



GUYANA
February 19-March 1, 2016
Guide Gary Sway, Tour host Bill Murphy, with five participants:
April, Connie, John, Frank, and Judi

ITINERARY

Friday, February 19, flight from Trinidad to Georgetown
Saturday, February 20, flight to Karanambu
Sunday, February 21, Karanambu
Monday, February 22, Karanambu
Tuesday, February 23, Karanambu, drive to Iwokrama River Lodge
Wednesday, February 24, Iwokrama River Lodge
Thursday, February 25, drive to Atta Lodge, Atta Lodge
Friday, February 26. Atta Lodge
Saturday, February 27, Atta Lodge, drive Surama
Sunday, February 28, Surama
Monday, February 29, Surama/ Atta Lodge/Georgetown/Kaieteur Falls
[Tuesday, March 1, free day]
Wednesday, March 2, Botanical Gardens

Friday, February 19. Arrival in Georgetown / Cara Lodge

Our group of six met at Trinidad's Piarco Airport and then enjoyed a pleasant mid-afternoon flight to Cheddi Jagan International Airport, about 25 miles south of Georgetown, Guyana, on the east bank of the Demerara River. Our transfer from the airport to our accommodations, Cara Lodge, was made in a comfortable van during rush hour, which afforded us the opportunity to see the hustle and bustle of the capital city. The historical presence of the British was evident in the architecture of downtown Guyana, where we saw multi-story wooden buildings constructed during the early part of the 20th Century.

Along our route we spotted our first 12 species of birds, all common. After checking in at Cara Lodge, and before dinner, a representative from Wilderness Explorers, Kenneth, welcomed us and provided us with an overview of our itinerary, along with a packet containing in-depth travel information and other literature to help us prepare for the coming 10 days. Cara Lodge provided storage for the duration of our trip for unneeded items such as heavy winter coats. The dinner at Cara Lodge was tasty and authentically Guyanese.

Saturday, February 20. Flight to Karanambu / Rupununi River Birding by Boat

Today we enjoyed an early breakfast and then spent some delightful time observing urban life from the sidewalk in front of Cara Lodge. Here in the capitol city, horses grazed along the streets unfettered in any way. From our street-side vantage point we observed a variety of common species that included parrots, pigeons, thrushes, kingbirds, and the first of many Snail Kites. At 7 o'clock we transferred by van to Ogle Field, just east

of Georgetown, from which domestic flights leave, for our flight to Karanambu to the south. For some of us, standing on a scale with our backpacks on so that our weight could be calculated into the total payload was a new and interesting experience. The 12-passenger Cessna was quite colorful, with a portrait of a Hoatzin, the national bird, emblazoned on the tail.

Guyana is full of birds. Even while waiting at the airport we were adding interesting birds to our list—herons, egrets, and our first Yellow-headed Caracaras and Red-breasted Meadowlarks. We took off at 8:45 on a 1-1/2 hour flight through clouds and mist, passing over what looked like endless broccoli tops (rainforest trees) and then spiraling down from 5,000 feet for a smooth landing on a paved runway at the village of Annai and then taking off again and flying for about 10 more minutes before landing on a dirt strip near our destination, Karanambu.

From the air, the view of the North Rupununi region was fascinating, resembling the South African veldt. We were all amazed by the miles and miles of unspoiled rainforest that we flew over—this is truly an undeveloped, unspoiled country.

We landed at 10:40 and were greeted by Melanie McTurk, daughter-in-law of Diane McTurk, the Executive Director of Karanambu Trust and Lodge. Melanie was accompanied by several guides and staff members from Karanambu who loaded our luggage into their pickup trucks as we all clambered in for the short drive to the lodge. The area is a seasonally flooded savannah, and the roads upon which we rode are often under 10 feet of water during the rainy season, when boats replace trucks. The Karanambu folks transported us and our gear over a few miles of dirt tracks to the remarkable settlement that would be our home for the next four days. We all had great views of the surrounding landscape from our benches in the beds of the pickup trucks, and we spotted birds as we rode.

After settling into our rooms in our comfortable thatched cabins, we assembled in the enormous thatched main building. There we met Gary Sway, our Macushi guide for our trip into interior Guyana. Melanie shared with us that Diane McTurk, a woman famous for her research on Giant River Otters, had been in Georgetown for several months, so during our visit the lodge had no Giant River Otters, parrots, or macaws in captivity, but no matter—we were to see many of those and other creatures in the wild during our time at Karanambu. Everyone exclaimed that the Karanambu compound looked just like a scene out of Africa—thatch-roofed cabins, plenty of distance between buildings, huge shade trees, and dry, shrubby savanna stretching to the horizon.

Melanie explained the daily schedule to us and described the operation of the lodge. We quickly learned to love meal time at Karanambu, which we enjoyed in the main building around a very long table that we shared with Melanie and many of the friendly, youthful Karanambu staff. The food at Karanambu, as well as at all other places we stayed in the North Rupununi region, was recognizable, fresh, tasty, and not at all spicy. It included all the food groups, including plenty meat, with plenty of tasty non-meat choices for vegetarians. One delightful Karanambu tradition includes partaking of the free flowing rum punch, all you care to drink, along with cashews from a very large tray of roasted cashew nuts, during the pre-dinner social hour. We used this time to review our field guides, reading up on some of the new birds of the day as well as mammals, reptiles, and insects that were new to us. We were pleased to find that Karanambu provides free hand soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, laundry detergent, and laundry service.

It didn't take us long to absorb Melanie's information, grab our gear, and follow our guide down a trail to the Rupununi River so we could start viewing birds and other wildlife. Our primary guide for the trip, Gary Sway, is a member of the native Macushi tribe that has occupied this region of Guyana, Venezuela, and Brazil for 7,000 years. Because the Macushi predate the founding of those countries by Europeans, the Macushi come and go freely across national borders. Led by Gary and a local guide, Kevin, we hiked along a short loop trail to the river and soon became very familiar with cowbird-sized Swallow-winged Puffbirds, which tend to perch on the

tip of the highest bare branches of trees, from which they sally forth to catch insects. We saw our first manakins, a spectacular wading bird called a Sunbittern, and numerous other species new to us all. We also saw a family of Giant River Otters and both Black and Spectacled Caiman.

