone, one of Panama's famous rainforest birding roads, also located in Soberania National Park. The road is approximately 17 km long and connects with Colon. It was built by the US during the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war in case the Panama Canal was attacked so they had a way to transfer oil through a network of pipes, thus the name. Over 400 bird species have been recorded here.

We spent the entire morning exploring here, mostly in the general vicinity of the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center which we would visit later in the tour. One of the first birds observed was the secretive and tiny Streak-





chedsted Antpitta, well camouflaged on the dark forest floor. It perched on a low branch and called several times as we all were able to get excellent views of it. We added White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-cheeked, Cinnamon, and Crimson-Crested Woodpeckers, a pair of serenading Song Wrens, and a Black-striped Woodcreeper as we slowly walked the road. Other really good birds Jorge helped us locate were Black-crowned Antshrike, Bicolored Antbird, and our fifth Puffbird species of the tour, a cooperative Black-breasted Puffbird who was perched directly over the road and did not seem to mind when we walked right under it. Sharon spotted a Whooping Motmot then Diane got us on a second one, the more motmots the merrier I say.

We returned to the tower and met a little later in the dining room for lunch, followed by an afternoon rest. In the mid-afternoon, we headed out for our afternoon outing at the well-known birding location named Ammo Dump Ponds. This site is situated alongside Gatún Lake and the Panama Canal Railway and has a mix of habitats including grassy fields, secondary growth forest, and freshwater wetlands. We watched large ships float by us on the lake and several passing trains loaded with shipping containers filled with the world's commerce. One of the trains flushed up an immature Rufescent Tiger-Heron and Sharon's keen eyes led us to where it had perched to preen. We added many water loving species like Purple Gallinule, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Striated Heron, Anhinga, and even some Magnificent Frigatebirds flying over the lake. A large flock of the by now common Orange-chinned Parakeets (seen on every day of the tour) flew by us as did some Gray-breasted Martins. Along the forest edge we added Red-legged Honeycreeper, Crimson-backed Tanager, Buff-breasted Wren, and Scrub Greenlet. In the grasses popping up and perching every now and then were Blue-black Grassquits and Ruddy-breasted and Variable Seedeaters.

We returned to the Tower and reconvened for the daily checklist, cocktails, and appetizers, followed by another super buffet dinner that included beef tenderloin filets with a mustard sauce, mushroom rice, and baked sweet potato. Then it was off to bed for a well-deserved rest.

## **Sat., July 13 Rainforest Discovery Center | Pipeline Road | Summit Ponds**

Today was an early morning and breakfast as we wanted to climb the tower after sunrise at the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center, which is in a private 35-hectare reserve adjacent to the national park. We had birded near this area the previous day but had not climbed the tower which takes you above the canopy level. On the way up the spiraling tower steps Jorge pointed out several roosting Greater White-lined Bats. Once atop the tower the view was indeed spectacular as were the birds that joined us in the surrounding tree tops. These included several very close Blue Cotingas, seven Keel-billed Toucans all in the same tree, and a fly-by Crane Hawk. A pair of Purple-throated Fruit Crows landed right next to the tower and the male flared and revealed its stunning purple throat feathers for us as our cameras clicked. It was wonderful to be able to look down at some



of the harder to see small birds you are usually craning your neck to look up at. These included Brown-capped and Mistletoe Tyrannulets, a very cute Moustached Antwren, Yellow-winged Flatbill, and Lesser Greenlet. Off in the distance was Calamito Lake and Rick identified two distant Common Gallinules through the scope. Before heading down we added a male White-tailed Trogon, a Green Shrike-Vireo, and some Scaled Pigeons.

We then joined up with Sheila, who was not a big fan of steps, at the hummingbird feeder area where we enjoyed seeing some old friends like Rufous-tailed and Violet-bellied Hummingbirds. The center had small feeder cups you could hold in the palm of your hand, and amazingly a Long-billed Hermit would visit them if you remained still and feed out of your hand. What a thrill for all who participated! Before we left a Bright-rumped Attila flew into a tree in front of us giving great views of its yellow rump.

