

TRIP REPORT
PANAMA
December 20- 29, 2007
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December 20, 2007

We left Pearson International Airport in Toronto at 09:00h, twenty minutes behind schedule, bound for Houston, TX. The flight was uneventful although we encountered turbulence most of the way. Our flight from Houston to Panama was delayed by almost an hour and a half, but we were finally airborne at 15:25h Houston time.

Customs and Immigration procedures at the International Airport in Panama City were speedy and efficient and while awaiting our baggage at the carousel, we met Lenny, a fellow passenger who was also headed for the Canopy Tower. We exited together and quickly found Julio, our driver, who was waiting to speed us to the Canopy Lodge, some two hours drive away. It was about 20:20h when we departed the airport.

For the most part the drive was uneventful, and at a rest room stop along the way, we encountered our first birds of the trip. The trees in the little plaza were full of noisy Great-tailed Grackles. Even at a bathroom stop at night, we had birds!

We left and carried on with our journey. When getting quite close to our destination, we rounded a corner in the road only to find that a tractor trailer had jack knifed and was blocking the road, other than for a narrow strip at the right which people were building up with planks. We all disembarked and Julio with great aplomb navigated his van around the marooned trailer. We got back on board and were on our way. When we were almost at the Canopy Lodge a bridge across a road was blocked so we had to turn around and take an alternative route.

We arrived at the Canopy Lodge well past 23:00h and were delighted find someone waiting for us with a sandwich and cake, and - most welcome of all - delicious, cold fruit juice.

After being shown to our gorgeous room, we fell asleep to the sound of the stream gurgling by, with the sweet, pungent, sensory delights of the tropical forest permeating our dreams.

December 21, 2007

When we left our room, we were able to see the complete splendour of the Canopy Lodge, this wonderful haven that Raul Arias de Para, has blended into the surrounding landscape, rather than imposing the structure on it. It is truly magnificent; wonderful in concept, splendid in realization. We fell totally and completely in love with the place. If there is a Shangri La of birding lodges, this is surely it. Of all the places around the world that we have visited, this is the one we are determined to return to.

We were treated to a delicious breakfast at 06:30h and were met by Tino, our guide. The bird feeding tables were loaded up with bananas and within minutes were covered with all manner of species - Clay-coloured Robin, Thick-billed Euphonia, Streaked and Buff-throated Saltators, Rufous Motmot, many tanagers, a Tennessee Warbler curiously feeding on bananas, a Bananaquit, and others, to say nothing of the numerous species of hummingbird at their own feeders. It would be possible never to leave the Lodge and still be rewarded with an excellent birding experience. There were Grey-headed Chachalacas and Bay Wrens right behind our room, Collared Aracaris and Grey-chested Doves in front.

But we did leave the Lodge with Tino, to bird along the road and into the nearby forest. The birding was excellent and the traffic minimal and travelling at a civilized slow speed and we saw some very special birds, chief among them the enigmatic and rare Rufous-crested Coquette. We had not one but two feeding actively on the purple flowers of a low bush, the red streamers of the male flaring like a flame from heaven. I am sure that Tino gave us the name of the bush but I did not record it and unfortunately have forgotten it. We were able to observe this bird at close range for about five minutes. This species would vie with another I will mention later as my favourite bird of the trip.

On a trail leading down from the Canopy

Adventure there was a perfect ant swarm with a mixed species entourage, but no Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo! Tino had seen it there only three days earlier. This is a species that we had dearly hoped to see, but the vagaries of birding dictated that it was not to be. Tino made a very valiant effort to locate it for us and we certainly appreciated his efforts. His disappointment was perhaps more palpable than ours.

I should mention that Lenny accompanied us on these walks with Tino and he was a fine and agreeable companion. We very much enjoyed his company.

At this juncture, let me heap praise upon Tino, who is far and away the best guide we have ever encountered. His knowledge of the birds, his ability to spot them, his rapidity to get them in the scope and most of all his uncanny ability to mimic virtually every single bird song, are truly amazing attributes. Furthermore, he is a delightful, polite young man, punctual, courteous and in every way pleasant company. A technique used unflinchingly by Tino which we found very pleasing indeed, is that he would announce the name of the bird as soon as he sighted it, then two or three more times while we were looking at it, and at the end of the session would repeat the name again. Thus, there was never any doubt what we were observing. This practice was especially helpful with skulkers and the many Antbirds, Antpittas, Antshrikes, Antvireos, Antthrushes, Ant-Tanagers and so on. When one sees these birds infrequently it is easy to become confused. We looked forward to every walk with Tino with eager anticipation, and knew that it would be memorable.