Lunch today was typical of the kind of food we would have during our trip—spaghetti with garlic bread, a fresh tossed lettuce salad with sliced green mango, and for dessert sliced grapefruit with ripe mango.

After lunch we walked to the Rupununi River. As we left the compound we watched a Pearl Kite fly overhead; it flew back over us a little later. Doves were conspicuous at Karanambu, with Ruddy, Plain-breasted, and Common Ground Doves in attendance. At the riverside we found many new birds—Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Neotropic Cormorant, and both Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers. We watched Giant River Otters swimming in the deep river. On the walk back, Judi, who was alone, saw our first White-fringed Antwren.

At 4 o'clock we went on a boat excursion downriver. This was extremely exciting, as the riverside animals were not particularly skittish. We found lots of Red-capped Cardinals, a couple of exquisite Pied Lapwings, three species of kingfishers, water-loving flycatchers such as Pied Water-Tyrant, multiple Black Caimans including gigantic adults with tiny babies, a troop of Red Howler Monkeys including a baby, and a juvenile Common Black Hawk that let us approach extremely closely. Throughout our excursion we could hear several species of tinamous calling, the most common being Undulated Tinamou. All of us can recognize Turkey Vultures at home in North America, but here in Guyana we had to learn how to distinguish Turkey Vultures from Greater and Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures.

A highlight of our boat trip was quietly coming upon a group of Jabirus, one of the largest wading birds on earth. Gray-necked Wood-Rails skulked along the river's edge, and multiple Ospreys searched for fish from the air. One very strange sighting was of an adult Rufescent Tiger-Heron standing belly-deep in the river; upon our approach, it walked slowly out of the river and up onto the shore. We found holes of all sizes along the riverbank—nests of kingfishers, motmots, jacamars, and others. Night-blooming *Cereus* cactus vines festooned the trees. Our first large parrots flew overhead—a pair of Red-and-green Macaws—and at long last we had an excellent, prolonged view of a secretive Variable Chachalaca, with a bright orange head and a rufous tail.

As the light faded, our boats were accompanied on our return trip by scores if not hundreds of Band-tailed Nighthawks feeding all around us on insects emerging from the river. We did our first daily tally of species seen during the day, enjoyed a fine dinner, and then crawled into our mosquito-netted beds, with the windows wide open to catch the night breezes.

Sunday, February 21. Karanambu

Today we arose in time for a 5:30 coffee grab and then were out to the savannah. Frank chose to spend the day with a local fishing guide, his target being Peacock Bass. In the pickup trucks or on padded benches in the back of the pickup trucks we rode slowly along tracks crisscrossing the grassy savannah. After a while an adult female Giant Anteater was spotted, and two of the guides hopped out of the trucks and directed the animal towards us for a better view. She came very close to us, running with a curious loping gait. We were all amazed at her large size. We were told that when a Giant Anteater stands on its hind legs, it can reach six feet tall. We loved seeing this unique animal. We were interested to hear later that the next group saw a female with a baby clinging to its back.

Birds of note included Grassland Yellow-Finch, Grassland Sparrow, Double-striped Thick-knee, and a Yellowish Pipit that climbed high, set its wings, and then sang beautifully as it tumbled back to the savannah, landing just where it had started. Among our old friends from North America were Eastern Meadowlark and American Kestrel. In a seasonally flooded, weedy (sedges and rushes) bottomland or slough we had an amazing 13

Pinnated Bitterns in view at once; to find a single Pinnated Bittern on a trip is usually considered successful. Other birds new to us included Green Ibis, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Maguari Stork, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, White-faced Whistling-Duck, and Muscovy Duck. April spotted a Yellowish Pipit about 10 feet from our pickup truck, and we were able to watch it as closely as any human could desire.

As we continue to explore the savannah, we found multiple Double-striped Thick-knees with enormous yellow eyes and a rather plain-colored wet-meadow hummingbird called White-tailed Goldenthrout, and we played hide and seek with a White-tailed Nightjar resting on the ground under bushes near the bottomland. Some of us had a quick view of an eye-level Spotted Puffbird in one of the densest brushy areas. All in all, it was an excellent way to begin the day.

We returned to Karanambu at 9:30, had breakfast, and at 10 o'clock walked with Gary to the Rupununi. We all had excellent views along the trail of a male Blue-backed Manakin in excellent light, but the real treat was encountering a male Guianan (White-faced) Saki monkey. Unlike many members of the primates, saki monkeys bear no facial resemblance to humans and thus appear quite alien.

Frank had been successful in his fishing quest for Peacock Bass, and we enjoyed the results of his foray for both lunch and dinner.

During the afternoon siesta, some of us ambling around the compound spotted a Chestnut Woodpecker dining on a ripe mango and our first Burnished-buff Tanager. At 4 o'clock we went for another boat ride, this time upriver and then up a tributary called Simoni Creek. We made a close approach to some roosting Boat-billed Herons and a juvenile Great Black-Hawk that was giving long, drawn-out screams.

We landed and walked for about a mile up a deep, dry ravine, following Kenneth, one of our Karanambu guides. A juvenile Gray-lined Hawk molting into adult plumage was a challenge for us to identify. A noisy flock of White-faced Whistling-Ducks flew over, and we enjoyed a close view of a tiny Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet. Our destination turned out to be Crane Pond, where we found Straight-billed Woodcreeper, a flock of Muscovy Ducks, a perched Black-collared Hawk, many more Jabirus, and just about every kind of heron or egret commonly found in that area. Showers came and went during our explorations, but during the lovely boat ride back down the Rupununi River to our launch site, all was still and clear. Again scores if not hundreds of Band-tailed Nighthawks flew around us. Joining them were Bulldog Bats, Fish-eating Bats, and Common Pauraques.

Back at Karanambu and well after dark, a few of us walked out to the abandoned runway and listened intently, picking up a very distant Tropical Screech-Owl, while closer to us we heard the calls of Undulated Tinamous and multiple Least Nighthawks. Gary used a flashlight to show us a White-tailed Nightjar resting near us on the runway. Then we conducted our tally, had dinner, and went to bed.

