

Trip Report

PANAMA, Canopy Tower and Lodge

April 16 - 28, 2010

Disclaimer: This report is as accurate as possible using limited notes taken in the field; any errors regarding species seen at specific sites are unintentional. Species are listed only on the day they were first seen unless the subsequent sighting involves something significant.

Species seen by group: 320

Additional species heard: 7

Birding guides: Carlos Bethancourt

Danilo Rodriguez

Moyo Rodriguez

Tour leaders: Cindy and Jim Beckman (owners,
Cheepers! Birding on a Budget)

Group: 10 + 2 tour leaders and guides

9 birders from New York, 1 from Ohio

Highlights: Streak-chested Antpitta, Sungrebe, Tody Motmot, Snowcap, Rufous Nightjar, Great Potoo, 4 species of Owl, 6 species of Trogon, 23 species of Hummingbird, Guayacan trees in full bloom



Day 0: Friday, April 16: Sarah S. recognized our *Cheepers!* logos and introduced herself just before we departed the Atlanta airport for Panama. We arrived at the Tocumen International Airport in Panama City before 8:30 PM, a little ahead of schedule, and made it through immigration and customs quickly. The rest of the group, coming in on a Continental flight from New York, were scheduled to arrive about an hour after us. Sarah, Jim, and I waited in front of the airport for the shuttle from the Hotel Riande to arrive. We had a chance to become acquainted as we waited, and we learned that Sarah had suffered a broken foot several months earlier and was still healing. After a significant wait with no shuttle arriving, I began to ask some of the guys working in front of the airport about the shuttle's schedule - every 30 minutes? once an hour? I learned that you must call the hotel and ask for the shuttle, and since we had already been sitting there for 45 minutes and the next group would soon arrive, we decided to put Sarah in a cab and get her to the hotel without further waiting. Jim stayed at the airport to greet the rest of the group, and I went to the hotel with Sarah to request that the shuttle be sent for the others as soon as possible. Luckily, the timing was perfect for the rest of the group, and they had very little wait time once they cleared immigration and customs. After introductions and checking in, we all settled into our rooms for a good night's sleep.

Day 1, Saturday, April 17: Although the bus would not pick us up until 10:00 AM, most of the group was out wandering around the grounds of the Riande hours before breakfast. Matt and Cathy M. had seen several birds by the time I spoke to them at breakfast, including a beautiful **Crimson-backed Tanager** - what a great start! Everyone ate at the buffet at whatever time they were ready, and there was still some time to walk around the gardens in the back of

the hotel. A group of us were searching for birds in the trees along the fence when a very vocal **Roadside Hawk** drew our attention. Within a few minutes, the fledgling's parents were in the air nearby, and we all had great looks at this nice little family of raptors. Other birds seen in that garden included some of the more common city birds like **Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, Clay-colored Thrush, Tropical Kingbird, White-tipped Dove** and **House Wren**. We also found **Red-eyed Vireo** and **Common Tody-Flycatcher** in the patch of trees behind the pool area. There were a few hummingbirds flitting about, but no one was able to identify any of the mostly females seen. We were all gathered in the lobby before our scheduled pick-up, ready to do some real Panama birding.

We loaded the bus promptly at 10:00 AM and started the drive to El Valle where we would check in at the Canopy Lodge and meet our birding guides. Along the way, we all got to know each other a bit. What a great group this is! We had a chance to talk the night before with Sarah, who is from Cincinnati. Although the rest of the group is from New York, and some are affiliated with the same birding groups, others had not met. Conversation was lively and interesting, and I could tell right away that I was really going to enjoy birding with this group. Although we were not really "birding" per se, from the bus we saw **Black and Turkey Vultures, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Cattle Egret, and Wattled Jacana**. Of course, there were **Rock Pigeons** and **Great-tailed Grackles** in just about any populated area we drove through.

As we entered the grounds of the Canopy Lodge, we were greeted by birdsong. Crossing over a lovely little bridge to the outdoor dining area, we could see several species of birds at the well-stocked feeders. The owner, Raul, was there to greet us and assign rooms, graciously giving our two single occupants an upgrade to double rooms. Although we were happy to meet Raul and our guides, Danilo and Moyo, and also anxious to see our rooms, our attention was repeatedly drawn to the activity at the feeders. Within a few minutes we saw **Thick-billed Euphonia, Rufous Motmot, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Blue-gray, Palm and Flame-rumped Tanagers** take turns at the feeders. A **Mourning Warbler** hopped around the base of the bushes where a **Snowy-bellied Hummingbird** sat guarding his food source. Raul pointed out a **Violet-headed Hummingbird** among the **Rufous-tailed Hummers** coming in to feed at the flowers. After enjoying the activity at the feeders for awhile, we went to our rooms to settle in a bit before lunch. The rooms at the Canopy Lodge are as lovely as any place I've ever stayed. Constructed with natural stone and wood from the surrounding area and decorated with beautiful Molas made by indigenous craftswomen, the room had an understated elegance that added to the pleasure of our stay (the heated towel rack and comfortable bed and pillows didn't hurt, either).



