



## Guyana Trip Report (Jan 11 - 23, 2025)

[Link: Guyana Trip Report \(Jan 11 - 23, 2025\)](#)

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*Kaieteur Falls © Paul Prior*

Guyana - just keeps on giving. Personally, this was my ninth visit since 2014, and still there are new things to see and to hear (and even to taste ...). But nowadays, it's not so much the new but the better versions of the old. 2025 did not disappoint. There are always species a particular trip will miss (Ground-Cuckoo, for example) but then there were encounters with familiar species which simply blew our collective mind (Cotingas were on fire this year!).

## Day 1:

All but the Czech contingent (arriving later that evening) met for introductions in the foyer of the esteemed Cara Lodge and the bar was set for the rest of the trip with a proposed wee hours start the following morning. Such early starts are essential in Guyana simply because so many target birds retire to the shade as the late morning heat starts to bake.

## Day 2:

As arranged, Waja picked us and our boxed breakfast up at 4:30am and we made the Mahaica River dock for 6am. The sun was up as were dozens of Hoatzins - our main target and Guyana's wonderfully weird national bird. The always retiring Silvered Antbird was next, followed by a pair of very obliging Blood-coloured Woodpeckers. A friendly local stopped his boat alongside ours to inform us that a pair of Giant Otters were just downstream and, sure enough, there they were. Neil, our local Guyana guide, called them in for better viewing with his strange "wa-wa-wa" call. What a great start.



*Giant Otter © Paul Prior*

After a couple of hours we stopped off at Nareesh's riverside home for chicken and roti brunch. And then we started our drive back to Georgetown, past foraging Scarlet Ibis, and stopping for a successful search for Rufous Crab Hawk and Spotted Tody-Flycatcher.

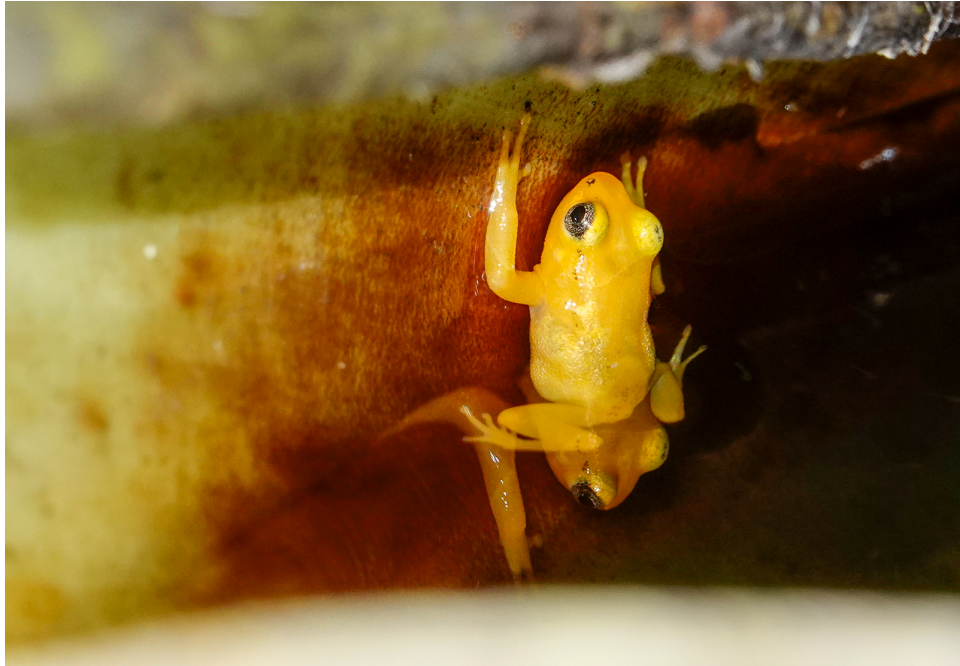


*Rufous Crab Hawk © Paul Prior*

Once back at Cara, we took the first of our daily siestas, re-energizing for our late Sunday afternoon stroll in the Georgetown Botanical Gardens for Laughing Falcon, Cinereous Becard, Toco Toucan, Black-capped Donacobius and an assortment of common Guyanese species.

