Eagle-Eye Tours



Adventure in the Wilds of Guyana - Guyana Birding Tour Trip Report 2022

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At last, the chance to revisit this wonderful country after a 2 year break. With a population of fewer than 800,000 people, most of whom live in the coastal region, this is a trip that explores a true wilderness. While international companies continue to exploit the enormous resources in the region, damaging pristine rain forest habitat, it is important that people from more wealthy nations who really care for the rich natural heritage here support the local people in Guyana – including the Macushi, the Wapashana, the Waiwai – who are fighting an ongoing battle to defend and protect some of the last truly wild places. The ground operators who organise and work with Eagle-Eye Tours to offer the possibility for tourists to experience the best that Nature in Guyana offers are Macushi and rightly extremely proud and protective of their marvelous natural heritage. It is a real privilege to have the opportunity to experience just a small fraction of what Guyana has to offer.

Day 1 – Arrival Georgetown

Having arrived a day early we decided to make the most of the spare afternoon and persuaded John Christian, our excellent in-country guide, to take us over to the National Park in Georgetown since the Botanical Gardens had been closed due to COVID. Turns out that the National Park is actually simply a large recreation ground – jogging track, football and rugby pitches - but with a productive boulevard of large trees and a couple of ponds. Here we spent time familiarizing ourselves with many common urban and suburban species – **Great Kiskadees**, **Tropical Mockingbirds**, **Ruddy Ground-Doves** – but also a couple of trickier species such as the trip's only **Greater Ani**, excellent looks at a **Laughing Falcon** and, best of all, the much sought **Blood-coloured Woodpecker**. Parrots were much less numerous than is usually the case in the Botanical Gardens but, even so, John managed to find us a lone **Festive Amazon**. Almost as surprising was the presence of a couple of **West Indies Manatees** in the larger pond. Apparently the animals move into these ponds when the various channels are flooded and then get trapped once the flood recedes. Loafing in the same

pond was what subsequently turned out to be the only **Spectacled Caiman** of the entire trip!



Festive Parrot © Paul Prior



Laughing Falcon © Paul Prior

Day 2 – Mahaica River

Early to rise for the long drive to the boat launch on the Mahaica River. As we arrived, **Striped**

Cuckoo and **Little Cuckoo** presented themselves in plain view by the dock. We then spent a wonderful couple of hours cruising slowly up and then down the river where our target and Guyana's national bird, the **Hoatzin**, reside in good numbers foraging in the extensive stands of Mucca-Mucca along the banks. Other riparian species such as **Silvered Antbird**, **American Pygmy-Kingfisher** and **Green-tailed Jacamar** showed well as did **Barred** and **Black-crested Antshrikes** and a very confiding **White-bellied Piculet**. A stream-side flowering tree hosted a large number of hummers – mainly **Black-throated Mango** but with one **Ruby Topaz** mixed in.



Green-tailed Jacamar © Paul Prior



Barred Antshrike © Paul Prior

As we disembarked at the end of the cruise a very cooperative **Pale-breasted Spinetail** popped into view, and then the drive back to the main road produced our first **Long-winged Harrier** and **Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture**. A **Rufous Crab-Hawk** which we had passed earlier at dawn was still sat on the same road-side telegraph pole. We stopped for a brief stroll down to the shoreline at Hope Beach but the tide was high and there were no shorebirds on view; however, turning our attention to the nearby mangroves we were treated to excellent looks at **Bicoloured Conebill**, **Ashy-headed Greenlet** and a pair of **Spotted Tody-Flycatchers**. We returned to Cara Lodge Hotel for an excellent lunch and then retired for a siesta, having arranged another attempt for shorebirds in the late afternoon, hoping that the tide would've dropped and exposed enough mud. Our timing was a little off since by 4:30 pm the ocean had receded enough that the shorebirds - almost all **Lesser Yellowlegs** - were already hundreds of metres from the seawall. Even further out were other foraging "blobs" (that further investigation revealed were **White-cheeked Pintails)** and the three medium-sized terns hunting over the mud flats were **Gull-billed Terns**. This tour rarely manages to catch the tides quite right and so, although rather distant, it was a treat to witness just how important these ocean edge 'flats are for wintering shorebirds – there were at least a thousand yellowlegs on view at the water's edge.

