

Panama Birding Tour 2022 Trip Report

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Day 1. Arrival Panama City

All the clients arrived safely and were excited to begin the Panama birding tour!

Day 2. Cerro Azul, Chepo and Tortí

After an early breakfast we met our driver, Félix, and drove to our first planned stop at Cerro Azul, a low mountain that overlooks Panama City from the continental divide. We walked the dirt service track that is bordered by native vegetation and soon started picking up our first birds with close-up Hepatic Tanager, Squirrel Cuckoo, Tawny-capped Euphonia, White-browed Gnatcatcher, Thick-billed Seedfinch, Long-billed Gnatwren, Yellow-crowned Euphonia and a flock of about a dozen stunning Black-and-yellow Tanagers. We also found a very interesting orchid called *Dresslerella pertusa*.



orchid (Dresslerella pertusa) © E Carman

As we drove out of Cerro Azul we had great views of a Broad-winged and Gray-lined Hawk, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, Bay-headed Tanager and a Bay-headed Tanager. Our next stop was on a side road near Chepo where we set up our picnic lunch and for dessert we had killer views of a male Golden-collared Manakin! We worked our way east and in the late afternoon we stopped at a small pond just outside of Tortí, the town where our lodge was, and it was very productive! What first caught our attention was a large, handsome Cocoli Heron towering over a flock of Black-bellied Whistling-

Ducks and Blue-winged Teal. In the fields surrounding the pond were several male Red-breasted Meadowlarks displaying and perching up on the taller plants sticking above the grass. Meanwhile Wattled Jacanas and Fork-tailed Flycatchers foraged in the vegetation surrounding the pond.



Golden-collared Manakin © E Carman

Day 3. San Francisco Reserve and Tortí River

San Francisco Reserve is a private property run by a priest from, of all places, Wisconsin! Father Paul is in charge of the water supply of several villages and much of this water comes from the forested hills on the reserve. As soon as we finished breakfast we visited this reserve to take advantage of the cooler, early hours of the day. As soon as we got off the van we were seeing new birds left and right, Greater and Smooth-billed Anis, Gray-headed Chachalacas, Ruddy Ground-Doves, Barred Antshrike, Black-tailed Trogon, the ventriloquial Barred Puffbird and a series of look-alike flycatchers including Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Boat-billed Flycatcher and Lesser Kiskadee.



Black-tailed Trogon © E Carman



Barred Puffbird © E Carman

Leaving the open fields and fence rows we entered the forested section of the road and had our first encounter with a large mixed species flock with Pied and White-whiskered Puffbirds, Cinnamon Becard, White-shouldered Tanager, White-flanked and Pacific Antwren, Black-crowned Antshrike and the range restricted Yellow-green Tyrannulet among others! Despite the day had warmed-up substantially, bird activity was constant. During lunch we studied the hummingbirds visiting the

feeders at the lodge including White-necked Jacobin, Scaly-breasted, Blue-chested and Snowy-bellied Hummingbird. After lunch we visited the Tortí River for the remainder of the afternoon and it was equally as busy as the morning had been. Whooping Motmots nesting in the river bank, a Laughing Falcon “laughing” from a cecropia tree and a spotless Spotted Sandpiper bobbing in the river were just the beginning of a lengthy list of well seen birds! Collared Aracaris, Lineated Woodpecker, Southern Lapwing, Black-chested Jay, White-winged Becard, Giant Cowbird and Great-tailed and Carib Grackles were only a handful of the species we saw.



White-whiskered Puffbird © E Carman

Day 4. El Salto and Yaviza, Darien Province

After a pre-dawn cup of coffee we began our drive east into the Darien province and we arrived at El Salto road bright and early which is key for having successful birding in this region! As we stepped out of the bus we were immediately surrounded by the dawn chorus of toucans, parrots, antbirds, manakins and woodcreepers. White-necked Puffbird, Black-bellied Wren, Blue-headed and Red-colored Parrot, Forest Elaenia, Yellow-margined Flycatcher and the impossibly blue Blue Cotinga perched in the top of a leafless tree. Among the tropical species we also saw several Neotropical migrants including Great-crested Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Summer Tanager and Bay-breasted Warbler. All of this activity was suddenly interrupted by a loud, rapid burst of wing-beats and as we turned to look, a Collared Forest-Falcon was in hot pursuit of a Tawny-faced Quail! Along the road we also found a couple of lethargic Three-toed Sloths and a troop of hyperactive Geoffroy's Tamarins before we passed through a large teak plantation. At the end of the road which dead ends into the Chucunaque River, we walked a trail bordering the river and had great views of Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Scaled Pigeon and a pair of Yellow-breasted Flycatchers. We also enjoyed watching a Lemon-tipped Damsel (Mecistogaster) slowly flying and scanning the vegetation, eventually grabbing and eating one of its favorite prey, a spider! The late morning sun in the Darien was now beating down with force so we hopped in the air-conditioned bus and drove to the end of the Panamerican highway in the town of Yaviza before we turned back to Tortí.



Geofroy's Tamarins © E Carman



End of Pan-American Highway © E Carman

Day 5. Tortí, Panama City, Gamboa.

After studying the Black-throated Mangos, Scaly-breasted, Snowy-bellied and Rufous-tailed hummingbirds at the feeders during breakfast, we packed the bus and made a couple brief, but very productive stops before driving back west to Panama City. The first stop was near the Tortí Hospital

overlooking some overgrown fields where we saw Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Gray-breasted Martin, Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel and two very showy woodpeckers, Lineated and Spot-breasted. We then made another stop at the pond we had visited previously and saw the same species but added a Pearl Kite. We also had much better views at the Tamarins as they moved along a fencerow. After lunch in Panama City we drove along the Panama Canal and our driver, Félix, gave us a personalized tour as we watched a couple mega-container ships entering the locks. Before reaching our next lodge, Gamboa Rainforest Resort, we made one more stop at a well known birding site, the Ammo Dump Ponds. Here we had Purple Gallinule, Wattled Jacana, Buff-throated Saltator, Mangrove Swallow, Wattled Jacana, Variable Seedeater, several handsome Rufescent Tiger-Herons, and we were able to study the subtle differences between Social and Rusty-margined Flycatchers. We reached Gamboa Rainforest Resort and checked-in to a very relaxing view.