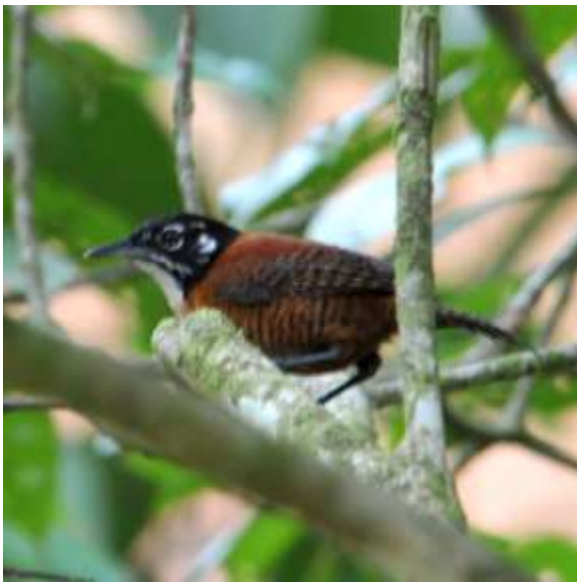
Our room at Canopy Lodge



Flame-rumped Tanager at feeder

After a wonderful lunch, we had a little more time to enjoy the spectacle at the feeders and explore a bit around the grounds before we set off on our first bird walk with our guides, Danilo and Moyo. A **Red-crowned Woodpecker** had joined the birds at the feeders. A pair of **Dusky-faced Tanagers** swooped in for a brief moment, scattering some of the smaller birds such as **Tennessee Warbler, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager,** and **Green Honeycreeper**. One **Bananaquit** made

an appearance, but lost our attention quickly when some raucous **Black-chested Jays** flew into the trees on the other side of the creek. Just before we started to walk away, some **Collared Aracaris** landed in the trees over the entrance trail. It took quite awhile for us to make some progress away from the buildings, stopping again to see a **Green Heron** as we crossed the bridge, but we finally went outside the gate and began our walk along the entrance road. Short spurts of rain forced us to take our rain gear on and off several times, but the rain did nothing to deter the birds! Before we took more than a couple of steps on the road, Danilo pointed out the **Blue-and-white and Southern Rough-winged Swallows** on the wires above us. One of the first birds we encountered once we started walking was a **Keel-billed Toucan**. We could hear it calling and searched the treetops on the hillside to locate it. Although it was seen from a distance, there's nothing quite like a toucan to let you know you're "not in Kansas anymore". As we walked up the road, Danilo and Moyo pointed out every sound they heard, every bird they saw. Members of the group, all experienced birders, added to the mix by spotting birds and giving each other directions. We quickly added some very good birds to our list for the day: **Orange-chinned Parakeet, Brown-hooded Parrot, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Orioles**, all flashy tropical species that wowed everyone in the group. New hummingbirds seen along the road included **Green Hermit, Garden Emerald, Blue-crowned Woodnymph, and White-vented Plumeleteer**, all males and all in plain sight. We would have struggled to identify some of the less colorful species without verification from our two experienced, knowledgeable guides: **Plain Xenops, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Paltry Tyrannulet, and Lesser Greenlet**. A **Buff-throated Saltator** introduced this family of birds to the first-time-in-the-tropics birders among us, and its close relatives, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Blue-black Grosbeak** were present, although the Blue-black Grosbeak was heard only. Some of us got to see **Orange-billed Sparrow** but missed the **Black-striped Sparrow** and others did the opposite. We found both **Variable and Yellow-bellied Seedeaters**, and a **Yellow-faced Grassquit** was observed foraging on the pavement after one of the downpours. We saw more individuals of the tanager species seen earlier at the feeders, and added **White-lined, White-shouldered, Tawny-crested, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded, and Plain-colored Tanagers** to the list.



