



## Guyana - a true wilderness

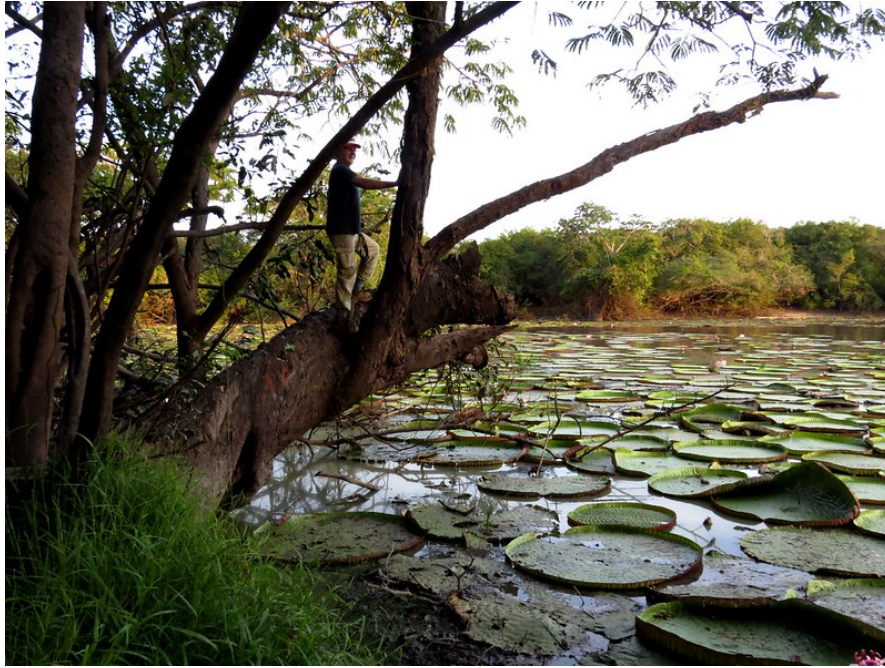
[Link: Guyana - a true wilderness](#)

When this is over... you might want to think about visiting some true wilderness. Guyana has been in the news recently regarding the discovery and imminent exploitation of oil resources which will no doubt change the fortunes of the poorest nation in South America. This is surely great news for some of the people of Guyana but at the same time puts into question the future of the huge expanse of near pristine tropical rain forest that dominates much of the landscape. But, you might ask, what does this little country have to offer that cannot be found in more popular destinations such as Peru and Ecuador? Certainly, while I would gladly head back to those excellent destinations for tropical wildlife viewing there are plenty of species, sights and sounds, that I'd have a hard time tracking down elsewhere. Guyana sits right on top of a significant region of endemism - the Guianan Shield. Although none of the several hundred bird species that have occurred are endemic to Guyana, regional endemism is high and, other than the locations in this friendly country, one would need to cross into neighbouring Venezuela to otherwise find the same species. Not something, sadly, that is on many birders' plans for the near future. The Guianan Shield - according to Wikipedia - accommodates over 100 endemic reptile species, close to 100 endemic amphibians, 30 endemic mammals and over 70 endemic bird species. I don't want to even start thinking about the huge number of endemic plants that must be thereabouts! The Shield entirely encompasses Venezuela, Guyana, French Guiana and Surinam, and the northern section of Brazil. My point is, there are many species of birds that even the most seasoned of South American birders would see for the first time on visiting Guyana. But, for me, more importantly, these species are in near pristine forest, primarily in the enormous Iwokrama Forest described as one of the four last great pristine forests of the world (alongside forests in the Congo basin, New Guinea and the Amazon).



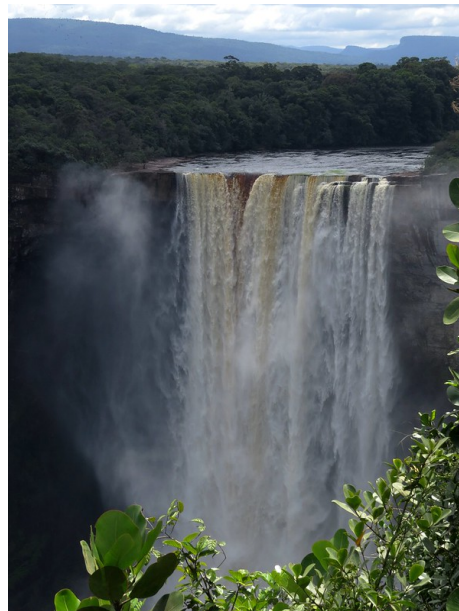
*Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock* © Paul Prior