Day 6. Pipeline Road and Gamboa Rainforest Resort

Our parking lot birding was productive prior to breakfast. As we watched a male Three-toed Sloth feeding from the large flower buds of a Pot-bellied Kapok (*Pseudobombax septenatum*), Keel-billed Toucans and Yellow-headed Caracaras attracted much attention as they called incessantly. We also had great scope views of the resident Bat Falcon from the restaurant. After breakfast we drove the short distance to the Pipeline Road, one of the most famous birding sites in Central America and we were about to experience it first hand. During the initial part of our walk we were hearing many species singing in the background, but soon we began seeing them up close as we ran into a mixed species flock. Red-capped Manakin, Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon, Collared Aracaris, Yellow-margined Flycatcher, Olivaceous Flatbill, followed by a fantastic show from White-flanked and Dot-winged Antwrens, Checker-throated Stipplethroat and an obliging Spot-crowned Antvireo. However, it was a family of four Cinnamon Woodpeckers who stole the show as they foraged very close to us at eye level.



Cinnamon Woodpecker © E Carman

After lunch and a refreshing siesta we took a walk on the extensive hotel grounds. In a shaded woodland bordering Lake Chagres we found several Neotropical migrants including American

Redstart, Tennessee, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia and Prothonotary Warblers all foraging with the resident White-shouldered and Crimson-backed Tanagers, Lesser and Golden-fronted Greenlets, Green Shrike-Vireos and Cocoa Woodcreepers. We also found Masked Tityra, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet and the stunning Flame-rumped Tanager. A short walk after dinner produced excellent views of multiple Common Pauragues and a Tropical Screech-Owl.



Masked Tityra © E Carman



Flame-rumped Tanager © E Carman

Day 7. Rainforest Discovery Center and Panama Canal boat tour

Prior to breakfast we focused on finding the Violet-bellied Hummingbirds that lek near the lodge, filling the air with an insect-like trill during the first 45 minutes of daylight. We found two of them and had fantastic views from all different angles. After breakfast we returned to the Pipeline Road, but this time we visited the Rainforest Discovery Center, a private site with trails and an amazing tower that projects over the forest canopy. We spent some time on the tower and saw several raptors including Hook-billed and Gray-headed Kite, Zone-tailed and White Hawk, as well as dozens of vultures of three different species, Black, Turkey and Lesser yellow-headed. Both the three-toed and two-toed Sloths were visible from the tower as well, the latter at close range.



Two-toed Sloth © E Carman

A short walk on the trails provided us with fantastic views of Fasciated Antshrike, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Whooping Motmot, Song Wren and Spotted Antbirds so close we could not focus our binoculars on them!



Whooping Motmot © E Carman

The center also maintains hummingbird feeders visited by Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-chested and Violet-bellied Hummingbird. On our way back out to the bus we encountered yet another mixed species flock and had killer views of Black-breasted Puffbird, Gartered Trogon, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Slate-colored Grosbeak and some neck-breaking views of the uncommon Gray Elaenia.



White-necked Jacobin © E Carman



Black-breasted Puffbird © E Carman

After lunch we boarded a small, covered boat and set off to bird the edges of Lake Gatún which makes up the majority of the canal's waterway. After passing several large container ships we moved slowly along the edges of the lake and spotted some interesting species. Several raptors gave us great views, Osprey, Gray-lined Hawk, Snail Kite and a Great-black Hawk with its dark plumage contrasting with its bright white rump. We also saw an assortment of egrets and herons, Jacanas, gallinules, cormorants, Greater Anis, a White-faced Capuchin Monkey carrying a baby on her back and we topped the tour off with a Central American Tamandua curled-up and sleeping in a tree.

Day 8. Pipeline Road and Panamá Viejo Bay

Once again we went to the Pipeline Road and walked along a different section deeper in the forest. This morning we were really hoping to see a Great Jacamar which is not an easy bird by any means, but we were here to see it all! The famous road continued to live up to its name as new birds kept showing despite this being our third time there. Chestnut-backed Antbird, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Southern Bentbill, Black-faced Antthrush, White-tailed Trogon and both Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, but the most exciting moment occurred just as we were going to turn around and leave. It all began when we heard a different bird call we were not familiar with and after searching for it and getting great scope views we found it was a Speckled Mourner, which is not an easy bird to find! As we were watching the mourner we suddenly heard the unmistakable, two-toned whistle of the Great Jacamar and at this point our hearts were really pumping. Although it took us some time to find where it was perched, once we did, we watched it for fifteen minutes in the spotting scope. At one point both the mourner and the jacamar were perched in the same tree, just unbelievable!!!



Great Jacamar © E Carman

With this, we returned to the hotel to pack our bags, have lunch and head out to Panama City for our last night. We made one last stop in Panamá Viejo, or Old Panama, where some of the ruins of the original city from the 1500's remain. From here we had great viewing of the mud flats exposed during low tide and saw a nice assortment of shorebirds and gulls such as Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Western, Least and Spotted Sandpipers, Black-necked Stilts, Willet, Whimbrel and Ruddy Turnstones amongst others. Just before getting on the bus, our last species for the tour was a Saffron Finch, and off we went for our final night at Hotel Riande for our farewell dinner.