



Sunrise Birding LLC

PANAMA TRIP REPORT

September 4 - 14, 2012

Leaders: Diego Calderon & Carlos Bethancourt

TOP BIRDS OF THE TRIP:

- Veraguan Mango
- Blue Cotinga
- Red-capped Manakin
- Spectacled Owl
- Streak-chested Antpitta
- Tody Motmot
- Collared Forest-Falcon
- Rufous Motmot
- Violet-capped Hummingbird
- White-throated Crake
- White Hawk
- White-headed Wren
- White-whiskered Puffbird
- White-tipped Sicklebill



Above: **Veraguan Mango**
Photos in report identified in red bold text.

Report & Photos
by Diego Calderon

Day 1 – September 04

Everyone arrived at the Canopy Tower after smooth flights during the day. We did some birding from the tower upper deck enjoying great views of the canopy, of the canal area and the city in the background. We enjoyed point-blank views of the very cool **Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher** perched in a Cecropia and a couple of lovely Short-tailed Hawks that were effortlessly gliding above the canopy looking for prey. We began feeding our mammal list with the neat and lazy Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth. Later on, we assembled for dinner and officially started out 2012 Panama trip!



Day 2 - September 05

Today started a bit wet so we did some birding from the dining room of the Canopy Tower before hitting the Semaphore Hill Road to find a good load of Antbirds! Among today's sightings were Fasciated & Western Slaty Antshrikes, Checker-throated, White-flanked and Dot-winged Antwrens, and Dusky, Chestnut-backed, Spotted and Bicolored Antbirds. We also got the much wanted Green Shrike-Vireo and a couple of Olivaceous Flatbills that were building their nest. The first migrant warblers we found were Black-and-white Warbler and American Redstart. After a nice lunch and bit of a rest, we



visited the Ammo Dump Pond to find no less than 60 species in a few hours in the late afternoon including the most obliging couple of White-throated Crakes I ever seen preening just less than 10m away from us. There was also a Rufescent Tiger-Heron feeding young, a lovely American Pygmy Kingfisher, a Panama Flycatcher, and the Scrub Greenlet that was a “heard-lifer” for me as the form here in the canal Pacific area sings very different to the races occurring in Colombia. Later on, we went ‘owling’ using the Rainfomobile (AKA El Tinamou) and with the help of Michael and Alexis got scope views of a calling **Common Potoo** plus two Central American Woolly Opossums, one Kinkajou, one Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth and one Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth! It was the perfect end to an excellent day!

Day 3 - September 06

Today we spent almost all day long on the famous Pipeline Road! We started with point-blank views of a singing Streak-chested Antpitta while a Black-faced Anthrush just walked in between us and the antpitta! A couple of Gray-chested Doves were also showing themselves nearby. We kept getting deeper and deeper into this fantastic road finding both Black and Ornate Hawk-Eagles as well as Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots. Smaller birds, including Southern Bentbill, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, and Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher amused us several times along the road, and a much bigger **Black-breasted Puffbird** singing from far away was lured in offering great scope views in the canopy. By noon we finally found what everyone looks for here in Pipeline: an army ant swarm that contained Bicolored, Spotted, and Ocellated Antbirds plus Plain-brown, Cocoa, Black-striped and Northern Barred Woodcreepers along with Gray-headed Tanagers. The afternoon turned quickly dark and potentially rainy, so after a great picnic lunch we drove back and stop at the entrance area where we got Little Tinamou crossing the road and White-bellied Antbirds calling their hearts out. We finished our day with great views of Cinnamon Becard, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, and several (in the streets!) Central American Agoutis at the Canopy B&B in Gamboa town.



Day 4 - September 07

Today we had an early breakfast (4:30am!) and headed to the Achiote Road area. We drove through a huge rain and the crack of dawn found us crossing the Panama Canal through the huge Gatun Locks. We got to our birding spot near Achiote town but it was still raining so we continued to town and had coffee and fried plantain chips at the

local restaurant. In town, we had some nice birding including Black-chested Jay and Black-striped Sparrow. We then hit our birding spot again by 9ish am and the rain had almost stopped so we birded the road getting both Masked and Black-crowned Tityras, Limpkin, the four available trogons: White-tailed, Violaceous, Black-throated and Slaty-tailed! One of our main targets there, a smart Spot-crowned Barbet, was spotted by Bart as it perched high up in the canopy cocking the tail and responding to my playback. Collared



Aracaris, **Keel-billed** and Chestnut-mandibled **Toucans** were abundant this morning. We also lured in a mini Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant that showed perfectly while Purple-throated Fruitcrows noisily surfed in the Cecropia canopy. We again enjoyed a superb roadside picnic lunch and then found another big target, a nice small group of White-headed Wrens before leaving the area.