### **Day 3:**

Not quite such an early start today since our flight south was not scheduled until 9am. The weather was perfect and we were treated to excellent views of the world's tallest single drop falls at Kaieteur. We were met by Francine, who escorted us on a tour of the viewpoints downstream and then back through the forest where we found Golden Frogs and Roraiman Antbird. Overhead, we were treated to great looks at a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons as they chased each other and the local swift flocks.



*Golden Frog © Paul Prior*

Our tour took us over the open “alvar”, where we marvelled at huge Tank Bromeliads and tiny Sundews, encountered the miniature Guyana White-lipped Frogs, Cliff Flycatcher, and the lucky front-runners came across Plumbeous Euphonia. Then back on the plane for the short flight on to Fairview and the delightful Iwokrama River Lodge, lunch and then siesta. By 4pm we were birding again, this time a simple stroll along the entrance road where we lucked in on a canopy flock, affording looks at Golden-headed and White-crowned Manakins; Green, Purple and Red-legged Honeycreepers; Flame-crested, and Bay-headed Tanagers; and then a lone Black-necked Aracari.



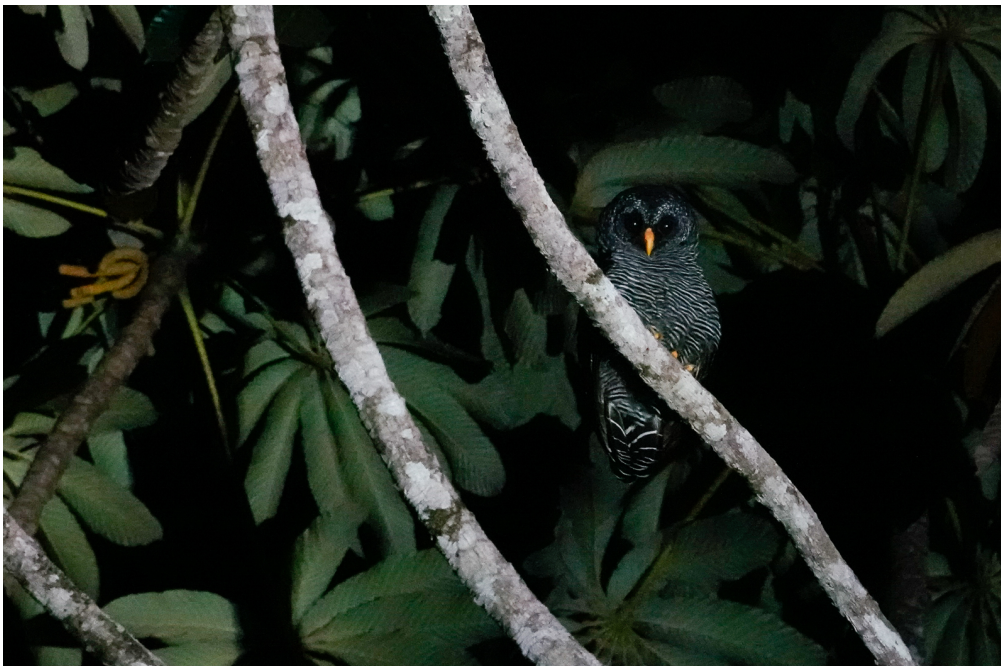
*Black-necked Aracari © Paul Prior*

## Day 4:

An early breakfast watching dawn over the Essequibo River was followed by a short boat-ride to the north bank of the river and a trek towards Kurupukari's white-sand areas. By the time we reached the latter it was already rather too hot for there to be much birdlife, but the trek there was very productive with Red-fan Parrots, a flurry of Woodpecker activity (Red-necked, Lineated, Crimson-crested - all the big guys], Black Caracara, and some distant but stunning looks at gorgeous Pompadour and Spangled Cotingas, sitting in brilliant sunshine. On the drive back to the river, we stopped for considerably less satisfying looks at Guianan Red Cotinga, Painted Tody-Flycatcher and a family of Guianan Spider Monkeys. Late afternoon we were out again on the ominously named Bushmaster Trail. Always tricky for a group of 10 people to bird a narrow forest trail, but our lodge guide, Alex, in tandem with Neil, did a great job, pointing out various forest features and getting us onto Great Jacamar, Rufous-bellied Antwren, and good looks at a lone Rufous-capped Antthrush.

## Day 5:

Already moving on, we hit the road by 7am in an effort to beat the heat. We drove the one and only highway south, the Rupununi Road, currently a dusty red-dirt road, but sadly soon to be black-top (no doubt with all the roadkill and environmental issues that such will bring this near pristine expanse of rainforest). Various stops along our way brought Waved Woodpecker, assorted Macaws, Mealy Amazon, a tree full of Green Aracaris and a single Guianan Toucanet, Swallow-tailed