Bay Wren



Clay-colored Thrush

All along the road we heard the incredible songs of the wrens - **Bay Wren and Rufous-breasted Wren** were the two species seen today. We saw more **Mourning Warblers** out in the open, a behavior none of us was accustomed to seeing in our yearly spring warbler outings, and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** confused some of the group in its drab winter plumage. **Rufous-capped Warbler** was probably the most popular member of the warbler family today, since it was a life bird for almost everyone. Most of the group managed to get on the secretive **Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush** (I did not - I was trying to get a shot of a Mourning Warbler when it appeared) and I think everyone got decent looks at the female **Golden-collared Manakin**. We were a bit disappointed that we couldn't find one of the males that was

vocalizing in the thick undergrowth, but we certainly weren't complaining! **Gray-headed Chachalaca, Scaled Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, and Groove-billed Anis** made their appearances at one point or another, but the star of the day, for me especially, was the last bird of the day: **Tody Motmot!** This was a bird I had never seen before, one that I probably should have seen on one of my prior trips. Not exactly a nemesis bird, but it was destined to become one if I didn't see one soon. The light was fading, the bird was sitting in the recesses of the forest, but it sat for a long time on an unobstructed branch and we had stunning looks through the scope. Photographs were taken in the name of memory only as the lighting was unforgiving even when I bumped the ISO up to ridiculous levels.

OK, I have to admit my life bird wasn't the very last bird of the day. On the way back to the lodge, some people saw an **Amazon Kingfisher** near the road. It seemed a bit anticlimactic to me, but not to the people who saw it. A beautiful little kingfisher, but, hey, it's not like it had tody in its name!

When we went over our checklists before a scrumptious dinner, we found we had seen 79 species of birds on our first day. Not too bad, considering we had spent a good part of our morning in transit.

Day 2, Sunday, April 18: When I came down for breakfast at 6:30, the resident **Rufous Motmot** was already having his morning meal. I had a little time to get some feeder bird photos before breakfast was served, and then, while we were eating, a pair of **Dusky-faced Tanagers** starting "pikking" in the bushes. I didn't recognize the call at first, but I knew it was something I had seen before, something good, and I interrupted conversations to draw attention to the sound. We all enjoyed great views of the pair as they worked their way from the bushes to the feeders. By the time I got to my camera, they were gone.

After breakfast, as everyone retreated to their rooms to prepare for the day's outing, I followed a Blue Morpho butterfly to the far end of the dining area, trying once again to get a photo of this most difficult subject. Its erratic flight makes it almost impossible to focus while it's in motion, and the brilliant blue is not visible when it has landed with its wings up. There, in a small cleared flat area next to a forested hill, I could see scraps of food had been tossed on the ground for the birds. As I stood there, a **Rufous Motmot** landed on the ground, just ten feet away. I remained motionless, stunned by the unexpected visit and the short distance between us. Finally, I tried to slowly turn my camera in the direction of the motmot. With that small movement, the bird took off into the forest. I waited a bit longer to see what might show up for this unofficial feast, and was rewarded with great photo ops for **Orange-billed Sparrow** and **White-tipped Dove**. By now, the group was gathering in the dining area for departure, and I quickly joined them.



Orange-billed Sparrow

This morning we piled into the minibus to head for La Mesa. We birded from the bus along the way, stopping each time Danilo and Moyo saw or heard evidence of birds. La Mesa is an area of rain forest interspersed with some areas that have been cleared, most noticeably for chicken farms. It was a terrific area for raptors, with **American Swallow-tailed Kite, Barred Hawk, White Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, and Bat Falcon** all seen. In some of the cleared areas we found **Southern Lapwing**, but most of the birding was done by searching through the trees along the side of the gravel road as we walked a bit, got picked up by the bus, walked a bit more, got picked up by the bus, etc. Several members of the flycatcher family gave us good views, but the Elaenias were the most cooperative today, with both **Yellow-bellied and Lesser Elaenia** practically posing for photographs. Other flycatchers included **Olive-striped, Piratic, Sulphur-rumped, Bran-colored and Yellow-margined Flycatchers**. Some tiny members of the family, the **Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant** and a **Common Tody-flycatcher** were seen by most of the group. (Common Tody-flycatcher is one of my favorite tropical birds, and I missed it for the second day in a row!)



Lesser Elaenia



Yellow-bellied Elaenia

Like yesterday, we were serenaded by wrens just about everywhere we went; **Rufous-and-white Wren** joined our list of sightings along with some new individuals of species we saw yesterday. A group of **Tawny-capped Tanagers** flitted about on the hillside, calling and moving almost continuously. Each time I got a bead on one of them, it would dart away as I raised my binoculars for a good look. I think I was the very last person to finally get one of them in my binoculars, but I was finally able to find one that sat still for a moment, even long enough for a (very poor) photo. A **Shiny Cowbird** was almost overlooked at the top of a tree in the distance, but one of the birders recognized that it was not a grackle or blackbird as they had first suspected and called Danilo's attention to the bird.

Our first **Three-toed Sloth** of the trip brought smiles to everyone's face, although a **Long-billed Starthroat** distracted us as we were watching the sloth. Other hummingbirds seen this morning included **Little Hermit** and **Blue-chested Hummingbird** and a few people got a glimpse of a **Green Thorntail**. The morning was starting to feel long as the day at

the top of the mesa heated up, and we tore ourselves away from the birding to return to the lodge for lunch right after spotting a pair of **Hepatic Tanagers**.