We returned to the Lodge at about noon in time for lunch at 12:30h, but in the meantime the feeders were loaded anew with bananas and the feeding extravaganza was again a feast for our eyes.

The very agreeable concept of siesta is alive and well in Panama. Birding was suspended until 15:00h, so we had time to read, nap, take a walk or simply laze away the time in a hammock.

At 15:00h we drove with Tino to **Campestra** and birded open fields beside the road and then we proceeded to a hotel which is under renovation where some excellent trails exist. Tino's target bird in this area was the tiny Snowcap, but we were unfortunately unable to locate it in the spot where he normally sees it. However there were

many other glorious sightings which more than compensated, including stunning views of a couple of White Hawks and a nightjar which failed Tino's strict identification guidelines. We had great looks at the bird in the scope, and I am amazed that we failed to identify it as Whip-poor-will. I think this is a classic case of North American birders being in a remote place and trying to interpret everything as exotic and unfamiliar. It was for Tino a first sighting in Panama. We would rather have had a Rufous Nightjar, but he was more than delighted with his new species!

It was back to the Lodge in time for the nightly check list and a glass of wine with delicious appetizers, followed by a first class dinner.

Tired after a long day of fairly strenuous birding on steep, slick trails, we showered and were in bed before 21:00h, well-contented with our day's activities.

All species seen December 21, 2007 - Cattle Egret, Green Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, White Hawk, Roadside Hawk, Yellow-headed Caracara, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Grey-chested Dove, Blue-headed Parrot, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Green Hermit, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Rufous-crested Coquette, Green Thorntail, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, White-vented Plumeleteer, Purple-crowned Fairy, Long-billed Starthroat, Ringed Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Tody Motmot (heard), Rufous Motmot, Collared Aracari, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Fasciated Antshrike (heard), Chestnut-backed Antbird (heard), Black-faced Antthrush, Golden-collared Manakin, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Lesser Elaenia, Olive-striped Flycatcher, Paltry Tyrannulet, Common Tody Flycatcher, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Grey-breasted Martin, Blue-and-White Swallow, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Rufous-breasted Wren, Bay Wren, Southern House Wren, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Clay-coloured Robin, Black-chested Jay, Yellow-throated Vireo (heard), Tennessee Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Canada Warbler, Rufous-capped Warbler,

Buff-rumped Warbler, Bananaquit, Dusky-faced Tanager, White-shouldered Tanager, White-lined Tanager, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Plain-coloured Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Orange-billed Sparrow, Black-striped Sparrow, Streaked Saltator, Buff-throated Saltator, Great-tailed Grackle, Yellow-billed Cacique, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Lesser Goldfinch.

December 22, 2007

We awoke to the patter of heavy rain on the roof. The rain persisted through breakfast and it was 07:45 before we left the Canopy Lodge to embark on a morning of birding with Tino.

He was very anxious to locate Snowcap for us, and we were equally eager to see it, so we returned to the same spot he had hoped to find it yesterday. Alas, no luck! The rain started again and we walked the rest of the trail in a bit of a downpour. The rain did not dampen our spirits, however, and we birded through it seeing many species, including a lovely Golden-collared Manakin male in full view.

We left this area and returned to the Canopy Adventure and entered via a different trail. Soon we were introduced to Mottled Owl, Tody Motmot and Dot-winged Antwren, with absolutely stunning looks at all three species.

We returned to the Lodge for lunch and once again were treated to the spectacle of the birds feeding on bananas at the various feeding stations. From what I saw of the voracious way the birds devoured the bananas, I am resolved to try them on our own feeders at home.

It was a very distinct pleasure for us to have Raul join us for lunch. It was extremely interesting to hear his personal account of how the Canopy Lodge came into existence.

After lunch we took a walk on a part of the property where Raul has constructed what he calls "the world's first feeding table for kingfishers." A small wetland has been created with wires strung across as perches. When the stream is at a certain level, minnows are caught and placed in the wetland, and frogs were brought down from Raul's house and introduced into the pond. There were thousands of tadpoles swimming around. The end

result is a feeding bonanza for Green Kingfisher and Green Heron and we saw both species there.

