

Panama & the Wild Darien | Trip Report

Jul. 29 – Aug. 5, 2022 | by Andrew Haffenden



With Naturalist Journeys guide Andrew Haffenden & participants Ralph, Audie, and Jeff



The Darién is one of the world's most evocative place names, conjuring up mystery and deep unexplored jungle where few have traveled. And with no roads in most of its area the reality is close to the legend. The Darién in the wet season is even less visited, and this was just the second Naturalist Journeys tour at this time of the year. Reflecting the low visitation, during our six days at Canopy Camp and the various birding areas we visited we saw just two other birders, a couple – or tourists of any kind. Other than the couple we had both Canopy Camp and the entire Darién for our birding alone!

Fri., Jul. 29 Arrivals | Panama City

Audie had flown into Panama a day early, and we other three met up with him at the Riande Hotel conveniently located a few minutes from the airport. Despite being surrounded on two of three sides by major highways, including the Pan-American which we would come to know well, the well vegetated grounds provided some nice birding. Audie became our location guide as he had already done the rounds. In short time we picked up our first Panama birds, twenty-one in all. Not bad for a couple of hours at a city hotel. Favorites included Saffron Finch, Green-breasted Mango, Tropical Mockingbird, Thick-billed Euphonia, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Lesser Goldfinch,



Variable Seedeater, Barred Antshrike and our trip mascot, dubbed Our Old Friend, Roadside Hawk. Flyover Wood Stork, Anhinga and Magnificent Frigatebird added to the mix. While this was the first time in Panama for Audie and Ralph, all of us had some familiarity with Central American birds and this easy brush up got us in the mood for more, and certainly for new species. An early dinner was voted on, as most of us arose before 4am, so after a round of welcome drinks and some good food we hit the sack for our 6.30 start in the morning.

Sat., Jul. 30

Panama City to Canopy Camp | Darién Province

After breakfast, our Canopy Camp van turned up, with two guides and two other Canopy Camp guests, Rhesa and Jim who were spending 20 days visiting all their Canopy Camp properties. Igua, our guide explained that rather than making several birding stops along the way and having lunch at Avicar we were going to drive straight through to the Camp. We did make a (usual) stop at Lake Bayano, as there were no reports at that time of developing demonstrations further east, and it was decided that even if something was to arise that day we would be able to beat an actual blockage. We were glad this decision was made, as we got some nice birds not seen again, including Bat Falcon, Pied Water-tyrant and Band-rumped Swift. Other birds including the rank-grass-loving Blue-black Grassquit and Variable Seedeater, our first Cocoi Heron, Ringed Kingfisher, Black-bellied Whistling Duck and a mottled Little Blue Heron. Heading west east we continued see birds along the way including Greater and Smooth-billed Anis, Tropical Kingbirds of course, a pair of Southern Lapwing and resident American Kestrel. We made at pitstop at Tortí which gave us our first Snowy-bellied Hummingbird at a feeder at Avicar. No demonstrations were encountered and eventually we arrived at the border between Panama and Darién Provinces. There is a checkpoint here as part of the National border patrol, so paperwork was taken care of and on our way we went, after requisite photos at the Darién sign (Ralph, Audie, Jeff, Me) and arch. Closer to camp a stop was made at the main store in Metetí, site of one of the blockades the previous week, where we loaded up on snacks for our travel and the all-important rubber boots. The \$12 to buy a pair to be left behind was a much better option than trying to carry them from home and back, and they did the job superbly.



We arrived at Canopy Camp is the same sunshine that had accompanied us for the most part for our journey from Panama City (referred to by Panamanians, including official government signs etc, just as Panama). Although by now it was 1pm lunch had been freshly prepared, and after the long journey we jumped at it. As was going to be the rule for the rest of our stay, typical Panamanian food was served for the main part, consisting of a protein – fish, chicken etc and a variety of local vegetables, plus a green salad. Healthy, filling but not heavy and so perfect for the climate. We received information about the camp and then a short break to settle in to our large and very comfortable tents, each with their own deck, elevated and facing the jungle. Then at three we headed out for our first expedition, and one of our main target birds – Crested Eagle, a slightly smaller look-alike of the Harpy. The area we were to search was about 30 minutes away, along a muddy road then a hike into an area protected for environmental education for regional schools.

