Eagle-Eye Tours



Touring the Wilds of Guyana in search of Avian Gold (Trip Report Jan 2024)

Link: Touring the Wilds of Guyana in search of Avian Gold (Trip Report Jan 2024)

Day 1: With the majority of the group arriving the day before the official start of our Guyana birding adventure, we were more than happy to accept our local guide's kind offer of a post-siesta visit to the Ogle mudflats. The tide was high but this afforded us excellent looks at the 30 **Scarlet Ibis** adorning the mangrove trees close to the viewing platform. Meanwhile, in the shallows below the platform, we spotted a trio of the weird **Largescale Four-eyed Fish** (*Anableps anableps*).



Scarlet Ibis © Paul Prior



Taking photos of Scarlet Ibis © Paul Prior

We then retreated to the nearby Georgetown National Park – actually a running track with sports fields – where we managed to find many representatives of the local urban avifauna, including a foraging **Zone-tailed Hawk** that made a swoop at a **Greater Kiskadee** in the tree canopy above our heads. The hike also provided great looks at a pair of canoodling **Yellow-crowned Parrots**, the trip's only **Wing- barred Seedeaters** and a single **Greater Ani** roosting with the **Cattle Egrets** in the south-side pond. **Day 2**: Now with the entire eight-person group on hand, we were up nice and early for the 90 minute drive to the Mahaica River, where we were to find the weird and wonderful **Hoatzin** – Guyana's national bird. Nareesh, our boatman, ferried us along the riverbanks, thick with moca-moca (the Hoatzin's foodplant) where we also encountered **Blood-coloured Woodpecker**, **White-bellied Piculet**, **Black-capped Donacobius**, **Little Cuckoo**, and a finally very cooperative **Silvered Antbird**.



Hoatzins © Paul Prior



Blood-colored Woodpecker © Paul Prior

As the sun reached baking temperature, we turned back and retreated to Nareesh's riverside residence, where we were treated to a fine chicken and dahl curry – and excellent looks at his next-door neighbours, a pair of **Bat Falcons** using a tall, sturdy snag in which to roost, and perhaps to nest. Re-united with our driver, Reinford, we headed back along the coast road to Georgetown, stopping at a stand of mangroves, where Neil called in a pair of very obliging **Rufous Crab-hawks**.

It was here that we also improved on previous views of **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**, and the highly sought **Blood-coloured Woodpeckers**. A pair of **Small Indian Mongoose** also crept out and onto our mammal checklist, but more importantly, the stop allowed our later arriving Aussie contingent to catch up with some stunning **Scarlet Ibis**. In the afternoon we set the pace for the rest of the trip with a well-earned siesta, followed by a couple of hours of birding, this time with a visit to the Guyana Biological Gardens. Here, once we'd distanced ourselves from the partying Saturday crowds, we encountered a surprising variety of species, the stars being the trio of **Toco Toucans**, **Red-shouldered Macaws**, **Crimson-crested** and **Lineated Woodpeckers**, together with other common species such as **Violaceous Euphonia**, **Yellow Oriole**, **Olive-grey Saltator**, and **White-lined Tanager**.



Toco Toucan © Paul Prior

Day 3: Being a Sunday, meant that the earliest flight to Kaieteur was at midday, which gave us the opportunity to revisit the Ogle shoreline on a more favourable tide. Sure enough, extensive mudflats stretched before us with a good variety of foraging shorebirds including certainly the largest concentration of **Lesser Yellowlegs** I've ever seen - at least 7000 were on view from one vantage point! The usual hurry-up and wait situation was in place at Ogle Airport, but this gave our Aussies a chance to explain the nuances of cricket, being televised on the lounge TV.



Kaieteur Fall from air © Paul Prior

Our 10-seater plane arrived and whisked us off to the fabled Falls where we were given an all too brief two hours to explore this unique place. Not only did the gorgeous weather allow us comfortable viewing of the splendid Kaieteur (where three **Cliff Flycatchers** performed wonderfully against this epic backdrop) but we were amply dazzled and entertained by a very obliging sextet of male **Guianan Cocks-of-the Rock** (or should that be Cock-of-the-Rocks?).



