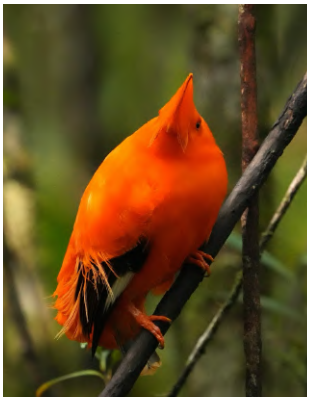
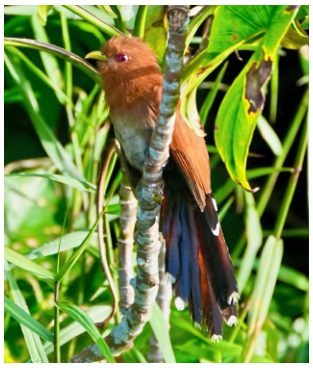
Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness | Feb. 12 – 23, 2026 | Trip Report by Bryan Shirley

NJ Guide Bryan Shirley & local guides John & Neil
Tour Participants: Mary, Glen, Kyle, and Francis





February 12, 2026 Georgetown & Guyana National Park

Bryan, Mary and Glen arrived last night late and had a nice relaxing day around the historic Cara Lodge in Georgetown. Kyle and Francis flew in from Panama and arrived in time for our optional outing to Guyana National Park, the large metropolitan park in Georgetown. We met our guide John and driver Vitor and headed to the park in the late afternoon. We had just stopped the van when the "lifers" started coming so quick it hard to know where to look. We had Southern Lapwings, Wattled Jacanas, and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds all in the same binocular view! Snail Kites were flying about and Great Kiskadees were abundant, singing their own name at us to make sure we knew who they were. Near where we started our walk there was a small pond connected via canal to the ocean. John picked some grass and after a few seconds of splashing it in the water we were surprised to see a Manatee poke its head up and eat it right out of his hand! It was the first time seeing a manatee for most of us and was a wonderful, unexpected treat. The pond had a couple of trees on a small island that were packed full of herons. It was mostly Cattle Egrets, but there were several Great Egrets, Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Striated Herons as well. We slowly worked our way around the park enjoying all the new birds. One of our goals here that we were excited to find was Blood-colored Woodpecker – a small

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woodpecker with a tiny distribution along the coastline of the Guianas. It was a pleasant walk and we saw tons of birds making it the perfect introduction for our time exploring Guyana.

February 13, 2026 Mahaica Boat Trip | Botanical Garden Parrots

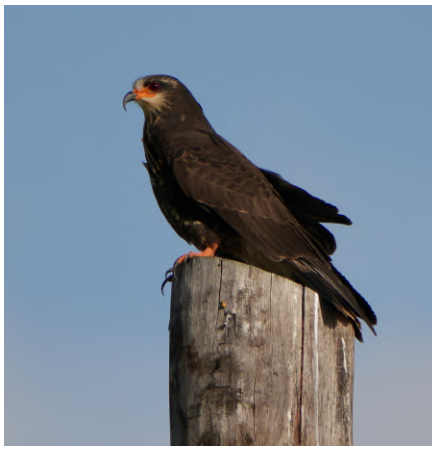
We had an early departure to get out of town before traffic and get on the river before it got too hot. It was shortly after sunrise when we arrived at the Mahaica River and met our guide for the morning. We piled into the boat and before long we had one of our most exciting birds of the day, the Hoatzin. They are the national bird of Guyana, and for good reason. What a great bird! We saw a few different groups of them working along the small trees lining the rivers. A Little Cuckoo popped out of the brush only a few feet from us and warmed itself in the morning sun, giving us lots of nice photo ops. We had at least four Green-tailed Jacamar and a pair of Black-capped Donacobius also made an appearance. Floating along the river birding was fabulous – being in the boat was not only peaceful and a relaxing way to bird, but it also allowed us to get closer and get much better views of many species. A great example was the Guianan Red Howler Monkeys – normally they are high in the trees and we would have to look straight up through all the branches to find them, today we had three in the low trees by the river so we were able to get great views of them. When it started to get hot (and we started to get hungry) we returned to the guide's house where his wife had breakfast waiting for us.