Monday, February 22. Karanambu

This morning we gathered at 6 o'clock and walked west with Kenneth and Gary along the Capuchin Trail, passing through a fallow field and entering a seasonally flooded but currently dry woodland. Three gorgeous, widely spaced Jabirus flew over at dawn. As we crossed the field we found Yellow-crowned Parrots, a Striped Cuckoo, and our first Yellow-breasted Flycatcher. A Roadside Hawk flushed the parrots, and later we got a nice, long look at a Roadside Hawk through my Questar telescope as it perched in a treetop. As we entered the forest we found typical woodland species such as White-fringed Antwren, White-tipped Dove, Crane Hawk, and half a dozen male Blue-backed Manakins dancing on their lek. We heard but did not see White-bellied Antbird, Green-backed Trogon, Red-eyed Vireo, and Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant. We saw more Swallow-winged Puffbirds and heard and then saw our first Screaming Piha, a robin-sized, brown bird with a deafening whistle. This one was close and nearly breaking our eardrums. One special bird we found along this trail—a

bizarre, orange-plumaged Capuchinbird—responded immediately to playback by flying in and perching above us, giving us excellent views of his vulture-like head as he emitted what can only be described as a sound similar to the mooing of a cow. We watched a pair of Finsch's Euphonias forage at head height in some nearby shrubs and finally saw a tiny Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant. Another invisible species of tinamou, the Red-legged Tinamou, called in the distance. Then the trail led us back to the river, with Cocoi Herons and other open-area birds in sight, among them Sunbitterns, Smooth-billed Anis, Solitary Sandpipers, White-winged Swallows, Red-and-green Macaws, Ringed Woodpeckers, a Black Nunbird, a Northern Slaty-Antshrike, and an aptly named Mouse-colored Tyrannulet. Butterflies we could identify included Monarch, Cabbage White, Alfalfa, and the interesting Cracker Butterfly, which makes a loud snap as it leaves its perch on the side of a tree.

At 9:30 we returned in a misty rain for breakfast, after which we rode boats to an access point just across the river from the launch site. From there we hiked for several hours on the Buffalo Pond Trail, which passes along a series of three ponds. A kettle of more than 100 Wood Storks circled slowly over us early on, and we had decent scope views of Ruddy Pigeon, rich chestnut in color, and of a distant, perched Wood Stock. We had a brief look at a male Gray Seedeater along the trail and found large, deep tapir tracks in the soft mud. We arrived at Buffalo Pond No. 1, which is covered with an icon of the Amazon, three-foot diameter *Victoria amazonica* lilies.

Overhead, a White-tailed Hawk became the target of a Pearl Kite that dive bombed it repeatedly even though the kite was only one third the size of the hawk. Only a few feet from us, slightly above eye level, two Lesser Nighthawks were spending the day resting on tree branches. We were so close that at high power through my scope, the field of view was filled by one eye of a nighthawk. A striking bird that everyone enjoyed seeing was Black-capped Donacobius, a mockingbird-sized cross between a thrush and a cuckoo. Continuing on our foray, at Buffalo Pond No. 2 we found White-headed Marsh Tyrant, immature and adult Cocoi Heron, and a high, circling flock of 132 Wood Storks, perhaps the same flock as the one we had seen earlier.

We took a break for cookies and water, which our guides had packed in. On the reptile front, we found several large Green Iguanas sunning themselves on tree limbs; these vegetarian lizards are a staple food of the people living in this region. We attempted to get a view of some very vocal Buff-breasted Wrens, but try as we might, they wouldn't come show themselves. At 12:30 we met the boat along the river. It had been driven downstream to a different spot than the one from which we had disembarked. We motored upstream for 35 minutes, reached the Karanambu boat launch site, and returned to the compound at 1 o'clock. We were tired, sweaty, and hungry, but in short order all of our needs were taken care of. This was probably the hottest day of the trip, yet the heat was not oppressive because the humidity was only about 80 percent. Still, I think we all succumbed to drowsiness and drifted off as we swung in our hammocks in the shade of our cabin porches.

At 4 o'clock we headed by pickup truck for Maribopo Pond, which we reached via a rutted track through a forest of short trees. Maribopo Pond is quite small, perhaps three acres, much of it covered in aquatic vegetation. It was absolutely alive with water-loving birds of all kinds. We saw at least a dozen Wood Storks, two dozen Great Egrets, several Snowy Egrets, many Jabiru, our first Buff-necked Ibis, a pair of Green Ibis, three or four Roseate Spoonbills, two Yellow-billed Terns, good numbers of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, a scattering of Least Sandpipers, and a pair of Red-and-green Macaws.

On the reptile front, we closely observed a 1-ft-long aquamarine-and-black spotted snake, the skin of which resembled the knobby surface of the palms of gardening gloves; subsequent searching through reference books failed to produce a name for this snake. Other good finds as the afternoon wore on were Green-tailed Jacamar and a troop of Brown Capuchin Monkeys.

Leaving Maribopo Pond far, far behind, we rode westward, the land rising almost imperceptibly until we were atop the tallest hill for many miles around, looking out over a landscape that probably resembles what much

of central Texas looked like before Europeans arrived. As our hosts broke out the thermoses of rum punch and crunchy macadamia nut cookies, we savored a gorgeous, nearly unknown part of the world. In all directions, to the horizon, we could see no telephone poles, no cell towers, no fence posts, only what nature had put there. In all the territory we were looking, we could spot only three buildings, all small, distant, and probably over the border, in Brazil. Adding to our enjoyment were several Plumbeous Kites circling over the North Pakaraima Mountains. A hefty dose of rum punch and some homemade macadamia nut cookies didn't hurt, either.

Just before dusk, as we were making our way slowly back to Karanambu, we spotted a Savannah or Crab-eating Fox hunting in scrub not far off the road. We stopped and watched it for a half minute before it moved into taller scrub and disappeared. In our headlights we also saw lots of Common Pauriques and White-tailed Nightjars resting on the dirt track during our return. Back at the ranch, we did our daily tally, had a fine dinner, and called it a day.