It was a full and exciting morning already but we had some additional time so we walked the trails by the discovery center and added Dot-winged Antwren, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Fasciated Antshrike, and Checker-throated Stipplethroat. As we walked a Broad-billed Motmot flew across the road with a large cicada in its bill and we soon stumbled upon a perched Rufous Motmot, the largest of the motmots. We finished up the trail walk with out of the world views of a male Velvety Manakin and a female Red-capped Manakin for good measure. Next we drove to the part of Pipeline Road where had stopped the previous day by a stream. We crossed a small footbridge and explored a new area of the road. Jorge had some local intel on the location of a Ruddy Quail-Dove nest and somehow he found it, no map needed. There was an almost full-sized chick in the nest but no adults nearby. We added Double-toothed Kite, another Rufescent Tiger-Heron, along with Northern-Plain Xenops. As we returned to the van area we were met with a gathering of trogons surrounding us that included Slaty-tailed, Black-tailed, and a Northern Black-throated feeding its youngster. With the help of the local ranger, we were able to get pictures and scope views of a Northern Tamandua sleeping high up in a tree before we headed back to the lodge.

After lunch and an afternoon siesta we visited an area known as the Summit Ponds. Near one of the ponds we found both an Amazon and Green Kingfisher, as well as a Green Heron. We walked down an old road for some forest birding and got decent looks at a pair of Squirrel Cuckoos, two Golden-collared Manakins, a Golden-fronted Greenlet, and a pair of Blue-black Grosbeaks. By then the sky was darkening so we headed back to the Tower just in time to avoid a late afternoon shower. We then repeated our evening ritual of filling in our checklist, enjoying cold cocktails with a freshly made appetizer (tonight's was a heart of palm ceviche), followed by another delicious meal with their traditional complementary wine at every dinner, before retiring for the evening.



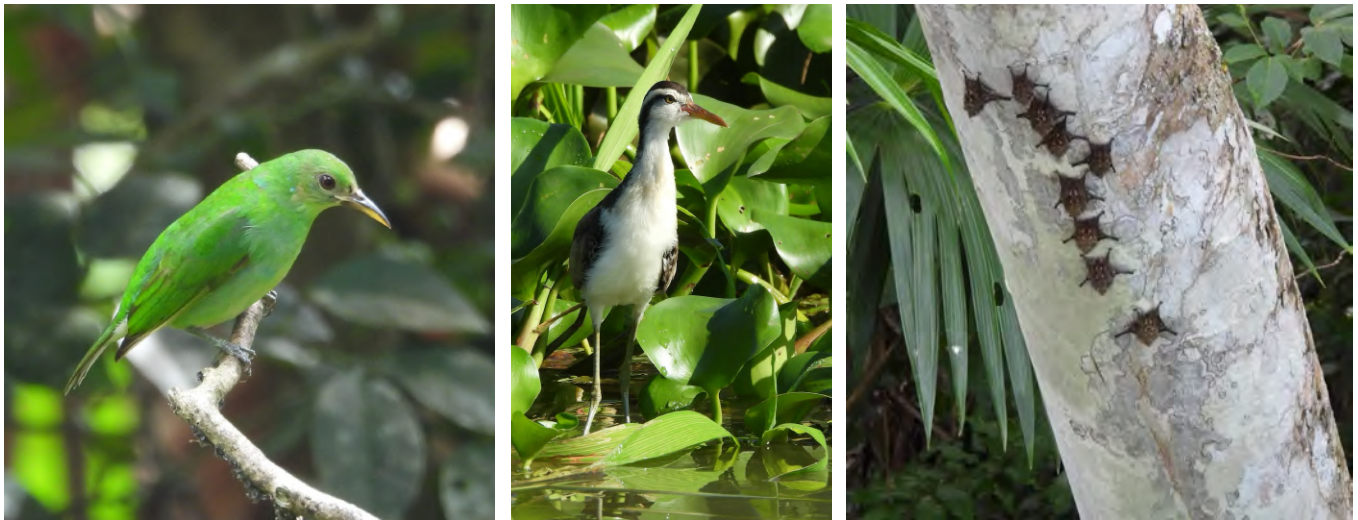


## **Sun., July 14 Canopy Tower | Panama Canal Boat Tour | Gamboa Rainforest**

We rose early to a beautiful sunrise and a clear blue-sky type of day. The misty clouds settling in the treetops below us contrasted beautifully with yellow, pink, and orange colors of the rising sun. Lots of birds decided to join us this morning as a male Slaty-tailed Trogon appeared along with a perched Double-toothed Kite and a Squirrel Cuckoo. In a nearby Cecropia tree a hanging male Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth brown and orange back coloration pattern glowed brightly in the morning sunshine. The Blue Dacnis were there also and the familiar daily calls of the Great Tinamou echoed in the forest below us.

