

# Western Panama: Tranquilo Bay | Oct. 18-25, 2025 Mt. Totumas Extension | Oct. 25-29, 2025 | Trip Report by James Petersen



Compiled by guide James Petersen with local guide Roger and Reinaldo. Our clients included Maggie, Dave, Roger, Cecilia, Noel, Jason, Carol, Christine and Daniel.



## October 17: Tranquilo Bay

After everyone met up in the hotel lobby, we left for a quick flight over to Bocas del Toro. There, we were picked up by representatives of Tranquilo Bay and driven to the docks for our short boat ride over to the lodge. The birding started while waiting for the boats as Black Vultures soared overhead, mixed in with more numerous Magnificent Frigatebirds. As we got under way, two Yellow-headed Caracaras flew past us, perching on the nearby houses overlooking the town. Though our boat ride was short, we still enjoyed some wildlife with numerous Frigatebirds overhead and a Royal Tern booking past us. Upon our approach to Tranquilo Bay, we



observed several Bottlenose Dolphins swimming leisurely. They surfaced periodically for air and displayed their back flippers before diving beneath the water once again.

Upon docking at Tranquilo Bay, we were soon outside the main area, with numerous feeders full of bird activity. The nearby banana feeders were overrun with wintering Tennessee and Prothonotary Warblers, some coming within feet of the porch. In the bright sunlight, the Prothonotary Warblers dazzled everyone. We soon quickly added a whole bunch of tropical species, from the small-yellow bellied Bananaquits that would chatter from the nearby trees to the dazzling dark blue Shinning Honeycreeper with bright yellow legs. There were also some nearby hummingbird feeders, which were taken up by large Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, alternating taking drinks and chasing each other away. Once the bird life settled down, we had our introduction to the lodge, shown our rooms and were back at the deck for some birding before lunch.

The hour of birding before lunch consisted of walking down to the dock we had arrived from. This area was full of Red Mangroves, their areole root systems forming perfect places for animals to hide. Once in the mangroves, we picked up few Northern Waterthrushes flitting about the mangrove's roots. In addition, in the canopy we had a few Crowned Woodnymphs flying about as well as a bright yellow Mangrove Yellow Warbler, its red head gleaming in the otherwise dark forest canopy. We slowly made our way out to the dock, scanning the sky for any raptors. With some scanning, Roger, our local guide, was able to pick out a distant Peregrine Falcon eating something. After admiring the calm, expansive bay, we started to head back until a raptor was spotted soaring nearby. The raptor turned out to be a Hook-billed Kite, its paddle-shaped wings giving it away. We watched it for a few minutes as the bird got higher and higher before turning back the way we came. Further up the trail, Roger pointed out 4 Lesser Lined Bats that were sleeping on the side of a building. A few of us stopped to admire the bats, before spotting something else entirely. In one of the eaves of the roof, a snake was curled up. One could see its tail and head; it turned out to be a small Central American Boa. After admiring the Boa, we slowly continued back up the path, not making it very far before Roger heard the call of a Black-crowned Antshrike. He was able to locate the bird high in the canopy and got us all on it. As we were admiring the bird, he also spotted a small, rounded ball higher up in the canopy, a Hoffmann's two-toed Sloth. After admiring the sloth, it was lunch time, so we headed back up to the main part of the lodge. The feeders were buzzing but right before lunch, a small Blue Dacnis came into the feeders, giving great views.

After a fantastic lunch, it was siesta time until 3:30. Everyone parted ways, with some exploring the grounds, finding a Giant Parrot Snake, Chestnut-backed Antbird and Stripe-tailed Barbthroat.

Starting in the gardens at 3:30, we slowly birded the area. We spent a lot of time near the Vervain flowers to start, where we had a male and female Crowned Woodnymph putting on a show, the male in stunning bright green and purple plumage. In addition to the Woodnymph, we had a pair of hybrid Manakins hanging out. Here



at Tranquilo Bay we are in the hybrid zone between White-collared and Golden-collared Manakins. We had both male and female of this yellowish hybrid playing hide and seek in the thick bush. Eventually, it did come out a few times before quickly returning to the interior of the bush. As we walked closer to the Vervain, a few Blue-headed Parrots flew overhead, quickly followed by a few Montezuma Oropendolas. While this was happening, a Green Honeycreeper was spotted in a distant Cecropia Tree. We all got distant scope views of the Honeycreeper until it flew off, and suddenly appeared right in front of us, giving all fantastic views of the bird. Once it flew off, we continued down the path. Further down, Roger heard the single screaming note of a distant Roadside hawk. As we were tracking it down, we admired the highways of Leafcutter Ants as they brought plant leaves to their burrows.

Roger than told us he had a surprise for us, consisting of great looks at 3, Three-toed Sloths. Once done looking at the Sloths, the Roadside Hawk was spotted perched in the distance, giving solid scope views of the bird. From here, we meandered through the forest, seeing Large Grasshoppers, frog's eggs by a large pool and a whole area of the forests cleared by Leaf Cutter Ants. From here, we came across a small area that had both a Stripe-throated Hermit and a nearby Bronzy Hermit, both hummingbirds giving great looks. In addition to the hermits, we observed 2 different Orb Weaver Spiders in their massive webs.

By now, it was getting to 5pm, so we headed up to the large tower to get fantastic views of the surrounding area. It did not disappoint, as we had several Red-lored Amazon's fly past the tower. Meanwhile, as we climbed up, the frog like call of a Masked Tityra was heard and later seen. Looking below, a White-vented Euphonia was spotted, while both Lesser Swallow-tailed and White-chinned Swifts zoomed overhead. By now, it was getting to checklist and appetizer/dinner time, so we headed back down and over to where it was served. After going through the checklist (47 species today) and a fantastic dinner, we were interrupted with our last sighting of the day. We were treated to the sight of two Panamian Night Monkeys chowing down on the left-over bananas outside. Afterwards, desert was served and all headed back to their cabins, ready for whatever wildlife tomorrow might bring.