Tuesday, February 23. Karanambu, drive to Iwokrama River Lodge

Today we bade farewell to John and Connie, who flew back to Georgetown and then on to new adventures in Trinidad and Tobago. Frank slept in while April, Judi, Gary, and I rode in the back of a pickup truck out onto the savannah. We felt like walking, so we got out of the truck and walked slowly along the track for perhaps a mile, savoring the quiet. We saw and heard a very distant pair of Laughing Falcons and a dark-morph Long-winged Harrier, had excellent close-up views of Mouse-colored Tyrannulet and Plumbeous Seedeater in nearby shrubs, watched a flock of attractive Crested Bobwhites forage in the roadside grass, had a fly-over flock of Roseate Spoonbills, and heard Pale-breasted Spinetail and Green-backed Trogon. Then it was back to Karanambu for breakfast.

We checked out of Karanambu Lodge after breakfast and rode in the Karanambu pickup trucks, along with Melanie, Kevin, and a few other Karanambu staff, on nearly invisible tracks across the savannah on our way to Ginup Landing, where we were to transfer to a different vehicle; in the wet season, this transfer is performed by the use of boats on the Rupununi River. We motored across the savannah and eventually entered a verdant valley nestled between low hills. The area looked like the Napa Valley of California (except for the lack of grape vines), with field crops, fences, and a few houses scattered at long intervals along the paved road. Along the way we saw a flock of perched Red-shouldered Macaws, a White-tailed Kite hovering over a nearby hill, and several Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures. An occasional horse or cow grazed in the distance, but by and large the area was free of large grazers. We arrived at Ginup Landing at 11 o'clock and birded the area near the river while awaiting our next mode of transport, which would take us the rest of the way to Iwokrama River Lodge.

In the low shrubs and trees beside the road, we located a Flavescent Warbler and had a fleeting glimpse of a Pale-tipped Tyrannulet (Inezia). A huge truck arrived, gun turret atop the cab and cushioned benches in the bed. It was a Bedford, an old British troop transport vehicle commonly used in this part of the world because of its ability to traverse difficult terrain. Our luggage was stowed in the bed with us, under a tarp. We climbed a ladder at the back of the truck and situated ourselves on the padded seats. In the midday sun we spotted a flock of five Green Aracaris flying in and out of a tree near a troop of Red Howler Monkeys, with all ages of monkeys represented. Later we observed a remarkably strange pairing: an adult Great Black Hawk standing on a stream bank next to a Snowy Egret.

We stopped for lunch at Rock View Lodge, a collection of buildings, ornamental trees, gardens, and a bit of forest just north of Annai. This oasis in the savannah is operated by an Englishman, Colin Edwards, who has created quite a little paradise there. We took a short walking tour and then enjoyed a buffet lunch. Afterwards, Colin showed us ponds in which they raise Arapaima, the world's largest freshwater fish, native to

the Amazon and Essequibo. Frank, an avid fisherman, was especially interested to see these large fish, which occasionally rolled on their sides, broke the surface, and gulped air.

We left Rock View Lodge at 2 o'clock. The temperature was, as April put it, "hot as blue blazes!" Joining us in the back of the Bedford truck were several Macushi adults and their young, extremely well behaved children. The birds were prudently taking a midday siesta. About two hours into the drive we spotted a White-throated Toucan and found a flock of six Swallow-winged Puffbirds perched high in a roadside Cecropia tree. As we left the savannah behind and entered the rainforest proper, it began to rain hard. There are certain challenges with third-world travel that one must endure to fully experience the wonders of remote areas. For example, the Bedford's fumes entered the back of the truck when the tarp was pulled down to keep the rain out, but when the tarp was up, we got wet, so we just made the best of it.

We arrived at Iwokrama River Lodge at twilight. We were met by Alex, a resident guide at Iwokrama Lodge. That evening we were the only visitors staying at the lodge. We gathered in the foyer of the main building to learn about mealtimes and about some of the activity that goes on at the Iwokrama River Lodge and then checked into our rooms, which, in contrast to the cabins at Karanambu, had window screens and oscillating fans.

After the heat of the savannah, the cool dampness of the rainforest was a welcome change. We walked around the perimeter of the compound and then a short distance along the entrance road. In the falling light we made out some Red Howler Monkeys and a Red Brocket Deer before heading for dinner. The rain tapered off, and after dinner we boarded a boat and explored some of the exposed rocks in the river. By flashlight we saw could make out what our guides identified as Blackish and Ladder-tailed Nightjars sitting on the rocks. We also found a Cook's Tree Boa and sleeping Black-collared Swallows.

Wednesday, February 24. Iwokrama River Lodge

At 6:15 we took a pre-breakfast boat ride up the Essequibo River, watching the first ferry of the morning carry vehicle across the watery gap in the Georgetown-Letham Road. The ferry was laden with cars, pickup trucks, and a few tractor trailers. Blue-headed Parrots flew over, along with Large-billed Terns and Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts. Long-nosed River Bats hawked insects over the river all around us as we returned to the launch site. After breakfast we rode the boat downstream for 15 minutes through some exciting "hydraulics" to a trailhead that led from the Essequibo River to the 950-foot-high summit of Turtle Mountain.

As we hiked ever upwards, a misty rain fell continuously, and the sounds of Black Howler Monkeys and the abundant Screaming Pihwas were our constant companions. Not far from the trailhead, at a base camp clearing in the rainforest, through the scope we watched one of our target species, a Red-fan Parrot, feeding a chick, observed several Black-necked Aracaris bounding through the foliage, watched a Green Oropendola fly over, and heard Spider Monkeys calling in the distance. We also had an excellent view of a gorgeous Yellow-billed Jacamar along the way.

Attaining the summit at 9:45, through occasional pauses in the blowing rain and fog occasionally we could see for at least a mile. All was unbroken rainforest, resembling an unending garden of broccoli, undisturbed by humans. Some trees were in full flower, a lovely violet color, and in two distant trees we spotted monkeys, Red Howlers in one and a Black Spider Monkey in the other. Perched atop a distant dead tree was an Orange-breasted Falcon, a rare species anywhere. It is one of the few raptors that prey on swifts.

Descending from the summit, we hiked carefully through squishy mud back to the base camp area, where we viewed a Guianan Puffbird along with a small flock of Plain-brown Woodcreepers near an army ant swarm. During the boat ride back to the lodge, April picked out a perched White-throated Toucan, above which sat

two Spix's Guans. She also spotted a troop of four Black Capuchin Monkeys on the far side of the river. We had good looks at Black-collared Swallows and Capped Herons, a gorgeous bird and a favorite of the group.