A short rest followed and soon it was time to venture out again with Tino. We drove to a steep, rough road that seems to be unused by vehicles, but is well travelled by people journeying from another village to the highway, to connect with transportation to work each day. It boggles the mind that they can do this. It is a steady climb all the way and we did not even reach their village, and we found it a strenuous workout, but filled with birds, including a stunning pair of Rosy Thrush-Tanagers which we saw well with Tino's expert guidance. Everyone we met on this walk said a cheery "Hola" and it was a pleasure to walk in such a convivial atmosphere.

We returned to the Canopy Lodge at about 18:00h in time to do the daily list with Tino and relax over happy hour. A delicious dinner followed and we were again joined by Raul - a gracious and entertaining host indeed.

All species seen December 22, 2007 - Little Tinamou (heard), Cattle Egret, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, White Hawk, Roadside Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Ground-Dove, White-tipped Dove, Grey-chested Dove, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo (heard), Striped Cuckoo (heard), Mottled Owl, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green Thorntail, Garden Emerald, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Green Kingfisher, Tody Motmot, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker (heard), Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Great Antshrike (heard), Dot-winged Antwren, White-bellied Antbird, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-faced Antthrush (heard), Golden-collared manakin, Lance-tailed Manakin, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher (heard), Great Kiskadee, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Grey-breasted Martin, White-thighed Swallow, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Rufous-breasted Wren, Bay Wren, Southern House Wren, White-breasted Wood-Wren (heard), Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush (heard), Clay-coloured Robin, Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-chested Jay, Lesser Greenlet (heard), Tennessee Warbler, Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, Canada Warbler, Rufous-capped

Warbler, Bananaquit, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Summer Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Blue-Grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Plain-coloured Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Variable Seedeater, Streaked Saltator, Buff-throated Saltator, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Lesser Goldfinch.

December 23, 2007

We awoke once again to the sound of rain pelting against the roof.

Hot water is "on demand" at the Canopy Lodge, but this morning we could not coax it through the pipes. David had a brief cold shower, but Miriam decided to pass! We went for breakfast and said goodbye to Lenny, since today we were to transfer to the Canopy Tower. We also bade farewell to Tino, but only for a few days, since we would be returning to the Canopy Lodge to finish our birding adventure.

Julio, the same driver that we had met at the airport in Panama City, was there to drive us to the Canopy Tower and we were happy to see him again. We left at 08:50h, but about twenty minutes into the journey Miriam realized that she had left her purse containing money, credit cards, driver's licence etc at the Canopy Lodge. Using my rudimentary Spanish, with which I was becoming ever more comfortable, I explained the situation to Julio, and without a moment's hesitation or any indication of reproach, he turned around. When we got back to the Lodge the purse was on the chair exactly where Miriam had left it and we resumed our journey back to the Canopy Tower.

Before arriving there we picked up Thomas and Sandy, a couple with whom we would become great friends during our stay together at the Canopy Tower. We arrived just before lunch and were able to get acquainted with a few of the other guests. We also spotted a pair of Blue Dacnis and three Collared Aracari from the observation level.

After lunch we were greeted by Jose (we always referred to him as "Little Jose" since there is also an older Jose who is a guide at the Canopy Tower) and he advised us to meet him at the front entrance at 15:00h to visit the **Gamboa** area right alongside the Panama Canal. Thomas and Sandy came along on this trip. There were some great birds, starting with absolutely stunning, prolonged

looks at a Rufescent Tiger-Heron. There were numerous Wattled Jacana and we succeeded in seeing no less than three White-throated Crakes. Jose was able to lure the first one into view; then, amazingly on our way back to the Tower, two other birds were right out in the open atop tussocks of grass in the wetland. A great view of a Broad-billed Motmot clinched all four species of motmots found in Panama. We also saw a crocodile and several coatimundis.

When we returned to the Canopy Tower we asked Jose to join us to do a checklist, but he declined to do so, and in fact, never performed this function. We were disappointed since we find this process so valuable when supervised by the guide who is intimately familiar with the local avifauna.

At dinner, we met Al and Esther, a couple who had arrived during our absence at Gamboa, and along with Sandy and Thomas enjoyed a fine dinner with stimulating and friendly company. We very much enjoyed the company of these terrific people and we have all exchanged email addresses and are committed to staying in touch, and birding on each other's home turf.