Kites and King Vulture. By the time we reached the white-sand areas it was already baking, but we did our best to crowd into what little shade there was, and managed to find goodies such as Black Manakin, Paradise Jacamar, Greyish and Pale-bellied Mourners, and Guianan Trogon. We reached Atta and proper shade in good time for lunch and then retreated to the cool of our rooms until the heat began to abate at 4am. We then hiked the entrance road and were treated to great looks at Black-tailed and Green-backed Trogons, another Great Jacamar; Ringed, Waved and Cream-coloured Woodpeckers (in quick succession); and a lovely pair of Blue-backed Tanagers. Out on the main road, Devon picked us up and taxied us south to the known owl location where, once the moon was up, Neil and Carlon brought a very obliging Black-banded Owl into view.



*Black-banded Owl © Paul Prior*

## Day 6:

This morning was our turn to head up to the Atta canopy-walkway where we stood among the tree-tops in the hopes of a passing mixed flock. The walkway and platforms afforded great views out across the surrounding forest but passerine flocks were rather sparse. Nevertheless, we persevered, and with the help of some bird-call broadcasts we gradually amassed a reasonable list of hard-to-see species such as Todd's Antwren, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Whiskered Flycatcher, Lemon-chested Greenlet, and a pair of Long-billed Gnatwrens.



*Canopy Walkway © Paul Prior*

The hike back afforded us the opportunity to watch Screaming Pihas screaming. Then after breakfast, we explored one of the back-trails, encountering a pair of Chestnut Woodpeckers, Mouse-colored Antshrike, Guianan Warbling-Antbird; and just one lucky observer got to Neil's scope in time to see a lone Capuchinbird disappearing into the canopy. As we returned for lunch, a couple from our group reported having discovered an apparent army ant swarm less than 100m behind the dining area. So, a few of us ventured out and stationed ourselves among the ants for looks at attendant Common Scale-backed Antbird, Black-banded and Plain-brown Woodcreepers, and a Bright-rumped Attila. A couple of us abbreviated our lunch and siesta to wait even longer with the swarm, and were rewarded with Rufous-throated and White-plumed Antbirds.



*Rufous-throated Antbird* © Paul Prior



*White-plumed Antbird* © Paul Prior

As things cooled off in the late afternoon, Devon drove us north along the Rupununi Road to try a couple of white-sand locations for some of our missing Guianan Shield species. Sure enough, although quite a trick to see, the Saffron-crowned Tyrant-Manakins were in place, and as we rejoined the main road, we finally managed to pull in not one but four Bronzy Jacamars. Meanwhile, in the tree right next-door was a trio of splendid Purple-breasted Cotingas, and another adult male

Pompadour!



*Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin* © Paul Prior

We continued north to a nearby swamp, filled with standing snags, where we found Capped Heron, Green Kingfisher, Green-backed Trogon, Pied Puffbird, Golden-collared Woodpecker, and Sulphury Flycatcher. As darkness fell, and after a much-appreciated sundowner rum, we headed back to Atta where, having lucked in on an early dusk Spectacled Owl, we tried to pull in the local White-winged Potoo - but the latter was not responding. The only hint of this species on this trip were the call and song that were heard pre-dawn around the lodge the next morning.



*Capped Heron* © Paul Prior

## Day 7:

Sadly, not enough time at Atta, but we had other places to be. We left early, bidding farewell to the completely habituated Black Curassows taking handouts at breakfast, and hit the first of several stops en route to Surama. The first stop was a complete success, providing great looks at Red-and-black Grosbeak, Dusky-throated Antshrike, and more Rufous-bellied Antwrens. We continued down the road and then ducked into the forest to take the trail to an old cock-of-the-rock lek-site. The hike halted abruptly to glimpse a small flock of Grey-winged Trumpeters and a single White-lipped Peccary cross the trail ahead. At the lek-site we were treated to prolonged looks at a couple of fabulous Guianan Cocks-of-the-Rock.



*Guianan Cock-of-the-rock © Paul Prior*

We reached Surama in good time for lunch and then siesta in the upstairs lounge with a great view across the adjacent savannah. Again, the sinking afternoon sun found us out birding, this time in search of the Great Potoo which patiently puts up with our group ogling him at roost every year.



*Great Potoo © Paul Prior*

Together with all the other birding groups visiting Surama this surely must be the most ogled Potoo in the world! This time the Great Potoo had a Spotted Puffbird sitting nearby, and then even better, we managed to get great looks at a Golden-spangled Piculet on the edge of the forest.



*Golden-spangled Piculet © Paul Prior*

From here, Devon drove us to yet another drying wetland where a few birds were foraging for whatever the conditions had left them. Savannah Hawk, a Yellow-headed Caracara and a Cocoli Heron stalked the baking mud, while Lesser Kiskadee and Green-tailed Goldenthrout foraged in the

scrub. As night fell a trio of Red-bellied Macaws flew into the palms to roost, a Great Horned Owl hooted nearby, and Common Potoo, Common Pauraque and Tropical Screech-Owl started their evening songs.

### **Day 8:**

A big day today! The group was taxied in two shifts across the savannah and over to the dock on the Burro-Burro River where we met our two boatmen and crew. Our passage along the creek was repeatedly slowed and halted by snags and logs and massive tree-fall, sometimes requiring deft boat handling, and at other times sheer horsepower, and the redistribution of passenger weight!



*Log crossing the Burro Burro © Paul Prior*

We passed dozens of Kingfishers - Ringed, Amazon, Green, and Green-and-Rufous - loafing Spectacled Caiman, busy Yellow-rumped Cacique colonies, flocks of handsome White-banded Swallows, and hordes of Proboscis Bats. At last we reached our destination, disembarked and hiked the short trail to the picnic table, located looking across the river towards a huge nest occupied by a likewise huge young Harpy Eagle. At reportedly seven months old, this guy was on the verge of fledging, and we watched as he ambled about his bed-sized nest, stretching wings, his downy crest fluttering in the breeze.



*Harpy Eagle on nest © Paul Prior*

We stayed with him over lunch and then made our way back to the boat for a repeat in reverse of our outward voyage. As ever the lead boat got the best of the observations: Blue-throated Piping-Guan for one crew, and then, after switching leads, a pair of Tayra on a bridging log for the other crew.



*Tayra © Paul Prior*

Once we were back at our home dock, the group broke into two: the sensible people accepted a lift with Robert straight back to Surama. The other people joined Neil, Larendo, and I for the long hike

back through the forest shade, where we encountered Fasciated Antshrike, Guianan Puffbird, and then a sighting that got Neil jumping: a female Fiery-tailed Aowlbill! That was plenty to satisfy our birding needs for the day and the rest of the afternoon was spent on RnR.