Guianan Cock-of-the-rock © Paul Prior

And then, all too soon, we made the brief flight over a further endless expanse of rainforest to

Iwokrama River Lodge. The lodge's assistant manager, Alex, was on hand to welcome us, and arranged to take us out on a pre-supper boat-trip on the Essequibo in search of nightjars. We were on the water enough before dusk to get great looks at both "river terns": **Large-billed**, and **Yellow-billed**, and the only **Capped Heron** of the trip. We motored cautiously over to the rocky islets a little downstream and waited for dusk and the appearance of a couple of **Ladder-tailed Nightjars**.
Day 4: After an early breakfast, we again boated across the Essequibo, to the N side of the river, and then spent the next few hours, walking the dusty highway to the white sands area of Kurupukari. Immediately we started finding some of the common forest edge birds, such as **Silver-beaked Tanagers**, **Swallow-winged Puffbirds**, **Black-tailed Tityra**, **White-fringed Antwrens** and **Dusky Antbirds**, with a few less common species mixed in: **Yellow-throated Flycatcher**, **Pompadour Cotinga**, **Black Manikin**, **Bronzy Jacamar**, **Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher** and **Campina Thrush**. Roadside feeding flocks held **Blue Dacnis**, **Red-legged** and **Green Honeycreepers**, and **Red-shouldered Tanager**. Best of all was a very handsome **Black-faced Tanager**, a beautiful **Grey-fronted Dove** lurking in the understory, great looks at **Guianan Trogon**, and fly-bys of both **Blue-and-yellow Macaws** and **Red-and-green Macaws**. Waiting for the ferry back at the river, we explored the sandy shoreline and found the strange concentric circle nest of the **Rusty** (a.k.a., Gladiator) **Tree Frog**; there were both **White-banded** and **Black-collared Swallows** on show here too. Once back on the southside, Devon drove us halfway along the lodge entrance road where we continued our morning's birding hike. **Tiny-tyrant Manakin** was the initial star, but further along we encountered a feeding flock with **Cinereous Antshrikes**, **White-flanked** and **Grey Antwrens**, **Wedge-billed** and **Buff-throated Woodcreepers**, **Golden-headed** and **White-crowned Manakins**.



Red-and-green Macaws © Paul Prior

Back at the Lodge we lunched and dispersed to our cabins for siesta, reconvening at 3:30 to embark on a hike along the ominously named Bushmaster Trail. It was rather quiet but then all it takes is one star bird: a **Ferruginous-backed Antbird** sang 50 m back from the trail and so we lined up to wait for this loveliest of antbirds to gingerly strut into view just a few metres away. Wonderful! Further along, the weird moaning of lekking **Capuchinbirds** signaled for us to stop and peer intensely into the high canopy. It took a long time but eventually everyone got looks, and then our

attention turned to the almost equally strange song of a nearby **Great Jacamar**. As we turned to retrace our steps along the trail, we spotted a pair of **Red-necked Woodpeckers** foraging high in the trees, occasionally punctuating the jungle ambiance with their striking double-knock (à la ivory-billed!).