We went onto the observation deck of the Tower to drink in the sights and sounds of the rain forest and then retired to bed.

All species seen December 23 - Magnificent Frigatebird, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Green Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bat Falcon, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Wattled Jacana, Pale-vented Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, White-tipped Dove, Greater Ani, Smooth-billed Ani, Western Long-tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous Motmot, Broad-billed Motmot, Collared Aracari, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Lesser Kiskadee, Great Kiskadee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Grey-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Barn Swallow, Southern House Wren, Tropical Mockingbird, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Bananaquit, Dusky-faced Tanager, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Blue-black Grassquit, Variable Seedeater, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Black-striped Sparrow, Streaked Saltator, Buff-throated Saltator, Great-tailed Grackle, Yellow-tailed Oriole (heard),

Baltimore Oriole, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Lesser Goldfinch.

December 24, 2007

We were awake early after a good night's sleep, but it was raining again. Darn!

We both ascended to the observation deck where Jose had said that he would meet us at 06:30h, but he did not put in an appearance until 07:10h, just twenty minutes before breakfast. However, before his arrival we had stellar looks at a howler monkey and Miriam was happy to see the Keel-billed Toucan which she had previously missed.

Breakfast was an enjoyable, lively affair with Al and Esther, Tom and Sandy. A new guest, Chris, a Brit, had arrived overnight and we were quickly drawn to his engaging personality and wry sense of humour. He was a welcome addition to our little cadre of intrepid birders!

We all boarded one of the Canopy Lodge birdmobiles and travelled down to the bottom of the hill where we started to bird on a trail leading into the Sobreano National Forest. We walked quite a distance down this trail and enjoyed excellent birding. One of the highlights was a pair of exquisite Purple-throated Fruitcrows in a perfect position for everyone to see. At the end of the trail we were faced with another heavy downpour, but we were able to shelter under a roofed sign. The rain let up for a while and we set out again, but quickly the skies opened once more and the rain poured down. Jose suggested that we go back to the Tower. We were safely ensconced there (and dry) by 11:15h.

Other exceptional birds on this morning walk were Grey-headed Kite, White-whiskered Puffbird, Violaceous Trogon, Black-throated Trogon, Long-tailed Woodcreeper, White-bellied and Chestnut-backed Antbirds.

We spent some time up on the deck until lunch was served, after which we pretty much relaxed until it was time to go out birding again at 15:00h.

Esther was not feeling well, so she stayed back, but the rest of us again boarded the birdmobile and headed off to **Summit Ponds**. Finally we had an afternoon of birding without rain! It was a great walk with a nice variety of species. Before leaving Canada we had expressed to each

other that we really hoped that we would see a Boat-billed Heron and we were not disappointed. An Amazon Kingfisher was a bonus.

We had an excellent dinner of curried chicken, glazed carrots, rice, broccoli and cauliflower; a feta cheese salad was also delicious. All of this was washed down with a delicious Chilean red wine. We stayed in the dining room talking to Tom and Sandy until about 21:00h and then retired to bed.

With the air redolent of tropical heat and humidity it was hard to believe that it was Christmas Eve.

All species seen December 24 - Magnificent Frigatebird, Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Grey-headed Kite, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Pale-vented Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Blue-headed Parrot, Red-lored Parrot, Short-tailed Swift, Western Long-tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Violaceous Trogo, Black-throated Trogon, Amazon Kingfisher, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous Motmot, Black-breasted Puffbird, White-whiskered Puffbird, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Plain Xenops, Long-tailed Woodcreeper, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Fasciated Antshrike, Western Slaty-Antshrike, Checker-throated Antwren, Slaty Antwren, Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky Antbird, Jet Antbird (heard), White-bellied Antbird, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Spotted Antbird, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Forest Elaenia, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Olivaceous Flatbill, Great-crested Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Mangrove Swallow, Tropical Mockingbird, Clay-coloured Robin, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Bay-breasted Warbler, White-shouldered Tanager, Summer Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Plain-coloured Tanager, Blue-black Grassquit, Variable Seedeater, Buff-throated Saltator, Yellow-backed Oriole, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Scarlet-rumped Cacique.

December 25, 2007

Christmas Day in Panama!

We awoke around 06:00h and were up on

the observation deck by 06:30h where Jose was supposed to meet us. This morning he did not show up at all.