Day 3 – Kaieteur Falls

Today's schedule allowed us just a slightly later start and so we were able to down a swift breakfast at Cara Lodge before Branford arrived to taxi us over to the local domestic airport for our flight in a little six-passenger plane to the famous falls at Kaieteur. The hour long flight took us over vast expanses of almost unbroken rainforest but the latter is sadly more and more scarred by the various gold-mining enterprises every time I visit. Low cloud obscured the falls as we arrived and rain was very much the theme for today – despite this being the dry season! Fortunately, said rain abated for a good half hour allowing us to fully enjoy the true spectacle of Kaieteur, people posing for pictures, and we even managed to find a couple of the endemic **Golden Frogs** hiding in the giant Tank Bromeliads that surround the gorge.



Kaieteur Falls © Paul Prior

Bird-wise however the rain pretty much washed us out, but we did manage a lovely first encounter with a stunning male **Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock** as we made our way back to the ranger station. Our pilot then flew us the half hour or so further south and east to the Fairview Village runway where we were met by Alex and company for the short drive to Iwokrama River Lodge. After a late lunch we retired to our cabins anticipating a boat-trip in the evening but once again the dry season rain forced us to change plans. The frogs didn't seem to mind, allowing us great looks at **Gladiator Treefrogs** and the ubiquitous and aptly named **Whistling Grass Frogs**.

Day 4 - Iwokrama River Lodge

After an early breakfast Alex and company boated us across the mighty Essequibo for an early morning walk north along the barely-used main road towards our first experience of "white sands" habitat. **Red-fan Parrots** and **Golden-winged Parakeets** fed in the roadside canopy trees and John's broadcast brought in the first of several species that this tour has not previously listed since this particular location was a new stop on our itinerary: **Plain-crowned Spinetail**. A little further along, the same strategy presented excellent looks at both **Black-headed** and **Black-throated Antbirds**, **Blackish Manakin** and a **Bronzy Jacamar** while familiar species such as **Swallow-wing Puffbirds**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Green-backed Trogon**, **White-throated Toucan**, **Lineated Woodpecker** and **Forest Elaenia** made for a very productive walk. At one point our attention was diverted far along the road ahead where a couple of **Cinereous Tinamous** gingerly crossed the wide lane. **Caica** and **Dusky Parrots**, **Black Caracara** and a pair of **Red-shouldered Tanagers** were species that we only rarely encountered again hereafter, the same being true for **Guianan Squirrel Monkey** and **Brown Capuchin**.



Black-headed Antbird © Paul Prior



Black-throated Antbird © Paul Prior



Swallow-wing Puffbirds © Paul Prior

Back at the boats it was proposed to make up for the previous day's failed evening boat trip by checking a couple of river islands for roosting **Ladder-tailed Nightjars** – bingo! Great looks at birds we usually only view by flashlight. After lunch Paul opted to join me for a brief walk on the start of the so-called Bushmaster Trail. As usually happens, this first attempt at forest-birding was a little exasperating but we still managed good looks at **Tiny Tyrant-Manakin**, **Helmeted Pygmy-**

Tyrant, **Grey Antbird**, **Slate-coloured Grosbeak**, **Mouse-coloured** and **Fasciated Antshrikes**, and **Black-eared Fairy**. Later in the afternoon the four of us revisited the same trail with Alex and John and found **Great Jacamar**, **Chestnut Woodpecker** and - the main event - a quintet of moaning **Capuchinbirds**, a little obscured high in the canopy but amusing us with their weird calf-like lowing.



