



Panama Trip Report January 2023

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Day 1. Arrival

Our group gathered in the evening for introductions and dinner.

Day 2. Cerro Azul

We gathered at dawn for a cup of coffee, grabbed our packed breakfast and off we went to our first outing in Panama. We boarded the bus with our driver, Misael Nuñez, and began driving to Cerro Azul, a gated community in the small mountains just outside of Panama City. Much of Cerro Azul was planted with non-native pine trees, but the surrounding Chagres National Park makes this a prime birding site. Our first birding would be at the house of two United States expats who have been living and maintaining bird feeders here for eleven years. Linda and Jerry Harrison welcomed us into their back porch where they have an incredible feeder setup for hummingbirds and fruit loving birds as well! First off we had White-necked Jacobin, **Crowned Woodnymph**, **Blue-chested Hummingbird**, Green Hermit, and both Bronze-tailed, White-vented Plumeleteers and **Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds**.



Crowned Woodnymph © Paz A Irola



Blue-chested Hummingbird © Paz A Irola



Snowy-bellied Hummingbird © Paz A Irola

Also drinking nectar were three species of honeycreeper, Green, Shining and Red-legged with all different plumage variants from male and female to immatures. Over to the side of the house was the fruit feeder and the first species to catch our attention here was NOT a bird rather an Olingo! **Olingo** is a neotropical, arboreal mammal related to raccoons and although they are mainly nocturnal this guy came out for a quick daytime snack.



Olingo © Paz A Irola

Once the Olingo retired to a nearby tree and curled up on a branch, the birds began coming down to

the feeder including both **Fulvous-vented** and Thick-billed Euphonia, Hepatic and Summer Tanager, Bay-headed, Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers and even a brief appearance of a Rufous Motmot!



Fulvous-vented Euphonia © Paz A Irola

After this mind-blowing experience we drove to **another part of Cerro Azul** to walk through the mix of pine and native trees. Once we found a spot that was protected from the wind we found our first mixed species flock which was dominated by Neotropical migrants including American Redstart, Golden-winged, Tennessee, Blackburnian, Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, Bay-breasted, Yellow-throated and Blue-winged Warblers, these last two being rarities for Panama.



We also saw Red-crowned and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, Plain-colored Tanager, Masked Tityra, Streaked Flycatcher, Chestnut-capped Warbler and fantastic views of two White-ruffed Manakins. We returned to the Harrison's house to have our **picnic lunch** and eat while we watched the birds eating, having a great review of the birds. Just as we were about to leave we spotted a different hummingbird coming in to the feeders and when it turned around and faced us it was clear we had just spotted one of the targets of Cerro Azul, the Violet-capped Hummingbird!



picnic lunch

We drove back down the mountain and made one more stop next to a pond and saw Southern Lapwing and Least Grebe as well as Lesser Goldfinch, Northern Waterthrush, Variable Seedeater and a Short-tailed Hawk soaring overhead. By late afternoon we were back at Riande Hotel, freshened-up, had dinner and off to bed we went.

Day 3. Chepo, El Llano-Cartí, Tortí.

At 6:30 we packed our bags on the bus, had breakfast and began driving east. Our first stop was along a gravel road through pasture where we picked-up Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Greater and Lesser Kiskadee, Wattled Jacana, Cattle Egret, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird and Black-throated Mango. We continued east and then took a road to the north from El Llano to Cartí to look for Sulphur-rumped Tanagers and despite it being the middle of the day patience payed off when we found a mixed species flock and one by one new species came into view, Blue Dacnis, Velvety Manakin, Rufous-winged Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager and our main target, the **Sulphur-rumped Tanagers!**



Sulpher-rumped Tanager © Ernesto Carman

Satisfied with the birds, it was now time to satisfy our stomachs so we set-up our picnic, had lunch and continued heading east, but after the Bayano Lake the road condition deteriorates substantially and driving is slow. We made one stop at the Río Mono bridge and had a colony of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, **White-shouldered Tanager**, Forest Elaenia, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, White-browed Gnatcatcher and the small White-eared Conebill. We reached our hotel in the small town of Avicar in the late afternoon and settled in for a good meal and sleep.