While we started to see birds along the road, just one stop was made as we wanted to look for the eagle; we could bird on the way back. Canopy Camp had been monitoring a nest since egg-laying (though not visiting with birders during that period) and there was a narrow path we followed to the tree, crossing several creeks on makeshift bridges along the way. Although the chick had fledged months before, it was hanging around in the general vicinity of the nest though could have been anywhere, so all eyes were looking aloft. Even so a lovely small toad was spotted by sharp-eyed Igua, despite the fact that he was searching the treetops and the toad was on leaf litter on the ground. We eventually got to the nest tree and searched every viewable branch but no bird. After about ten minutes Igua told us to wait and went off to look in the vicinity. Not five minutes after he left the young bird flew in and sat on a large branch in full view. Igua had left his scope in place, so we all had great views. After about ten minutes the bird flew, but only to land in another branch with perhaps even better views. Igua had not yet returned and we didn't want to call out so as to not disturb the bird. Eventually the youngster flew off into the forest. Naturally when he returned, we asked if he had found it, no was the answer and so we all looked disappointed.



I then asked him to “ID a bird we saw” and showed him my camera screen. His somewhat somber face broke into a large grin, and as a guide I could tell that a wave of relief was flooding over him. More than satisfied with our first and successful target hunt we returned to the road for edge birding, and we quickly started to rack up new species (something we continued through our birding time in Panama, racking up 7 new species per birding hour for the trip). Highlights included Plumbeous Kite, Long-tailed Tyrant, Crested and Chestnut-headed Oropendulas and Golden-headed Tanager. A non-bird highlight of the day was a great view of a Three-toed sloth who appeared to be deep in contemplation. Parrots of several species flew and called overhead and we began to learn both their calls and flight style. We then returned to camp for some pre-checklist relaxation, very happy with a bird-filled first day. After the checklist, which tabulated some 65 species seen and a further 10 heard only. Much of the reason for the high heard only count was that we were returning to the road the next morning to bird it in its own right, so didn’t try too hard to hunt out the more common heard only species. After dinner a spotlighting walk down the Camp entry road provided nice views of a Common Opossum and Striped Owl, and both Mottled and Black-and-White Owl were heard. We then retired for our first night in the Darién.

Sun., Jul. 31

El Salto Rd | The Pan-American Highway

After being woken up to Howler Monkeys in the distance and an assortment of mostly unknown bird calls, though Little Tinamou was known to a couple of us along with Whooping Motmot, the latter for some reason an elusive bird for most of the trip as far as viewing went, only being seen on our last day despite being heard every day of the tour. Our destination this morning was a return to El Salto Rd, one of the best birding areas in the region. And so it was for us, with over 50 species, about 30 of which were new. Five others were heard only, though all but one of these we got to see as the trip progressed. Once again we escaped any rain, but the generally overcast skies but still presenting a bright background made for some difficult birding in the dense forest, so typical for rainforest birding anywhere. Birds just seem to like having the light behind them. As always one of the most common birds was Ruddy Ground-dove, always on or alongside roads both highway and dirt and White-tipped Dove was the most common dove flying across the road. A Striped-throated Hermit gave us quick but good views as it tested Heliconias growing at the side of the road, and butterflies of the same name, also called Longwings, were common, especially what is either Common or Red Postman and another so far unidentified one.