## **October 18: Punta Robalo Road- Bosque Protector Palo Seco – Continental Divide Road**

After an early morning breakfast, we all headed down to the docks to head to the mainland for a full day of birding. Upon starting out on the water, we had 2 brown Whimbrels fly past us. Over the course of the next 40 minutes, we came across a handful of Royal Terns, Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Once closer to shore, we had a Belted Kingfisher perched on a nearby house, while a handful of Royal Terns were observed perched on some old pilings. Mixed in the orange billed Royals were 3-4 dark billed birds with yellow tips. These were the smaller Sandwich Terns. Once docked, we birded the surrounding area while the days supplies



were offloaded onto the waiting van. Here we had 2-3 reddish Ruddy Ground Doves on the street, while a couple of small Variable Seedeaters foraged in the surrounding grass. The seedeaters we observed were entirely black (males) with a few brownish females mixed in, meaning they were the “Black race” of Variable Seedeater. With some more scouring, we turned up a perched purple Martin, a diminutive Social Flycatcher and a lone Great-crested Flycatcher.

Our next stop was to bird the lowland, swampy areas by the Punta Robalo Road. As we parked and got out, 2 Green Ibis flew overhead. This species was commonly heard throughout our stop here with their wailing call a common sound. As we slowly worked the marshy areas on either side of the road, a rattle was heard. After some patience, we were rewarded with looks at 2 Olive-crowned Yellowthroats as they bounced between two nearby bunches of dense shrubs. The male giving brief looks at his dark mask.

While keeping track of the Yellowthroats, a medium sized rail was spotted at the back edge of the marsh. With some scanning, a few of us was able to observe Gray-cowled Woodrails running between gaps in the tall dense grass. Everyone got to hear them as well, as they cackled their load, laughing call. We continued down the road, but not too far, as 2 Green Ibis were spotted perched next to each other. We all had great scope looks at these calling dark green birds.

Continuing onwards, we came to a bushier area where a tanager with a golden yellow hood was spotted, a Golden-hooded Tanager. This bird eventually gave fantastic views as it perched out in the open for all to gawk at. In the same area, we also had the bouncing call of a Long-billed Gnatwren and the rolling call of a Black-throated Wren, both birding staying true to their skulky nature and remaining unseen. From here, we worked our way down the road and stopped at the next opening when a small bird with a large bill was spotted perched in a distant tree. Scope views gave us a black and yellow breasted bird with a large beak, a Collared Aracari. We watched as it perched for us, only for us to be distracted by several Keel-billed Toucans that came flying across the road, perching in a tree close to the Aracari. We took turns watching as the toucans jumped around in the tree, chasing each other.

Closer to us, we had a small group of kiskadee like Social Flycatchers flying about. Within the Social flycatchers, 2 Gray-headed Flycatchers were spotted, perching in a shrub and on the telephone, giving good looks.

We then entered the bus to continue onwards but we didn't get far because at the next wet area 2 Southern Lapwings were spotted. As we all piled out of the bus to get looks at these Gray and white birds, they walked out of sight. As we scanned through the numerous Cattle, Snowy and Great Egrets, we spotted a Purple Gallinule. At the same time, a low groaning call was heard, and we quickly walked away from the bus to a stand of trees surrounding the marsh. In the stand was the source of the call, 2 Boat-billed Herons! As we watched the Herons, a few of the group walked further down the road, finding 2 Speckled Caimen! By this time, it was getting later in the morning and hence it was time to move on to our next birding stop.



Our next stop was the Guard building by a nearby park. While lunch was set up, we wandered by the road, slowly picking up more species. On the edge of the dense forest, we quickly had a Common Tody-Flycatcher and 2 stunning all black Scarlet Rumped Tanagers. Roger then got us to lead us to behind the guard building to look at a stunning, Orange-billed Sparrow. Behind the guard building was overrun with birds, starting what turned into two bright, Orange-billed Sparrows, which included one young bird, its dark colored bill giving it away.

Next up was a Purple-crowned Fairy that was perched above us. While looking at this gorgeous, white bellied hummingbird, a dark breasted Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer flew in. As we switched over to watching the Plumeleteer, a second Purple Crowned Fairy flew in, and fed what turned out to be its young. This seemed to be when all the birds came all at the same time. After the Fairy we had Bay Wren start to sing, while a Morning Warbler started to forage in front of us. We barely had time to get on the Mourning Warbler before a similar warbler with a bright lemon yellowish rump flew right in front of us, then disappearing. A Buff-rumped Warbler. With some work, we got the warbler to come out in the open, giving all great looks. This trend continued, with a Long-billed Hermit being spotted working nearby flowers. As we ventured closer for a better look, a Bay Wren was spotted down slope, eventually giving all good looks at this skulky, black headed handsome wren. By now lunch was set up and we enjoyed a fantastic picnic lunch prepared by Tranquilo Bay. After lunch and while packing up, an extremely high King Vulture was spotted, making all run to the road to catch looks at this stunning vulture. Once everything was packed up, we had to our last 2 stops of the day.

As we headed up to the Continental Divide Road, we watched as the lowland forest gave way to the highlands and eventually a cloud forest of higher elevations. Once at the start of the road, we got out and slowly walked the road, looking and listening for more birds. It wasn't long before a small hummingbird with a bright white rump was spotted, a female Green Thorntail! This hummingbird stayed perched for all to get fantastic scope and binocular views before it continued with its day. We slowly continued up the road, with Roger finding a small Variable squirrel, that gave all good looks. Further up we came to a patch of Heliconia flowers that Roger said looked like good area for hermits. A few minutes later both a Green and Stripe-throated Hermit was spotted near the flowers as a nearby Slate Throated Redstart sang. Unfortunately, the birds had other plans, giving us brief looks a few times as they randomly appeared and disappeared in the thick tangle of the cloud forest. We walked a little further up, coming across both Eastern and Western Wood pewees before getting back in the van and driving further up in elevation. Our last stop on the road was a spot where we could see the ocean, and near some bright red flowers that Roger mentioned Snowcaps loved. A few moments later, a small brown hummingbird flew in and we got brief looks at a Snowcap. Eventually, a nearby Snowcap was spotted perched, giving all fantastic looks at this reddish-brown hummingbird with a pristine white cap! We ended up seeing 3 of this special hummingbird, 2 chasing each other while a 3<sup>rd</sup> one was observed perched nearby. By now, it was getting late in the day and seemed like the rain was getting closer so it was decided we would head back down. On our way down, we had one more stop, by a fruit stand. As White-collared Swifts cruised over the forest, a small flock of warblers was observed, including both Blackburnian and a Chestnut-sided Warbler. This flock also produced good looks at a Tropical Parula, its orange breast necklace a nice give away upon its



otherwise yellow breast. With rain coming quicker, we headed back to the bus and the drive back down from the mountains. It was an uneventful trip back to the lodge, with discussions over what was everyone's favorite species of the day which seemed to change with the mention of one that was forgotten among the sea of birds we observed today.