White-shouldered Tanager © Paz A Irola

Day 4. Reserva San Francisco and Tortí River.

We gathered before breakfast to watch the first birds moving around at dawn and saw Red-lored Parrots, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Boat-billed Flycatchers and a female Black-throated Mango sitting in her nest. After breakfast we drove to the nearby San Francisco Reserve, a private reserve owned by the Franciscan and protects an important tract of forest. Just off the bus we began seeing new birds as we scanned the giant **Cuipo (Canavillesia sp.) trees** with Bat Falcon, Hook-billed Kite, Plumbeous Kite, Great Black Hawk and Savannah Hawk as well as some smaller species including Long-tailed Tyrant, Ringed Kingfisher, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Becard, Black Antshrike and Golden-fronted Greenlet.



Cuipo Tree © Paz A Irola

As we walked a bit further along the forested road we found an extremely obliging **Great Jacamar** just as a mixed species flock began to move in front of us with Rusty-winged Antwren, Moustached Antwren, White-shouldered Tanager, Plain Xenops, Bay Wren, Barred Puffbird, a Mistletoe Tyrannulet building a nest and the range-restricted Yellow-green Tyrannulet which periodically raises one wing at a time over its back.



Great Jacamar © Ernesto Carman

After lunch we went to the Tortí River and birded along the banks. Several birds were coming down to the shallow edges of the water to bathe including Crimson-backed and Blue-gray Tanagers, Variable Seedeaters and Orange-crowned Orioles. In the trees along the river bank we found a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Great Antshrike, Buff-breasted Wren, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and we actually managed to get scope views of Red-billed Scythebill, a woodcreeper with a very long, decurved bill which it uses to probe into rotting wood and clumps of epiphytes to look for invertebrates. After an extremely birdy day, it was time for dinner and bed as we were going to have an early morning the following day.



Crimson-backed Tanager © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. The Darien: El Salto Road and Yaviza

At 4:30 a.m. we began driving east from Tortí and into the Darien province and our main birding destination is a site known as El Salto, but it is crucial to arrive early while the day is still cool. As soon as we arrived and got out of the bus birds began appearing left and right and it remained that way for the next couple of hours! First we encountered a Golden-collared Manakin on a lek (courtship display site) and Red-lored, Mealy and Blue-headed Parrots were flying overhead and then with few minutes in between, a pair of Great Green Macaws and the smaller Chestnut-fronted Macaws flew over the treetops, all of this as Mantled Howler Monkeys howled in the trees next to us. We then found a mixed species flock, led by the usual White-shouldered Tanagers and they were accompanied by Red-rumped Woodpecker, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Black-bellied Wren, Black-crowned Antshrike, White-flanked Antwren, White-winged and Cinereous Becards and a small flycatcher with a bright yellow rump called the Black-tailed Flycatcher. In the understory we got great views of Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher and **Gray-cheeked Nunlet**, while in the taller trees we saw **White-necked Puffbird**, Lineated and Cinnamon Woodpecker, White-tailed and Black-tailed Trogons and in the top of a tree a male **Blue Cotinga** gave us extended scope views to please our eyes.



Gray-cheeked Nunlet © Paz A Irola



White-necked Puffbird © Ernesto Carman



Blue Cotinga © Ernesto Carman

As it became overcast and rain threatened to come we had one last hotspot with many birds, this time larger species such as Purple-throated Fruitcrow, another Great Jacamar, Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Gray-headed Chachalacas and a quick glimpse of Black-chested Jay as it flew across the dirt track in front of us. We walked back to the bus as the rain cleared-up and drove to the end of the Panamerican highway in the town of **Yaviza**. After a quick pit stop we stopped on a

little gravel road to setup our picnic lunch and watch birds, of course. Here we saw Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, a Wattled Jacana with three newly hatched chicks and the Pied Water-Tyrant. After lunch it was time to make our drive back to Tortí and get some much-deserved rest watching hummingbirds while drinking a beer.