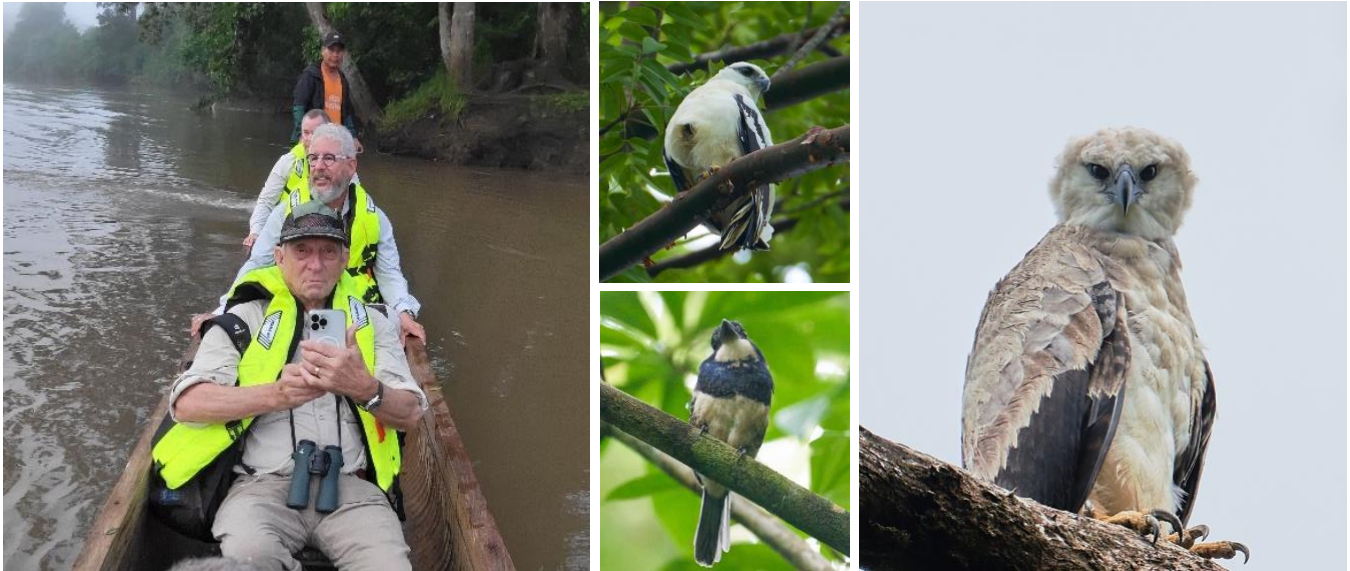
While looking over a cleared area Igua saw a Red-throated Caracara in a distant tree. Another individual landed in a different tree, sat for a calling loudly. We had great scope views of these handsome birds which then took off and flew around and over us, always calling with their parrot like voice. Black-tailed Trogon, White-necked Puffbird, Spot-crowned Barbet, Collared Aracaris and two species of toucans, familiar Keel-billed and relatively recently split Yellow-throated, as did six species of woodpeckers, including the spectacular Red-crested, though the sought after Red-rumped was the woodpecker of the day. Five species of parrots flew over, and a few were seen perched. Hardest to find and see were the various Ant-somethings, in part because we were road-birding and those that may were seen as movements or heard calling couldn't be enticed out for viewing. "Dark/black movement" was as good as many IDs got, not for the want of trying. Finally a long period of patience and eye-straining was rewarded when a previously heard Black-crowned Antshrike deigned to give us views, then left. The four other heard-onlys were left for another day; subsequently we had success with two of them. Ubiquitous Cocoa and common Streak-headed Woodcreepers were noted, and a quick but positive view of a Plain Xenops was our first. The Eastern Kingbird look-alike Choco Sirystes was spotted though not well by two of us. After being heard the previous day a Purple-throated Fruitcrow was seen, and a shout from Igua direct us to one of our target birds, the lovely Blue Cotinga. (That's for you, Jeff). Those who were familiar with Lovely and Turquoise Cotingas were, as usual, grateful for the lack of overlap (almost) of these three extremely similar species. Eight species of tanagers and close allies were seen, including the beautiful and common golden-hooded and the sought-after White-eared Conebill, a tricky bird to get a decent look at. Three species of Oropendolas were seen, Crested, Chestnut-headed and the Darién-restricted (in Panama) Black, and Yellow-rumped Caciques flew across the road on several occasions. Eventually we headed back to the camp for a well-earned lunch, a break and our afternoon outing. Our afternoon outing was to more open habitat and included getting to the very end of the Pan-American Highway on the north American continent, at Yaviza some twenty miles east of the Camp (The road stripe is the last one on the highway). But another aim here were two birds, Bicolored Wren, a South American wren only recently recorded in Panama, and Spectacled Parrotlet, both previously found in the small cemetery in Yaviza. Unfortunately neither bird was found, however the end of the road *was* there for us, so one out of three aims achieved. But before we arrived at Yaviza we birded a small side road through mostly open farmland, quite a change from our forest birding. The lack of shade made for a hot walk, but as with the rest of our time in the Darién not hot enough to stop us birding. Here we saw our first Pale-vented pigeon, expected Anis, and a good selection of grassy field birds - Blue-black Grassquit, Variable Seedeater, Thick-billed Seedfinch and a nice male Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. Yellow-headed Caracaras were common, and a highlight was a hatch-year White-tailed Kite perching and flying, always a nice bird to see especially for us from the East.