After breakfast we departed for a boat tour on the Chagres River, Gatun Lake and the Panama Canal. If you're interested in the history of the Panama Canal an excellent book is "The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal" by David McCullough. A brief history of the canal dates back to the early 16th century when Vasco Núñez de Balboa first crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1513. The idea of a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans gained traction over the centuries, leading to the French attempt to construct it in the 1880s, which ultimately failed due to engineering challenges and mosquito borne diseases. The United States took over the project in 1904 under President Teddy Roosevelt, successfully completing the canal in 1914, which significantly enhanced maritime trade by providing a shortcut for ships. Today, the Panama Canal remains a vital waterway, owned and administered by Panama, and continues to play a crucial role in global shipping.

As we boarded the boat Dave noticed some Gray-headed Chachalacas and a Squirrel Cuckoo in trees near the dock. As our journey began we learned from Jorge that the Chagres River is approximately 135 km long and flows into both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. We slowly cruised in marshy areas filled with Common Water Hyacinth and partially submerged logs that harbored Wattled Jacanas, many with chicks. Green & Striated Herons, Smooth-billed and Greater Anis, and Purple Gallinules also were seen. As the boat moved into the canal Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, and Green and Ringed Kingfishers were added to our day list. Once in the canal Anhingas, Magnificent Frigatebirds, and Brown Pelicans entered the mix of birds, as did a Great Egret and several American Crocodiles. We took a long ride in the canal at a pretty good rate of speed enjoying the breeze and fresh air. The captain maneuvered the boat into some coves off the canal surrounded by jungle where we watched other boats attract White-faced Capuchin monkeys with bananas. Snail Kites, both immatures and adults, were plentiful, we must've seen close to a dozen with many perched very close to the boat, some feeding on snails. We added Limpkin and Mangrove Swallows to our list and our captain found a tree overhanging the water with ten Proboscis Bats roosting under it. On the return trip on the canal we passed several massive oil tanker and container ships that dwarfed our small boat.



We returned to the lodge after the boat trip for lunch and an afternoon break. Around 3:00 we visited the Canopy B&B in the open-air bird-mobile. The B&B is a small lodge they use for overflow guests, that also had fruit and hummingbird feeders. We watched the feeders and trees for about an hour seeing familiar tanagers like Blue-gray, Palm, and Crimson-backed, plus a Buff-throated Saltator, and both Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers. Several Central American Agoutis visited the feeders as well. From there we took a short drive to the Gamboa Rainforest Reserve. We birded the parking lot there for a bit, adding about 12 species of birds we'd seen before. Unfortunately, we had to cut our birding short here as one of the group felt ill so we got that individual prompt medical attention and went back to lodge. Happy to report everything eventually turned out fine. Dinner that night was interrupted by two new visitors to the bananas, a pair of Panamanian Night Monkeys! These monkeys have large brown eyes to aid in night vision and are arboreal and nocturnal. They stayed long enough for some pictures to be taken and provided an exciting end to our last night at the Tower.

## **Mon., July 15 Canopy Tower | Canopy Lodge**

Our last morning at the tower consisted of our daily visit to the tower roof for sunrise and coffee and to see who was out and about. The birds must've heard we were leaving because they certainly showed up to say good-bye. We had close views of a White-browed Gnatcatcher, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, our daily Blue Dacnis group, a Northern Plain-Xenops, and a Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon. Jorge got excited when a pair of Golden-hooded Tanagers flew in and stayed long enough for Daphne to get her first good looks at them. The Scarlet-rumped Caciques made a reappearance as did some Squirrel Cuckoos and Scaled Pigeons. Before heading down for breakfast we watched a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth lying flat on his back comically scratching himself in all the right places, as Great Tinamous called once again from the forest.