We thought that Jose was a superb young guide with an engaging personality. He knew the birds well and was adept at getting a telescope on them very quickly. We all enjoyed being with him. I think that in time he will develop into a premier guide at the Canopy Tower. At present, however, he lacks a little in discipline. It was Christmas morning, and we would all have understood completely had he told us that he might not be able to meet us, due perhaps to a little Christmas Eve revelry, or family commitments, but we would have preferred to have known this, rather than have him simply not show up.

Similarly, although we asked several times about a night tour, we could never get him to commit to leading one, and in fact, we were never able to go out at night. Raul had specifically told us to insist on a night tour, but it was not to be.

The morning started with a truly torrential downpour. We were advised by "Big Jose" that it was the first time he could ever remember rain on Christmas Day. The rain did not let up and no one was able to go anywhere. Miriam and I sat under the overhang at the front entrance and watched the hummingbirds, who seemed to enjoy the rain completely, and after a while decided to take a walk part way down the road, rain or not. It was easing off a little.

When we turned around to return we were met by Big Jose and a group on a birdmobile and were advised that Little Jose was not far behind with our group to go on a tour. We climbed aboard and were driven to **Gamboa** to the house of a lady who I believe is a prominent member of the local Audubon Society. Jose loaded up her feeders with bananas and within minutes an amazing variety of birds descended onto the feeders, including about fifty Orange-chinned Parakeets. Grey-headed Chachalacas tried to displace the smaller birds and Jose had to continually chase them away. A gorgeous Black-cheeked Woodpecker visited the garden and everyone got truly excellent looks at it. There were tanagers, honeycreepers, Clay-coloured Robins, a Ruddy Ground-Dove and other species. It was truly an excellent selection of birds, all of which we could examine closely for as long as we wished.

What had started out so dismally, turned

into a sunny morning filled with birds.

For Miriam and me, it was a fitting Christmas present.

Following the visit to the garden we proceeded to a nearby resort, where we saw Southern Lapwing, Yellow-crowned Euphonia and a Little Blue Heron, among others. We then visited an orchid grower for a short period and birded around the parking lot, before returning to the Tower for lunch. On the way back we encountered Slaty-tailed Trogon, again with spectacular views, and a Grey Hawk.

We met Jose at 15:00h for a trip to the local **Botanical Gardens**. Our target bird there was Blue Continga, but we never did see it. The birding was good, however and we enjoyed it. We scored Golden-hooded Tanager and the very attractive Streak-backed Woodcreeper - lifers for both of us. It didn't rain either!

One very interesting part of this visit, was a stop at a Harpy Eagle exhibit. Harpy Eagles are being reintroduced into this part of Panama, especially at the end of Pipeline Road, and a couple of injured captive birds were housed in a huge outdoor enclosure. The hope was that captive breeding would occur, but despite being together for ten years, nothing had occurred. In fact we were told that the male and female had effectively established exclusive territories in the enclosure and neither passed into the territory of the other. That was all about to change. On the way out, Jose was advised by someone at the gate that the male had just crossed into the female's side of the exhibit and killed her. She was at a disadvantage for, despite her size superiority, she had wing damage and was unable to fly. Apparently the male ripped open her throat.

We were among the last people to see her alive.

Christmas dinner consisted of baked ham, plantains, rice and a salad with a light Christmas cake for dessert - all very tasty indeed.

All species seen December 25 - Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Grey Hawk, Yellow-headed Caracara, Collared Forest-Falcon (heard), Grey-headed Chachalaca, Common Moorhen, Southern Lapwing, Pale-vented Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Blue-headed Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Short-tailed Swift, Western Long-

tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Amazon Kingfisher, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Blue-crowned Manakin, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Kiskadee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Masked Tityra, Grey-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Tropical Mockingbird, Clay-coloured Robin, Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Summer Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Plain-coloured Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper, Shining Honeycreeper, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Variable Seedeater, Buff-throated Saltator, Great-tailed Grackle, Giant Cowbird.

December 26, 2007

This was our day to bird the legendary Pipeline Road and our breakfast was scheduled for 06:00h so that we could leave at 06:30h.

Instead of Little Jose taking us, we joined a mixed group with Big Jose. It was a fine, sunny day with a nice breeze most of the time and we were delighted to bid farewell to the incessant rain that we had experienced since our arrival.