A small pond revealed a Wattled Jacana pair with chicks, and is often the case a discussion on just how Jacana should be pronounced ensued. Overall today was a good day for kites, with Pearl, Mississippi and Plumbeous Kites also seen. A Spot-breasted Woodpecker was our first for the trip, moving from tree to tree, and Lineated was in the more open area. Mealy parrots flew over, along with expected Blue-headed and Red-lored. A distant Black-crowned Tityra took some time to ID but was an interesting exercise. Great Kiskadee were everywhere, oddly our first sightings of this usually very common flycatcher. Our last stop for the day was at a small chapel where both Barred and White-headed Wrens had been seen. Try as we may we could not turn any of the three White-headed Wrens we did see into a Bicolored, but the White-headed is a beautiful bird and new to all of us, so it was a most enjoyable stop. We then returned to the Camp for a short bit of rest before the checklist and dinner. An early bedtime was in order as our next day was the most anticipated – a very early start for the long, complex and arduous trip for the Harpy Eagle; some 4 to 5 hours we were told. We hoped the weather gods would smile on us, as we were making the trek regardless!

Mon., Aug. 1 Alto Playona

We started today with a 5am breakfast quickly eaten, and more importantly drunk, then loaded up the 4WDs for the 45 minute drive to a village on the Chucunaque River, Panama's longest, for our ten minute power canoe trip to the next village along the river, the start point for both our two part trek to the Harpy Eagle nest tree. After some sorting out and mulling around the horses, or rather ponies, we were riding for the first part of our trek were assembled and we dutifully in turn stood up on a box and mounted our hopefully trusty steeds. Other than Igua we weren't actually riding per se as each horse was led at walking pace by a handler. Our job was to sit as comfortably as possible, hold onto the saddle and not fall off. Once we got to the trail itself this turned out to be not as easy as at the start, as the trail quickly became extremely muddy, with the horses and the handlers and other villagers who helped with the trek often sinking eight inches and more and more into the mud. It didn't help that much was uphill as well. We were immediately very happy that the horses were available as trekking this section on foot would have been far too difficult. We dismounted for a creek crossing on a narrow log bridge while the horses were walked across, and a similar bridge was the start of our foot trek. But we did stop for a few birds along the way, including a small group of Chestnut-fronted Macaws, a South American species only found north of there in the Darién. We were all very pleased to see them.