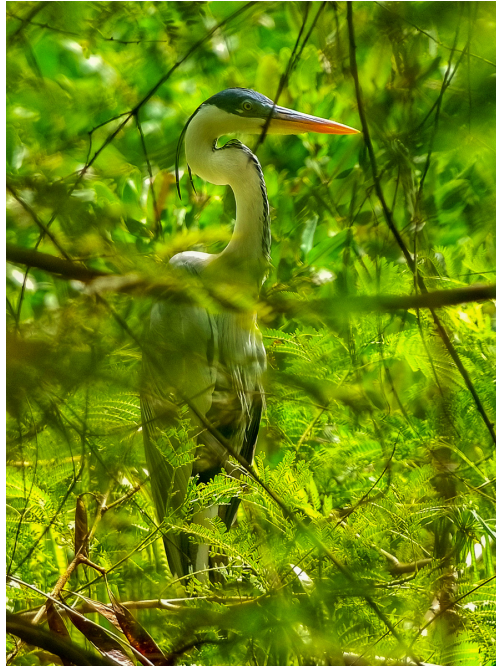
Day 6. Tortí, Panamá Viejo and Gamboa Rainforest Resort.

We started our morning birding the parking lot of our hotel and watched the Orchard Orioles as they left their night roost, Red-lore Parrots were heading to their feeding grounds and House Sparrows began patrolling the roadside. We also had Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole and scope views of a male Sapphire-throated Hummingbird that kept returning to the same perch to sing. After breakfast we loaded-up the bus and made two quick stops before making our way back west to Panama City. At the Tortí River we saw Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Tricolored Heron, Greater Yellowlegs, Southern Lapwing, Great-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, a pair of very vocal **Barred Puffbirds** doing their lazy wolf-whistle like song and just as we were leaving we caught a quick glimpse of a pair of a pair of Carib Grackles flying away.



Barred Puffbird © Paz A Irola

Another quick stop at a small pond just outside of Tortí produced a **Cocoi Heron**, many Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, both Striated and Green Herons, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-breasted and Eastern Meadowlark and a Pearl Kite perching in a dead tree nearby. After a couple bathroom stops and a very bumpy section of the road we made it to Balboa where we had a bite to eat then continued on towards Gamboa. A totally unexpected thunderstorm broke out on the way with very heavy rain, however it was very localized around Panama City and soon we had driven out of the rain.



Cocoi Heron © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. Gamboa Rainforest Resort, Pipeline Road and Ammo Dump Ponds