Oropendola nests



Chestnut-headed Oropendola

As we were heading back to the lodge for lunch, we stopped to take some photos of the pendulous oropendola nests hanging from a large pine tree at the edge of the road. We watched as the **Chestnut-headed Oropendolas** flew in and out of the nests, marveling at how quickly such a large bird could disappear into such a small opening. Just as we were about to drive on, Danilo spotted a different type of icterid - a larger **Crested Oropendola** flew by the colony of its smaller cousins. As the bus started to roll, someone called out "Kingfisher!", and we stopped to watch a **Green Kingfisher** who had probably been in plain view the entire time we were watching the Oropendolas.

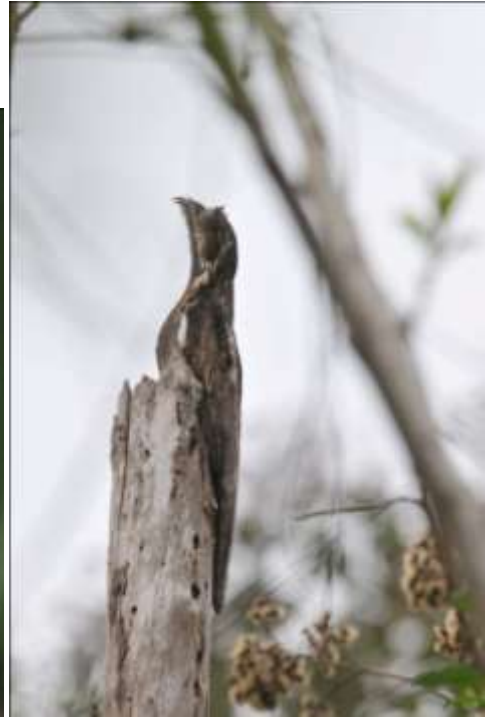
After lunch, we made a short stop at the famous El Valle market, and then headed to the Cariguana Trail to search for some specific species. We parked at the bottom of a hill in a very nice residential area and started walking along the road. As we worked our way up the hill, we scoured the manicured gardens and huge trees for anything with feathers. One of the favorite birds for this part of our walk was the **Barred Antshrike** that appeared low in the bushes again and again as if to make sure everyone had a chance to admire his beauty. **Wedge-billed and Spotted Woodcreepers** made their way up the trunks and along the branches of the massive trees while **Yellow-green Vireos** bounced from branch to branch. **Yellow-crowned Euphonias**, similar but not identical to the Thick-billed Euphonias observed on the feeders, were in full view long enough for all to ascertain the difference between the two species. New tanagers for this afternoon included **Silver-throated and Summer Tanagers**. The entire group was able to see a **Chestnut-backed Antbird** as it strutted along the forest floor.

Leaving the residential street, we drove to another spot where Danilo led us down a path that seemed to go through private property. He had specific target species in mind, and we first stopped to try to locate a **Lance-tailed Manakin** in a patch of forest near a partially-built house. Although we could hear the birds, we could not find them and they did not respond to taped calls. We went further, through an area where nursery plants were being grown, until Danilo finally stopped us in front of a snag in the middle of another forested area. There, on top of the snag, was a **Common Potoo**

posing as the tip of the branch. As we took photos and changed positions to see if we could get better light on the bird, the potoo shifted its weight a bit and we could see an egg under the lower belly. What a thrill! We left the Potoo to continue to another spot where our guides knew of a **Tropical Screech Owl**. We then continued on to yet another very specific area on private property, just a few minutes away, where Danilo located a resting **Crested Owl** for us. Two owls and a potoo in one afternoon! This is just one example of how invaluable local guides are - without their knowledge and connections within the community, we would never have been able to see any of these very special birds. The last part of the afternoon was a nocturnal bonanza!



Tropical Screech Owl



Common Potoo

Other birds seen today, in no particular order, included **Blue-headed Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Whooping Motmot, Lined Woodpecker, Plain Antvireo, Masked Tityra, Gray-breasted Martin, Pale-vented Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, Streaked Saltator, and Black-faced Grosbeak**. Heard but not seen were **Swainson's Thrush** and **Rosy Thrush-Tanager**. Total species seen today was 102 with an additional 7 species either heard only or seen by just the guides.

Day 3, Monday, April 19: Today we departed early for a full day's outing to a dryer region about an hour away from El Valle near a small village called El Chiru. The contrast with the lush and wet foothills of El Valle was dramatic. This habitat consists of relatively permanent growth of low and often straggly bushes and small trees with grass interspersed. It is a distinctive habitat of the Pacific lowlands and we were told there is little of it left because most of the population in Panama has settled in the Pacific Coast. With different habitat, of course, comes the attendant change in bird species.