After about 45 minutes of horse riding we began our uphill trek on foot. Though a little muddy in parts it was easy enough going, especially compared to the lower part of the trek. Although we heard and saw birds along the way the aim was the Harpy, and we didn't want to risk weather coming in as the day so far was bright and sunny and we wanted to take advantage of this good luck. About 40 minutes later we arrived at the nest tree, where there were benches in place – Canopy Camp knows how to treat its guests! But no eagle in sight. We milled around to see different parts of the tree, and the guides and villagers spread out to look. After about 15 minutes the call came. The young eagle had been spotted from along the track a bit! Success! We gathered around and got our first views, relief washing over us (and, I know, the guides as well). Harpy Eagle – check! Then a call from one of the villagers that a very good view could be had back at the benches, so we moved there, and he was right, the views were better. After much photography and digiscoping we took a break to have some sandwiches and drinks, as did our hard-working crew, then we started to look again for a couple of birds heard but only glimpsed while searching for the eagle, especially the very elusive and frustrating Black-crowned Antshrike. This species was also heard yesterday, but after ten minutes was finally only briefly glimpsed by Jeff and myself. In this case the bird was circling us for some 10 to 15 minutes but remained elusive. We gave up when the Harpy was found, but on second try later the antshrike finally came into view, both male and female. Other ant-somethings magically pulled out of the dark forest by Igua, were Black Antshrike and Bare-crowned Antbird, along with Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Southern Bentbill, Black-bellied Wren, Song Wren and White-shouldered Tanager. Two puffbirds were seen, a target Gray-cheeked Nunlet and Black-breasted. It was a three species day for trogons; Slaty-tailed, Black-tailed and White-tailed, including a juvenile female that made choosing between Slaty-tailed and Black-tailed difficult, but Igua came through once he got a slightly better view. We had two new raptors, a juvenile light morph Collared Forest-falcon and a high but open viewed White Hawk, its bulging crop indicating lunch had just been taken. Great Jacamar, Collared Aracari, Plain Xenops, Cocoa Woodcreeper and a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher all put in appearances and a bit of effort got everyone on one of the smallest woodpeckers in the world, Olivaceous Piculet, coming in at about one-third of an ounce and just 3.5" long. Trees are still the source of the boats that ply the river, cutting down and initial shaping done in the forest then dragged to the river for final shaping and gunwales attachment.



Back at the village lunch was broken out, and after the long morning's sometimes strenuous activities it was demolished pretty quickly. We then repaired to the canoes, only to find just one was available, so three of us and Igua waited dockside while the others three were ferried back to the first village. This was fortuitous for us, as a trio of King Vultures mixed itself in with the ever-present Blacks, helping us to learn how to pick them out at a distance as the flock drifted away. This delay also gave us time to ponder on and appreciate our own lives at home and the things we take for granted almost without thought. Many of the villages in the rainforest of the Darién have no fresh water source other than the Chucunaque River along which they sit, and as we waited women sitting in the water were washing dishes and clothes, and a girl washed and brushed her teeth, all in the muddy river. The boat ride however returned us to our privileged life, allowing us good views of Mangrove Swallows and Brown-chested Martins. On the drive back to the camp some nice birds were seen and stopped for, including Savannah Hawk, a close view of a swooping Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and a beautiful Orange-crowned Oriole. Naturally that evening our checklist run-through had a big Whoopee! in the middle of it. Our mid afternoon arrival back at camp gave us time for some personal birding around the grounds, or just relaxing after the early start. A small Howler Monkey group a little way from my tent was seen framed by trees and backlit, quite a pleasing sight, so I took a couple of pictures. Unknown to me when doing so the main subject, a female, had recently giving birth, and the very small, pale infant could be seen clinging to the underside. A second female only partly seen was attending, almost certainly a sister. Geoffroy's Tamarins, one of which Audie got this marvelous photo of a couple of days earlier, were working the fringes of the gardens and the Variegated Squirrels were busy as well.