Sandy and Thomas stayed behind at the Tower, with Thomas still recovering from an unknown ailment that had plagued him for a couple of days, but our stalwart companions Esther and Al came along and were as excited as we were to finally bird this Holy Grail Pathway of birding.

We were not disappointed! From the moment we entered the road, past an unmanned security barrier, the birding was terrific. In addition to the birds we encountered an entire troupe of howler monkeys with several babies and a White-headed Capucin also.

Without a doubt, the Scaled Antpitta that Jose worked hard to lure out for us, was the "best" bird, but there were many other great sightings including three Short-billed Pigeons, a Black-throated Mango, a White-tailed Trogon, our only Cinnamon Woodpecker of the trip, a Black-striped Woodcreeper and a Grey Elaenia in full view while

hopping around at the outer edges of a tree for a full four or five minutes.

We left the Pipeline Road around noon and returned to the Tower for lunch.

Following the rest period until 15:00h Little Jose took four of us (David, Miriam, Al and Esther) back to the orchid farm we had previously visited, but we birded farther along the road in an area that Jose had not previously covered. How fortunate that we did. One of the most sought after birds by everyone - a bird that had been the topic of much conversation at the Canopy Tower - was the Blue Cotinga. You will recall that we had missed this species at the Botanical Gardens, and no one else presently staying at the Lodge had seen it. It was at the top of the wish list for many of the other birders.

Jose was walking along when he suddenly spun on his heels, and with rising excitement in his voice, said, "Quick, quick, look in the scope - Blue Cotinga." And there for all to see, perched at the very top of a tree, wide open and resplendent, was a male Blue Cotinga. It stayed long enough for Miriam to take good photographs and we were all thrilled. I think that for one day at least Little Jose had become the biggest Jose of all!

We sure had bragging rights at Happy Hour that night!

Was this our favourite bird of the trip or did the Rufous-crested Coquette still hold first place? They are both very special birds which will long live in our memory.

All species seen December 26 - Anhinga, Magnificent Frigatebird, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Broad-winged Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Grey-headed Chachalaca, White-throated Crake, Wattled Jacana, Pale-vented Pigeon, Short-billed Pigeon, Ruddy Ground Dove, White-tipped Dove, Red-lore Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Greater Ani, Short-tailed Swift, Western Long-tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, White-tailed Trogon, Violaceous Trogon, Black-throated Trogon, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Ringed Kingfisher, Blue-crowned Motmot, Black-breasted Puffbird, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Western

Slaty-Antshrike, Scaled Antpitta, Blue Cotinga, Golden-collared manakin, Blue-crowned Manakin, Red-capped Manakin, Yellow Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, Grey Elaenia, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Streaked Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, White-winged Becard, Masked Tityra, Grey-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, Tropical Mockingbird, Clay-coloured Robin, Lesser Greenlet, Green Shrike-Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, White-shouldered Tanager, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Summer Tanager, White-winged Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Plain-coloured Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Variable Seedeater, Black-striped Sparrow, Blue-black Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackle, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Chestnut-headed Oropendola.

December 27, 2007

This was the morning for us to transfer back to the Canopy Tower. We left at 08:15h with our trusty driver, Julio, who now had adopted the delightful and respectful practice of calling me Don David!

We were accompanied by another couple who were dropped off at the domestic airport, and by Al and Esther, and Keir, who had been at the Canopy Tower for a week, but with whom we had not interacted too much since he was part of an established group who were already together when we arrived.

It was almost surreal that as we proceeded back to the Canopy Lodge, covering now familiar ground, we truly felt as though we were going back home. When we drove into El Valle, it seemed appropriate that the store where we had earlier bought postcards and souvenirs, should be called "David's Store!"

We arrived at the Lodge at about 10:30h but our rooms were not ready since a VENT group had not yet departed and some rooms would not be vacated until 11:00h. The staff served us coffee, tea and cold drinks with cookies and loaded the feeders with bananas so that we could enjoy birding from the patio. Al was on the bridge and suddenly spotted the Rufous-crested Coquette and called everyone over for stunning looks. We had by

now met a couple of fellow Canadians, Steven and Wendy. Steven rushed in to get Wendy who had gone inside to take a shower, but even though she rushed out in a robe, she was too late for the coquette.