*Guianan Puffbird © Paul Prior*

## **Day 9:**

Perhaps the most difficult morning of the trip. The sun was relentless from the word go and the birds were accordingly hard to come by. We headed across the adjacent savannah and managed a few early morning sightings of Wedge-tailed Grass-finch, Grassland Sparrow, and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters. Devon taxied us to the forest-edge where we lucked in on Cayenne Jays, a lone Summer Tanager, and various Elaenias. And then we headed deeper into the forest for an audience with a known lek of Capuchinbirds: seven in all, and through some nifty scope work, Neil got everyone good looks at these strange-looking Cotingids. Back at the lodge we loaded our luggage and began the drive to our next hotel. We made stops along the Surama Road, but the sun was now in full force. We gained a glimpse of an unusually shy Amazon Motmot, but not a great deal else. I think we were all happy to break for lunch at Madonna's Restaurant at the junction with the main Rupununi Road. Well-fed, and equally well regaled with stories from our hostess, Madonna, we settled into the van for the drive to Rockview. Here we were soon made to feel at home by our host and family, and retired for our customary siesta. Neil and Devon returned at 4pm to end the day with more great birding along the highway south of Rockview. First, we ducked along a riparian trail, where we managed great looks at Black-crested Antshrike, White-bellied Piculet, and Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, and Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, whilst some energetic pygmy-owl tooting brought a trio of hummers - White-chested Emerald, Glittering-throated Emerald, and Long-billed Starthroat - and finally an actual Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl! From here we made for the now rather dry Moura Wetland but there were still birds to see - a Long-winged Harrier hunted in the distance, while closer to us there were Vermillion Flycatcher and White-headed Marsh Tyrants. The real stars turned up just before dusk: a flyby pair of enormous Jabirus. These were soon followed by the evening procession of first Least and then Lesser Nighthawks.

## Day 10:

Another day, another boat trip. This time along the Rupununi. We taxied down to Kwatamang Landing and boarded our boats. The river was very low, but no log-jumping shenanigans this time, just lots of sandbars to be dragged over. A very-difficult-to-glimpse pair of Crestless Curassows were our first goodies, followed by more Jabiru, Large-billed Terns and several pairs of delightful Pied Lapwings.



*Jabiru © Paul Prior*

The lead boat managed to spot a pair of Giant Otters before they made their escape up the bank and then in one quiet bay we found a beautiful Sunbittern perched up in the riverside understory.



*Sunbittern © Paul Prior*

Eli and crew beached on the west bank and we hiked several hundred metres to an oxbow lake covered in fabulous Amazon Giant Waterlilies. A dozen Muscovy Ducks, a couple of Wattled Jacanas, an Anhinga, and a pair of Black-collared Hawks were the only birds on hand, nevertheless, it was a pretty magical location.



*Amazon Giant Waterlilies (with Jacana at back) © Paul Prior*

The hike back to the boat afforded us good looks at Amazonian Antshrike, more Capuchinbirds, and then, as we reached the beach, we flushed a couple of Ladder-tailed Nightjars from their daytime

roosts. We returned to Rockview in time for lunch and were invited to join Zorba - our host's son - on a short afternoon tour of the grounds, including a very entertaining cashew-preparing demonstration. Then at 4pm Devon and Neil returned to take us up to Camodi Bash, a roadside reservoir, which, given the dry conditions, attracted several cool birds including a foraging Sunbittern (at one point in dispute with a Green Ibis over fishing rights).



*Green Ibis and Sunbittern © Paul Prior*

## **Day 11:**

We were off at 4:30am for the drive to Karasabai, the early start affording us the opportunity to stop at sunrise to watch a pair of Aplamado Falcons hawking for insects over the open savanna. A little further along, we stood quietly and watched as our third Giant Anteater ambled off into the long grass, and then stopped to marvel at the spectacle of over 20 giant Jabiru flocking, on their way to forage at a nearby farm.