Ferruginous Antbird at Iwokrama © Paul Prior



Searching for Capuchinbirds © Paul Prior

As the shadows deepened in the forest, we took our trail back into sunshine in the lodge compound – here **Giant Cowbirds**, **Red-capped Cardinal** and **Chestnut-bellied Seedeaters** were foraging on the lawn. **Day 5**: An early breakfast was followed sadly by our departure from Iwokrama; we would be birding the road down to Atta, our next rainforest stop. First, a huge roadside tree held not one but three **Woodpecker** species – **Waved**, **Chestnut**, and **Golden-collared**. The same tree also hosted our first **Guianan Spider Monkeys**. We stopped at a few bridges in the hopes of Crimson Topaz, but much as the recent up-swing in the Guyanan economy is good news for the people of Guyana, the rerouting and straightening of every creek along the Lethem and Rupununi Roads to facilitate the construction of multiple bridges has had rather devastating impact on the road-side and riparian habitats. Hopefully, once the construction is completed, the vegetation will have a chance to recover, but apparently the local fishing has been ruined. Our stops did however produce excellent looks at **Coraya Wren** and a whole suite of **Toucans** (**Channel-billed** and **White-throated**), and **Aracaris** (**Black-necked** and **Green**). We also made a stop to search for Devon's **Green Anaconda** he'd seen the day before. Somehow Devon managed to spot the animal sleeping in the long grass at the edge of the road, looking more like a pile of discarded truck tires than a 12ft snake! We reached Atta shortly before lunch, got introduced to the rock'n'roll boys (the three habituated **Black Curassows**: Elvis, Little Richard and Jerry-Lee), and then all settled into the daily routine siesta, except for a couple of group members who wisely opted to spend their downtime near the dining area, scanning the fruiting Cecropias and other high perches, which, once the rain had passed, were filled with a wonderful array of feeding and sunning birds: **Black-spotted Barbet**, various **Toucans**, **Purple-throated Fruitcrow**, **Spangled Cotinga**, **Green Oropendola**, and **Bay-headed Tanager**. Dillon, the excellent Atta guide, then joined us for our late afternoon drive back-and-forth along the Lethem Road. First to the north, where we scanned the roadside trees, finding **Pied Puffbird**, **Pompadour Cotinga**, **Dusky Purpletuft**, **Red-and-green** and **Scarlet Macaws**, **Guianan Streaked Antwren** and **Guianan Toucanets**. As dusk fell we headed back south to the creek below Atta where at last we found a male **Crimson Topaz**, somewhat silhouetted, but still in all his glory. Finally, we drove to the Atta entrance road and disembarked to wait for the famous **White-winged Potoo**. The wait was eased with the traditional "sundowner" rum passed around and a couple of flyover **Short-tailed Nighthawks**. The time to call the local potoo arrived and sure enough after just a few whistled imitations, the bird arrived, albeit only for a rather brief visit. Meanwhile, an **Amazonian Pygmy-Owl** called nearby signalling time to return for supper. **Day 6**: Up a good half hour pre-sunrise to march out to the canopy walkway. En route, we stopped to get unbeatable looks at a trail-side **Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl** and then we proceeded up the 150 steps and out along the rope bridges to the main platform. A wonderful view, and the ambiance was very special, but the birding was very slow with just a **Slate-coloured Grosbeak**, a **Black-eared Fairy**, a **Sooty-headed Tyrannulet**, and a couple of **Red-rumped Caciques** to keep us company in the canopy. We retraced our steps along the rope-bridges and the forest trail, stopping for views of **Screaming Piha**, squeezing out his remarkable song. With breakfast finished, Devon drove us back up the road to a white sand area where Dillon and Neil put their all into calling various local specialities. A roadside flock held a **McConnell's Flycatcher**, and then the first real "goodie' to fall for the lads' broadcasting was the special but somewhat underwhelming **Olivaceous Schiffornis**. We lined up for an attempt at **Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin**, but the two birds that responded stayed tantalizingly out of sight in the canopy until one eagle-eyed individual spotted one of the birds peering down at us. As we hiked back to the road, Neil indicated a half dozen **Grey-winged Trumpeters** that were making their way through the forest undergrowth 50 m away from us. We lost sight of them in the tangle and so we decided to try to head them off at the open ground that they seemed headed for. But they must've changed their route, because they never reappeared, and we had to content ourselves with good looks at perched **Golden-winged Parakeets**. As we arrived back at the lodge for lunch, Dillon spotted a **Tiny Hawk** sat high in the canopy behind the lodge. Another "goodie"!