We then went to bird in a bit around the Gatun Lake mangrove areas where we found our 5th trogon of the day, an obliging Black-tailed Trogon surrounded by several Mantled Howler Monkeys and lovely *Brassavola* and *Epidendrum* orchids. We then boarded the Panama Canal Railway Company to make the famous transcontinental trip from the Atlantic to the Pacific and being transferred to our place at Canopy Tower.

Day 5 - September 08

This morning we visited the vast Metropolitan Park where drier habitat delivered a different set of birds including the neat Lance-tailed Manakin, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-and-white Wren, and the always lovely noisy Rosy Thrush-Tanager! We searched several mixed flocks looking for the Panama endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet that Carlos heard a couple of times but we could not locate one. On the other hand, we did have some amazing close views of raptors including a calling young **Collared Forest-Falcon** and the smaller Double-toothed Kite! By noon we went to the tower for a nice lunch and a bit of a rest (*only for some as the tower is always calling you to go up to search for more birds and enjoy the view!*) before heading to the close Summit Ponds and the Old Gamboa Road. We started with great views of few Boat-billed Herons, both Amazon and Green Kingfishers, and Lesser Kiskadees at the pond; then we wandered the old road (now a wide trail) to find Jet Antbirds, Red-throated Ant-Tanager and a stunning roosting Spectacled Owl! Already excited with our owl of the day, we wanted more so we hike down Semaphore Hill near the tower where we found, after some work, the rare and puzzling *centralis* Choco Screech-Owl plus some Mottled Owls... a pleasure to finish the day!



Day 6 - September 09

Today we devoted all our day to the nice and somewhat isolated Cerro Azul area that to look for our first higher elevation specialties. Carlos and I decided actually to start in the nearby Cerro Jefe as our group seemed quite fit to hike up a bit more in search of specialties. We got our first flock and a load of grand tanagers showed up: Hepatic, Emerald, Speckled, Bay-headed, Rufous-winged and Golden-hooded Tanagers teemed, the near-endemic **Black-and-yellow Tanagers** were feeding young [*this bird was a special lifer due it was just been confirmed for Colombia (and South America) in a recent expedition to Tacarcuna Mountains in the Colombia/Panama border!*]. Here at Cerro Jefe I had the nicest and weirdest habitat/vegetation impression as we were lower than 900 meters and it looked like a paramo or white-sand forest: elfin fairly dwarf vegetation, Clusiacea plants dominated, branches packed with orchids and mosses, very poor sandy soils, and fresh temperature. It felt like at least 2000 meters in the Andes... loved it! Who wouldn't love this area when you



find the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker and the mind-boggling Yellow-eared Toucanet in the same trail? We had prolonged scope views of both these MEGAS before returning down to the van and moving to our lunch place. After lunch, we visited another one of the Canopy Family friends homes up there in the mountains surrounded by hummingbird feeders where we scored no less than 10 species including Green, Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits, White-necked Jacobin, **Violet-crowned Woodnymph**, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, and Violet-capped, Blue-chested, and Snowy-bellied and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. Driving back to the Tower we did a brief stop at the old Panama Bay area and added almost 40 more species to our list including herons, egrets, both night-herons, several plovers, sandpipers, yellowlegs, and more urban Yellow-crowned Parrot.

Day 7 - September 10

Today we were leaving the Canopy Tower area so we had our last chance for one of the main targets for our group: the electric Blue Cotinga! So after breakfast we went to the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center tower, climbed up the 34m tall metallic tower and upon arrival a juvenile male was just there waiting for us. After enjoying some great scope views one brilliant blue adult male showed up and basically remained with us for the rest of the 2 hours we were up there at the tower. Then we passed by the Visitor's Center and added splendid close views of the Violet-bellied hummingbird as well as Green and Long-billed Hermits. Just when we were leaving the area, we found a nice

army ant swarm that delivered several **Bicolored Antbirds**, a couple each of Spotted and Ocellated Antbirds, more than a few Woodcreepers including Plain-brown and Northern Barred and several Gray-headed Tanagers. The show was interrupted by a huge storm with very heavy winds so we sheltered for some 15-20 minutes before departing. As we traveled, Carlos and I had to go out of the car several times to chop and push fallen trees and branches from the road so we could reach the Tower on time to leave to El Valle. Two hours later, we arrived in the fresh lovely town of El Valle de Anton surrounded by beautiful volcano-rim mountain peaks. We enjoyed a delicious lunch and checked in our fabulous rooms at the Canopy Lodge. We found our first target just upon arrival: the Violet-headed Hummingbird and then went looking for Tody Motmot, Rufous-and-white Wren, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant and White-tipped Sicklebill... all found that same afternoon.