Tues., Aug. 2 Canopy Camp

After the long and busy day yesterday an easier day of birding was our pleasure today, with birding around the campgrounds and a short drive to a nearby road on the menu. This also meant enjoying breakfast at a leisurely pace, a nice change. The usual suspects were at the fruit and hummingbird feeders, with Bananaquits leading the way of course. Hummingbirds were White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeleteer, Blue-chested and Crowned Fairy at the feeders, with Pale-bellied and Stripe-throated Hermit in the forest. For a change a Little Tinamou was calling quite close, so we determinedly searched and searched, and although this large bird was only feet away at one stage we could still not actually see it. Thirty minutes of frustration later we called off the effort when a close by Trogon started calling. It proved more cooperative and altogether three trogon species were seen, including Gartered, new for us. A Rufous Motmot became the first motmot seen, though Whooping had been heard every day and a Rufous-tailed Jacamar was our second jacamar species. A search for the uncommon and Darién specialty Dusky-backed was on the books for tomorrow, which would make for a sweep of the Panama jacamars if seen.



Our so far daily sightings of Keel-billed Toucan and Collared Aracaris continued, and a second for us Spot-crowned Barbet put itself on our list. Black-cheeked, Red-crowned and Red-rumped Woodpeckers and another Collared Forest-falcon were also added. A nice find skulking away as usual was Russet Antshrike and both White-bellied and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, though heard before were finally seen. Our first Wedge-billed Woodcreeper showed itself, strange for what is usually a not uncommon bird. Cocoa and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, near daily birds, joined in as did an accurately but also mysteriously named Plain Xenops. A walk across the creek running through the ravine overlooked by our tents was to the lek areas of two kinds of Manakins, always a crowd pleaser, and we were not disappointed.

Though patience was required we had good looks at both Golden-collared and Golden-headed Manakins, and Jeff and Igua caught identifiable quick looks at a Red-capped. We spent a little more time than usual on the less flashy birds during today and were rewarded with seven species of flycatchers – Black-headed Tody-flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Forest Elaenia, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, Bright-rumped Atilla, Streaked Flycatcher and Piratic Flycatcher plus the flycatcher-like Cinnamon Becard. Yellow-margined Flycatcher was heard only, and ironically a bird we had seen every day prior, Tropical Kingbird, was not seen! Other firsts for the Darién were Thick-billed and Fulvous-vented Euphonias, both routinely expected especially the common Thick-billed but not seen until today. A high-pitched call immediately had us looking for, and finding, a Tropical Gnatcatcher. On our return from our road birding Igua got a call that a King Vulture had been attracted to the cow's head and other bits that were placed away a bit from the immediate camp area to attract vultures, so we quickly made our way there. Definitely not your usual bird feeder, with about twenty-five Black Vultures plus a magnificent King. What a stunning bird! We took our usual break after lunch, and it started to rain. Good, we thought, when it stops that will bring out the birds. We didn't count on it pretty much not stopping, and we were deluged until dinnertime. But as often the case a rest is appreciated if not planned, and we sat around the common area for much of it talking about birds and birding. During a couple of short breaks birds visited the feeders to fill up, and a very colorful Ameiva sp. lizard wandered around on the deck looking for a snack. The rain continued and water was running across the lawns and down paths. Though living in North Carolina Audie said he not seen rain so heavy, and Canadian Jeff was amazed at the size of the raindrops as well as the intensity. Ralph and I, however, living on an island subjected every summer to tropical storms and occasional hurricanes and nearby Mobile being the wettest city in the continental US, felt quite at home. Although we missed out on our afternoon outing and night owling this was the only time during our entire stay that our birding was interrupted by rain. A shout from one of



the workers summoned Igua, who then called us. Among the rubber boots available for guests was a small False Papoka snake curled up. So yes, when they tell you to check shoes before putting them on, they are right!