On the return drive into Georgetown we made a few stops for some key species. Rufous Crab Hawk live only in the mangroves along the coast of northern South America, so we were excited to find one. We also had a flock of about 20 Scarlet Ibis feeding in a rice field. Most were juveniles, but it was interesting to see the polka dotting of bright scarlet feathers starting to appear.

Back at Cara Lodge we had a nice lunch and siesta, then went to the Botanical Gardens for the afternoon. Lots of parrots and macaws were coming in to roost including Festive Amazons. A pair of White-bellied Piculets tapped at the branches of a tree by the road and Toco Toucans called loudly from the tree behind us. It was easy and fun birding here. We walked slowly along the road stopping frequently to put a new bird in the scope. The park was fairly busy with walkers and others enjoying the cool evening and it was fun to get to interact with the friendly locals here.

February 14, 2026 Travel Day | Blue-and-yellow Macaws | Atta Lodge

Tourist numbers in Guyana are still very low compared to most places. That is one of the appeals here – no huge resorts or big buses. It was great to be at small lodges with either just our group or at most a couple of other people. It is one of the most sparsely populated countries, leaving huge areas of untouched forest and we are lucky such a place exists, let alone being able to visit here. Along with that comes some logistical challenges and



we had a slight hiccup in our plans today. We had planned on flying in a small chartered plane, but it had gone in for maintenance and no other plane was available. So after breakfast at Cara Lodge we loaded up the van and started the long drive across the country. Georgetown roads were crowded, but eventually we got out of the city and traffic eased as the forest improved. Part of the road had been recently paved and there was a lot of construction until we got onto the dirt road for the rest of the trip. Again, we felt lucky to be visiting here before the inevitable development. Overall, the drive was enjoyable – we had good discussions in the van and at each of our bathrooms breaks we got to stretch and bird for a few minutes, picking up a few good birds at each stop. When we got to the Essequibo River Ferry Crossing, we had a bit of time to bird before boarding the ferry for our "pelagic trip" across the river. A gorgeous Blue-and-yellow Macaw flew in and landed in a tree nearby and on the river we had both Yellow-billed and Large-billed Terns flying about.

Upon arrival at Atta Lodge we quickly put our stuff in our rooms and regrouped in front of the lodge to bird. Marail Guans were in the trees above us and the resident Black Curassow strutted past on the grass a few feet away. Several Scarlet Macaws flew in and landed in a tall, dead tree allowing us to watch them through the scopes. We birded until dark and then tried for a White-winged Potoo. It called and called but refused to show itself and eventually we could hear the calls getting further and further away. While were trying to find it, the fireflies put on quite a show though! We didn't have long to explore tonight, but just enough to get us all excited for tomorrow!

February 15, 2026 Iwokrama Canopy Tower | Black-banded Owl!

Woke up excited to be birding here! We started at daylight in the open area around the cabins. One tree always had something going and we spent most of our time watching stuff come in and out of that same tree. In the 30 minutes or so that we watched we had macaws, parrots, toucans, woodpeckers, and others perch in the dead branches before heading out to various destinations to feed. After breakfast we started through the forest to the canopy walkway, stopping whenever we found something exciting. We had a herd of White-lipped Peccary feeding along through the forest. When they saw us they quickly retreated out of sight, grunting and snapping their jaws as they went. When we arrived at the canopy tower we crossed the hanging bridge one by one onto the platform. The views of the expansive forest were stunning. Being able to observe the birds and animals from the canopy tower was a highlight. We had birds that normally we would have to strain our necks to see straight up at eye level! We actually got to look DOWN on a Screaming Piha! A few of the goodies we saw here included Purple-breasted and Spangled Cotingas, Dusky Purpletuft, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Guinan Puffbird, and too many more to list. A few Guianan Spider Monkeys were spotted in a far tree, and we were able to watch them through the scope. Once it got hot and the activity died down we headed back to the lodge for cold drinks and lunch. One nice part about this tour (like other tours in very hot places), we had a bit of free time in the heat of

the day. We took advantage of the free time to nap, wander around the garden photographing insects, editing photos, and even do some rainforest yoga for one member of our group.