We spotted some birds before we even reached our destination, on a residential street close to the highway where we stopped for a restroom break not too far from El Chiru. **Barred Antshrikes** vocalized from the bushes and it didn't take much to get them to come out in the open. Everyone marveled at how much easier it was to see them today than yesterday when they had kept dodging in and out of the shrubbery. Also in the trees in the median strip near the gas station where we stopped were **Southern Beardless Tyrannulet** and **Yellow-bellied Elaenia**, very agitated looking for the "intruder" (Moyo's owl imitation). For the third day in a row a **Common Tody-Flycatcher** appeared, and I finally was able to see it this time!

The change in temperature and humidity was evident each time we climbed out of the van to search for birds along a dry dirt road that traversed open fields with occasional scrubby brush. Two beautiful **Southern Lapwings** flew into view and we continued to try to get better looks at them as they made their way through the field in the same direction we were moving on the road. **Crested Bobwhite** provided a challenge as we all attempted to get a decent view as they moved in and out of tall grass about 150 feet off the road. As we were watching the bobwhites and having a snack, a **Veraguas Hummingbird** showed up and allowed us all to get good looks. The only other hummingbird seen all day was a **Sapphire-throated Hummingbird**. **Brown-throated Parakeets** landed in a tree along the edge of the road, and we observed **Fork-tailed Flycatchers**, male and female, tending to two fledglings. Other flycatchers along the dry road were **Eastern Kingbird**, **Panama Flycatcher**, and **Piratic Flycatcher**. We saw our first **Great Kiskadees** and **Barn Swallows** for the trip along with typical grassland species such as **Blue-black Grassquit**, **Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters**, **Eastern Meadowlark**, and **Red-breasted Blackbirds**. Two species of **ground dove**, **Plain-breasted** and **Ruddy**, were found multiple times.



Fork-tailed Flycatcher



Fork-tailed Flycatcher fledglings

We left the dry forest and headed to the Pacific Ocean for lunch, with a stop along the way at a private home where Danilo and Moyo knew a **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl** had taken up residence. They spoke with the lady of the house, who obviously has had any visitors since the owl took up residence, and then we enjoyed terrific views of this diminutive owl.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

We were treated to a luxurious midday break at a private home on the beach at Santa Clara. **Black Vultures** fought with each other for scraps of fish that had been left on the beach while **Magnificent Frigatebirds** flew overhead. A **Blue-footed Booby** flew by over the water as we were watching **Brown Pelicans** dive for fish. **Neotropic Cormorants** and **Laughing Gulls** were the only other ocean species seen, although I must admit our group wasn't too vigilant about watching birds as some took a swim in the ocean while others relaxed on comfortable chairs in the shade near the house. After a nice rest, we went back to birding.

We made our way to a rice field that was being harvested - what a birding bonanza that creates! **Peregrine Falcons** and **Savanna Hawks** cruised the area while every type of egret and heron in the area foraged for rodents and reptiles in front of the large machinery as it slowly made its way across the fields. **Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Green Herons, White Ibis,** and **Wood Storks** all took turns at the front of the machine. **Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras** joined their long-legged relatives on the ground while **Common Black Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk,** and **White-tailed Hawk** checked things out from above. We moved on to an portion of a road on private property that skirted a small wetland. Here we saw more **Yellow-headed Caracaras** and **Savanna Hawks** and got good views of **Turkey, Black,** and **Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures** both in the air and on the ground. We found **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Glossy Ibis** sharing a rookery as **Wattled Jacana** and **Purple Gallinule** foraged below and **Amazon Kingfisher** sat poised for action. In the scrubby growth we found **Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Lance-tailed Manakin,** and **Golden-fronted Greenlets,** and some people also got to see **Scrub Greenlet** and **Yellow Warbler.** As we were rounding some farm buildings to leave, two **Gray-necked Wood-Rails** darted across the road in front of us.



Crested Caracara, juvenile



We headed back to the lodge, thrilled with our day of birding and basking in the pleasure this day had provided - 78 species seen today with an additional 3 species heard only.

Day 4, Tuesday, April 20: This morning we traded our bus for a group of rugged 4-wheel drive vehicles to visit the area known as Jordanal. As we were preparing to leave after breakfast, a **Sunbittern** was spotted on the creek that runs through the Canopy Lodge property, right next to the dining area. It flew a couple of times, providing views of the beautiful pattern on its wings, and stayed in view long enough for everyone to get a good look.