We met at sunrise in the parking lot for our pre-breakfast birding and it was very busy as Gamboa Rainforest Resort is surrounded by a large swath of forest and the wildlife is abundant! We immediately turned our attention to a fruiting fig tree just in front of the hotel which had half a dozen Slaty-tailed Trogons, Gartered Trogon, Whooping and Rufous Motmots, Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, Collared Aracari, Gray-headed Chachalacas and a varied assortment of tanagers. After breakfast we drove a short distance to the world famous Pipeline Road to spend the morning birding this gravel road that traverses the tropical rainforest along the canal zone. Soon we were getting views of Velvety and Red-capped Manakins, Black-breasted Puffbird, a skulky Black-faced Antthrush, Black-tailed Trogon, Crimson-crested and Lineated Woodpeckers and close-up views of Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher. The highlight of the morning however was a Streak-chested Antpitta that came into clear view for several minutes just three meters from our feet, seeming to inflate and lower his belly every time he sang!!! After a brief bathroom break we ran into a mixed species flock with fantastic views of White-whiskered Puffbird, Fasciated Antshrike, Wedge-billed Wood Creeper, Olivaceous Flatbill and a female Checker-throated Stipplethroat that dropped to the ground after catching a big, fat, juicy larva to keep other birds from stealing it from her. A little further down the road, as we watched a pair of black and blue fish guarding their young in the Juan Grande creek, a mixed flock of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, Purple-throated Fruitcrows, Scarlet-Rumped Caciques and Cinnamon Woodpeckers noisily worked through the canopy as a White-necked Puffbird quietly looked down at us from a high perch. We returned to the hotel to enjoy the rich buffet and have a little siesta before heading back out for the afternoon to bird the wetlands known as Ammo Dump Ponds. We spent most of our time in one spot as it seemed all the birds were coming to one tree! Among the species we saw very well we're Yellow-tailed and Baltimore Orioles, Yellow-bellied and Variable Seedeaters, Yellow-crowned and Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Buff-breasted Wren, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Crimson-backed Tanager and Buff-throated Saltator. In the wetland itself we saw several Rufescent Tiger-Herons of various ages, Purple Gallinule, Lesser Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, **Greater Ani** and after a bit of quietly searching we caught some good views of the secretive White-throated Crake! After dinner we went owling and we were successful at

finding a pair of Black-and-white Owls around the hotel's marina.



Greater Ani © Paz A Irola



Birding at Gamboa Rainforest Resort © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. Rainforest Discovery Center

Once again we met for sunrise birding, this time on the upper levels of the hotel where we had a

fantastic view of the Chagres River and surrounding forest. Right in front of us a pair of Bat Falcons were perching on a dead snag providing fantastic scope views and on the hand railing leading to the rooms we saw, at very close range, two species of Motmots, Whooping and Broad-billed! After breakfast we drove the short distance to the Pipeline Road, but this time we visited the Rainforest Discovery Center, a private reserve with great trails, an impressive canopy tower and hummingbird feeders. We encountered a small flock early on in our walk with Spotted Antbird, Olivaceous Flatbill, Spot-crowned Antwireo and Rufous Motmot. From the 32 meter tower we could get a literal bird's eye view of the surrounding forest, looking over the different levels of the canopy. Although the morning heat had already set in we saw a White Hawk soaring with the many vultures and a pair of Brown-capped Tyrannulets building their nest BELOW US! We also saw Black-throated Trogon and killer views of Red-throated Ant-tanagers before we spent some time sitting and enjoying the hummingbirds at the feeders: White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Long-billed Hermit and one male Violet-bellied Hummingbird that appeared a couple times. After another diverse, plentiful and delicious lunch we went to a dock on the Chagres to catch a boat and explore the edges of the canal. Amongst the many Snail Kites we also saw Lesser and Great Kiskadee, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Great Egret, Greater Ani, Osprey and super camouflaged Proboscis Bats roosting on the side of a tree.



Snail Kite © Paz A Irola



Boat trip © Ernesto Carman



Boat tour on Panama Canal © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. Gamboa Rainforest Resort, Old Panama, Costa del Este and Miraflores Locks

After our usual morning birding and breakfast we packed up and began making our way towards Panama City to bird along the Pacific coast. On the mudflats in front of Old Panama we had a great number of shorebirds including Black-necked Stilt, Willet, Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy

Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, Blue-winged Teal, Neotropic Cormorant, Laughing Gull, Herring Gull, White Ibis and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. We then birded along the mangroves in Costa del Este and had great views of Common Black-Hawk, Cocoa Heron, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird and Northern Scrub-Flycatcher. After a quick bite to eat we visited the visitor center at the Miraflores Locks and had the opportunity to watch several massive cargo and cruise ships go through the locks and being lowered down to the Pacific Ocean. From here we made our way to Hotel Riande for our last night and farewell. **Day 10. Departure**



Geoffroy's Tamarin Monkey © Paz A Irola