Day 8 - September 11

After an early breakfast we left for the Altos del Maria gated community, about 45 from the lodge. At our first stop, we found a noisy flock of Tawny-crested Tanagers and there were Common Bush-Tanagers everywhere. A calling Barred Forest-Falcon proved to be not easy although it gave us a fly-by glimpse. A tiny White-throated Spadebill showed really well. We then drove a bit more to a very nice trail inside the forest where we did not have too much activity but a great bird responded to the playback that Carlos was making: Black-crowned Antpitta! We did work on this bird for at least 45 minutes but the place was not the easiest and only a few of our crew were able to glimpse its fancy plumage. Later on we added the superb Brown-billed Scythebill to our list in this same area. A very foggy afternoon we had but anyways we enjoyed a superb couple of Purple-throated Mountain-gems and a glimpse of a female Snowcap that was working on canopy flowers together with much bigger Green-crowned Brilliants. It was so foggy and rainy that we decided to come lower elevation just above El Valle and we were able to get new trip birds like the small Garden Emerald and a very distant couple of Black-headed Saltators. We returned to the lodge and had hot showers and dry clothes before the cocktail happy hour and dinner time.

Day 9 - September 12

Today we went for a completely different habitat and set of birds - drier forests and more open areas with scrub and rice fields bordering the Pacific coast, a place known as Juan Hombron. We started with some roadside birding getting Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Scrub Greenlet, and the always-singing Rufous-browed Peppershrike. Then we saw a Crested Bobwhite walking along the road so we stopped to enjoy it and there we were lucky to get Brown-throated Parakeets and our first male Sapphire-throated Hummingbirds and Garden Emeralds. We kept driving towards the rice fields where several egrets, caracaras, and hawks were following the working trucks grabbing insects, rodents and snakes... quite a show! We could not enter the rice field itself because there was a small helicopter fumigating so Moyo and I thought we would have to work harder to locate a Veraguan Mango (*not endemic anymore as it is been found in*

Costa Rica). What a surprise when just at the first *Heliconia* patch we found at least two males and one female feeding on insects from a huge legume tree. We then found more males and females at different places that morning which offered us perfect scope views of this range-restricted hummer. We got some more drier-habitat birds before lunch including Slate-headed Tody-Tyrant, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Pale-breasted Spinetail and Lance-tailed Manakin. We had lunch at Raul's (the guy behind Canopy Family) beach house in Santa Clara where we relaxed barefoot in the sand while seeing Brown Booby, Whimbrel, Sanderling, Willet, pelicans, Neotropic Cormorants, Magnificent Frigatebirds, and others. Later in the afternoon, we visited an area to look for Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Red-breasted Blackbird in vain as the rain caught us up.

Day 10 - September 13

Today was our last official day of the trip. We drove the 4x4 road to Jordanal stopping at Las Minas area to try for some higher elevation missing targets but it was quite foggy so we kept going down. Our first stops provided Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, as well as a lovely pair of Masked Tityra and a massive White Hawk. Males of Cerulean Warbler and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis proved to be elusive in the canopy and only some of us got glimpses. We kept going lower and lower, crossing crystal-clear-water rivers with our 4x4 while Crested and Chestnut-headed Oropendolas were flying above us; before reaching the 400 meters, we got a couple of Barred Puffbirds. Later in the day, these birds proved to be very effective in attracting birds like pygmy-owls do (*I did not have idea about this!*). After a nice lunch near the river, we enjoyed the bird activity at a fruiting fig tree and due to the Barred Puffbird voice, we got nice male and female Slate-colored Seedeaters. We started working our way back getting a cool crew of four Spot-crowned Barbets near the road. We spent some time looking for some of our missing targets again at the ridge in Las Minas where we at least did catch up with the Orange-bellied Trogon that is here an isolated population from its bigger range in Costa Rica and W Panama.



Left: Canopy Tower; Right: White-whiskered Puffbird

Day 11 – September 14

Today we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways with great memories of our fantastic birding tour at Canopy Tower and Lodge.

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