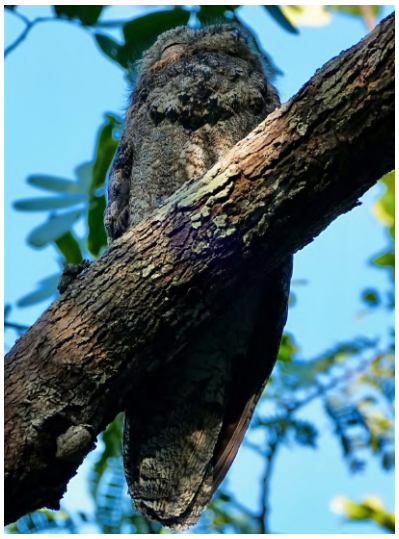
We met again at 3:30 well rested and ready to go. It started raining just when we met, so we hung out on in the covered restaurant until it stopped. We birded our way down the entrance road to the main road and then went by van for a couple of miles, making a couple of stops along the way. This afternoon was really productive. Lots of larger species like parrots and toucans were sitting up to dry off from the rain before they headed to roost. We had "sundowner" snacks and drinks until it was good and dark, then we called in a Black-banded Owl. It flew in and called a few times, then sat around posing for photos for us. Owls are always exciting, but especially one striped like a zebra! Back at the lodge we had a nice dinner and did our long bird list for the day.

February 16, 2026 White Sand Forest | Long-tailed Potoo

Just a bit up the road from Atta Lodge was an area where the soil is replaced by a white sand. The sand doesn't hold a lot of nutrients and the trees were much smaller. This creates a new niche in this complex environment for several species that are not in the thicker forest around Atta. We did a couple of short walks in the forest and picked up several interesting species like Olivaceous Schiffornis (what it lacks in beauty it makes up for with its amazing song!) Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, Golden-headed Manakin, and a gorgeous Spotted Puffbird. We all enjoyed our down time in the afternoon, then did a short outing once it cooled down a bit. We had brief views of a Yellow-billed Jacamar and a Guianan Red-Cotinga, but as is often the case in the late afternoon, parrots steal the show. We had several Scarlet Macaws and Blue-cheeked Amazons flying about or perching for a few minutes before carrying on to their roosts. While we enjoyed our sundowner drinks, we also enjoyed watching a Bat Falcon catch dragonflies. Tonight we had our sundowners at a spot for Long-tailed Potoo and once it was dark enough we called it and it quickly responded and flew in and landed on a stump near us! A pair of Blackish Nightjars were also flying around and landed on the road near us several times.

February 17, 2026 Army Ants | Guianan Cock-of-the-rock

It was time to leave Atta Lodge and move on to Surama. We checked out and loaded up and left shortly after breakfast. It wasn't far to Surama, probably well under an hour if we just drove, but it took us until lunchtime since we made several stops and short walks. On one of our walks into the forest we were lucky enough to find a swarm of army ants. Large numbers of birds follow the army ant swarms and it can be one of the highlights of a birding trip to the tropics. This swarm appeared to just be getting going and there were not many birds, so we went for a walk and then checked back about 20 minutes later. The ants had mobilized in force and the birds were starting to show up. The birds don't eat the ants, but rather everything that is trying to get away from the ants. Millions of ants cover everything in sight, causing insects, spiders, and any other living creature to try to get away and the birds were waiting to snatch them up. We had Black Nunbirds within a few feet of us and over the

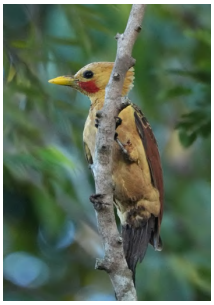


time we watched we ended up with six types of woodcreepers and three antbird species including the gorgeous White-plumed Antbird.