Back at the lodge a delicious dinner of shrimp and pasta was served with a fantastic desert of Chocolate coconut Pecan Pie being served. Delicious. Afterwards everyone slowly wandered off to bed. The last people to leave were lucky enough to see a couple Racoons in the distant tree.

## **October 19: Popa Island – Tranquilo Bay**

We met at the lodge for a delicious breakfast before heading down to the dock for our morning departure to Popa Island. We were a little delayed getting down to the dock because right as we were about to leave, the White-faced Capuchin Monkeys came to the deck to take bananas for their breakfast. We all watched as these athletic monkeys leap from the surrounding vegetation to the deck railing to grab a banana before sitting in the nearby vegetation to peel and eat said banana. A few of them were brave enough to eat it on the deck, those ones were able to eat one, while grabbing 1 to 2 other bananas before heading back to the vegetation. By the time the monkeys were done, we departed down to the dock and off to Popa Island.

While out on the water, we observed several Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Royal Terns. As we watched the Red Mangroves that surround the Island come into view, a Green Kingfisher flew out from the nearby Red Mangroves and then back into them. We continued floating towards the island with both Red-lore Amazon and Blue-headed Parrots flying overhead. This was when Robert found a medium sized all white bird perched at the top of the trees a long way away—a Snowy Cotinga. We all rushed to the front of the boat and got distant views of this special all white bird perched. The bird decided to than fly across the water, as all tracked the bird before it disappeared on the other side of the treeline. From here, we continued to motor and eventually docked and disembarked for some birding on Popa Island.

As we disembarked, a White-lined Tanager was spotted but quickly flew away. As we gathered everybody to try and relocate the tanager, a larger hummingbird came in and perched in front of us—a Band-tailed Barbthroat, a relative of the Hermits. The hummingbird was so cooperative that we were able to get scope views of this perched hummingbird. From here, we continued up the trail, stopping when the guides found one of the Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs. This species is particularly widespread, but each population has a slightly different color scheme. This one was brownish red with blue leggings. We spent time observing and carefully getting pictures of the frogs. When it seemed like it was going to rain, we headed up to a hill overlooking the rest of the coast.

The hill was very productive birding wise with included fantastic views of the surrounding area. As we walked up, a small falcon flew overhead, a Bat Falcon. We later had excellent scope views of this bird perched on a



distant tree. At the lookout, we saw three toucan species—Keel-billed, Yellow-throated, and Collared Aracaris—up close. In one of the trees overlooking the water, we had a small flock move through, giving us good looks at an Olive-backed Euphonia, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper as well as a Mangrove Warbler. During all this, a White-throated Crake sounded his static like call from the distance. By now, it was time to head back to the lodge, and we slowly worked our way down boarded our boat. Before heading back, we slowly did a loop of the island, where we were able to get amazing looks at a Bright-rumped Attila perched in the Red Mangroves as well as a Baltimore Oriole.

Once back at the lodge, everyone had an hour before lunch. Some went back to their rooms, while a few of us went over to the tower, spending some time on top. With more fantastic views of the area, we enjoyed our time up there, watching the three Roadside hawks chase each other in circles. After some time up there, we ended up birding the grounds, getting amazing looks at a small group of Tawny-crested Tanagers; their bright orange crests contrasting with an all-black bird.

After a delicious lunch and siesta, it was a free afternoon for all. Some chose to relax, while others choose to go snorkeling and or go Canoeing on the bay. Those who did that saw several cool animals including seeing Sting Rays.

Those who did not go out in the water, joined together for some afternoon birding on the grounds. All though it was quite we had a fantastic time exploring the edge of the forest, seeing untold numbers of Bay-breasted Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes and Alder Flycatchers. Towards the end of birding, we heard a rough chortle call and tracked it down to a clump of undergrowth. While scanning the undergrowth, we had a small dark antshrike come out with a bold white flank—a White-flanked Antshrike. As the bird quickly moved on, we continued to track our mystery call till it finally showed itself. A small, thrush like bird with a chestnut back, black belly and a blue eye ring—a Chestnut-backed Antbird!

From here, we slowly ambled back to the gardens, where we sat and observed a Stripe-throated Hermit working the Vervain flowers. While sitting, a loud pecking noise was heard, and we slowly tracked it down to in the canopy of a large tree. A large woodpecker was perched, pecking away at the wood—a Linneated Woodpecker. We slowly ran into other of our group that had come back from their time in the water and heard about their afternoon. Jason was able to locate some White-browed Gnatcatchers. By this time, dinner was calling so we headed back to the main lodge for a delicious dinner. During desert, we again had a nocturnal visit from some Panama Night Monkeys. After dinner, we all went back to bed after a long day. Christine decided to go out looking for night frogs and was rewarded with fantastic looks at 2 Red-eyed Tree frogs, as well as a Speckled Caimen.



## October 20: Snyder Canal – Changuinola River

We started the day with an early breakfast and then down to the dock to head north to the Saco Canal and Changuinola river area. The ride over to the mouth of the canal was uneventful, with sporadic bird activity made up of Magnificent Frigatebirds, Royal Terns and a few Sandwich Terns. As we neared the entry of the canal, a large bird turned right in front of us, showing an all-brown body with a white belly—a Brown Booby! As we watched this one fly off, we unexpectedly saw another one a way away, its white belly giving it away. As we entered the Changuinola Canal, it was explained that this canal was dug back in the 1800's when Panama was a state or part of Columbia. At the start of the canal, there were 10+ swallows flying around, all greenish with white rumps—Mangrove Swallows. While the swallows were being observed groups of both Red-lored Amazons and Blue-headed Parrots were flying overhead, presumably coming from their morning roost sites. In between the small groups of parrots, were a few Montezuma Oropendolas and a larger flock of Olive-throated Parakeets.