Wed., Aug. 3 Chucunaque River | Nueva Vigia | Tuquesa River

Once again we woke to Howler Monkeys and the Little Tinamou calling; today it was joined by a distant Great Tinamou. After breakfast we headed back to the Chucunaque River for a longer boat ride to the village of Nueva Vigia. We birded the river on the way, noting typical river birds such as Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga and stately Cocoi Herons. This village has seen the potential of ecotourism, and helped by Igua a couple of villagers have been training as local bird guides, and birding locations scouted and monitored including some large natural ponds along a creek which provide habitat for waterbirds as well as the forest birds. These ponds and surrounding forest were our first stop for this morning. On arrival we met our local guide and headed out along a looping trail. Before we had even left the village a brown bird sitting on a post was spotted, a Striped Cuckoo. It obligingly sat there while we all got good views. At our first pond we scouted the edge, where a Roadside hawk was perched and a Capped Heron appeared on the far side. We spent time teasing two Black-crowned Antshrikes out of the tangled vegetation, and Igua saw a beautiful Green-and-Rufous quietly perched above the water. Unlike many other kingfishers Green-and-Rufous like to conceal themselves within vegetation rather than sit out in the open. This particular bird was much bluer than typically, at least to my eyes and the camera's sensor. This turned out to be a good day for kingfishers, as our river time enabled a sweep of all possible species, adding Ringed, Amazon, Green and American Pygmy. Panama's only other kingfisher, Belted, is not present at this time of the year. Another highlight at the pond was Green Ibis, unlike many ibises a river specialist. A rather nice Tarantula attracted our attention, the second or third of the tour.

As we walked the trail the usual suspects were seen or heard – Black-crowned and Black Antshrikes, Cocoa and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, Black-crowned Tityra and Cinnamon Becard, Black-headed Tody-flycatcher, Streaked Flycatcher, once again all three species of Oropendulas, and our usual five or six tanager species and seven species of woodpeckers. Five species of parrots flew over or sat perched. But numerous birds were added to our list, including Black-faced Antthrush, Plain Brown Woodcreeper, Masked Tityra, White-winged Becard,



Black-tailed Flycatcher, Gray-capped Flycatcher, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Dusky-faced Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper and a beautiful Flame-rumped Tanager, rather poorly named as for the majority of its distribution it is lemon-rumped rather than red-rumped. But we also had some target birds for this area, including Royal flycatcher at the second pond. Sure enough the bird was there, calling and came quite close, but could not be coerced into view. This has been a nemesis bird for Jeff, and unfortunately continues to be. But with a second target we were more successful, when a small group of Spectacled Parrotlets, missed at Yaviza, flew around, eventually coming closer and landing in a tree above us for stunning views. Another great sighting was not specifically a target for here, but was one generally, the wonderful Red-billed Scythebill. After teasing us for a bit it finally gave us excellent looks, in enough light to see the red of the long curving bill. Arriving back near the village a major target was searched for, Black-capped Donacobius, a South American bird also found in eastern Darién and whose taxonomic status is unclear.

We were fortunate and got onto a pair quickly and added it to our list. Nearby was another new bird, a Panama Flycatcher, in appearance a drab version of our familiar Great-crested Flycatcher. In the ditch next to the path Purple Gallinules fussed around. We then headed back into the village for our picnic lunch, everyone eager to sit down in the shade after several miles of walking, sometimes in muddy conditions and often in the hot sun. Cold drinks went down quickly. Another part of tourism for the village is selling crafts made mostly by the women, though wood carvings are done by the men. There was a table full of different objects – textiles, bowls and plates woven from local reeds, masks and jewelry. Needless to say our group and Jim and Rhesa made a reasonable dent in the offerings. Such support for these villages is an important part of being able to share their land and the wildlife on it, and to help ensure both forest and wildlife is conserved not killed and cleared. After lunch we said goodbye to the village and headed back out on the Chucunuque River then turning into the Tuquesa River. The target bird here was our last jacamar, Dusky-backed. Like the Donacobius this is a South American bird that ranges into eastern Darién. It's a small bird, the habitat is vast and the trees dense. But somehow our guides found a pair although a good distance away – views were possible only from the river as the water level was too high for walking on the banks. But views they were and the distinguishing features separating it from the similarly restricted Rufous-tailed noded.