*Giant Anteater © Paul Prior*

We had made very good time, and having picked up Uncle Ali (the local parakeet steward) we stationed ourselves on one of the valley roads and waited for the parakeets. They were late! But in the meanwhile, we were entertained by Blue-tailed Emerald and a very obliging Squirrel Cuckoo.



*Squirrel Cuckoo © Paul Prior*

Then at last we got word that a small party of parakeets had landed in trees 100 m off the road. We made our way to where Uncle Ali and Neil had set up the scope and spent the next 20 minutes, watching a pair of gorgeous Sun Parakeets. In the same area, a little pygmy-owl tooting brought in a

nice mixed flock of mobsters: Hooded Tanagers, Burnished-buff Tanager, Ochre-lore Flatbill, Tropical Gnatcatcher, White-bellied Piculet, Chivi Vireo, Ash-headed Greenlet, and a Streaked Flycatcher. With the sun getting higher we headed over to the eco-centre - a project in progress - for lunch, watched over by a dozen Proboscis Bats roosting in the roof above us. And then the long drive to Manari and a well-earned siesta.



*Proboscis Bats © Paul Prior*

At 5pm we were off again, this time a short drive to the nearby JR Ranch wetland with another specific target. As we waited for sundown we trained the scopes on grazing Capybara, and a small number of White-faced Whistling-Ducks. Finally at dusk, constantly scanning the nearby mat of aquatic vegetation, we managed to spot several Azure Gallinules. Success!

## **Day 12:**

Our final day of birding and of course another early start. Jeremy, Romaine and Rolden arrived to taxi us in 4x4s across the savannah to the Ireng River - the Brazilian border. After a quick picnic breakfast, we trooped off with Neil in search of our last two big targets - species with very restricted ranges. As ever there were plenty of other birds to see in the meanwhile: a pair of Chestnut-vented Conebills in a small mixed flock was particularly interesting, and then, as we crept through the dry riparian woodland on our quest we were treated to looks at Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Black-crested Antshrike, Pale-legged Hornero, and Orange-backed Troupial. We were joined by Jeremy, and between them our guides finally managed to track down a male Rio Branco Antbird which gave excellent looks, and then a pair of Hoary-throated Spinetails, which were not quite as cooperative.



*Rio Branco Antbird © Paul Prior*

It was then back to the 4x4s for a slower drive back across the savanna. White-tailed Hawks hung in the breeze close overhead, and we stopped to check out the always too-cute Burrowing Owls. Most of the ponds were very dry, but this provided foraging for flocks of Red-breasted and Eastern Meadowlarks, a large flock of Fork-tailed Flycatchers, and several White-throated Kingbirds. Another wetland provided us with looks at a trio of Maguari Storks, but we now needed to get back to Manari for lunch and to pack our bags for the afternoon flight. Our hostess, Lisa, helped transport our luggage to Lethem and soon enough, after an hour's easy flying we were back where we started: the Cara Lodge.



*Our group*

Given how tired the group surely must've been after this marathon of dawn starts and constant birding, our final supper was surprisingly animated, although this may in large part have been due to the promise of the Cara Lodge's speciality dessert: Peppercorn Ice Cream! Needs to be tasted to be believed - much as Guyana needs to be visited to be believed. Between us we had amassed a list of over 370 species of birds, several very cool mammals and some unforgettable experiences. Guyana does not get talked about as much as some other South and Central American birding destinations, but hopefully the participants in this latest Eagle Eye Tour will join the growing number in-the-know and spread the word. By providing a higher and higher profile for ecotourism here, perhaps the authorities will endeavour to give greater and greater protection to the very real treasures that are surely under potential threat from the wave of imminent development. The people of this wonderful country, as stewards of the Guyana wilderness, should be given as much support as possible. In the meanwhile, it was a pleasure travelling with this group of ever-enthusiastic nature-nuts. Here's wishing you all more excellent birding in the future! [Guyana Birding Tour species list Jan 2025 \(eBird\)](#)