

Panama Trip Report - Jan 2025

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The January 2025 Panama tour was an exciting adventure filled with numerous mammal species, 274 species of birds, and a variety of beautiful landscapes. A wet January in Panama, created some tricky terrain, but yielded lots of fruiting trees that brought the bird life in the rainforest to life. This tour gave an excellent birding experience from across the Canal Zone all the way to the Darien.

Day 1. Arrival

With a few hours to kill in the afternoon, some recreational birding around the hotel yield Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Crimson-backed Tanagers, and Orange-chinned Parakeets nesting in the palms by the pool. We met in the evening for a welcome dinner to introduce each other and discuss the exciting days of birding ahead.

Day 2. Cerro Azul

After breakfast, we departed for Cerro Azul, a gated community within Chagres National Park, which has a plethora of habitats in the highlands overlooking Panama City. At our first stop, we could sense that some rain may be incoming, but before it started to pour we found some exciting species such as Yellow-eared Toucanet, White-ruffed Manakin, Black-and-yellow Tanager, Emerald Tanager, and we encountered our first ant swarm of the trip where we found Bicolored Antbird, Spotted Antbird, and Chestnut-backed Antbird. Eventually the rain picked up and we made our way back to the bus. Our next stop was quite unique and surely started our trip off with a highlight. We were welcomed to the home of Jerry and Linda Harrison to view their incredible bird feeder set-up that they've maintained for the last 13 years. Immediately our hosts began excitably pointing out different hummingbird and tanager species that were feeding in incredible densities just meters away from us. We managed to linger at their home for a few hours, taking refuge from the heavy rain. As we watched the birds visit the feeders, colourful species kept coming in one by one. Bay-headed Tanagers, Hepatic Tanagers, Thick-billed and Fulvous-vented Euphonias, and three honeycreeper species (Green, Shining, and Red-legged) were coming to the bird feeders nonstop, giving us lots of amazing photography opportunities. Over the course of the morning we saw a total of 10 different hummingbird species there. Some of the hummingbirds observed included Long-billed Hermit, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-chested Hummingbird, and we had a short but beautiful look at the rare and near endemic Violet-capped Hummingbird. After the rain let up, we explored other parts of Cerro Azul on our way back to Panama City, picking up more species such as a large flock of Carmiol's Tanager, a very cooperative Squirrel Cuckoo, a Fasciated Tiger-Heron in the riverbed, and Black-cheeked Woodpecker.



Bay-headed Tanager © Matthew Fuirst



Crowned Woodnymph © Matthew Fuist



Blue-chested Hummingbird © Matthew Fuist

Day 3. Riande, Chepo, Llano-Cartí Road, Tortí

After an early breakfast we hopped into the bus and started our journey east making a quick stop outside of Panama City where we saw Fork-tailed Flycatcher and Gray Kingbird. We stopped along a dirt road adjacent to cattle farms in the town of Chepo where we saw wading bird species such as Wood Stork, Great Egret, and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron along with a collection of raptors like Short-tailed Hawk, Roadside Hawk, Crested Caracara, and two close-up Pearl Kites. We also observed a Caiman swim under the bridge with a fresh catch in its mouth. From there, we worked our way to Llano-Cartí Road, which by that point was blazing hot and windy. We set up a picnic lunch, which was rewarded with a flyover White Hawk. After a delicious picnic we continued our road trip east along the Panamerican Highway to the village of Tortí where we would spend the following three nights. On our way to Tortí, we made a brief stop at the bridge overlooking Lake Bayano. There, we managed to see Neotropic Cormorant, Little Blue Heron, Osprey, and a Common Black Hawk (adult and juvenile) that topped off our raptor-filled day. We eventually arrived at our hotel and once settled in we enjoyed viewing the birds at the feeders by the restaurant. We concluded the day with Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, and Long-billed Starthroat, all feeding right next to our dinner table!



Greater Ani © Matthew Fuist

Day 4. El Salto and Yaviza Today we started our adventure east to the Darien province and to make sure we made the most of it we left the hotel before sunrise. We arrived at the El Salto road and immediately faced the results of the above-average rain conditions that season (despite it being the dry season). Only a few hundred meters into the road, our bus got stuck in the wet, muddy road. Fortunately, we had some excitable clients ready to help and we collectively managed to push the bus out of the mud! A disaster was avoided. Now realizing that reaching the end of El Salto road was not feasible, we decided to walk along the road from the bus for an hour or two and then come back. Along our walk we were delighted to see numerous specialties in some mixed flocks such as Blue Ground Dove, Blue-throated Goldentail, White-necked Puffbird, Little Tinamou, White-bellied Antbird, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Black Antshrike, Black-crowned Tityra, Black-chested Jay, and Southern Bentbill, just to name a few! We also observed a new mammal species for the trip, the charismatic Geoffrey's Tamarin Monkey.