Our next stop was at a Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek. There was one male that was pretty shy but eventually we were able to get it in the scope for views of this out of this world bird. We also had a pair of Amazonian Motmots here as well. It was close to lunchtime so we drove the rest of the way to Surama and got settled into our rooms before lunch. Eash of the cabins here were named after a local indigenous group and painted with pictures of the local tribes and some of the resident birds. Surama is a community run ecolodge which provides jobs for the locals and is an incentive to protect their environment – a positive example of the effects of ecotourism. After lunch we had our daily siesta time, then headed out in the late afternoon. Since Surama is in a much more open, savannah/forest mix there are lots of new species here. We had four new seedeaters just while we were trying to get into the van! Our first stop was in a small forest patch to look for a roosting Great Potoo. It wasn't in the normal tree, so we started searching. We were about to give up when our driver, who was helping search, found it for us! From there we walked down the road to a small wetland and were happy to see a Jabiru there. Neil played a pygmy owl call for a bit and we got a pretty upset bunch of birds searching for the owl including four species of hummingbirds. At sunset we had our sundowner drinks and then we tried for a Common Potoo. It was quick to respond, but didn't actually show itself for about 20 minutes and then it landed on a pole right in front of us! Pretty cool to see a Great Potoo on a roost and a Common Potoo about an hour later after dark. On the drive back we did well with nightjars too, adding White-tailed Nightjar and Common Paraque to our list.

February 18, 2026 Ground Cuckoo | Otters & Eels | Tayra

This morning after breakfast we walked from the lodge. The first few hundred yards were open savannah so we could see a few new species. We spent a few minutes looking for a Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch that was calling and after getting good looks at it we continued down into the forest along the old road. Soon after entering the forest we had fabulous views of a Black-faced Hawk. One bird we were really hoping for here was Capuchinbird and it wasn't long before we heard their strange call, then a few minutes later had one in the scope. At a small, mostly dry river we were happy to spot a Neotropical River Otter with a baby. They played around for a bit in the remaining puddle, then worked their way up the dry river bed towards us. Eventually they either heard or smelled us and the adult grabbed the young one by the nape and took off down the river away from us. It was probably for the best though, because on the other side of the bridge there was another pool and that one had an electric eel in it! One of the birds that everyone hoped to see in Guyana is the notoriously difficult Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo. Neil had been playing the call and we checked several areas where he has seen them



recently to no avail, when finally we heard one call nearby. We hustled back down the road to the area it called from and quietly waited and got lucky when it crossed the road in front of us! We watched it though the understory for a few minutes, taking lots of blurry pictures and enjoying the excitement of getting to see this rare bird. In the afternoon we birded along the road back to the main road from Surama and were treated with another great mammal sighting – a Tayra was about 50 feet up a vine ripping apart a bees nest! It looked at us a couple of times but was much more interested in finding dinner and we got to watch it until it was nearly dark. After our daily sundowner drinks we continued our streak of good luck with night birds and had a pair of Short-tailed Nighthawks circle around us and then a pair of Spectacled Owls posed for photos before we headed back to dinner to celebrate another wonderful day.

February 19, 2026 Birding by Boat to Harpy Eagle Nest!

Today was another exciting day. After breakfast we walked down the road through the forest to the boat dock where we boarded our boat and started down the river. The boat ride itself was quite interesting due to all the trees that were fallen down into the river. We went around trees, over trees, and ducked under trees, all adding to the adventure! Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers were common, letting us approach closely before they eventually would fly down the river, only to start the sequence over again. Good numbers of White-banded Swallows were perched on the rocks and trees over the river. Of course lots of parrots and macaws flew around as well and we saw a Red-and-Green Macaw sticking its head out of its nest hole. One of the most interesting sightings was a humongous Anaconda. It was coiled up but it looked like it was probably about as big around as my thigh! When we reached our destination we walked a few minutes through the forest to an opening with a table and benches with a view of a huge tree that had a Harpy Eagle nest. We had heard that the nearly fully-grown chick was moving around a bit and not always in the same tree, so we were a bit worried when we wouldn't find it, but eventually located it in the same tree with the nest! What a spectacular bird! Over the next hour we watched one of the most sought after birds in the world. It called a few times, probably hoping for lunch from a parent, and even moved to a different part of the tree. We kept a vigil while we ate our box lunches, but the adults never showed before we walked back to the boat. Back at the lodge we had a couple of hours to relax and do our own thing, which varied from naps, relaxing in the hammocks, or trying to get the perfect photo of the Yellow-rumped Caciques and other resident birds. In the late evening we did a short walk around the entrance to the forest and had a nice view of a sub-adult Pompadour Cotinga, getting close to full purple plumage, before we returned to the lodge for our last dinner and to toast the Harpy Eagle.