As well as regional endemics such as the stunningly gorgeous Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock and the considerably more sober looking Rufous-crowned Elaenia, there are more widespread species which are generally easier to encounter in the forests of Guyana than anywhere else on the continent. Capuchinbirds gather at traditional lek sites near the Iwokrama Lodge and in the forest at Surama. The same areas, and especially in the vicinity of Atta Lodge, provide opportunities for seeing a higher number of Cotinga species than just about anywhere else on the continent, the main target being Crimson Fruitcrow, but also gems such as Guianan Red Cotinga and the not so flamboyant Dusky Purpletuft. I can't recall ever having amassed as impressive a trip-list of parrots as I have on my several visits to Guyana, from the ever-popular Macaws (five species at least!) to the mega-rare Sun Parakeets at Karasabai. The variety of antbirds on show varies from year to year, being somewhat dependent (as anywhere) on the occurrence of antswarms, but over the years Ferruginous-backed Antbirds and White-plumed Antbirds have become firm favourites. Away from the forests, out on the extensive savanna around Manari and Caiman House, much-sought species such as Bearded Tachuri and Crested Doradito are important additions to any ardent lister's tally, as are Rio Branco Antbird and Hoary-throated Spinetail on our drive to the Ireng River, but for me the main thrill of the open country portion of the Guyana trip is the chance of Giant Anteaters! Nothing is ever guaranteed in Nature but the staff at Caiman House always maintain the potential for an encounter with one of these fabulous animals high on the agenda. Boat trips on the adjacent Rupununi River present opportunities for further giant spotting - we've happened upon families of Giant Otters on several occasions. And as if that weren't enough of giants - a side-trip is always made to show-off Guyana's national flower: the Giant Water Lilies.



*Water Lilies © Paul Prior*

Every day brings something special, from our first day in Georgetown, when we could track down the highly range-restricted Blood-coloured Woodpecker, to our last day before we fly back north to Georgetown having sampled the savannah birding around Manari. For me, our 2 hour stopover at the splendid falls at Kaieteur, is always a highlight ...



*Kaieteur Falls © Paul Prior*



... but for the purpose of this blog I'm going to select my favourite pictures for each of the 12 days from all of the seven visits that I have made since I first fell in love with this country in 2013. **Day 1:** an introduction to Georgetown, usually with a visit to the capital's botanical gardens. Hopefully to find Festive Amazon.



*Festive Amazon © Paul Prior*

**Day 2:** our first boat-trip primarily in search of Guyana's national bird, Hoatzin.



*Hoatzin © Paul Prior*

**Day 3:** Our in country flight takes us south, stopping in at the massive waterfall in Kaieteur NP where we have a good chance for Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (see above) but for me the endemic Golden Rocket Frogs living in the Giant Bromeliads take the prize (after The Falls themselves of course)!



*Golden Frog © Paul Prior*

**Day 4:** The forest surrounding Iwokrama holds a wonderful biodiversity - birds, bugs, mammals and plants. This beauty is a Royal Firetip, a type of skipper.



*Royal Firetip Skipper © Paul Prior*

**Day 5:** Our drive down to Atta Lodge passes through prime Guyanan Shield habitat, in particular the white sand areas with very specific avian targets such as Bronzy Jacamar.



*Bronzy Jacamar © Paul Prior*

**Day 6:** A chance to explore the forest trails around Atta Lodge can be very productive - but can't always promise White-plumed Antbird.



*White-plumed Antbird © Paul Prior*

**Day 7:** The transfer to Surama presents further forest birding opportunities, not least the chance perhaps of visiting the local Harpy Eagle nest if the birds are cooperating!



*Harpy Eagle © Paul Prior*

**Day 8:** Surama presents us with our first open country birding of the tour, always a nice change of pace. Here a Savanna Hawk takes flight before the rain storm hits.



*Savanna Hawk © Paul Prior*

**Day 9:** The open country continues all the way down to the Rupununi – yet more first encounters with various savanna specialties, like the ever present but not always visible Ferruginous Pygmy-owl.



*Ferruginous Pygmy Owl © Paul Prior*

**Day 10:** By the Rupununi we've tried several different venues but Caiman House has proven the most successful for our main target – Giant Anteater.



*Giant Anteater © Paul Prior*

**Day 11:** An early start gets us across to Karasabai in good time for a chance at the fabulous Sun Parakeets.



*Sun Parakeets © Paul Prior*

**Day 12:** Manari is our base for an early morning expedition to the Ireng River for two highly range-restricted species: an antbird, and this Hoary-throated Spinetail.



*Hoary-throated Spinetail © Paul Prior*

Click here to find out more about [Eagle-Eye Tours Guyana: Neotropical Birding tour](#). For more species and pictures from Eagle Eye's trips to Guyana over the past few years feel free to visit my Flickr page ([https://www.flickr.com/photos/paul\\_prior/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/paul_prior/albums)) ... and if January birding in Guyana doesn't tickle your fancy then perhaps check out the Patagonia albums on the same page and join Steve Ogle and I in November for the [Patagonia Wildlife Safari](#).