Lunch and siesta was followed by another drive south along the Lethem Road but not before we

ogled a **Mareil Guan** feeding high in the trees behind the lodge, and not before Dillon had pulled in the local **Black-faced Hawk** for stunning views. We drove quite a way south to get to another disrupted creek, but the construction didn't seem to have bothered a trio of **Red-fan Parrots** sat nearby. We spent some time milling about in this area since it was quite a productive stretch of road – **Spix's Guans**, **Guianan Puffbirds**, prolonged looks at **Guianan Toucanet**, a small troupe of **Guianan Red Howlers**, and a couple of **Weeper Capuchins**.



Black-faced Hawk © Paul Prior



Red-fan Parrot © Paul Prior

Dusk fell, rum was downed with the sun, and we opted to try for **Black-banded Owl**. It took a while for the pair to respond, but then to put icing on the cake one of the lads spotted a **Long-tailed Potoo** sat blinking its huge saucer-eyes. A brilliant end to the day. **Day 7**: Farewell to Dillon and Atta, we drove slowly (the slowest vehicle on what is becoming a faster highway through this wonderful forest reserve) south out of the park, stopping at various likely looking spots, where we picked up **Black Nunbird**, but little else to be honest. The birding improved tremendously once we turned west off the main highway and onto the Surama village road. We parked a short way along and were quickly joined by a superb **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, being harassed by a trio of **Red-throated Caracaras**. The hawk-eagle settled nearby – it turned out she was building a nest in one of the roadside trees – and gave just wonderful views. Exploring a little further along, Neil dug up an **Amazonian Motmot**, albeit an uncharacteristically shy individual; and then, returning to the van, we were treated to excellent looks at three **Paradise Jacamars**, surely the pointiest bird in the world.



Ornate Hawk-Eagle © Paul Prior

Onwards to Surama, where we lunched and agreed upon our post-siesta rendezvous. The first port-of-call was Neil's old Wildlife Club clubhouse in downtown Surama. Here he introduced us to his young cousin, Craig, who then led us to the bush immediately behind the house, where one by one we peered through the scope that had been set-up … on a **Zigzag Heron**! Wow! What an absolute bonus. Devon then drove us to the grove of trees to the north of Surama, where Oscar the Grouch (a.k.a. the **Great Potoo**) lives. Further excellent looks but this time at a somewhat more expected bird.



Great Potoo © Paul Prior



Watching a Great Potoo

From here it was a short drive to the nearby wetland where we spent a very pleasant late afternoon checking out the **Rufescent Tiger-Heron** in the marsh, counting the baby **Spectacled Caiman** at the edge of the wetland, watching the **Red-bellied Macaws** fly into roost in the Moriche Palms, ticking off **Sulphury Flycatcher** and **Glittering-throated Emerald**, and laughing at the embarrassed horse that fell into the watering hole. To be honest, other than this animal's obvious

embarrassment it actually looked quite refreshing, given the baking Guyanan heat! Time for sundown, and almost immediately the **White-tailed Nightjars** and **Common Pauraque** started calling. Our attempts to attract these to a nearby perch failed, but then having heard, and played for **Common Potoo**, Devon, somehow spotted the bird flying past and we tracked it to a nearby snag where we were afforded excellent looks at this marvellous night-bird.



Common Potoo © Paul Prior

Day 8: We needed to beat the heat this morning and so we took another early breakfast and set off on foot across the neighbouring savannah patch. **Lesser** and **Plain-crested Elaenia** were calling and singing but the **Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch** took some coaxing. One of the main local celebrities before the arrival of Neil's Zigzag Heron has always been the extremely-difficult-to-see **Ocellated Crake**. It seems that in recent years the locals have hit upon a way of catching glimpses of this elusive bird, and so we gave it a go. Amazingly it worked, but unfortunately, one has to be lucky enough to be looking at precisely the correct spot when the bird briefly emerges. Only three people were that lucky this time. Even now it was starting to warm up out on the savannah and so we headed onwards for the forest shade, stopping for looks at **Blue Ground-Dove**, and at last a slightly more cooperative **Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch**. At the forest edge, we were teased by an unresponsive **Northern Slaty Antshrike**, but fared much better just inside the forest with **White-browed Antbird** closer to the floor, **Yellow-olive Flatbill** in the upper canopy and **Spotted Puffbird** in the mid-canopy. **Mouse-coloured** and **Dusky-throated Antshrikes** called from deeper in the forest but again were unimpressed by our broadcasts. We were briefly distracted by a **Banded Cat-eyed Snake** swimming in a puddle (the same species had graced one of the group's shower-stalls the night before!).