February 20, 2026 Giant Anteater | Sun Parakeet

This morning we had a very early departure so that we could get to Karasabai, our destination for the morning, before it got too hot. That put us starting into the savannas just as it was getting light and that was a perfect time to look for Giant Anteaters, and we caught one heading toward cover from the grassy plains just at daylight! It was only about 50 yards off the road and we were able to watch it slowly walking along until eventually it made it into the trees. It was pretty exciting and was a good way to wake us all up! As we traveled through the grasslands we started seeing new birds as well. We found a Double-striped Thick-knee and a few Crested Bobwhite along the road. The waterholes had lots of birds including a Jabiru. When we made it to Karasabai we stopped and picked up our local guide who led us up into the canyon we would be birding in. Karasabai is a different habitat than anything we had been in so far. It was forest, but more like a dry scrub than the forest we had been in up to this point. Our key species here was the Sun Parakeet – a stunning green and yellow parakeet that is only found in this corner of Guyana and neighboring Brazil. Luckily there were lots of other birds to keep us busy because the Sun Parakeets were not cooperating. We tried a Pygmy Owl call to bring in mobbing small birds and had a great flock with Burnish-buffed Tanagers, Bananaquit, and a few Antwrens and flycatchers. Then all of a sudden a real Ferruginous Pygmy Owl showed up as well! While we were watching the other birds, a Sun Parakeet flew past and landed in the top of a tree. We quickly got the scope on it and were able to see it quickly before it flew off. Feeling good about our success, we went down to the Karasabai visitor center where lunch was waiting for us. After lunch we dropped our local guide off and drove the rest of the way down to Manari Ranch, our home for the next few nights. The heat was pretty brutal so we took a good siesta and got settled until it cooled off a bit, then did an easy walk around the lodge and gardens. Another Pygmy Owl made an appearance, and there were Yellow-crowned Amazons, Brown-throated Parakeets, and Red-shouldered Macaws coming to roost in the palms around the lodge. Just at dark a couple of Least Nighthawks flew around the lodge a bit as they were waking up for a night time feeding session.

February 21, 2026 Savannas of Manari Ranch | Sunset over Lagoon

This morning after breakfast we had two four wheel drive vehicles waiting for us for our outing on Manari Ranch. We stared out across the new habitat – grasslands with scattered trees and wetlands here and there. Fork-tailed Flycatchers were common and three Burrowing Owls checked us out from the edge of their burrow. Eventually we reached the river that was the border with Brazil. There was a thick riparian zone along the river that formed the entire range for the Rio Branco Antbird – a key bird we were looking for us here. The other key species here is the Hoary-throated Spinetail. It has a larger range than the Antbird, but still just a tiny corner of Guyana and neighboring Brazil. We slowly worked our way around the area searching for our birds. We had a few others along the way – Rufous-tailed Jacamar made the fifth Jacamar species of the trip and a couple of