After breakfast we finished packing and had time for a short walk down Semaphore Hill, the main road to the lodge. We didn't see many new birds but did see our caciques, a Slaty-tailed Trogon, and a male Black-faced Antthrush. Jorge knew of a spot where there was an old concrete cistern that tree frogs liked to hang out in. After some searching, he found us a beautiful Sylvia's Tree Frog. This striking looking frog has bright orange flash coloration underparts and is green above. The highlight of the walk however was when Rick saw some movement on the forest floor that turned out to be a pair of Great Tinamous silently trying to sneak past us. We had heard them calling all week so it was a treat to finally see them. We returned to the Tower and assembled our bags and took a group picture in front of the beautiful jungle scene mural painted by one of the staff on the bottom floor of the lodge. We then said our goodbyes to Jorge and thanked him for his excellent guiding, and also to Tatiana, the lodge manager, who took such good care of us with her hard-working crew.





A driver came to pick us up and take us to our next and final stop the Canopy Lodge. The journey was around 3-hours by way of the Centennial Bridge over the Panama Canal, along the coast near Coronado, and up into the mountains near Anton Valley (El Valle de Anton). As we passed through the lovely town of El Valle, surrounded by mountains and waterfalls, our driver pointed out a part of the mountain the locals call the sleeping Indian, and yes it looked the part. The elevation at the lodge was much higher than the Camp and Tower, at approximately 2500 feet, meaning it was also significantly cooler and less humid. Arriving at the lodge, we were welcomed by the staff and our familiar friend and guide for the rest of the tour, Eliécer "Eli" Rodríguez. Our bags were moved to our beautiful spacious rooms and we then enjoyed our welcome lunch in the open-air dining area.

The Lodge has a fruit feeder and hummingbird feeders near the dining area so we spent some time in the chairs there enjoying the show. Almost immediately we had a new hummingbird for the tour, a diminutive Violet-headed Hummingbird that favored the purple vervain flowers right in front of our seats. Crimson-backed and Dusky-faced Tanagers visited the banana feeder station as did Black-chested Jays, a Rufous Motmot, Buff-throated and Streaked Saltators, and an Orange-billed Sparrow. We were somewhat surprised when a Gray-cowled Wood Rail showed up, apparently also a fan of bananas. We then took a walk on the Lodge grounds and along the nearby paved road. With Eli's excellent skills and some enjoyable cooler weather, we admired our new surroundings and saw some new birds as well. Highlights included Golden-hooded and Bay-headed Tanagers, Chestnut-capped and Buff-rumped Warblers, Rusty-margined and Social Flycatchers, a Green Kingfisher, and a Common Basilisk lizard basking by the stream. During our walk we came across a family group of four Nine-banded Armadillos foraging in the underbrush. We returned to the Lodge for a short break, then met for our daily checklist, dinner, and discussion of plans for the following day.

## **Tues., July 16 Canopy Lodge | Adventure Park | Fundación EVACC | El Valle Market | Cara Iguana | El Valle Brewing Co. | Dave's Birthday | Night Walk**

I'm tired just looking at all those places we visited today! As you can see we had a full day planned, and some of it not so planned, more on that later. We started the morning with coffee, or diet cokes for some, at the feeder station. Many of the same birds made an appearance with the exception of a Panama Flycatcher, new for the tour. After breakfast we took a short drive to the Canopy Adventure Park, where it all started for Raul and the Canopy Family. At the park is a zip line track, a natural swimming pool, hiking trails, and several waterfalls. Inside the park we crossed several foot bridges over a stream and made our way towards the natural pool. Eli spotted



a Spot-crowned Barbet and then a Bay-Wren and two Buff-rumped Warblers. Two new birds came into view, a small flock of Tawny-crested Tanagers and then a new Euphonia, coincidentally a Tawny-capped male and female. A nice surprise was a stalking Sunbittern we found by the pool and we watched it for a while as it slowly made its way towards the stream. We hiked over to the impressive Chorro Macho waterfall for a group picture. Eli told us that tapirs used to frequent the area and they had the local name “macho” because of their size and that’s how the waterfall was named.