Banded Cat-eyed Snake © Paul Prior

At the first dried creek bed we stopped to rest, serenaded by the lovely carolling of **Cocoa Thrush**. Walking on we had more luck with a pair of **Guianan Warbling Antbirds**, and then encountered a pair of **Capuchinbirds** at the second dried creek where there was also a **Black-eared Fairy**. The trip's only **Spot-winged Antbirds** were being somewhat uncooperative a little further along the trail, and it was decided to about-turn and make our way to the rendezvous with Alex and Devon, who would taxi us back to the shade of the lodge. After the routine lunch and siesta, Devon picked us up in late afternoon to drive us to the gradually cooling savannah to the east of the village. Here, Neil had a plan to get us all onto another elusive Crake: **Ash-throated**. Vocally the birds were extremely responsive but just wouldn't reveal themselves. Meanwhile, another horse went for another swim (intentional this time) and a pair of stunning-plumaged **Finsch's Euphonias** wowed us from right up close. We walked out onto the Mountain Trail that cuts across the savanna, unfortunately disturbing a very distracted **Crested Caracara** from its dust-bath. This patch of savannah holds a species dear to any lister's heart, a bird whose family name begins with an "X" – a rare thing indeed (I just checked, and the only other such family hereabouts would be the Xenops). We found our **Black-naped Xenopsaris** singing from the sparse scrub in the company of **Yellow-bellied Elaenia**, a pair of **Bicoloured Wrens**, and a few **Common Ground-Doves**. As we left the savanna, we were treated to a flight of **Lesser Nighthawks**, and since the evening was so pleasant, we opted to go try for an owl. Although it took some coaxing, the pair of **Spectacled Owls** did finally show very well. Another great day! **Day 9**: Heading out of Surama, we first spent time on the village entrance road in the vicinity of the Hawk-Eagle nest. Here, broadcasting pygmy-owl hoots brought in some inquisitive hummingbirds and a small number of concerned passerines. A female **Racket-tailed Thorntail**, **Black-eared Fairy** and **Fork-tailed Woodnymph** perched close overhead, while **Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet**, **Guianan Tyrannulet** and **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher** peered from the roadside tree canopy. Heading north along the Lethem Road, we birded the area close to the old Harpy Trail (sadly, that nest is no longer occupied). The usual toucans and parrots were on show, and one of our group spotted a **Tayra** dashing across the road. A tall roadside tree held both **Todd's** and **Spot-tailed Antwrens**, but they remained in the upper canopy, singing but invisible. And so, we ducked onto the Harpy Trail and hiked deeper into the forest… where Neil brought us to a halt and excitedly informed us he'd just heard the distinctive bill-snapping of **Rufous-winged Ground-**

Cuckoo. We lined up across the broad trail and waited: sure enough, the snapping continued, and at last people started getting glimpses of small portions of the bird, visible through the thick ground vegetation. Then the bird moved to the trail and walked right across in front of us, followed by another. Wow! what an absolutely amazing encounter! We continued along the trail stopping for an impressive **Forest Giant Owl** butterfly, but then received a phone call from Devon warning us of an impending rainstorm. So, we retraced our steps and joined Devon at the vehicles. Given the forecast, we opted to drive south to our lunch-stop, earlier than intended, but when the rain did finally hit us, it was a real tropical downpour!