We returned in time for a 1 o'clock lunch. It poured rain all afternoon, but that didn't prevent us from scanning the area from the second floor of the main dining hall. Between deluges, insect-eating birds fed on insects flying over the grassy area between our building and the Burro Burro River. The most common species were Gray-breasted Martins and Black-collared Swallows. We also had rare topside views of swifts, including Short-tailed, Band-rumped, Gray-rumped, and a species new for all of us, Chapman's Swift. These species are very difficult to identify from below, but from our vantage point above them, we were able to see the color of the rump and tail, which is key to their identification.

At 4 o'clock we joined Alex and Gary in a walk around the main compound and along the entrance drive, again with a few rain showers. We found Blue-headed Parrots, Painted Parakeets, Plumbeous Kites along the river, three kinds of hummingbirds (Fork-tailed Woodnymph, White-chested Emerald, and Blue-tailed Emerald), and Chestnut-bellied Seedeaters. Four Black-necked Aracaris socialized in a tree on the edge of the clearing, and for a few seconds we glimpsed a flock of six Gray-winged Trumpeters on the roadside. We enjoyed another boat ride after dinner and then went to bed, our sleep sweetened by the lullaby sound of raindrops on the roof.

Thursday, February 25. Drive to Atta Lodge

This morning after a pre-dawn breakfast we left Iwokrama River Lodge and rode to Atta Lodge in two Iwokrama River Lodge pickup trucks. The sky was clear and blue. Visibility from the pickup trucks was incomparably better than it had been in the big Bedford truck and thus the birding was far better, too. Atta Lodge guide Alex came with us and was a great help in locating and identifying birds. The drivers were obliging about stopping whenever we spotted birds in the treetops or on the roadside, which was frequent. Birds that were new for the trip appeared constantly: Swallow-tailed Kite, Channel-billed Toucan, Blue-cheeked Parrot, Black-headed Parrot, and Marail Guan. Through the scope we had distant but satisfying views of Spangled Cotinga, Pompadour Cotinga, and Purple-breasted Cotinga and had great views of male and female Waved Woodpecker, Blue Dacnis, Black-tailed Tityra, and Lineated Woodpecker. We heard but could not spot an Amazonian Motmot. I used playback to attract an Amazonian Pygmy-Owl, and we were delighted when its mate joined it. Side by side they sat above us vocalizing for many minutes. We found a Black Nunbird, Orange-winged Parrots at their nest hole, Giant Cowbird, and Swallow-winged Puffbirds in dozens of treetops.

We stopped at Macaw-Macaw Creek, where a few of us glimpsed a Crimson Topaz hummingbird while the rest of us settled for Racket-tailed Coquette, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, female and juvenile Great-billed Seed-Finch, Gray-breasted Sabrewing, White-chested Emerald, Reddish Hermit, and a Rufous-throated Sapphire feeding at a flowering melastome bush.

Happy and dry, we arrived at Atta Lodge at 10:30 to the sight of a Purple-throated Fruitcrow in a tree in the lodge clearing. After checking in, confirming meal times, and learning that laundry service at Atta was free, we met the resident Atta guides—Gabriel, Ryan, and John. Our principal guide, Gabriel, showed us a pair of Scarlet Macaws and a pregnant Red Brocket Deer on the entrance drive and gave us a close view of a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. Amazingly large Helicopter Damselflies with clear wings and a bright yellow spot at the tip of each wing hovered low in clearings in deep shade, sharing the airspace with Blue Morpho butterflies. Other birds found on our hike included Paradise Jacamar and the only Gray Brocket Deer of the trip. After our 12:30 lunch, we were on our own until 2:30.

At 4 o'clock we followed Gabriel along a trail through the rainforest that led to a long, rather steep set of wooden steps that climbed for several hundred yards to the base of an elevated suspension bridge at one end of a series of similar bridges that led to stationary platforms positioned around huge trees. As we proceeded

along the trail, we stopped to admire a miniscule but highly vocal Tiny Tyrant-Manakin, while in the distance a Thrush-like Antpitta called from what seemed to be its permanent spot, as we heard it each time we passed through the area; we never saw a single feather of this secretive bird. A pair of Red-throated Caracaras startled us as they screeched from a tree overhead; the locals call them "forest anti-man" because they scare away all the game animals when a person walks by.

Gabriel was intent upon making sure that each of us was as careful as possible as we ascended and descended the wet wooden steps on the way to the canopy walkway. We had met a woman at Rock View Lodge who had broken her leg when she slipped on these stairs, so we made sure we stepped carefully. At the canopy walkway, all was quiet. One of the three giant trees to which the canopy walkway had been affixed had crashed down sometime during the previous few months, taking with it a substantial part of the walkway along with one of the three stationary platforms. The fall had opened a sizable gap in the forest canopy. Gabriel and the other guides told us that the catastrophe had made a tremendous amount noise and that the local birds had not yet been brave enough to return to the area. Still, through the gap in the canopy we spotted some very coveted birds such as King Vulture, Swallow-tailed Kite, and White-collared Swift, one of the largest swifts on earth. A pair of Red Howler Monkeys foraged silently about 100 feet from us, barely moving the branches as they foraged for fruit and buds. A tiny baby monkey was clinging tightly with its arms, legs, and prehensile tail to its mother's chest. While on the platform we encountered a fast-moving mixed-species flock of small tropical birds that included Black-faced Dacnis, male and female Green Honeycreeper, Golden-sided Euphonia, and Red-legged and Purple Honeycreepers. The highlight of that visit was watching a miniscule Rufous-throated Sapphire mob a much larger Amazonian Pygmy-Owl high above us.

As the light level fell, we walked slowly back to the lodge, again being very cautious as we descended the wooden steps. Around and above the clearing at the lodge, just before dark we were treated to nice views of Short-tailed Nighthawks, viewed a Mealy Parrot in the scope, and watched a mixed flock of Swallow-tailed and Plumbeous Kites drift past while a Variegated Tinamou called in the distance. Another Helicopter Damselfly mesmerized us with its very slow, beautiful flight, and several Red-rumped Agouti foraged around the margin of the clearing.