Our next stop was a short tour of the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center (EVACC) Foundation headquarters on the grounds of the Hotel Campestre, just outside of the town. We received a fascinating tour of the small facilities from a docent, who introduced us to the work of the Foundation in captively propagating endangered and threatened species of frogs in Panama, with a focus on the extremely rare Panamanian Golden Toad (or frog as it is also known), now assumed extinct in the wild. The toad is well known in Panama and they even celebrate it with a national holiday in August where locals dress up as the frog in yellow clothes with black spots. After finishing our frog tour, we did some roadside birding in an area known as Mata Ahogada in El Valle de Anton. We had good looks at a male Barred Antshrike, a fly-by Garden Emerald hummingbird, and multiple wrens including Bay, Rufous-and-white, Black-bellied, Isthmian, and Rufous-breasted. Almost forgot, a Southern House Wren as well. We then headed back to the lodge for lunch and a short afternoon break.

After lunch we briefly visited the El Valle market place for local crafts for ourselves and the folks back home. The grocery store across the street had reasonably priced local coffee so Rick grabbed a few bags as his souvenirs. Our next stop was at Cara Iguana, a rural area at the edge of town and very near the volcano of the same name. This area was very easy to bird from its wide and quiet roads and in a little over an hour we had 30 species tallied. Some highlights were Lesson’s Motmot, Masked Tityra, Piratic, Social and Panama Flycatchers, Rufous-and-white Wren, and a male Lance-tailed Manakin that Rich captured a great photograph of. We also added a new mammal species as we spotted a Variegated Squirrel climbing up a tree.

Earlier in the day we had passed a strange looking building built into a grassy hummock that looked like something out of Lord of the Rings. Upon further inspection it turned out to be the El Valle Brewing Company’s tap room. We had discussed visiting it before dinner for our happy hour and I’m proud say the yes votes were unanimous. So we spent about an hour there sampling their freshly brewed beers in their outdoor picnic area. We had some birds too while we sipped, including Southern Lapwings, Tropical Mockingbirds, and Blue-and-white Swallows. Then it was back to the lodge for appetizers, our checklist, and another wonderful meal. It was





Dave's birthday so the lodge staff surprised him with a birthday cake which we all helped him finish. A few of us went on a night walk after dinner and found some Glass Frogs on leaves by the foot bridge. These frogs have translucent skin to help them mimic leaves but it allows you to see their internal organs. So very cool. Dave spotted his second large Savage's Thin-toed Frog (or Smoky Jungle Frog as they are known locally) and later the group found a Red-webbed Gladiator Tree Frog. We heard a Tropical Screech Owl calling but had no luck observing it.

### **Wed., July 17 Canopy Lodge | La Mesa & Las Minas Road**

Our trip was nearing its conclusion as this was our last full day in Panama. So our morning was somewhat bittersweet knowing this but somehow we persevered and started our day at the feeder stations with coffee and diet cokes. We had 16 species before breakfast including a half-dozen Gray-headed Chachalacas and a Chestnut-headed and Crested Oropendola. After breakfast a small contingent of us went birding to a higher elevation spot called La Mesa Road while Sharon and Rich decided to spend the morning relaxing by the feeder station with their cameras. La Mesa Road offered us a visually pleasing blend of secondary forest, scrubby pastures, overgrown fincas and grassy borders. Eli took us to a tree where a nice surprise waited for us, a family of three Tropical Screech Owls stared down at us from their day-time roost. We continued birding the road and found over 20 species of birds already on our list for the tour but enjoyed good looks at another Rufous-and-white Wren, a Roadside Hawk, and some Blue-headed Parrots. We did add several new birds including a Black-headed Saltator, a pair of Black-striped Sparrows, and two Flame-rumped Tanagers (the Lemon-rumped race). Before we departed we watched a colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas fly back and forth to their hanging basket nest colony in a distant tree.