Forest Giant Owl butterfly © Paul Prior

Having finished the delicious lunch at Madonna's we were back on the road in sunshine; we soon broke out onto the savannah where **Eastern Meadowlarks**, **Fork-tailed Flycatchers**, and **Savannah Hawks** could be seen from our passing vehicle. By early p.m. we had arrived at Rock View and arranged for a post-siesta excursion in search of wetlands. By about 5pm we finally reached Maura Wetland where we spent a very pleasant late afternoon, catching up with various marsh species: **Yellow-chinned Spinetail**, **White-headed Marsh-Tyrant**, **Pied Water-Tyrant**, **Black-caped Donacobius** and unexpectedly another pair of **White-naped Xenopsaris**! As dusk arrived, so did the nighthawks – dozens of **Least Nighthawks** swept low across the marsh and were then joined by a pair of **Aplomado Falcons**. It was dark enough to stop birding, so we drove back to Rock View to join our host for a belated "happy hour".



White-naped Xenopsaris © Paul Prior

Day 10: Up early to drive across the savannah to meet up with Eli and his crew, ready to boat us along the Rupununi River. The weather was perfect, and the river was low enough that we were reduced to a slow crawl through the sandy shallows. **Pied Plovers**, **Black Skimmers**, a young **Jabiru**, and various herons rested on the sandbars and beaches; a small flock of **Wood Storks** perched high on a flat-topped riverside tree, while soaking up the early sun from the treetops along the bank were several **Roadside Hawks** and a handsome **Crane Hawk**. After an hour, Eli beached the boats and we disembarked. Scanning downstream we spotted a family group of seven **Giant Otters**; they were rather distant, but with scopes we were able to watch one of the adults happily chowing down on a Peacock Bass! As we watched this animal at his breakfast, a pair of **Crestless Curassows** came down to the water's edge behind him, and although somewhat obscured by the riverside vegetation, this was yet another much sought species. Once we'd all had looks at the dining otter and a nearby loafing **Black Caiman**, we followed Eli along the riverside trail to an oxbow pond, stopping en route to find **Amazonian Black Tyrant**, **Black-chinned Antbirds**, **Spotted Puffbird**, **Green-tailed Jacamar**, **Guianan Trogon**, and a spectacular **White Witch Moth**. A few at the front also managed further closer (albeit brief) looks at **Crestless Curassow.** Finally, we reached the magical pond where we rested and soaked in the ambiance of this tranquil oxbow where **Wattled Jacanas** strolled over the **Amazon Giant Water Lilies**.



White Witch Moth © Paul Prior

The boat-trip back to the landing was uneventful, and we were soon back at Rock View for lunch. The group was invited to join our host's son, Zorba, for an afternoon tour of the property, highlighted by feeding their "pet" Arapaima! In late afternoon the group convened for a drive back north along the Rupununi Road to explore a rarely visited trail into the forest at Bamboo Creek. Here we were treated to looks at a very responsive pair of **Amazonian Barred Woodcreepers**, **Great Jacamar** and lekking **Capuchinbirds**. Unfortunately, the **Todd's Antwren** that we could hear was not as obliging and stayed high in the canopy … and likewise the garrulous pair of **Grey-cowled Woodrails** that serenaded us from the deep roadside vegetation back at the van remained unseen.



Capuchinbird © Paul Prior

Day 11: A very full day ahead of us, and so we were up before dawn to start the drive to Karasabai. At sunrise we stopped at the main road junction (the turn off for Karasabai). We stepped out of the vehicles and listened to the dawn chorus of **Least Nighthawks** out across the savannah and watched an **Aplomado Falcon** feasting on a large moth in mid-air above us. A little further along we were treated to great looks at the first of seven **Giant Anteaters** that we would encounter early this morning. Opportunities to stop were limited since it was important to reach our first destination by 7:30am.



Giant Anteater © Paul Prior

Sometimes, the parakeets (our main target) are there waiting for us, but this time we spent a nerve-wracking hour, waiting for them to appear. In the meanwhile, we enjoyed our first views of **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**, **Streaked Flycatchers**, and rather obscured looks at **White-bellied Antbird**. And then, at last, a small group of the celebrity birds flew in. Initially they perched in a rather distant tree, but eventually settled down to feast on fruits very close by, affording us exceptionally good views of these dazzling birds: **Sun Parakeets**!