El Salto © Matthew Fuist

After our walk we made our way back to the bus and had a picnic lunch by the road. Once we completed lunch, we got back on the highway to head to the very end of the Panamanian Highway at the Darien Gap in Yaviza. There we spent a short time watching the dozens of local workers at the marina shuttle loads of cassava and bananas on canoes. We then made our way back to Tortí.



Yaviza © Matthew Fuirst

Back in Tortí, our eagerness to continue birding led us to do a short walk along the Tortí River. There we actually managed to find a number of species hiding in mixed flocks in the shade. We saw

Whooping Motmot, Barred Antshrike, Masked Tityra, Cinnamon Becard, Yellow and Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet moving about in the vegetation along the river. We also observed several aquatic species such as Ringed and Green Kingfishers, White Ibis, Southern Lapwing, and Solitary Sandpiper.

Day 5. San Francisco Reserve

Today was our day to complete the San Francisco Reserve trifecta, as our goal was to visit three times in one day! After an early but delicious breakfast prepared by Andreas and the rest of the Hotel Avicar staff, we drove to the private reserve run by the Franciscan church. This reserve is a forest comprised of marvelous old growth Cuipo trees and a network of creeks. protects a large amount of habitat because it is also integral to the distribution of potable water to the villages in and around Tortí. At the pond where we parked the bus, we started our walk off with a Rufescent Tigerheron, Greater Ani, Streaked Flycatcher, Lesser Kiskadee, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, and Green Heron. Making our way up the hill and into the forest trails, we were immediately greeted by a Golden-collared Manakin that was being quite vocal along the trailside. We continued into the forest stopping for mixed flocks along the trail, which included songbirds such as Olivaceous Piculet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Rusty-winged Antwren, Dot-winged Antbird, Black-faced Antthrush, and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. The reserve has a number of creek beds and while walking along them we saw Buff-rumped Warbler, Sunbittern, and White-vented Plumeleteer. We continued our hike up along a ridge within the depths of the forest where we noticed the occurrence of a few more species as we gained a bit of elevation. As the group was walking up the ridge, we witnessed the amazing sight of Golden-headed Manakins displaying next to the trail. Along the ridge we also picked up some new species for the trip such as Black-breasted Puffbird, Speckled Mourner, and Northern Black-throated Trogon. After lunch at the hotel, we returned back to the San Francisco Reserve to explore some new trails. Despite the heat, our afternoon birding yielded Zone-tailed Hawk, Keel-billed Toucan, Blue Cotinga, Bay Wren, Crested Oropendola, and Dusky-faced Tanager. On our way back to the hotel we stopped by a wetland outside of Tortí that had Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Wattled Jacanas, Least Grebes, and Red-breasted Meadowlark. After a hearty dinner, we prepared ourselves for the third and final visit to the reserve of the day. With flashlights at the ready, we were excited to search for some nocturnal species. While walking along the entrance road, we heard and saw Common Potoo, Common Parakeet and Barn Owl!

Day 6. Tortí and Gamboa

At sunrise we gathered for some early birding along the Tortí River after packing up the bus. Along the river, we had a suite of mixed flocks that were moving about in the morning. We saw a Crane Hawk flyover the river along with Black-crowned Antshrike, Common Tody Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Greenlet, and White-eared Conebill. We also found a Lesser Nighthawk roosting on a perch. We proceeded across the highway to another spot to walk along the Tortí River. There we saw some new species for the tour such as Purple-crowned Fairy, Black-tailed Trogon, Amazon Kingfisher, Yellow-olive Flatbill, Long-tailed Tyrant, and Yellow-throated Vireo. After finishing up a decent morning of birding around Tortí, we got on the road and made our journey west to Gamboa. Once we arrived at the hotel, we treated ourselves to some drinks and adventured around the property of the resort looking for new birds before dinner. Instantly, we found Violet-bellied Hummingbird and Flame-rumped, Golden-hooded, Crimson-backed, and Plain-colored Tanagers flying around in flocks. As we gathered as a group for our evening get together, we could see Red-lored Amazons flying overhead and Gray-headed Chachalacas on the grounds.

Day 7. Pipeline Road and Ammo Dump Ponds

This day was a highly anticipated day since we were heading to the well-known Pipeline road, an iconic birding spot in Central America. We made our way first to the Ammo Dump ponds where we spotted Mangrove Swallow, Gray-headed Kite, Isthmian Wren, Scrub Greenlet, Variable Seedeater, Greater Ani, and Purple Gallinule. After our short stop at the ponds, we made our way up Pipeline Road, which did not disappoint! Along our walk up the road we encountered four trogon species (Slaty-tailed, Black-tailed, Gartered, and White-tailed)! We also saw Checker-throated Stipplethroat, Fasciated Antshrike, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Collared Aracari, Rufous Motmot, Dusky Antbird, and White-shouldered Tanager. Along our walk we heard numerous troops of Howler Monkeys calling and saw several Central American Agoutis roaming along the road. We also had some great looks at hard to spot species such as Velvety Manakin, Song Wren, and Great Tinamou! At lunch, we dined along the Chagres River, which allowed us to eat and get nice looks at Snail Kites, Mangrove Swallows, Wattled Jacanas, and Common Gallinules. After lunch, we did a birding walk from the hotel to explore the woodlots in the area. We walked a short trail where we saw Red-capped Manakin, White-whiskered Puffbird, Blue-black Grosbeak, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Northern Plain-Xenops, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, and Black-tailed Flycatcher, which was a treat! That night we went to bed early in preparation for another early morning.