From here, we entered the canal, slowly working our way down this 7-mile stretch. At our first stop, a Long-billed Gnatwren called from deep in the dense forest, and on the other side of the canal, the zapping chatter of a nearby White-throated Crake was heard, both staying well hidden. At this spot we also had two different species of Honeycreepers, both Shinning and Red-legged working the midstory of a nearby tree. As we continued further into the canal, one of the guides spotted a large brownish bird on the right side of the canal. This bird was brownish with a yellow bill and long tail with black spots underneath, a Squirrel Cuckoo. The cuckoo did the least cuckoo thing it could do and came out into the open for us all to admire. It was hard to leave the cuckoo, but more birds awaited us, so we continued down the canal. A few moments later, a dark brown lump was spotted high up on a tree. This turned out to be a roosting Short-tailed Nightjar, giving all great looks as it snoozed from a night of catching bugs. Further into the canal we crept, with quick looks at Prothonotary and Tennessee Warblers as they darted in front of us, trying to stay hidden in the thick vegetation. The many Green Herons and Little Blue Herons did the same. As we made our way to the next stop, multiple Amazon Kingfishers were spotted, just staying ahead of the boat. The next time we stopped the boat; a small kingfisher was heard on the left side of the canal. With some maneuvering, we found the small, orange bellied American Pygmy Kingfisher. As with the Squirrel Cuckoo, this Kingfisher decided to fly out and perch in the open for us. Everyone was delighted with this small colorful gem of the rainforest and waited till he flew off before continuing onwards.

At our next stop, a large Brown Basilisk was spotted laying on a low tree branch. At the same time, a hummingbird was noticed feeding on some nearby palm flowers. This turned out to be a blue-chested Hummingbird. Everyone took turns switching between the Basilisk and the hummingbird before continuing on. Further down, someone spotted another brownish cuckoo high up in the canopy—this one had a dark half yellow and half black bill—a Mangrove Cuckoo. It took a while of watching it move around in the distance before it surprisingly flew and perched right out in the open for all to see. We all watched this extremely shy cuckoo perch for us until it had enough and retreated to its forest lair.



As we continued to drift down the canal, the habitat changed from the flooded forest we had been drifting through to more of a grassy marsh. With this change came a whole new set of birds starting with the first of many Northern Jacana's. These dark birds with yellow primaries seemed to be everywhere we looked. We had one instance where one flew away as it was very close to a Speckled Caiman. The nearby Purple Gallinule saw the Caiman as well, and both flew away, protesting the location of the caiman. As we continued down the canal, we had our national geographic moment, as we came across a perched Common Black Hawk with a freshly caught eel like creature. We watched as this raptor consumed some of its meal, before leaving it to finish the rest of the eel in peace.

By now, we had gotten to an opening, the other side of the canal, that connects to the river. As we slowly motored out into the river, we scanned the other side, seeing handfuls of both Black-necked Stilts and Blue-winged Teals on the far shore. As we got closer, we noticed there was a small flock of Least Sandpiper's mixed in. The small flock took off, whirling over the water before coming back to near where they took off from. During the Least Sandpiper flight, a Black-bellied Plover booked past us, heading towards the ocean. As we continued cruising down the other side of the river, we slowly picked up many of the wading birds of the area; from Great Egrets to Little Blue and Tricolored Herons to Western Cattle Egrets, they were all there. Further down, a larger heron with grayish cheeks and a finely barred breast was spotted offset from the shore. A Bare-throated Tiger Heron! We watched as the hulking heron stood motionless before flying back into the trees and out of sight. Nearby where the Tiger Heron was, we had 2 Southern Lapwings as well as a whole group of Northern Jacanas, which included a younger bird. By now, it was getting near lunch time, so we motored across the river to the lunch spot. Before we got to the lunch spot, we came across a reed bed where both a small heron and large heron were spotted. The small one was a Least Bittern, and we never saw it again. The larger heron ran to the back of the reeds and lifted its head up to view us. This gave all good looks at the yellow dagger like bill, and brown barred head of a Pinnated Bittern. It was like a staring contest one could never win, as the bittern just started at us while we admired it from the boat. Eventually, we moved on heading down to our lunch spot by the shore.

After a fantastic picnic lunch provided by Tranquilo Bay, we motored down river to the ocean. As we did, we had great looks at several Snail Kites as well as a Yellow-headed Caracara. Past the Caracara, we had a Crested Caracara fly across the river and shortly later, an Anhinga lifted off as well, its white topside and quick, snappy flaps giving it away.

A short while later, we reached the beach and were on the sand looking at several wintering and resident sandpipers. Among the woody debris, a small flock of Semipalmated Plovers fed, in their wintering plumage. Closer to the water line, we had a mixed flock of the smaller "peeps" that included Semipalmated Sandpipers. A Western Sandpiper was soon picked out of the flock, its longer droopy bill giving it away. While we were



scanning, Roger was able to find a Collared Plover higher up on the beach, and we all had great looks at plover with a narrow black breast band and brightly patterned head. As we switched back to the peep flock, a larger yellow legged sandpiper had joined them. This new bird had a very demarcated breast band, making it an unusual Pectoral Sandpiper. Further down the beach, one Sanderling raced up and down with the waves. On the way back to the boat, the front part of the group found a Dickcissel, that quickly flew off. By now, it was time to head back through the canal to the lodge.

It was a bit quicker going back, but we had one stop closer to the entry point to the canal. The guides were great at finding hidden animals, as halfway through we stopped for a Snake, getting great views of it wrapped around a palm frond before it slithered off into the forest. As we were watching for anything in the flooded forest, a green blur jumped off a palm frond and disappeared. Luckily, we were able to spot it and get fantastic views of a bright Green Basilisk.

Once we loaded back on to the original boats, we motored our way back to the lodge. On the way back, we had one side stop, where we scanned some sunken piers for terns and gulls. Here, we found a juvenile Laughing Gull, mixed in with a large group of Royal Terns. We also found 2 banded Royal Terns, bands 857 and 00C- which appear to be from a breeding colony off the coast of Virginia!