When in Bhutan, Harvey Mudd and David used to compose limericks every day to be read at dinner, so David memorialized Wendy's big miss with the following piece of doggerel:

There's a lady named Wendy we met
Who failed to observe the coquette.
She was taking a shower
While it sipped on a flower.
We do hope that she'll see it yet.

A while later, David spotted the bird in exactly the same spot and was able to show it to most of the VENT participants. All were delighted since the bird had eluded them up until now, and one guy literally jumped for joy!

Unfortunately, Keir had gone for a walk both times and missed the coquette. Wendy was also elsewhere and missed the bird for a second time.

By the time we had lunch at 12:00h a light rain had started. It continued and finally drove us from our balconies where we had retired after lunch. The rain had gotten a little heavier and the wind picked up, driving it into the balcony.

We met Tino at 15:00h but the rain was heavy and we delayed our departure. At around 15:45h the rain had abated somewhat and we set out for a rocky, steep trail beyond the Canopy Adventure. Steven and Wendy were quite thrilled to get terrific looks at Black-chested Jay and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. Both really are spectacular birds.

After a typically delicious dinner, we sat around chatting with everyone, and retired to our room about 20:30h.

All species seen December 27 - Great Egret, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, White Hawk, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Southern Lapwing, Rock Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Green Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Rufous-crested Coquette, Green Thorntail, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-vented Plumeleteer, Purple-crowned Fairy, Ringed Kingfisher, Tody Motmot, Rufous Motmot,

Red-crowned Woodpecker, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Paltry Tyrannulet, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, White-thighed Swallow, Rufous-breasted Wren (heard), Bay Wren, Clay-coloured Robin, Black-chested Jay, Tennessee Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Rufous-capped Warbler, Bananaquit, Dusky-faced Tanager, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Summer Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Plain-coloured Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Variable Seedeater, Black-striped Sparrow, Streaked Saltator, Buff-throated Saltator, Black-headed Saltator, Great-tailed Grackle, Yellow-billed Cacique, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Chestnut-headed Oropendola.

December 28, 2007

Overcast skies greeted us as we breakfasted at 06:30h, but at least it wasn't raining!

The group that set off with Tino for the morning's adventure comprised Al, Keir, Wendy and Steven, and David and Miriam. Esther was not feeling well and stayed behind.

We drove past the Canopy Adventure on a very rough road, past a large chicken farm and walked along a ridge road birding. The scenery was fantastic, the birding quite splendid, the company more than amenable and, of course, the guide was superb. What more could we ask for?

Tino explained that the area we were walking through comprised a watershed divider where all waters on one side flow to the Pacific, from the the other to the Caribbean.

Al made the astute comment that this kind of birding was his favorite. Open landscapes, clear views, unimpeded by the dark and gloom of a rain forest, where one has to crane and squint to see skulking rarities. Not that we don't wish to enjoy that kind of birding also; it was simply so uplifting to be out in the clear under wide open skies.

One of the highlights of this walk was unimpeded views of Orange-bellied Trogon. It was a good hawk day too with great looks at White Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk and Roadside Hawk. A phenomenal sighting of a Spotted Woodcreeper was the only one for the trip.

At the end of the walk, before getting back into our vehicle, we saw numerous Yellow-faced

Grassquits perched on fences and we were really able to study them. They are truly attractive little birds, probably not closely observed, but certainly meriting close scrutiny.

Upon our return to the Lodge we were delighted to see our good friend Chris who had come over that morning from the Canopy Tower. Good company was personified by this individual, whose tales of a varied and interesting life were always fun to listen to.

Wendy and Steven had asked Tino to take them along to the local market in El Valle, so we decided to accompany them. It was great fun to walk around the various vendors and practice my fledgling Spanish skills. The merchandise was typical tourist stuff, but we bought a couple of items anyway, and were glad to leave a little money in the local economy.

As elsewhere in Panama we found the people delightful. There was none of the hucksterism that so often characterizes this kind of market. It was a pleasure to stroll around in warm sunshine.

Our afternoon trip comprised only Miriam and David plus another couple whose names we never did get and basically seemed uninterested in birding, plus Keir. Our first stop was at the Canopy Adventure Trail, where Tino was able to show us a pair of Mottled Owls and call in the Tody Motmot by using his amazing skills of bird vocalization, so that everyone had a good look.