Day 8. Rainforest Discovery Center and Boat Tour on the Rio Chagres

On our last full day in Gamboa, we decided to start the day with a magical experience by watching the sunrise from the Canopy Tower. We parked the bus and hiked into the Rainforest Discovery Center in the dark, listening for nocturnal animals and birds. On our way to the tower, we heard a Broad-billed Motmot calling and saw a Northern Tamandua. We reached the top of the canopy tower just before sunrise, which was a challenging but rewarding experience for many. There, we enjoyed a spectacular view of the rainforest canopy and watched the birds and other wildlife awaken. We saw White-faced Capuchin Monkeys foraging in the canopy and watched Mealy and Red-lored Amazons flying by in flocks. From the top of the tower we also got great views of Scaled Pigeon, Band-rumped Swift, Lineated Woodpecker, and Bright-rumped Attila. After a couple hours of birding the tower, we retreated into the shade and spent the rest of the morning birding around the trails of the Rainforest Discovery Center. Right by the Discovery Center building, we picked up some more species for the day such as White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed Hermit, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Yellow-backed Oriole, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. During our adventuring around the trails we also saw some more hard to spot species such as Song Wren and Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon. After another riverside lunch, we set off on our boat tour along the Chagres River. We made our way north up the river, spotting waterbirds and Snail Kites as we enjoyed a change of scenery on the water. During our fun on the boat, we saw Anhinga, Tricolored Heron, Yellow-rumped Cacique, and dozens of Wattled Jacanas.



Snail Kite © Matthew Fuirst

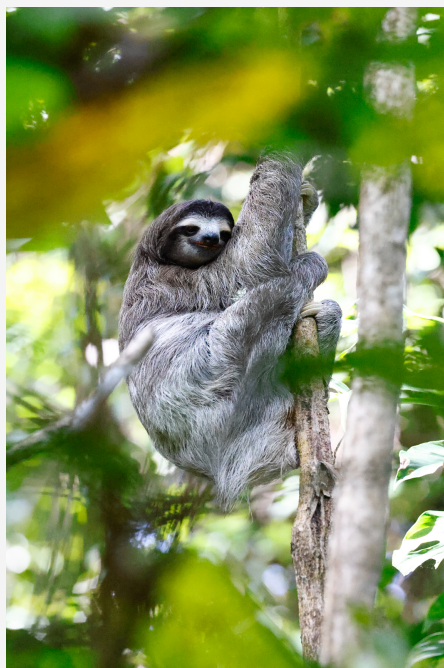
After going through our bird list for the day and having a fun dinner, we went for a night drive up the Pipeline Road to see what we could find. At the entrance to the Pipeline Road, we encountered a family of Collared Peccary and a Rothschild's Porcupine foraging in a tree nearby. As we walked up the road, we heard Mottled Owl, Crested Owl, and Great Potoo. Once we returned to the hotel that night, we decided to do one last walk around the resort at night, and amazingly we encountered a Black-and-white Owl right along the road! A fantastic conclusion to our nocturnal birding.



Mottled Owl © Matthew Fuirst

Day 9. Metropolitan Natural Park and Casco Viejo

On our last day in Gamboa, we did some early morning birding around the hotel where we saw Keel-billed Toucan, Yellow-throated Toucan, Gartered Trogon, Green Shrike-Vireo, and Buff-throated Saltator. After breakfast, we packed up our bags and made our way to the Metropolitan Natural Park in Panama City. On our way there, we made a stop at the Panama Canal to watch the barges make their way towards the Miraflores locks. Along the canal, we picked up Brown Pelican and Savanna Hawk. We started our hike at the Metropolitan Natural Park excited to find some new species, but battling a very hot morning in the sun! On the trails, we found some shade and were greeted by Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Wren, Rufous-and-white Wren, Black-and-white Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, and a flyover Peregrine Falcon. At the end of our hike, we saw a very conspicuous and photogenic Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth!



Three-toed Sloth © Matthew Furst

After lunch we headed into Panama City and walked through Casco Viejo, the historic district of Panama City, which in 1997 was designated a World Heritage Site. As we explored the streets of the city, we made stops along the waterfront to watch shorebirds, wading birds, and other aquatic species. When we arrived the tide was high, but we still managed to see some shorebirds such as Willet, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Spotted Sandpiper, and Wilson's Plover! We also found numerous Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-herons, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Royal Terns, and Laughing Gulls along the coastline. From here, we returned to our hotel for our farewell dinner and wrapped-up an amazing tour of Panama.

Day 10. Departure



Panama Jan 2025

[Panama Birding Tour species list January 2025 \(eBird\)](#)