By the time we got back, dinner was shortly after. After a delicious dinner and a desert of Gingerbread roll, we all headed back to bed after a fantastic day.

## **October 21: Buena Esperanza Road – Tranquilo Bay Forest (Bird bathing station)**

After an early breakfast, we packed up and headed down to the boats for our typical ride to the mainland for a morning of birding on the Buena Esperanza road. As we got out of the van, the morning chorus was singing, with Gray-cowled Woodrail, Social Flycatcher and Mealy Amazons being heard from the nearby forest. As we slowly worked the road, Roger, was an expert in identifying the calling birds and getting us all on them. Near the bus, we had a small flock of birds that included a distant Panama Flycatcher, that called its high-pitched bouncing ball call. While this happened, we had a medium sized Cocoa Woodcreeper working its way up the nearby trees.

As we walked further down the road, we had flocks of mixed parrots fly overhead. These flocks consisted of Blue-headed Parrots as well as Red-lore and Mealy Amazons. Mixed in were smaller numbers of Brown-throated Parrots as well. Further down the road, a Green Ibis flew out from the dense vegetation. Further up, Roger spotted a small black and white bird perched high up in a dead snag. When looked in the scope, this bird was identified as a Pied Puffbird. A little further up the road, a few woodcreepers were spotted, creeping up the nearby trees. With some patience, we got on them and identified them as 2 Cocoa Woodcreepers. A little further up the road, a small dark bird with a long tail was spotted. We observed this Long-tailed Tyrant clearly through the scope. On our way back from the tyrant, we got looks at a Boat-billed Flycatcher and Golden-



hooded Tanager, while trying to find the Gray-cowled Woodrail—its raucous laughter obvious as it stayed hidden.

We then loaded up into the bus and continued onwards, up the road to our next stop. At the next stop, we piled out of the bus to head onwards down a trail. Before the trail, we slowly explored the other side of the road, finding a few more different color morphs of the blue jean poison dart frogs along with another species, the Green and Black Poison Dart Frog. While waiting, Roger spotted a perched Slaty-tailed Trogon, which we all got excellent looks at.

From here, we moved to the right side of the road and walked down a trail. While in the thick part of the forest, Roger heard and was able to call in 2 Purple-throated Fruit Crows. Everyone glanced up as these jet-black crows with deep purple throats flew overhead, each taking turns perching within view before vanishing into the canopy, only to reappear a few seconds later.

After getting our fill of the Fruit Crows, we continued onwards, down the path. A few steps down, we again stopped after hearing a distant trogon calling, and we were able to spot a second Slaty-tailed Trogon perched in one of the trees, calling away. Everyone got scope views of this bird as it seemed unbothered by the group of birders watching it. With a White-tailed Trogon calling in the distance, we slowly moved on down the path. Although the White-tailed Trogon never came out for us, we did get fantastic looks at a large Woodcreeper as it crept up the trees near us, a Plain Brown Woodcreeper. By now, it was time to head to our next stop. We were heading back on the trail when Roger stopped us, getting us quick views at a dullish gray faced Tanager. This was a Dusky-faced Tanager. We got brief but good looks as it foraged with a second one low in the understory. From here, we got back on the bus and continued onwards.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> to last stop of the morning took place at a bridge. Here, we slowly scanned the vegetation for any of the calling birds. As the morning had progressed and the earlier dawn choruses diminished, we observed a flock of Tawny-crested Tanagers along the roadside. We noted several of these uniformly black birds moving actively between branches, occasionally vanishing from sight only to reappear at some distance. Our attention was turned to the other side of the road where a Trogon had flown in and was calling. We all got fantastic looks at this White-tailed Trogon as it called from the side of the road, posing for good looks through the scopes and binoculars. By now, we had one last stop before heading back to the lodge, a bit further up the road. Here we piled out of the bus and were greeted with; after a wait to the raucous sounding call of a Pale-billed Woodpecker. Everyone got fantastic views of this bird as it took turns hiding in the canopy and coming out for all to see. By now, it was time to head back to the Island for lunch after a fantastic morning of birding.

After a delicious lunch, we were given a bit of down time where clients had their option to relax or go out and do some activities on the water. We regrouped at 4pm, and our guide led us on a hike to a pool designed to



attract bathing hummingbirds. The bathing station bustled with activity as Crowned Woodnymphs and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds took turns dipping into the water, then returned to their perches to groom their feathers. Although we had several hummingbird species, the hit for everyone was the Purple-crowned Fairy that made numerous passes and perched for all to see. While the hummingbirds were stealing the show, we did observe several passerines come in as well, with brief looks at both the Manakin hybrids and a Red-capped Manakin as they snuck in at the back of the ponds. In the distance, a white-throated Crake sounded, its insect like scolding call sounding through the forest. While all that activity happened, we had a Gray-cheeked Thrush come into the water, while several Prothonotary Warblers also flitted around the water. By the time we were done, it was time to head back for dinner at the lodge.

After a fantastic dinner, we gathered for the night hike. We started out the night hike heading down to the dock to listen for Potoos in the mangrove forests. While the Potoos stayed silent, we did have a fantastic look at the night sky while a Mottled Owl hooted lowly in the distance. At the dock, Roger showed us the anemones that glowed in the blacklight that he shined on them. We slowly worked our way back up to the lodge, stopping to see Lesser Lined Bats, a jumping Spider and a sleeping Crowned Woodnymph. After the woodnymph, a sleeping Brown Basilisk was also spotted sleeping on a nearby palm frond. Further up the trail, we came across a massive Middle American Bullfrog as it sat on the path, letting us all get good looks at it. We ended up seeing a few more of these as we continued towards the small pond. A little further up the trail, Roger spotted a Two-toed Hoffmann's Sloth in a tree, with a baby clutching to her back! The sloth gave fantastic as it slowly ate some leaves, giving good views for all who were on the walk. As we worked our way further up the trail, we got to the small pond, where a Speckled Caiman loafed on the surface. Roger mentioned that this one was named cocoa. After spotting the caiman, Roger found a Red-eyed Treefrog, offering everyone an excellent view. After the frog, Roger looked around the pond, finding the 2 other life stages of the frogs, eggs and newly emerged tadpoles, still with a tail. After that, we slowly worked our way back, each going to their respective cabins after a fantastic day of birding.