Sun Parakeet © Paul Prior

We now had to make tracks for Manari, our early flight on the following day having forced us to rather overfill this, our last day of savannah birding. We arrived in time for lunch and a much needed but brief siesta, and then we were off again, divided among the three 4WD vehicles for our trek across the savannah to the Ireng River – the border with Brasil. We took time to stop at a couple of the fast-shrinking wetlands, enjoying the sights of **Roseate Spoonbills**, **White-faced Whistling-Ducks**, and **Jabiru**, but our destination was the riparian woodland along the Ireng. It was a little distressing to find, as we arrived, that the habitat was smouldering from what we were told were fires set by local fishermen to clear the understory – i.e. precisely the habitat of our target birds, both of which are Critically Endangered!



Shrinking wetland on the Manari Savannah © Paul Prior

Undaunted, our illustrious guide headed off, away from the smoke, to search for the beleaguered birds. Neil's work ethic throughout this tour had been top-notch and sure enough after an hour or so he called us to a location further along the river where he had discovered a pair of **Hoary-throated Spinetails**, perhaps a "brand new" pair since this pair were far more responsive than I've previously experienced with this often rather skulking species. Relieved, we turned our search to the antbird, but time was not on our side and we had to make do with good looks at **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, **White-fringed Antwren**, and a fly-by **White-tailed Hawk**.



Hoarty-throated Spinetail © Paul Prior

Then, as dusk fell, we started our drive back across the savannah and into the dark. But the birding continued – the savannah was alive with night-birds: loads of **Least Nighthawks**, a few **White-tailed Nightjars**, and great looks at **Nacunda Nighthawks** foraging across the headlight beams of our vehicles. A trio of **Double-striped Thick-knees** stared back at us from the grassland and a pair of **Pinnated Bitterns** posed in some track-side marsh vegetation.



White-tailed Nightjar © Paul Prior

Day 12: Flight day! It had been an exhausting few days and so this morning there were only a handful of us up for a pre-breakfast stroll around the Manari Ranch grounds. However, we were rewarded with excellent looks at an angry **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**, **Orange- backed Troupial**, **Vermilion Flycatcher**, **Red-bellied Macaws**, and the trip's first and only **Brown-chested Martin**. And then we were off to Lethem Airport where sadly we said farewell to our friends, Neil and Alex, and our Manari hostess, Lisa.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Paul Prior

The flight north back to Georgetown had us home in time for some to join “special ambassador” Roger on a whirlwind tour of the sites of the capital. Somehow this was the first city tour I’d taken in eight visits … and it was certainly worth it. At first looks Georgetown really doesn’t seem that special, but with Roger’s help we discovered numerous local historic buildings, the most impressive, of course, being Saint George’s Cathedral – one of the tallest wooden churches in the world, constructed mainly from native Greenheart lumber. As ever it had been a wonderful 12 days in Guyana, and as is always the case there were some unique elements. The unusually dry conditions (reportedly a hangover from a rather strange rainy season with dramatic flash floods but with over all less rain than expected) seemingly resulted in rather lower densities of invertebrate food for antbirds and other lower-story forest-foragers. But, meanwhile, the trip had presented us with superlative encounters with Guyana’s typical celebrity species: Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock, Sun Parakeets, Capuchinbird, Red-fan Parrots and Giant Anteaters. And then several unexpected goodies: Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo, Zigzag Heron, Tiny Hawk, Ocellated Crake, Crestless Curassow. But to be honest the real highlight is always the vastness of the forest – every moment spent here is simply magical and a thrill. Thanks as always to the great group of people who joined Neil and I on this adventure – for me the group dynamic was epitomised by the moment when the van resounded with a chorus of “Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree”, perhaps geographically out of place, but certainly indicative of the spirit of this 2024 Eagle Eye Tour!



Our Guyana birding group 2024

Guyana Birding Tour (Jan 2024) species list