We divided ourselves into groups and piled into the 4WD trucks for the day's adventure. Driving up and down steep hills, through streams, and over rough rocks, it was easy to see why we left the bus back at the lodge. One of the first "new" birds encountered was a pair of **Long-tailed Tyrants.** They were much closer than I've seen them on past trips, and they stayed for quite awhile. Although the birds were cooperative, the backlighting did not allow for pristine shots.

We stopped shortly after 8:00 AM at a stream crossing and found several good birds. **Buff-rumped Warblers** foraged along the stream, and on the opposite side of the stream, a **Long-tailed Hermit** was working on its pendulous nest under a large heliconia leaf. **Violaceous Trogon** wowed the group. A bit further up the road we found **Barred Puffbird** and **Masked Tityra**. As we were watching a **White Hawk** circling above us, a wren song drew our attention. A handsome **Bay Wren** serenaded us as we snapped as many photos as we could while this normally elusive bird sat in the open.

While many of the 88 species sighted today were repeats of species we'd already seen on the first three days of the trip, we saw many new birds for the trip: **Plumbeous Kite**, **White-collared and Band-rumped Swifts**, **Rufous-breasted Hermit** (one of 10 species of hummingbirds seen today), **Spot-crowned Barbet**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner**, **Buff-throated Woodcreeper**, **Yellow-margined Flycatcher**, **Boat-billed and Gray-capped Flycatchers**, **Cinnamon and White-winged Becards**, **Tropical Gnatcatcher**, **Wood Thrush**, **Scarlet-thighed and Blue Dacnis**, **Fulvous-vented Euphonia**, **Black-headed Saltator**, **Blue-black Grosbeak**, and **Scarlet-rumped Cacique** were all seen in the Jordanal area today.



Broad-billed Motmot



Barred Puffbird

We returned to the lodge for lunch and a short rest, and then part of the group went to experience the nearby Canopy Adventure. A series of 4 platforms connected by zip lines, this was a first for most of the group. On the trail leading to the first platform, we saw **White-tipped Sicklebill** as it sat on its favorite perch beneath the Heliconias it feeds on. As we crested a hill, a pair of **Broad-billed Motmots** sat on a diagonal branch just a few feet in front of us. I had left my dslr with the 80-400 zoom lens in the van, thinking it would be unwise to have it with me on the zip line, so I had just my

pocket Lumix camera to take photos of these very cooperative birds. Our first **Emerald Toucanets** of the trip were also seen on the walk to the zipline platforms. Our list showed 88 species seen today with an additional 6 heard.

Day 5, Tuesday, April 21: Today we left early to travel to Altos del Maria, an area where higher altitude, milder weather, and new roads through forest provide excellent birding. New homes are being built in this private area, but there is still a lot of undeveloped forest and, because of the new roads, these forests are easily accessible. We left before dawn and arrived at Altos del Maria early. There was fog in the air as we started to bird, and we all felt quite cool in the damp early morning air. One of the target species for the day is **Snowcap**, and we were not disappointed. It appeared in the low growth along the side of the road while there was still fog in the air, shortly after we had stunning views of **Black-and-yellow Tanagers**, male and female. The male was eating a worm that was so large and so bright that it looked for all the world like one of the gummy worms my grandson likes to eat. The tanager's brilliant colors were somewhat muted by the mist in the air, but it was amazingly bright nonetheless.



Black-and-yellow Tanager

We walked along the paved street with hardly any interruptions due to traffic. **Ochraceous Wren, White-ruffed Manakin, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Long-billed Gnatwren,** and **Barred Forest Falcon** were all seen from the first part of the road as we walked slowly uphill. We took a side street where the pavement was not yet finished to a point where we could see Lake Gatun in the distance. At the entrance to a short nature trail that led into the forest, we saw **Slate-colored Grosbeak**. On the nature trail was Common **Tufted-Flycatcher, Slaty Antwren, and Spot-crowned Antvireo**. Near the end of the main road, where construction was evident, we spotted a **Band-tailed Barbthroat** preening itself at about eye level. As we watched and photographed this bird, we could hear **Common Bush-Tanagers** approach. We were all able to locate the small birds and see the bright white spot behind their eyes as they foraged in the bushes.

We enjoyed a box lunch at the end of one of the unfinished side roads, with chairs, a serving table, and delicious food provided by our guides. While we sat there, we found **Plain Wren**, which had previously only been heard by the group. **Blackburnian Warbler, White-vented Euphonia, Green Thorntail, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, and Orange-bellied Trogon** finished off our bird list for the afternoon. After visiting the model home and offices of the developer of Altos del Maria, we drove back to the Canopy Lodge with thoughts of what it would be like to live in such a magical place with

toucans, trogons and motmots as feeder birds and delightful temperatures all year long. Although we finished the day with just 69 species seen, our lowest daily count so far, we were all quite pleased with the day's birding.