## **October 22: Bosque Protector Palo Seco – Fortuna Dam – Fortuna Forest Reserve**

We met early and after a delicious breakfast, we headed out on the boats to the mainland, and to the Fortuna Reserve. Upon getting to the mainland, we birdied the small town first. Here we came across an Eastern kingbird, 10 Mississippi kites, and nice looks at a few Variable Seedeaters, while Blue-headed Parrots flew overhead. From here, we drove by the marsh we birdied a few days prior, stopping for some Crimson-fronted Parakeets, Tropical Kingbirds, Jacanas, egret's, Green Ibis and a Tropical Mockingbird. Our first stop was by a fruit stand— where we had a Purple crowned Fairy, Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-chested hummingbird around. We slowly walked over to the edge of the forest, where 2 Wedge-billed Woodcreepers foraged among the bark. Nearby, a Gray-breasted Woodwren sang loudly from deep in the understory. With some work, some of us got glimpses of this skulky bird as it moved around the shrubs while in the distance a Bay Wren sang loudly.



Overhead, Roger was able to find a small warbler flock that consisted of an Olive-backed Euphonia while several Bay-breasted, Black and White and Chestnut-sided warblers foraged together. Mixed in, we spotted a Hepatic Tanager, the highland race of this species. While this was going on, the other side of the road also erupted with activity, but mainly Tanagers. Over here we had a brief look at our first Speckled Tanager!! This bright green species was a showstopper. Mixed in with the tanager were some bright yellow Silver-throated Tanagers, a “Blue-bellied” Bay-headed Tanager and a Golden-hooded Tanager.

From here, we piled back in the bus to head to our next stop. Although it was raining at our next stop, a reservoir, we got some good looks at both a Rufous-collared Sparrow and a few Blue-and-White Swallows. We continued upwards, getting into more of the higher elevation that we were in a few days ago. Our next stop was by a cell phone tower. As we walked the trail, the grunting of a Northern Emerald Toucanet was heard while Mistletoe Tyrannulets darted between the thick lower vegetation. When an Orange-billed Nightengale Thrush started calling, the fog and rain started to return, so we made our way back to the bus, and continued onwards to our lunch spot.

While we ate a delicious sandwich from Tranquilo Bay, we enjoyed the view. As it overlooked a small garden that in the back was framed by tall pine trees. Within the small garden, a Garden Emerald occasionally visited the flowers, while a Lesser Goldfinch was observed perching on nearby blooms. Meanwhile, a flock of Sulphur-winged Parakeets flew overhead.

After lunch was finished, we searched the nearby pine trees. Here, we came across a small flock of songbirds. Overhead us, we quickly had American Redstart, Bay-breasted Warblers and Chestnut-sided Warblers working the pine trees. In addition, mixed in, were a few bright yellow Silver-throated Tanagers and a dull colored Mistletoe Tyrannulet. While this activity was going on, both a White-tailed Emerald and a Green Hermit flashed by, giving brief views. It was now time to slowly head back down, so we loaded up and continued downwards to our next stop. At the next roadside stop, we had brief looks at a Black Guan as it walked backwards into a thicker part of the forest. Meanwhile, several Common Chlorospingus were observed while a bright greenish woodpecker was spotted working on a dead tree. This turned into a fantastic view of a Green-olive Woodpecker as it worked on the tree. While everyone was looking at the woodpecker, Roger was able to find a Collared Trogon, that was obligingly perched right next to the van. This bird was very cooperative and let all get fantastic looks at this female trogon. Its belly was orange—making it the orange bellied race of Collared Trogons.

Our next stop was back at the reservoir, where the rain had somewhat let up. This allowed some new birds to come out. We observed two blue and white swallows perched on the roof, seeking shelter from the rain. Behind the buildings here, a Saltator fly by, a Buff-throated Saltator. Roger than was able to find a male Thick-billed Euphonia, its bright yellow belly showing brightly among the grayish cloud forest. Everyone got great views of this small, hyperactive bird.



From here, we drove back down in elevation, watching as the foggy, cloud forest slowly transitioned back down to lowland rain forest. A quick stop to gas up turned into a longer stop when we noticed a small kettle of Broad-winged Hawks migrating overhead. It only took a scan down towards the mountains to see the real migration—a non-stop stream of migrating raptors making their way from the upper reaches of North America to South America. It seemed to be a mix of Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks, with the number we counted totaling over 10,000 birds. We later checked the hawk count website for the totals for the nearby count area, and they had 1 million birds that day. It was jaw dropping just to see 10,000 birds swarming through the scopes! From here, we had a ride back to the island, watching the terns and frigatebirds soar on the dying thermals for the day after a fantastic day of birding.

## **October 23: Tranquilo Bay**

We started today with an early rise, those of us who choose met by the base of the tower and spent the morning watching as parrots flew overhead. We had a few Mealy Parrots mixed in with the Red-lored Amazons fly by, squawking as they made their way from their nightly roosts. Meanwhile, several Short-billed Pigeons flew past, and a distant Roadside Hawk rose into view. As the hawk ascended on the morning thermal, two Yellow-headed Caracaras passed nearby. Perched in the upper reaches of the canopy was an Eastern Kingbird bigger than the surrounding mixed flock that had appeared. The mixed flock gave us some great birds including both Red-eyed and a yellow breasted Philadelphia Vireo. Mixed in with the vireos, smaller birds, such as Palm and Plain-colored Tanagers, were also seen darting between canopy gaps. This was a backdrop when we had a Blue Dacnis come out and perch put in the open, giving all up there a fantastic view before it darted back into the canopy. By now, it was getting close to breakfast time, so we worked our way back down the tower and towards the lodge.

After breakfast, the day's activity was spending the morning birding the grounds here at Tranquilo Bay. As we walked the trail, surrounded by large trees and thick vegetation, a Roadside Hawk was heard screaming in the distance. While, above us, a small antwren was observed, brownish with a large white slash underneath the wing. This turned out to be a Dot-winged Antwren. Soon, the jet-black male with white dots on its wings showed up, giving good looks at this small bird. As we continued onwards, we came to a clearing.