Ladder-tailed Nightjar © Paul Prior

It gets dark early in the forest and so it was still surprisingly light when we broke out into the open ground around the lodge. **Spix's Guan** were perched high in the Cecropias; **Epaulette Orioles** were still feeding in the scattered trees, and elegant-looking **Pied Lapwings** were spread-out across the wide lawn foraging with the herd of **Giant Cowbirds**.

Day 5 – Atta Lodge

An early breakfast followed by an early departure, planning to bird at multiple stops along the Linden-Lethem Road to Atta Lodge. Our first stop produced a **Mareil Guan** feeding right in the open canopy of a roadside Cecropia, our only **Green Aracari** and both a **Waved** and a pair of **Cream-coloured Woodpeckers**. Our second stop put us right beside a very busy fruiting tree, and although the foraging birds remained in the canopy we managed to pick out several key species: **Spangled Cotingas** (including a couple of stunning adult males), **Pompadour Cotingas**, several **Dusky Purpletufts**, a **Golden-sided Euphonia**, **Green**, **Red-legged** and **Purple Honeycreepers**, and a **Blue Dacnis**. The next stop was more specific in its intent – a gorgeous male **Crimson Topaz** sat all too briefly over one of the several streams that we crossed. But now the sun was high and an attempt to walk the unshaded road as it crosses an extensive "white sand" area was quickly voted down, and we made instead for the relative cool of the accommodation at Atta Lodge. Lunch and a siesta made the most sense in such baking heat and we resolved to walk the entrance road and the highway down to another stream in the late afternoon. Birds were initially rather inactive although we managed an encounter with **Grey-winged Trumpeters** along the entrance road. **Grey-rumped** and **Band-rumped Swifts** were foraging low over the deserted highway while **Dusky Antbirds** and **Guianan Streaked Antwrens** foraged in the roadside vegetation. The highlight was the **Pale-**

throated Three-toed Sloth sleeping in a nearby Cecropia. At the stream we were treated to further looks at **Crimson Topaz** (this time an adult male with complete tails streamers) and rustled up a couple of **Black-chinned Antbirds**. Trevor and Devon arrived with the vehicles and after having pointed out the huge **Electric Eel** lurking in the muddy waters below the bridge they drove us further south to a known spot for **Black-banded Owls**. At dusk John and Teechee broadcast calls and sure enough the pair of owls flew in to investigate the interlopers. They stayed rather high in the canopy but flashlights and smart use of the scope helped considerably. We began the drive back to Atta, the guys sweeping the roadside vegetation with spotlights which finally revealed a very cooperative **Long-tailed Potoo** sitting out in the open on his early evening feeding post. Meanwhile the sloth was in precisely the same position as earlier, although Teechee assured us that it had actually moved an arm!



Pale-throated Thee-toed Sloth © Paul Prior

Day 6 – Canopy walkway

Calm, clear weather at dawn seemed like good conditions for an early hike to the canopy-walkway. Kudos to the group for managing the hillside stairs so admirably and they certainly deserved better birds from the canopy-platform than appeared over the next two somewhat birdless hours. Still it was agreed to have been worthwhile if only for the view, and we did manage looks at **Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant, Guianan Tyrannulet**, **Guianan Puffbird** and undercarriage views of **White-lored Tyrannulet**. The hike back to the lodge compound afforded us the opportunity to finally get good looks at the bird that is all mouth – the **Screaming Piha** (familiar by sound to anyone who watches any film set in any jungle, anywhere in the world!!).