We then birded an area in town where we had previously birded on the first part of our trip to the Canopy Lodge. The highlight bird was Rosy Thrush-Tanager and the final bird of the walk was a beautiful Garden Emerald. In the interim we saw a Golden-winged Warbler, which Miriam missed. She had missed this species on other occasions in Ontario, so it would have been a lifer for her. This elusive warbler seems destined to become her nemesis bird!

We enjoyed a happy hour and Tino helped us to complete the list for the day. After a tasty dinner, we sat talking well into the evening, assisted by a couple of bottles of wine! We finally got up to bid farewell to everyone, since we had to be up very early the next day to be taken to the airport in Panama City. The people to whom we bade farewell - Al and Esther, Chris, Steven and Wendy - had become true friends, and we were sad to leave them. We had no doubt, however, that we

would see them all again, and we look forward to that day with eager anticipation.

All species seen December 28 - Cattle Egret, White Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Southern Lapwing, Rock Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, White-tipped Dove, Grey-chested Dove, Smooth-billed Ani, Mottled Owl, Stripe-throated Hermit, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Garden Emerald, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-vented Plumeleteer, Long-billed Starthroat, Orange-bellied Trogon, Tody Motmot, Rufous Motmot, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, Spotted Woodcreeper, Plain Antvireo, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Chestnut-backed Antbird (heard), White-ruffed Manakin, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Yellow Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Lesser Elaenia, Paltry Tyrannulet, Common Tody Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Clay-coloured Robin, Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-chested Jay, Philadelphia Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Canada Warbler, Rufous-capped Warbler, Bananaquit, Common Bush-Tanager, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Dusky-faced Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Silver-throated Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Variable Seedeater, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Streaked Saltator, Buff-throated saltator, Great-tailed Grackle, Baltimore Oriole, Chestnut-headed Oropendola.

December 29, 2007

Our alarm sounded at 04:30h and we got up rightaway, showered quickly and went out to meet our driver - Julio (who else?). Tino had asked us the previous evening if we needed breakfast before leaving, but we didn't want to trouble the staff at so early an hour. They had, however, prepared coffee for us and we certainly enjoyed it.

We set off at 05:00h in the dark, bound for Panama City. Our drive there was uneventful, and we recorded whatever birds we saw after daylight permitted it.

Julio deposited us at the airport at 07:30h and we assured him that it was not "Adios" but "Hasta otro dia."

We got through the formalities at the airport quickly and lifted off from Panama bound for Houston, TX at 09:50h. Another mini birding adventure awaited us there but that will be the subject of another report.

All species seen December 29 - Anhinga, Great Egret, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Rock Pigeon, Tropical Kingbird, Grey-breasted Martin, Tropical Mockingbird, Great-tailed Grackle.

General Comments

Whenever we travel we are always conflicted by the desire to return, and the opposing wish to visit somewhere new. The attraction of a new and undiscovered location has always won out.

Panama, however, is one country we will definitely revisit. We fell in love with the country, the people, the birds, the food - everything, but most of all we were enraptured with the Canopy Lodge. We are unabashed admirers of this tranquil haven and vow to return.

Having known previously of the conservation ethic of Raul and the contribution he has made to environmental work in his country, we were especially delighted to have the opportunity to meet him, and in fact, share a couple of meals. There is something symbolic and primal about breaking bread together. I was especially flattered when he took the time to speak to me on the phone before we left the Canopy Lodge.

The Canopy Tower was a wonderful experience and the birding, if anything, better than the Canopy Lodge. It is incredible to me, that Raul could have had the foresight to look at a disused military communications tower, and envisage a future world-class eco-resort. It is to his eternal credit that he did. For us though, the Canopy Lodge is number one in our hearts. We may travel to resorts that are more sumptuous, places more birdy, but for us it is hard to imagine that it can be displaced from our hearts.

We were significantly impressed by the local guides that Raul has recruited, and the manner in which he has given them a chance to have long-term, meaningful, well-paying jobs. For Tino it has provided the opportunity to travel

outside Panama and to experience sights, places and opportunities he probably never thought possible.

All of the other staff were courteous, friendly, eager to help at any time and it was patently clear that they were well-treated and respected by an employer who cares about them. I hope that we accorded them respect and courtesy during our stay.

We simply say, "Muchas gracias, Panama. Volveremos!"

If you would like further information concerning this trip please contact us at theospreynest@sympatico.ca or at 519 725-0866, fax 519 725-1176.