From the thick forest we heard a harsh chatter, a Chestnut-backed Antbird. With some patience, we were able to get views of this skulky bird, as it worked its way past us, always staying in the thick undergrowth. From here, we followed a trail into the dense rainforest, with many of the lower vegetation showing thick thorns to prevent animals from eating them. The trail was quiet, so as we left the trail, heading back into the clearing, a broad-winged hawk circled above us, lifting up to continue its migration south.

As we slowly made our way back, a few dull colored birds flew into the lower canopy—several Lesser Greenlets. After viewing these small birds, we continued towards a portion of the forest that had the southernmost population of Stub-tailed Spadebills. With some work, they were calling in the distance and only briefly came



out. Although blocked by the vegetation, some were able to see this small bird, its southern most range from a disjointed population. By now, it was lunch time, so we worked our way back to the lodge for lunch and a brief siesta/time to do water activities.

We met again at 4pm, ready to go back to the hummingbird bathing station. At the station, we again had multiple Crowned Woodnymphs as well as two Purple-crowned Fairies who alternated bathing, perching and chasing each other off the perches. It was really something to watch the acrobatics of these hummingbirds as they maneuvered and whizzed by as well as the belly flopping sound that was made as they hit the water. While the hummingbird show was going on, we also had some passerines come in for a drink. These included the dull Gray-cheeked Thrush, both Chestnut-sided and the ever-present Prothonotary Warbler- adding a splash of color to the shaded station. Meanwhile, the hybrid Mankins made an appearance, quickly though as they quickly came in and then left to disappear back into the dense jungle.

By now, it was time to head back. We worked our way back and met back up at the lodge, to go over the checklists and everyone's favorite moments of the trip. Carol's was the peace of the place combined with the boat trips. Her favorite birds were the Speckled Tanager, Purple-crowned Fairy and Crowned Woodnymph. Roger's was seeing the Toucans and the Purple-Crowned Fairy while Rochelle enjoyed seeing the hummingbirds at their bathing station. Maggie enjoyed climbing the tower, Speckled Tanager and Roger finding the sleeping hummingbird at night. Dave enjoyed the canal trip and the Keel-billed Toucan. Daniel enjoyed all the birds, including seeing the Snowcap and the American Pygmy Kingfisher. Noel enjoyed the Keel-billed Toucans and Cecilia enjoyed the Trogons, and the hummingbirds, especially the hummingbird bathing station. Jason enjoyed the colorful birds, antshrikes and the daily checklists and Christine enjoyed being with everyone and the raptor migration day.

## **October 24: Tranquilo Bay – Punta Robalo Road – Mount Totumas**

After a fantastic breakfast, we said goodbye to those who were returning to Panama City as some of us continued onwards to the Mt. Totumas extension of the trip. Most of the day was spent in the vans, driving all the way across to the other side of the country in David. From David, we switched over to 4-wheel drive trucks and slowly made our way back up into the highlands, finally getting to Mt. Totumas lodge around lunch time. We were blown away by the feeding setup, with 5-6 different species of hummingbirds seen right off the bat. As the rain kept up, we stayed inside observing the feeders, watching multiple Flame-colored Tanagers, both male and female come into the feeders as well as Silver-throated Tanagers, Common Cholorsphingus and two species of Brush finch—both White naped and Chestnut-capped. As the afternoon moved on, we took a walk down to one of the feeding stations. Here, we were surprised to find 3-4 Spotted Woodquails perched up in the midstory of the canopy. The reason for their ascent into the tree was not observed; however, we were able to observe them clearly as they gradually moved along the branches until they disappeared. As we slowly made our way back a Barred Forest Falcon called from nearby, staying hidden from us as light faded. We followed it up with a fantastic dinner and some mothing as the owner turned on the moth lights for us.



## **October 25: Mt. Totumas Cloud Reserve (Deck +gardens and Big Tree Loop)**

We were up early before breakfast at Mount Totumas to enjoy the feeder show. The feeders were being stocked as we arrived. As we waited for breakfast, we enjoyed the hummingbird show, with 9 species of hummingbirds seen coming in and out of the feeders. Some clients ventured on the deck and were rewarded with insanely close looks at Scintillant, Talamanca Hummingbirds as well as Green Crowned Brilliant's. Meanwhile a Long-billed Starthroat hovered over on the right side of the porch, taking turns drinking nectar and perching. While the hummingbird feeders were active, so were the banana and seed feeders, with many Silver-throated Tanagers everywhere, you couldn't get away from them. Mixed in were smaller numbers of larger reddish orange Flame-colored Tanagers as well as two Red-headed Barbets making an appearance. There was one of each, a male and female, each enjoying the papayas. Meanwhile, in the low bushes Scintillant Hummingbirds perched, while Slaty Flowerpiercers moved between opened flowers. Closer to where the moths roosted, Golden-bellied Flycatchers sallied out and back, catching morning breakfast while White-naped, Chestnut-crowned and Yellow-thighed Brushfinches made infrequent appearances at the feeders. After a delicious breakfast, we packed up to head out for the morning.

The morning's hike was uphill, called the big tree loop. Our first bird on our slow trek up was in the parking lot where a Yellow-faced Grassquit. As we slowly worked our way further up, the call of Collared Trogons echoed through the rain forest. By the time the walk was over, we had heard 7 different Collared Trogon individuals. As we slowly worked our way further up, a few new warbler species came into view. We had looks at both Flame-throated Warbler with its burnt orange Firey throat as well as Golden-crowned Warbler. Both species moved around quite a bit, so getting long views were tricky. Further up, the forest opened into a shaded coffee Plantation. The forest floor was completely covered with coffee plants under large trees. Here, we had some Band-tailed Pigeons whizzing by. In the shaded area we had another Golden-crowned Warbler calling and partially visible a Mountain Elaenia was spotted. In the back, a flock of warbler passed by, giving looks at some migrating Black and White, Tennessee and 2 Black-throated Green Warblers. Meanwhile, 2 Brown-capped Vireos flittered about in the canopy. We worked our way further up slowly, but as lunch time was approaching, the bird activity was dying down. On our way back, we came across a flock of Vaux's Swifts feeding up high, mixed in where larger, White-collared Swifts, dwarfing the smaller Vaux's. We returned for lunch and watching the bird feeders.