We then turned around to head back to the Chucunuque and back to the Camp. We kept birding along the rivers of course, chalking up Great Kiskadee, Lesser Kiskadee and a Boatbilled Flycatcher well discerned from the common Kiskadees by Ralph. Other birds along the rivers included our only typical shorebird for the trip, a Spotted Sandpiper, a wanted Rufescent Tiger-heron, Great Egret, Striated Heron, another Capped Heron and a couple more Green Ibis. Plumbeous Kite and Roadside (Riverside?) Hawks perched high, and Swallow-tailed Kite and Gray-lined Hawk were added to our trip list as was Laughing Falcon. A pair of White-necked Puffbirds were also out and obvious, though high, and a new bird and always nice to see was a pair of wild Muscovy Ducks flying overhead. We returned to our lodging mid-afternoon, after what we all agreed was an excellent day's birding.

This was our final night at Canopy Camp as we were heading back to Panama City tomorrow after a last effort for bicolor Wren and a couple of other misses. We tallied up the bird list, reaching a little over 200 species with all but five seen in the Darien. Not a bad 4.5 days and a lot of bird memories. For us all though, being in the high forest after watching a Happy Eagle was the strongest memory we would take with home with us.

Thurs., Aug. 4 Canopy Camp to Panama City

With bags already packed waiting to be collected went for our last breakfast here, and it was excellent as usual. We said our goodbyes to the camp staff, then headed east towards Yaviza again, hoping to find the wren in the area of the chapel where we first looked, or at a spot a little further along. Unfortunately, no wrens, though another Green Ibis was seen. So we turned west and headed for the big city. We had arranged lunch at Tortí, and as we arrived a little early we went birding along a hill trail next to the river. While we saw familiar birds, we also picked up two new ones, including, finally, actually seen Whooping Motmot, in fact two. The first one gave us a sufficient view with some leaves in the way, but the second was close and in full view. The second new bird was Dusky-faced Tanager, a bird more closely related to the cardinal group than the other tanagers, in its own family with just three other birds, two of whom are the only birds in their respective genera. An odd group indeed. We then continued on to the traffic and noise of the city, an odd feeling after spending days when virtually everything we heard other than a few human voices were the sounds of nature and, occasionally, rain.



Today was Ralph's birthday, so a celebration of sorts took place at dinner, defined in a way by the choice of food tonight for Ralph, Audie and Jeff – a good US-style hamburger! We were all traveling on the same flight tomorrow, so farewells were not said until we departed ways in the Atlanta airport. Our time together was spent in the camaraderie of a common interest combined with easy-going natures and a common sense of humor, often displayed. It was great time spent together.

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P1: Roadside hawk. P2: Saffron Finch, Tropical Mockingbird, Cocoi Heron, Pied Water-tyrant. P3: Darien sign (IR), Canopy Camp (CC). P4: Leafitter Toad (AB), Crested Eagle, Brown-throated three-toed Sloth, Plumbeous Kite. P5: Postman Butterfly, Red-throated Caracara, Blue Cotinga, El Salto Rd. P6: Yaviza sign (RH) Pan-American Hwy, White-tailed Kite, Wattled Jacana, White-headed Wren, Spot-breasted Woodpecker. P7: Chucunuque River, Trail to Harpy nest, Harpy Eagle, Horse crew. P8: Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Canoe, White hawk, Black-breasted Puffbird, Lesser yellow-headed Vulture, Orange-crowned Oriole. P9: Mantled Howler, Geoffroy's Tamarin (AB), Blue-chested Hummingbird (left), White-naped Jacobin. P10: Golden-headed Manakin, King Vulture, Ameiva sp lizard, False Papoka. P11: Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, tarantula, Black Oriole, Panama Flycatcher. P12: Spectacles Parrotlet, Black-capped Donacobius, Nueva Vigia villagers and crafts, White-necked Puffbird, Dusky-backed jacamar. P13: At Harpy site. P14: Farewell dinner, Ralph, Audie and Jeff, dinner at Canopy Camp with guides Igua and Eliecer, Jeff, Audie, Ralph and guests Jim and Rhesa.