Common Tufted-Flycatcher



Band-tailed Barbthroat

Day 6, Thursday, April 22: Today we said goodbye to the Canopy Lodge staff and guides and departed for the Canopy Tower, located a few hours away near Gamboa in the Canal Zone. We took the opportunity to take some final photos of the feeder birds and to take a short walk along the entrance road before loading into the bus to start Phase 2 of this incredible trip. We opted to walk the beginning of the Canopy Adventure Trail so that birders who had not seen the **White-tipped Sicklebill** on the day that some of us did the zipline would have the opportunity to see this unique little character. We didn't have to go far up the trail to the spot where the Sicklebill usually sat guarding his territory of Heliconia plants, and we didn't have to wait long before the star attraction flew in to land on his favorite perch. We saw many birds on our morning walk but added just a few new birds to the list before leaving: **Lesser Goldfinch, Black-faced Antthrush, and Black-throated Mango**. We saw Two-toed Sloth fairly low in a tree along the side of the road, the differences between the two species of sloth now becoming quite clear to us.



White-tipped Sicklebill

The Canopy Tower is located at a much lower elevation, we knew to expect warmer temperatures and were thrilled at the prospect of seeing a new set of birds.

As we approached the Gamboa area, people began to ask me about the beautiful flowering trees we were seeing. We were all taken back by the beauty and the number of these gorgeous yellow trees dotting every hillside in all directions. I said I had never seen these trees in bloom before, and we learned upon our arrival that the Guayacan trees are in full bloom each year for just a few days, and then the blooms disappear. Having never visited Panama in mid-April, I had never witnessed this spectacle. So impressed was Raul by the display of color, he arranged to have a helicopter fly over the tower to capture some photographs.



We were shown to our rooms and served lunch as soon as we arrived, and then had some time to rest before we went out for our afternoon birding. It took the staff a few minutes to tear us away from the hummingbird feeders, though! **White-necked Jacobins** and **Violet-bellied Hummingbirds** stood out among the more familiar hummers at the feeders with **Blue-chested Hummingbirds** perhaps the most abundant. **White-vented Plumeleteer** and **Long-tailed (aka Long-billed) Hermit** allowed much better views at the tower's feeders than we had previously enjoyed. Wasting no time, while the rest of us settled in and got some rest or spent time on the tower deck, Matt and Cathy walked down the entrance road on Semaphore Hill and found several interesting birds on their own, including **Red-capped Manakin**. Others went to the tower and saw **Swainson's Hawk** and **Mississippi Kites** (hundreds of them!) in migration and heard the Green **Shrike-Vireo** for the first of many times. Heard almost constantly but rarely seen as it forages among the treetops, the Green Shrike-Vireo's song reminds me of our Tufted Titmouse, which makes it easy for me to remember.



Cindy and Jim with the "Rainfo-mobile"

At around 3:00 PM we all piled into the back of the "Rainfo-mobile", a larger version of the "Birdmobile", and headed to the Ammo Dump Ponds for some afternoon birding. Just before leaving, I observed some nesting **Yellow-rumped**

Caciques near the parking lot. At the ponds we heard the **White-throated Crake** calling, but we were unable to find the bird among the tall grasses around the ponds. Among the herons and egrets at the wetland, we saw **Rufescent Tiger-Heron** and right in front of us was a **Sora**. In the tall grasses lining the road we found **Smooth-billed Ani** and on the wires overhead **Pale-vented Pigeon**. Sitting low in the open branches of a tree at the road's edge was a **Buff-breasted Wren**, and a **Black-crowned Tityra** came in close, landing on a tall fence post right above us. Some **Yellow-tailed Orioles** and a **Bronzed Cowbird** were seen in the fields beyond the security fence, and we also saw **Yellow-billed Cacique** going in and out of the pendulous nests hanging over the road.



Black-crowned tityra



Buff-breasted Wren

We returned to the Canopy Tower in time to complete our checklists before dinner, and retired early in preparation for the next day. We finished Day 6 with 95 species seen and an additional 4 heard only.

Day 7, Friday, April 23: We met on the observation deck at 6:00 AM to see what might be around before breakfast. Dozens of **Swainson's Hawks** soared overhead as the song of the ever-present Green Shrike-Vireo rang out. A **King Vulture** was spotted among the migrating raptors. **Geoffrey's Tamarin** came in to the Cecropia trees for a morning snack, delighting all with his presence. A **Green Honeycreeper** flitted about in the area where a **Blue Dacnis** nest was being tended by the female as the male foraged for food nearby. And, wonder of wonders, we actually got to SEE the **Green Shrike-Vireo!** Just as we were starting down the stairs for breakfast, a **Collared Aracari** flew in and landed in a tree at eye level. Most of us delayed breakfast to stay and watch the bird; as we were watching it, a **Scarlet Tanager** flew in nearby. A few of us couldn't tear ourselves away from such a stunning view of such a beautiful bird, so we stuck

around a bit longer to take even more photos of the aracari, the **Palm Tanagers** that were landing right next to us, and the **Blue Dacnis** on the nest. It was difficult to drag ourselves away from the observation deck, but we finally went down for breakfast knowing that another day of outstanding birding was ahead.