After lunch, it was raining, so we waited to go out till it stopped. Once it stopped, we made our way down the road from the lodge and paused at the lower blind area. Here we had a Rose-breasted Grosbeak that had come down to the water. As we continued further down the road, we came across a small flock of warblers, which included Slate-throated Redstarts as well as a Wilson's Warbler. The small flock included two non-warblers—a Red-eyed Vireo and a Philadelphia Vireo. By this time, the rain had started again, and we worked our way back up to watch the large numbers of hummingbirds at the feeders before dinner.



After dinner, once it got dark, the moth light was again turned on and we spent a couple hours checking it for the different species of moths. We were lucky to have an enormous Elephant Beetle come into the light today. This was followed by a couple big moths, one of which was a Orizaba Silk Moth. With the silk moths, there were many Sphinx Moths and a couple even smaller moths. By this time, it was getting late so every went off to rest after a good day of birding.

### **October 26: Mt. Totumas ( Deck- Los Poso- Quebrada- Quetzal trail)**

We again, met at the feeders before breakfast to take in the bird feeding spectacle. The 9 species of hummingbirds were still coming and going from the feeders. We all got better looks at a White-throated Mountain Gem as it came into the feeders.

After a delicious breakfast, we head out for the morning. Our route for the morning was road birding on the road that led to the lodge. As we were getting ready to leave, a Ruddy-capped Nightengale Thrush was spotted walking underneath one of the cars. A few of us were able to observe this very shy species as it foraged out in the open before disappearing back into the forest.

Our first stop was at the river flowing down from the lodge. Here, we enjoyed the black and white plumage of a Torrent Tyrannulet. As we slowly worked the area, a few more species appeared, including great looks at the shy Orange-billed Nightengale thrush as it worked the opposite edge of the road before disappearing back into the vegetation.

From here, we piled back into the vans and headed down to our next stop. From here, we had a series of stops where the birding was fantastic. At a turn in the road, we got out to get scope views of both a male and female Green Hermit as it took turns feeding on the nearby Heliconias. From here, we continued down the road, coming to an opening that was filled with birds. Here we had a forest edge on one side of the road, and open field on the other. This led to us picking up both Streak-headed and Spot Crowned Woodcreeper on one side of the road, while the other had a Red-faced Spinetail. Over the road held some trees where we all got great views of a Speckled Tanager, its green, black plumage bright, feeding a younger bird. Further down the road, we had a Dark Pewee working the fence posts while a Black Phoebe was heard calling in the distance. We continued further down the road, with one more stop. Here at the bend in the road we got out and slowly worked the forest edge, finding a a streaky chested Olive-streaked Flycatcher perched in the mid stories of a nearby tree. Continuing, we had the fantastic looks at a very cooperative Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, as 3 of them foraged, jumping in and out of the nearby vegetation. By now, it was time to head back up for lunch, we made a few brief stops, picking out Chestnut-collared swifts out of the massive swift flock and a Short-tailed Hawk a little further up on the road.

After lunch, the rain started, and we went out in a break of it. We walked downward to the coffee area with Rainoldo explaining the coffee process. How the coffee plants are sprouted down there and only planted once



they reach a certain age. Then they wait till the berries ripen before the next step is completed. As the rain picked up, we slowly picked up more species, with distant looks at a Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher. We also had amazing looks on the way back up at a very cooperative Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush as it foraged out in the middle of the road. Back at the feeders, we had our usual flock of hummingbirds as well as quick looks at a Yellow-thighed Brushfinch coming to the feeders. By now it was dinner time and some more time watching the moths come in after a fantastic day.

### **October 27: Mt. Totumas (Deck- Vista Valle)**

We started the morning before breakfast watching the many species coming into the local feeders. It took until after breakfast, at 10 am before the rain stopped enough for us to head out on our morning walk. As we worked our way back up the mountain, we covered more ground, finding a group of clown-faced Acorn Woodpeckers perched high up in a dead snag. As we continued further up, White-throated Spadebills called in the distance while multiple Mountain Elaena's flew out from the canopy of the trees, snagging breakfast for the day. Mixed in were a few Mistletoe Tyrannulets as well. A yellowish flycatcher made an appearance as Gray-breasted Woodwrens sang their complex rambling song in the background. On the way back down, we came across a few Black-faced Solitaires, one giving brief but good looks before flying off in the thick vegetation.

After a fantastic lunch, we all headed out to walk the upper trail loop. This was a newer trail that took up to the higher elevations. As we worked our way through an opening in the forest, both a Broad-winged and Short-tailed Hawk soared overhead. In the distance, a Gartered Trogon called in the distance, while a Red-crowned Woodpecker was briefly spotted in the distance before flying off. As we continued upwards, two mountain thrushes made an appearance. Further up, when we got back into the forested areas, we came across a flock of warblers. Here we had a mix of our wintering warblers; Black and White, Tennessee, Blackburnian and Black-throated Green that were mixed in with their resident warblers; Flame-throated Warblers and a Slate-throated Redstarts. Since it was the afternoon, the birds quieted down, but it gave us a chance to admire the scenery, these tall, damp, fog filled mountains. We got high enough to get glimpses of the valley below, partially obscured by fog at times. By now, dinner was approaching, so we slowly worked our way back down to the lodge, for the final checklist and recounting our favorite parts of the extension. During dinner, we went over our favorite parts of the extension; Cecilia's was all the hummingbirds while Noel's was the variety of birds found at the resort. Jason enjoyed the Quetzal Trail hike—showing if the narrow hilly, scenic terrain. Christine enjoyed all the reptiles seen as well as the night hike and all the hummingbirds while Daniel enjoyed seeing the Black-faced Solitaire and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher. Our guide, Rainoldo enjoyed seeing the Golden-winged Warbler on the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last day.

## **October 28: Back to Panama City**

We woke up early for a packaged breakfast as we made our way back to David from the Mt. Totumas lodge. As we were driven back down, we recounted all the wonderful birds and wildlife we observed over the course of the trip. It was a farewell from the lodges as the trip ended and we made our way back to Panama City and back to the US.

*Photos by James Petersen*

*Keel-billed Toucan by Bryan Calk*