Flavescent Warblers were a great find. Eventually we were able to locate both the Antbird and Spinetail. We actually had a couple spinetails chasing each other all around us! From there we headed to a large marshy area to check out what waterbirds were around. Wattled Jacanas were working their way around the lily pads, and we located the always hard to see Azure Gallinule there as well. A pair of Maguari Stork were gorgeous standing in the lush grass, another exciting find for us. Back at the ranch we had a nice lunch and the our daily siesta until the late afternoon, then we headed to a neighboring ranch for the evening. The marshy lake there was full of birds and we had a great evening scanning and watching them. One of the highlights was watching a flock of about 60 Red-bellied Macaws flying around and around trying to get the courage to land and get a drink. The light was perfect on them and they were so pretty! They would land in the marsh for a few seconds, then all take off again and start flying around looking for a new place to land. A herd of Capybara kept appearing on a small island near us, then we would look again a minute later and they would all have disappeared again, no doubt in the grassy water where we couldn't see them. The sunset over the lag oon was spectacular and it was a wonderful evening.

February 22, 2026 Mocomoco Village

After breakfast we started our day with a short drive through Lethem to the small village called Mocomoco. We met our local guide and started birding along the road, eventually making our way to a small river and waterfall. The birding was good, as was the scenery. This area is mountainous and we were back in nice forest, unlike the grassy savannas around Manari. We had over 70 species here in the morning! A White-bellied Antbird took a few minutes to find, but once we located it, it didn't move for a few minutes and we were all able to see it well and it was nice to have an antbird that we could see well and wasn't just black! We did well with tanagers and warblers today and had a couple of nice mixed flocks. Guira, White-lined, White-shouldered Tanagers were new for our trip and we also added Golden-crowned Warbler to our extensive list. We had a pair of Variable Chachalaca calling loudly from a thick tangle just a few feet from us – we never could catch even a glimpse, but it was fun to listen to them so closely. Back at the lodge we had lunch and a nice siesta. We had a nice walk around the ranch in the evening after it cooled down. An Orange-backed Troupial was a nice find and we enjoyed watching macaws getting settled for the night in their hole in a large palm tree.

February 23, 2026 Spectacular Kaieteur Falls! | Return to Georgetown

Since our flight at the beginning of the trip was cancelled, we had made arrangements to fly to Kaieteur Falls today. We left early and drove a couple of hours to the airstrip north of Atta Lodge. Our plane was right on time and soon we were soaring above the forest. We already had an appreciation for how nice the forest was from our drives, but seeing it from the air really made us realize how extensive it was. During our flight we saw almost

no sign of any human activity – just beautiful forest as far as we could see. When we arrived at the falls we quickly checked out the visitors center and started on the walk to the falls. One of the highlights here is the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek. We had seen one bird earlier in our trip but nothing like today. We had several males calling and displaying in plain view and only a few yards away. Being able to see them so close made it so we could really see the fine details of their spectacular plumage. From there it was only a few more minutes to the falls. Kaieteur Falls is one of the most impressive waterfalls in the world. With a single drop of over 700 feet, it is one of the world's highest. While we admired the falls, Neil was looking for a special frog that we were all hoping to see. We ended up seeing several of this tiny, bright yellow frog. It is called the Golden Rocket Frog and lives solely in the small puddles formed in large bromeliads found around Kaieteur Falls. We flew from the falls back to Georgetown and headed back to air conditioning and a hot shower at Cara Lodge. We enjoyed our last dinner together, sharing thoughts and memories of our wonderful trip.

Photos: Kaieteur Falls (Stephen Grace - SG), Guianan Cock-of-the-rock (BS), Little Cuckoo (Glenn Perelson - GP), Manatee (GP), Great Kiskadee (GP), Saffron Finch (GP), Black Currasow (Bryan Shirley - BS), Snail Kite (GP), Blood-colored Woodpecker (GP), Black-collared Hawk (GP), Toco Toucan (GP), Festive Amazon (BS), Guianan Cock-of-the-rock (BS), Great Potoo (GP), Cream-colored Woodpecker (BS), Giant River Otter (GP), Red-and-Green Macaw (BS), Birding by Boat (BS), Harpy Eagle (BS), Blue-backed Manakin (BS), Giant Anteater (BS), Burrowing Owls (BS), White-headed Marsh Tyrant (BS), Yellow-rumped Cacique (BS)