Canopy walkway © Paul Prior

After breakfasting back at the lodge we managed to salvage the morning with a very productive hike along what I call the "Rear Trail" – a less trodden, narrow trail along the south edge of the property. But not before Teechee pointed out a pair of **Pink-throated Becards** nest-building close to the cabins. A noisy gang of **Purple-throated Fruitcrows** bundled through the surrounding trees and as we set off a pair of **Red-necked Woodpeckers** foraged on one of the larger trees at the trailhead. Initially as we stepped into the forest the birding was tricky in the way that rainforest birding can be – busy flocks of foraging passerines passing quickly by. But gradually we all got the hang of following laser-pointer directions as keen-eyed local guides spotted shapes and movements in the shadows. **Cinereous Antshrikes** were leading the first party which held the prettiest of **Antwrens**: **Rufous-bellied**. Shortly after that came excellent views of **Brown-bellied Stipplethroat**, **Long-winged Antwren** and - a star bird for Paul – **Guianan Red-Cotinga**! Continuing along the same trail we came upon a troop of **Wedge-capped** (or **Weeping**) **Capuchins** and then John set about persuading one of my favourite birds – **Ferruginous-backed Antbird** – into view in the dense trailside vegetation. And then back to the lodge for lunch and the now customary siesta, but not before taking in views of **Guianan Toucanet** feeding with **Black-necked Aracaris** in the large trees behind the dining area.



Ferruginous-backed Antbird © Paul Prior

At 3 pm the group gathered for a drive back north towards the same “white sand” area that we had abandoned to the heat the day before. Devon made an impromptu stop to show us a large **Brazilian Giant Tortoise** feeding happily at the roadside and then on to our first intended stop which quickly proved fruitful with great looks at a **Spotted Puffbird**, some **Golden-headed** and **White-crowned Manakins**, **Scaled Pigeon**, and a chance to at least hear a bird I’d never even heard of before: **Pelzeln’s Pygmy-Tyrant**. Out at the main road we were entertained by best-yet looks at **White-throated Toucan**, a couple of fly-by **Blue-cheeked Parrots** and a roadside **Lesser Kiskadee**.



Brazilian giant tortoise © Paul Prior



Spotted Puffbird © Paul Prior

As night fell we stationed ourselves near to one of the bridged streams and watched a pair of **Plumbeous Kites** preparing for roost. Several **Short-tailed Nighthawks** made passes over our vehicles as dusk deepened and then John set about broadcasting for the evenings main draw: **White-winged Potoo**. The two calling birds appeared very quickly and again flashlights and telescopes were deployed for better looks. Satisfied we left the potoos whistling back-and-forth to the **Cinereous**, **Little** and **Red-legged Tinamous** calling from the darkness of the forest floor. Again John and Teechee took to the roof of the vehicle in front and swept the roadside with spotlights as we drove back to Atta; a lone **Blackish Nightjar** was pretty much the only find although the front vehicle glimpsed a mystery mammal whose ID changed from Paca to Jaguarundi … so who knows?

Day 7 – Atta and Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock lek

Amazonian Pygmy-Owl provided a wake-up call this morning but it took some time for one of the locals to spot the little fellow in trees at the edge of the lodge compound. Also in the surrounding trees was a very cooperative pair of **Guianan Warbling Antbirds**, and the local pair of **Black Currasow**. We had places to be so said farewell to Atta and hit the road to Surama … but first we decided to return to the "white sand" area close to the north to try again for the mysterious Pelzeln's Pygmy-Tyrant. We'd downloaded some calls and song from the internet overnight but at first the broadcasts proved fruitless. No worries because in the meanwhile Teechee found us a lovely **Scale-backed Antbird** and then John rustled up a **Guianan Schiffornis**. At last he little newcomer, started calling and presented brief views; it seems the diagnostic features for **Pelzeln's Pygmy-Tyrant** are "uncooperative and nondescript". Back on the road we headed south and dropped Teechee at the end of the Atta entrance road and then onwards to our main target, a bird we'd already had pretty good luck with back on Day 3. The drive was uneventful but for the lone **Collared Peccary** that dashed in front of Trevor's vehicle and ran along the road edge for a hundred metres before diving back into deep cover. The walk into the site was fairly easy and as soon as we arrived there was one gorgeous male **Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock** guarding his leking spot. He treated us

to absolutely stunning looks and then flew 30 m to join another couple of males posturing at another specially prepared 1m patch of open forest floor. Definitely the best encounter I've had with the species over my seven visits.



Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock © Paul Prior



Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock © Paul Prior

We left these stellar birds doing their thing and made slowly back to the road past a troop of **Red-faced Spider Monkeys**. At the main road a **Black Hawk-Eagle** was soaring overhead proclaiming his territory and there was a **Black-bellied Cuckoo** in the roadside canopy.



Red-faced Spider Monkey © Paul Prior

Now the drive to Surama where it was a surprise to find the main dining area and lounge were in full reconstruction mode – a project started in 2019 but then faltered and delayed by COVID. Still, they'd refurbished one of the outer buildings for use as a small dining area and the benabs (cabins) were in good shape. After the obligatory siesta, Trevor and Devon drove us over to an area of dry forest where we set about finding the roosting **Great Potoo**. Devon scored the prize and we all took photos of the slumbering giant.



Great Potoo © Paul Prior

Neil our local guide at Surama found us a **Plain Xenops** and then a **Guianan Trogon** put in a brief appearance. As we hiked back in the direction of the ecolodge we watched a band of **Cayenne Jays** pile through, and as the afternoon drew on a small flock of noisy **Red-bellied Macaws** repeatedly passed overhead. We reached a marsh and its neighbouring artificial pond which hosted a small flock of **White-faced Whistling-Ducks**. **Yellow bellied Elaenia**, **Streaked Flycatcher** and **Green-taied Goldenthroats** visited our group as we sipped rum punch, waiting for nightfall. **Lesser Nighthawks** sailed by and then the local **Tropical Screech-Owls** started up. Despite much to and fro and near misses we simply couldn’t pin a single bird down and returned to Surama happy but screech-owl-less. Of course, then, as we sat in the small dining building for supper and checklist, a Tropical Screech-Owl started calling right outside affording excellent looks for all of us.



Birders at Surama Guyana © Paul Prior

Day 8 - Anaconda Adventures

This morning we strode purposefully out across the cool early morning savannah, picking out our first savannah species such as **Grassland Sparrow**, **Wedge-tailed Grassfinch**, and **Plain-crested** and **Lesser Elaenias**. An **Ocellated Crake** teased us with his slightly demented trill but we knew better than to even try to pull such a skulker out at this time of day so we continued towards the tree cover on the far side of the small savannah, concentrating on more likely species such as **Northern Slaty Antshrike** and **Finsch's Euphonia** before stumbling upon a roosting **Common Potoo** - or was it just part of the dead snag? Then we dived into the cool shadow of the forest. Compared to the birdy hike on the "rear trail" at Atta, this morning's hike was like pulling teeth. There were birds lurking in the darkness but they just wouldn't reveal themselves. **White-browed Antbird** and **Amazonian Grosbeak** were especially exasperating, and we never really managed more than fleeting glimpses of the latter, having to make do with his tantalizing, sweet warbling cadence.



Common Potoo © Paul Prior

A **Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher** provided a pleasant change as it sat in full view and a pair of **White-flanked Antwrens** and a **Plain-brown Woodcreeper** gave slightly better looks, but generally it was tough going and remained so even as John and Neil led us off-road, bushwhacking a shortcut to the parallel track to the north. This short-cut however did finally afford us good luck with a female **White-browed Antbird**. We reached the road out rather behind schedule and began our hike back. As we rested on the unusually sturdy bridge over one of the tributaries of the Burro Burro, Schube noticed something struggling about 50 m upstream seemingly trapped in a fishing net. Neil and John picked along the bank and discovered a **Green Anaconda** horribly tangled. Neil gingerly lifted the net but the animal was not going anywhere and so a rescue mission was launched. I offered to grab the snake - a mere youngster at just over 2 m long - not realizing that this would require me to perform an unaccustomed balancing act across a long plank bridge to reach the net. Anyway, to cut a long story short … I had to cut the netting which was tight around the animal's neck (what part of a snake isn't "neck"?) but fortunately not yet tight enough to cut the animal. It was a beautiful creature and a real relief to see it slither back into the water a few metres upstream of the net and swim away safely.