During our evening tally and at dinner we were joined by one of the regulars—"Gertrude," a Smooth-sided Toad that had learned that where there are people, there are bugs to eat. Dinner at Atta was as tasty as at our other accommodations during the trip, the main difference being that rather than the food being served as a buffet or family-style with plates of food for each table, the cooks at Atta prepared just enough food so everyone had some, but there was no going back for seconds. After dinner several of us enjoyed a unique experience—taking a shower in privacy, in a bathroom that adjoined each bedroom, but in a shower built beyond the extent of the roof. That provided us with an opportunity to enjoy a shower while looking up at the stars. This was one of our few clear nights, so we took the scope to the middle of the clearing and shared views of Jupiter and its moons with the tour participants and the curious and then delighted Atta staff.

Friday, February 26. Atta Lodge

We never grew tired of awakening to the far-carrying roars of a nearby troop of howler monkeys at Atta. The volume of their chorus was like waves washing up on a beach, rising and falling in volume almost like a song, until the dominant male made a barking "woof" twice in quick succession, which signaled the end of the roaring. Some of us also heard the loud rustling of feather shafts in the wings of a Spix's Guan proclaiming ownership of a tree near our cabins, and a few of us heard a Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl calling from the forest. As we emerged from the cabins, the light was still dim enough to be acceptable to a crepuscular Short-tailed Nighthawk scooping insects from the air above the clearing. Each day a family of Black Curassows feed near the cabins on cooked rice left there by the staff. The curly feathers on the crowns of the curassows were quite remarkable to observe.

This morning we returned to the canopy walkway, once again watching our feet very carefully as we climbed the slippery wooden steps. The canopy walkway area again was silent. From high above we observed a pair of Spotted Barbets in the distance and then a Guianan Warbling-Antbird foraging far below us in a brush pile composed of what had been the canopy of the fallen rainforest tree. In the distance we saw Red-and-green Macaws flying out in search of their breakfast.

Back at the lodge we birded around the clearing, finding Purple-throated Fruitcrow (all of us) and Fulvous-crested Tanager (one participant only). After breakfast, at 9 o'clock Gabriel led us on a productive hike on a loop trail he had cleared, beginning and ending along the entrance road. He showed us Buff-cheeked Greenlet, Lineated Woodpecker, a White Hawk in flight, a blindingly beautiful Crimson Fruitcrow, and both Amazonian Barred-Woodcreeper, and Red-billed Woodcreeper. We had stupendous views of a very close Ferruginous-backed Antbird that responded to playback and which remained to search the forest floor near us for several minutes in plain view. High points in the mammal world included good views of a White-faced Saki monkey and a South American Coati just 10 feet up in a small tree. It remained there awhile, watching us, and then got spooked, clambered down the tree, and trotted away. Gabriel also showed us a Yellow-green Grosbeak, a Golden-collared Woodpecker, and an aptly named Dusky Antbird. We spotted a pair of Pompadour Cotingas. April said the male looked like it was made of purple cabbage. We all agreed that it really did.

After lunch we strolled out the entrance road to the Georgetown-Letham Road, where we had exceptionally fine views through the scope of a Dusky Parrot as well as views of a Plumbeous Kite, two Squirrel Cuckoos, Tropical Kingbird (surprisingly rare in this area), two Scarlet Macaws, a Giant Cowbird looking for an oropendola nest to pirate, and a Black Curassow. We heard a pair of Coraya Wrens making contact calls with each other in low vegetation on the roadside. I knelt in the dirt near them and softly played their song on my smart phone, which attracted them to within two feet from me, but except for an occasional feather or movement in the vegetation, they were as invisible as if they been a mile away.

A super highlight was watching Swallow-winged Puffbirds flying down from their canopy perches to enter their subterranean burrows in the sandy soil just off the roadside. They reminded us of Brown-headed Nuthatches in the southeastern part of the United States, which forage high in pine trees but nest in very short stumps. Other birds seen along the roadway included a Green Kingfisher, a pair of Scarlet Macaws at their nest hole, a Green-tailed Jacamar, a Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper, a flock of lovely Black-headed Parrots, and both Gray-rumped and Band-rumped Swifts flying beneath us under a small bridge.

Overhead we saw five Short-tailed Nighthawks, four Plumbeous Kites, and another White Hawk. Six Scarlet Macaws near us atop a huge Mora tree was unforgettable. After lunch we visited the canopy walkway one last time. It was as quiet as it had been on our previous visits. We departed with hope that the local birds would overcome their hesitancy to occupy the walkway area.

We found the birding skills of the Atta guides to be exceptionally good. Gabriel gets credit for building all of the trails at Atta except for the one to the canopy walkway. He had been in the same bird-guide training class as had our guide, Gary. They are the only two students in that class who are still working as bird guides.

Saturday, February 27. Atta Lodge, drive to Surama

The local troop of Howler Monkeys awoke us with their deep roars well before dawn. We were up and out in short order, hiking to the canopy walkway again before breakfast. The day dawned sunny and bright. Along the way we listened to the call of a Tiny Tyrant-Manakin and agreed that it sounded just like a Black Rail. In the distance we heard a Guianan Tyrannulet and a Lemon-chested Greenlet, but otherwise the canopy walkway continued to be very still indeed.

After enjoying breakfast and saying goodbye to the staff, at 8 o'clock we departed Atta Lodge, once again in the back of the Bedford truck. We backtracked a few miles toward Iwokrama Rainforest Lodge to visit an area of white sand forest, a special habitat in which we enjoyed close views of two Bronzy Jacamars, a species restricted to that forest type. We stopped at a bridge over a stream and found a group of species that included male and female Guianan Streaked-Antwren, a male Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, and more Swallow-winged Puffbirds.

A highlight of the morning was a chance to stretch our legs for an hour along a trail that led from the roadside to a lek of Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, where with patience we saw two stunningly incandescent orange males and a female in subdued browns and greens. While sitting quietly we also spotted a Black Nunbird and a rabbit-sized animal with a baby. Although several of us, including Gary, saw the two animals well at close range, we were unsure of what they were. They appeared somewhat like the now-familiar Red-rumped Agouti, but their ears were longer, the hind legs were shorter, and they were brown rather than orange. Gary decided that they must have been Agoutis.