We then continued our way up the mountain to our final stop of the morning where the plan was to walk and bird a gravel road that eventually led to the town of Las Minas. It was pretty birdy so we spent over 2.5 hours here enjoying the activity and 44 species of birds. A few new ones were a male Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer we watched feed on heliconia flowers, a male and female Crowned Woodnymph, a Northern Emerald-Toucanet, a soaring Short-tailed Hawk, and a very close pair of Collared Trogons. More new birds filtered in as we walked with several White-ruffed Manakins eluding us until we finally got a peek at one of the males through the leaves. Only Rick and Eli saw the Chestnut-capped Brushfinch despite our best efforts, but this guy is skulker and likes to make life difficult for birders. Towards the end of our walk Eli played a mixed flock recording to see what would be attracted to it, and suddenly we had our own mixed flock in a large tree in front of us. Some of the birds that showed up were Dusky-faced and Tawny-crested Tanagers, a stunning Emerald Tanager, a Silver-throated Tanager, and a Russet Antshrike (with the last three all new birds). Happy with our efforts and flush with new birds we returned to the van and back to the Lodge for lunch and a short rest.

We collectively decided we just wanted to chill on the Lodge grounds the rest of the afternoon as we had packing to do but Eli talked us into taking a short drive where one of the other lodge guides had found a roosting Spectacled Owl. We searched in the area it was seen but were unsuccessful; nothing ventured nothing gained as they say. Back at the lodge we enjoyed the birds at the feeders once again and took solo walks on the property. Dave had an unexpected surprise when he heard a commotion in the trees by the Lodge's waterfall and was lucky enough to witness a Tayra (a large member of the weasel family) chasing a flock of Gray-headed Chachalacas through the branches. Rick and Sharon noticed a pair of amorous Delicate Ameivas near the feeders and asked their permission for photographs (they did not seem to mind the attention).

Before we knew it it was checklist and appetizer time. Rick asked everyone to speak about their favorite memories and birds of the tour and here is the summary of that discussion. Overwhelmingly our favorite bird was the magnificent Harpy Eagle seen at the beginning of the tour but still very strong in our memories. Rich broke the mold and picked the photogenic Pied Water-Tyrant seen at Bayano Lake. The Harpy Eagle adventure day also made the list of favorite memories as the journey to get here was quite thrilling, and our Panama Canal boat tour and the Tower night drive were also mentioned. After our checklist was done the Lodge manager presented all of us with a certificate for membership in the TLC (Tower, Lodge, Camp) Club, signed by Raúl Arias de Para himself. A nice touch to end the tour with. We enjoyed our final dinner together and retired to our rooms to finish packing while a Tropical Screech Owl called outside Sharon's room.

## **Thur., July 18 Departures**

We enjoyed our last breakfast at the Lodge, then did final organizing of our gear, everyone seemingly a bit reluctant to leave. We said our goodbyes to the lodge staff and thanked them for their hospitality and also Eli for guiding us so expertly at the Camp and the Lodge. Our driver Eduard was back with the van again and off we went on the 3-hour drive to Panama City, with everyone but Rick (who had a red-eye flight) being dropped off at Tocumen Airport for their flights home. We came to Panama as strangers and left as friends, hopefully with more adventures together in the future.

*Photos: Group (Rick Weiman - RW), Sapphire-Throated Hummingbird (Sharon Lynn - SL), Thick-billed Euphonia (RW), Northern Tamandua (Richard Frank - RF), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (RW), Black-tailed Trogon (RW), Black-capped Donacobius (RW), Ochre-Lored Flatbill (SL), Harpy Eagle (RW), Violet-Bellied Hummingbird (SL), Geoffrey's Tamarin (SL), Keel-Billed Toucan (SL), Rothschild's Porcupine (SL), Blue Dacnis (Richard Frank - RF), Velvety Manakin (RW), Snowy-bellied Hummingbird (RF), Green Shrike-Vireo (RW), Group (RW), Geoffrey's Tamarins (RW), Green Heron (RF), Smooth-billed Ani (RF), Snail Kite (RF), White-Faced Capuchin Monkey (SL), Proboscis Bats (RW), Wattled Jacana (immature) (RW), Green Honeycreeper (female) (RW), Geoffrey's Tamarin (RW), Rufous Motmot (RF), Tawny-capped Euphonia (RF), Crested Oropendola (RF), Lesson's Motmot (RW), Tatayo's Glass Frog (RW), Delicate Ameiva (RW)*