Green Anaconda © Paul Prior

We made our rendezvous with the vehicles a little further up the road and returned to the lodge to wash the fishy stench off and then lunch and siesta. The plan being to head out to another section of savannah once things had cooled somewhat. This more distant stretch of open country on the east side of the village would provide us with several more new species. **Ash-throated Crake** crooned from a roadside swamp - we ignored him and attended instead to the **Swainson's Flycatcher**, **Tropical Gnatcatcher** and **Grey Seedeaters** perched in the open on top of a roadside tree. Next we strode straight out across the savannah and eventually found our target: **White-naped Xenopsaris**. John discovered where a small group of **Lesser Nighthawks** were day-roosting and while we scoped these, our first **Bicoloured Wrens** and **Cinereous Becard** happened along. As darkness fell we continued east on the road back towards the main highway in search of owls. This time a **Spectacled Owl** was very quick to respond and sat high in a nearby tree ogling the humans gathered below. However, other than a sadly road-killed **Coralsnake** this was the only encounter of the evening.

Day 9 – Harpy Eagle Nest

One big target this morning: the Harpy Eagle nest located about 10 km downstream along the Burro Burro and accessible only by river. We were dropped within a half hour hike of the launch and trudged through yet more unseasonal rain to the shelter buildings from where the four of us watched a **Blue-throated Piping Guan** drying off at the top of a nearby Cecropia while John, Neil and captain Lionel readied our craft.



Blue-throated Piping Guan © Paul Prior



Boat ride on Burro Burro © Paul Prior

Since the steps down to the river were very slick, machetes were employed to restore the old trail to the alternative beach where we could more easily board the boat. Finally, we were off, all seven of us … plus a chainsaw! The passage was relatively clear for the first few hundred metres and we were able to relax and spot riverside critters such as a lone **Cuvier's Dwarf Caiman** and a retreating **White-faced Saki Monkey**. But it soon became clear exactly why Lionel was equipped

with a chain-saw. The fluctuating water levels on the rivers hereabouts – especially with so much dry season rainfall – meant that from one week to the next felled trees that previously allowed passage beneath them were now unbridgeable obstacles. I am constantly impressed by the locals' handiness in dealing with unexpected situations in the landscape, and once again Lionel, John and Neil proved up to the task.



Cuvier's Dwarf Caiman © Paul Prior

Finally, we reached the stretch of river that afforded clear views of the enormous nest in a giant tree set 300 m back from the bank. But no birds. And then we realized that the piercing calls in the background were those of a **Harpy Eagle**, she must be perched somewhere nearby. Lionel and Neil paddled us quietly back upstream and there she was, rather distant but right out in the open. After a few minutes she took flight and disappeared but we figured she'd gone to the nest… and so we followed. Sure enough there she was on the nest, with her mate! We sat on the river basking in this amazing privilege. The two eagles interacted, canoodled and then - woo-hoo - the main act! What timing! Lionel was quite excited since this would mean an egg was imminent. The arduous boat trip had been worth every minute.



Harpy Eagle nest © Paul Prior



Harpy Eagle pair © Paul Prior

But now we needed to speed back up river; making the most of the relatively clear passage we managed to get back to terra firma in about 1 1/4 hours. We were rather late and due back at Surama for our departure and a well-deserved lunch at Madonna‘s restaurant at the junction with the main highway. Madonna (our driver’s mum) provided the best meal of the entire trip: fresh soursop juice, plantain balls, ground cassava; just excellent. And now onwards to the savannah

proper and new lodgings; we hurried past new open country birds: **Crested Bobwhites**, **Buff-necked Ibis**, **White-tailed Hawk**, and reached Rock View in good time. Here our hosts, Colin and Velda, made us amply welcome, insisting on our joining them for evening rum cocktails pre-supper.