We explored huge boulders that formed open caverns and crevices in which several species of bats were roosting, among them our first Long-nosed Fruit Bats. Returning to the Bedford, above the road we saw a Double-toothed Kite circling overhead. Farther on we stopped to check for birds in a tree festooned with hanging nests of oropendolas. It was a colony of two species of caciques, with nests of Red-rumped Caciques high and those of Yellow-rumped Caciques lower.

Three hours after departing Atta Lodge, at 11 o'clock we broke out of the rainforest onto the savannah and shortly afterwards arrived at Surama Village, a Macushi settlement and Gary's hometown. A cluster of octagonal wooden cabins ("benabs") had been constructed in a large clearing at the edge of the rainforest. We were greeted by the staff at a two-story building that served simultaneously as Eco-lodge headquarters, dining hall, and bar. A very active colony of loquacious Yellow-rumped Caciques occupied about a quarter of a mature mango tree right beside our benab, next to the lodge. The afternoon was free time for us, so we visited the nearby visitors' center to purchase wi-fi time, caught up on journaling, relaxed in the hammocks, and read some of the books in the library.

At 4 o'clock Gary returned on his motorbike from his house and led us on a long walk on a dirt trail that took us among knee-high grass and shrubs. In this open grassland we saw male and female Blue Dacnis, the ever-present Swallow-winged Puffbirds, an adult Savannah Hawk in a tree, flocks of Brown-throated Parakeets, a Common Ground Dove, Tropical Kingbirds, Blue-gray Tanagers, a Blue-tailed Emerald hummingbird, and a perched female Rufous-throated Sapphire viewed at close range through the scope.

A highlight of the walk was viewing a Great Potoo sleeping away the warm afternoon in a grove of leafless trees. It looked like an armless gray teddybear. It didn't seem to mind at all when we approached to within a few feet of it.

Another highlight was coming upon a small, beautiful snake on the dirt path—a Yellow-bellied Road-racer. Upon our approach, it slithered off the trail into the sparse grass, raised the front third of its body up like a cobra about to strike, and then checking us out, turning its head from side to side. As we admired it, a Macushi vaquero (cowboy) rode up, herding steers, which Gary told us were owned by the Macushi community at large rather than by any individual. The vaquero was the real deal, dressed for work.

After admiring his expertise, we continued walking until we came to a seasonally flooded slough where we had close looks at pair of Cinereous Becard in a leafless tree. We got back to the lodge at dusk, did our evening tally, enjoyed a delicious buffet dinner, and called it a day.

Sunday, February 28. Surama

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A challenging hike up nearby Surama Mountain was originally scheduled for this morning, but we canceled the hike because of concern that hiking the steep trail in the rain would be dangerous. Instead we walked along a dirt lane that led from our benabs toward the Burro Burro River. The surrounding grassy fields yielded a much-wanted species, the Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, a strikingly attractive bird with a peacock-like tail. The bird sat still long enough for us to view it through the scope. We saw many butterflies, including scores of the migratory White-tailed Patch swallowtail, a lovely combination of lime green, black, and white. It is actually a day-flying moth. Despite the scattered showers and viewing from beneath umbrellas we had close views of Finsch's Euphonia and lots of tiny Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters.

Entering a stretch of rainforest, we pulled out a Pectoral Sparrow, brown and white with a black face and with one of the highest-pitched calls we had ever heard. We also heard but could not obtain good views of a Painted Tody-Flycatcher that stayed high above us, directly in line with a bright bit of sky. A memorable sighting was that of a Blue-headed Parrot about 15 feet above us sticking its head out of a nest hole. From a distance we heard Ruddy Pigeon. One clump of shrub yielded fleeting but repeated views of a mixed-species flock that included a Guianan Warbling-Antbird, male and female White-flanked Antwrens, a Mouse-colored Antshrike, and a White-flanked Antwren. Surely there was an army ant column nearby. We walked back to the benabs and reached them in time for lunch.

The sky cleared after lunch. We spent the next couple of hours either in our benabs, on the second floor of the dining hall watching the Yellow-rumped Caciques and a pair of Piratic Flycatchers that were looking for an oropendola nest in the mango tree to confiscate, or just admiring the unspoiled view and occasionally the martins, swifts, and swallows catching flying insects just above the vegetation.

At 3:30 we packed into the back of a pickup truck and rode along the track we had followed that morning, across the savanna and entering the rainforest, arriving at the Burro Burro River at 4 o'clock. A group of newly constructed wooden buildings stood in a clearing near the riverbank, available for visiting groups wanting to sleep in the wild in hammocks. The camp featured another Yellow-rumped Cacique colony; that species really seems to like human presence. River bats slept as they clung to the shady side of a huge boulder in the middle of the river.

We boarded a metal canoe-like boat, long and narrow and stamped "Made in Brazil," with a staff member named Milnor paddling in the back and Gary paddling in the front. We each had our own short bench seat. Birds began to appear along the riverside. One of the coolest was the White-banded Swallow, the underparts of which were like a negative image of that of most other swallows – black with a white band rather than white with a black band. Overhead we spotted a Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, a species that prefers unbroken lowland rainforest, in contrast to the Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, which prefers savannas. The riverside was thick with garrulous Yellow-rumped Caciques.

As we rounded a bend in the river, a pair of Red-throated Caracaras screeched at us from their perch in a tall tree. We slid silently along the stream, spotting Anhingas, a pair of Yellow-throated Flycatchers, a Black Nunbird, and an Amazon Kingfisher. We heard a Great Jacamar but, once again, we couldn't spot this elusive bird. Very close to the boat, a Reddish Hermit hummingbird fed on a flowering bush. We finally saw our first (and last) Cocoa Thrush of the trip, a bird that in other places is very common but which was decidedly rare in the North Rupununi region at that time of year. April amazed us by picking out an American Pygmy Kingfisher by the sound of its wings. We eventually found three of them along with Green and Ringed Kingfishers. We spent some time trying to get more than a glimpse of a singing Buff-breasted Wren but finally gave up and moved on. The golden afternoon light gave way to thick black clouds, and as we returned to the launch site, the rain arrived. We used the opportunity to look for toads with our flashlights. Back at the village, we did our evening tally rally, had dinner, and went to bed.