Buff-necked Ibis © Paul Prior

Day 10 - Rock View and boat ride on Rupununi

A reasonably early start to the day with Trevor and Devon driving us to the boat launch at Kwatamang Landing for a much more leisurely cruise along the Rupununi - Eli did not have his chainsaw with him. We spent a tranquil two hours drifting downstream spying **Crane Hawk**, **Crimson-crested Woodpecker**, the usual **Toucans**. A small party of **Large-billed Terns** kept us company as we scanned the bankside vegetation for **Crestless Curassow** but despite much effort from John and Eli the birds stayed back from the bank, booming and whistling quietly to themselves. We were paddled carefully along a side stream and then disembarked for a short walk to a magical spot – a flooded oxbow covered in the iconic Queen Victoria's Water Lilies. There wasn't much bird life on the pond but it really was quite beautiful. Just a handful of **Wattled Jacanas** and a quick look at a passing **Sunbittern.** As we made our way back to the boat, John drew our attention to an all dark flycatcher lurking in the understory: **Amazonian Black-Tyrant**. We spent a while attempting to finally get looks at a pair of **Buff-breasted Wrens** and then tried again for the curassows but with no luck, settling instead for close flyover **Wood Storks**, **Grey-fronted Dove**, a couple of **Capped Herons**, **Black-chinned Antbirds** and **Black-crested Antshrikes**. At lunch Colin, our host, suggested people might want a break from the birding to be given a tour of the property. Everyone was keen and we spent a pleasant early afternoon learning about the history of Rock View and sampling some freshly roasted cashews. Later in the afternoon John returned to join us on a stroll out along the adjacent Annai runway where we encountered **Vermilion Flycatchers** and **Grassland Yellowfinches**.



Vermillion Flycatcher © Paul Prior

Some timely tooting (ie. pygmy-owl imitations) brought in a nice selection of local songbirds: **Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet**, **Yellow-breasted Flycatcher**, **Ashy-headed Greenlet**, and a **Bananaquit**, but the real reason for the evening stroll had yet to appear. Then a little past dusk, the stars turned up: a total of six **Nacunda Nighthawks** winged past and off into the night.

Day 11 - Sun Parakeets

A very early start to what promised to be a very busy day. Devon and Trevor picked us up at 5 am, Colin and Velda on hand to deliver our packed breakfasts. We picked John up from his house en route - it was still pitch black out there. But gradually the savannah came to life and then one of the reasons for our early departure crossed the almost trafficless road in front of Trevor‘s vehicle: a **Giant Anteater** making its way to shade after a busy night of ant-eating.



Giant Anteater © Paul Prior

We saw three more of these strange creatures as we continued south, and then pulled off the road to make for a wetland where people had recently discovered a small population of Crested Doraditos – but unfortunately not showing today. The wetland was otherwise jumping with good numbers of **Pied Water-Tyrants**, **White-headed Marsh-Tyrants**, **White-tailed Goldenthroats**, **Purple Gallinules**, and **Long-winged Harriers**. As we drove back to the main road a **Pinnated Bittern** flew in, but this poor flight view was soon improved upon when Devon spotted another one hiding unsuccessfully in the roadside wetland vegetation. Schube and I managed a quick look at an **Azure Gallinule** in the same pond and both **Jabirus** and **Maguaris** were stalking frogs close by. We turned off the main highway and headed northwest for Karasabai, past the old, abandoned rice farm, stopping very briefly for **White-tailed Hawks** and **Double-striped Thick-knees**. We were on a mission, past experience having taught that the parakeets would disperse by mid-morning. As we neared the site, Trevor's vehicle peeled off towards the village in order to fetch the local parakeet-ranger, a courtesy to the village which had taken on the task of protecting these endangered birds. Devon's vehicle continued on into the valley where the birds tend to congregate in the early morning. And there they were: as simple as that! Some 40 **Sun Parakeets** glowing in the fruiting trees. Now I was somewhat on tenterhooks fearing that the birds might leave at any moment, until at last Trevor arrived with Paul and Donna. I really needn't have worried; these birds were happy where they were and treated us to marvellous views.



Sun Parakeets © Paul Prior



Sun Parakeet © Paul Prior

We turned our attention to other local birds such as **Brown-crested Flycatcher**, **White-bellied Piculet** and a lone, young male **Tufted Coquette**. Trevor and Devon drove us all back to Karasabai where an early lunch awaited us, and then, well-fed, we were off again for the long drive south towards Manari. I think we all dozed a little as we were taxied at speed across the baking savannah, the plan being to meet with a local birder who knew the Ireng River territory. But Jeremy was

nowhere to be seen and so we decided that between us we'd figure it out. We needed to move soon because there was still a long drive along the rough savannah track. At last we reached the banks of the Ireng - Brasil just on the far-side - and the five of us headed off in search of the two local specialties. A short walk along the riparian edge - where Jeremy caught up with us (definitely better late than never since he knows these birds better than anyone) – brought us to a favoured spot. John employed his trusty broadcast and soon had a male **Rio Branco Antbird** responding and slowly making its way towards the intruders. The bird – an extremely range-restricted species – climbed higher into the low canopy, remaining a little obscured but otherwise perfect. Too easy! But not so for the **Hoary-throated Spinetail**. This took a deal more patience but eventually a pair came by and afforded really good looks – another very restricted species. What a day! And it wasn't over yet.



Hoary-throated Spinetail © Paul Prior

Some quiet tooting brought in a series of common species such as **Paled-tipped Inezia**, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, **White-fringed Antwrens** and finally a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** itself.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Paul Prior

We headed slowly back to the vehicles but there was more to come: we flushed a small feeding flock of **Plumbeous Seedeaters** which presented great looks as they perched high in the grasses, and there alongside them a pair of **Bearded Tachuri**! It seemed now that people were getting a little birded-out (what!!?), but we had just one more site to check, one of the larger savannah ponds. In normal dry seasons this particular pond would provide much needed standing water for many waterfowl but I guess this year it was just one of many. However, although the bird numbers were down, the stop did afford us our are only look at a herd of **Capybara** feeding nervously on the far side of the pond. We drove slowly back along the savannah track to the highway, Schube and I stopping to scan a small pond where we could see a pair of **Yellow-billed Terns** fishing, and closer inspection revealed a couple of **Solitary Sandpipers** foraging along the pond edge. Another hour on the road and we finally reached Manari Ranch, our last port before the flight back to Georgetown the following day. It had been a tough day but we'd caught up with all but one of the six targets: Giant Anteater, Sun Parakeet, Rio Branco Antbird, Hoary-throated Spinetail and Bearded Tachuri – the Doradito would have to wait!

Day 12 - Back to Georgetown

Some much-needed R n R for us this morning although Schube, John and I were still up early to walk the surrounding property while Paul and Donna searched for the best fallen mangos beneath the huge fruiting trees where hoards of **Red-bellied Macaws**, **Brown-throated Parakeets** and a pair of **Yellow-crowned Parrots** enjoyed the feast. The garden and back forty held plenty of the standard savannah edge species – **Orange-backed Troupial**, **Vermillion Flycatchers**, **Boat-billed Flycatcher**, **Glittering-throated Emeralds** and **Bicoloured Wren** – but yesterday's big haul had proven a fine finale to the trip's birding. At 10am we drove the short distance to Lethem Airport and waited for the plane which would fly us in about an hour the distance that had taken us almost ten days to cover by road!



Orange-backed Troupial © Paul Prior



Glittering-throated Emerald © Paul Prior

Cara Lodge Hotel welcomed us back to Georgetown with hot showers and a fine lunch, and the group prepared for the following day's very early departure from Cheddi Jagan International Airport by undergoing various COVID tests. It had been an amazing adventure – one that I am certain will not soon be forgotten by the four of us. Great birds, great landscapes, and wonderful people. After a few days back in Toronto at -10°C I'm already eager to get back to the humid rain-forest and baking

savannah of this true South American jewel. See you there in 2023! Paul Prior