Monday, February 29. Surama/Rock View/Georgetown/Kaieteur Falls

We awoke today to a continuation of last evening's rain and wind. We packed our gear, enjoyed breakfast at 6:30, and departed at 7:15 in the Bedford truck, headed for Rock View Lodge and the Annai airstrip, where we were to catch our return flight to Ogle Field near Georgetown. As we left Surama Village, the driver stopped several times so Macushi women and children headed for Annai could climb aboard. They were interesting people, especially one woman who said that the baby boy she was nursing was a month old but that she didn't remember his name because the father had named him. The drive to Rock View Lodge took less than 30 minutes and was quite comfortable. The rain stopped. We passed a dirt landing strip being constructed in Surama Village and some small schools, a church, and a community center. We had about an hour of free time at Rock View. We each drifted in a different direction, admiring the flowers, trees, and birds. I noticed that Colin was wearing shorts and flip-flops, so I asked him why he wasn't concerned about malaria. He told me that the human body builds up immunity to diseases over time and that he had had malaria 14 times already and that it was no worse than a case of the flu. A Vermilion Flycatcher was quite a sight as it sat in full sunlight on a fence post, and a Sooty-capped Hermit visited a flowering shrub next to the front door of the lodge. April found an Orange-backed Troupial, which was new for the trip. Eventually it was time to step on the scale, get weighed, and get a ticket.

The plane was on time, the flight was easy, and when we arrived at Ogle Field, a driver from Wilderness Explorers was there to help us collect our belongings, load them into the van, and hand each of us a bottle of water.

Our plan was to send the luggage back to Cara Lodge with the driver. Though not on our original itinerary, we elected to add a trip to see Kaieteur Falls and this afternoon was the available time. We needed to arrive and then board our flight to Kaieteur Falls immediately. Judi had been ill during the night and decided that flying to Kaieteur wasn't a good idea for her, so instead she returned to Cara Lodge and then, after she had recovered, visited the Botanical Gardens. A Wilderness Explorers' guide, Carlos, led us to the Ogle Field departure lounge, where we ate a packed lunch supplied by Wilderness Explorers while waiting for our Cessna. Space was very tight in the aircraft. The pilot told me to work my way into the copilot's seat (there is no door on the right-hand side of the aircraft). April and Frank sat in the back seats, and poor Carlos had to recline in the rear section where the cargo is usually stashed. The pilot taxied almost to the end of the runway and was preparing to turn the plane into the wind for takeoff when suddenly he shut off the engine and steered the plane into the grass along the runway. He told us that the left brake had failed and that we needed to return to the terminal. The airport was shut down for 45 minutes while a tow truck came to haul the Cessna back to the hanger, and a golf cart came to take us back to the terminal.

After half an hour, another Cessna was ready, and with the same pilot we took off on the 75-minute flight to Kaieteur Falls. He circled the falls twice, banking so we all had a great view of it, before descending and landing on a naturally bare rock runway. Our time was tight because we had to land at Ogle Field before dark, so accompanied by a Kaieteur Falls guide we hurried to three lookout spots while picking up as many new bird species as we could. The falls was indescribably thrilling. We were the only visitors there and had the whole place to ourselves. We were amazed that there was no railing at the falls or any of the safety features one would expect to find in the United States, only a small sign asking visitors to stay eight feet away from the edge of the cliff. To our bird list we added Cliff Flycatcher, another male Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, and our only Cayenne Jay. Surprisingly, the plant life near the falls was typical of a northern bog. It featured acid-loving plants such as sundew and nut sedges in abundance. In the throat of a terrestrial bromeliad we found a tiny Golden Poison Dart Frog (family Dendrobatidae), one of the most toxic creatures known.

Our pilot lifted off in time to make it back to Georgetown before dark, which was critical because the plane was not equipped for night landings. A Wilderness Explorers' van shuttled us back to Cara Lodge, where we met Judi. The four of us enjoyed a farewell dinner at Cara Lodge.

Tuesday, March 1. Free day

Frank and Judi left early this morning for Cheddi Jagan International Airport and their onward flight. April and I spent the day with a Guyanese friend who had been one of my drivers in Trinidad 20 years ago. We visited with him and his wife at their home east of Georgetown and then had lunch and toured some of the local sights.

Wednesday, March 2. Botanical Gardens, departure

Just after dawn, Carlos, our guide from Wilderness Explorers, picked us up. He and his driver took us to the Botanical Gardens, which looked more like a park than a botanical garden. At that early hour hardly any other people were present, and the abundant birdlife was almost tame. Carlos was exceptionally good at knowing just where to look for the species we wanted most to see. For example, he knew exactly where to look for Blood-colored Woodpecker, Festive Parrot, a sleeping Great Horned Owl, and a White-bellied Piculet. We got to within 10 feet of a Limpkin. All in all, the Botanical Gardens at dawn produced almost as many species as any other location we had visited during the trip.

On the way back to the hotel, after we had told Carlos that we hadn't yet seen a Rufous Crab-Hawk, he directed the driver to a spot in downtown Georgetown, only a few blocks from Cara Lodge, where he knew a Rufous Crab Hawk would be perching—and it was!

Closing thoughts

Guyana is a marvelous country with enormous stretches of unbroken rainforest, almost uninhabited savannas, beckoning mountain ranges, as yet unexplored river systems, and a huge number of interesting bird species, many of which are endemic to the Guianan Shield region. It also teems with mammals, reptiles, fish, and an astonishing array of fascinating insects. We felt completely safe everywhere we went, even in Georgetown, the country's most populated city. People we met were uniformly friendly and helpful. Yes, it rained from time to time and temperatures were high at midday a few times, but that's to be expected when one is only a few degrees north of the Equator and at a low to moderate elevation. Guyana is absolutely worth visiting, and the Macushi people are excellent hosts and guides. We are grateful for their service to us, especially to Gary Sway, who was able to share his knowledge of the birds of Guyana along with providing an intimate view into his world as an indigenous person from Guyana. Given the opportunity, we would all love to go back.