Green Honeycreeper



Collared Aracari



Keel-billed Toucan

After breakfast, we started walking down the entrance road, an excellent birding location that I had never had the privilege to bird since I had not stayed at the Canopy Tower on any of my previous trips. It's a good place to see some of the skulkers like antbirds and antpittas. We did not come across an ant swarm, but we did get good looks at **Dot-winged and Checker-throated Antwrens, Dusky and Spotted Antbirds, and Western Slaty and Fasciated Antshrikes**. A cooperative **Keel-billed Toucan** showed off its colors to us, not a new bird for the trip but exciting for us to see at such a short distance.

Several **Swainson's Thrushes** were spotted, along with a single **Gray-cheeked Thrush**. Other highlights included a **Mealy Parrot, Blue Cotinga, Cinnamon Woodpecker**, and one of my favorites, **Blue-crowned Manakin**. The group also got to see the **Red-capped Manakin** lek that Matt and Cathy had found yesterday and a Three-toed Sloth with a youngster. We saw many species at closer range or in better light than previously on the trip, including **Violaceous Trogon, Broad-billed Motmot, Plain Xenops, Squirrel Cuckoo, Tropical Gnatcatcher**, and more.

After lunch, we drove to Summit Gardens to visit the Harpy Eagle display and bird the grounds. The resident **Harpy Eagle** is missing some talons due to frostbite suffered in the northern US zoo where he once lived. We all marveled at the size of the talons and legs and the beauty of this magnificent bird, quietly hoping that we might see one in the wild rather than in an enclosure. Outside, **Short-tailed Swifts** darted about overhead as we listened to the song of the **Black-bellied Wren. Yellow-olive Flycatcher** and **Tropical Pewee** were among the many species of birds seen in the trees right outside the Harpy display building. We first heard, then saw, a **Black-throated Trogon**. As we walked a bit along the entrance road, we found **Plain-brown and Streak-headed Woodcreepers** foraging in the same trees. Nearby, Carlos pointed out some **Tent-making Bats** taking refuge under some enormous leaves that they had chewed to form a tent. At the rear of the property we saw a **Giant Cowbird** among the **Chestnut-headed Oropendolas**. In a grassy area we saw **Thick-billed (Lesser) Seed-Finch**.



Harpy Eagle, captive



Streak-headed Woodcreeper



Black-throated Trogon



Tent-making Bats

Following our checklist update (80 species today), we had a special dinner in the form of a scrumptious outdoor barbeque served on the roof of an outbuilding in front of the tower. Excellent food, great company! At around 8:00 PM, we were taken on a night drive in the Rainfo-mobile. We traveled down Semaphore Hill with our guide spotlighting as we moved slowly along. Highlights included **Two-toed Sloth** moving fairly quickly for a sloth, **Central American Woolly Opossum**, and **Western Night Monkey**. The best thing we witnessed, however, was a **Common Potoo** as it sang its mournful song from a branch a short distance from the vehicle. What a sound!



Central American Woolly Opossum



Night Monkeys

Day 8, Saturday, April 24: We started the morning with a visit to the world-famous Pipeline Road. Although we could not get a visual on them, we heard our first **Great and Little Tinamous** of the trip. One of the first new species seen this morning was **Red-lored (Yellow-cheeked) Parrot**, one of four parrot species seen on our first excursion to Pipeline Road.

Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts were plentiful enough in the parking area that most of us got good looks at the distinguishing field marks, most noticeably, of course, the tail. Going deeper into the forest, we spotted a pair of **White-whiskered Puffbirds** sitting quietly in a ravine. Unbothered by our presence, we enjoyed watching the pair from every angle, with each bird facing us straight on a few times, making it abundantly clear how they were named.

As we rounded a corner before entering the main part of Pipeline Road, we heard a **Black-bellied Wren** singing. This time we were able to locate the bird in the thicket, but we were drawn away from the first wren as Carlos directed our attention to the song of the Song Wren a bit further down the path. We watched as a group of **Song Wrens** lined up along a log at the edge of the path in plain view. The **White-breasted Wood-wren** was the only wren whose voice we heard but who we could not see today. As we walked down the old road that had been created so that workers could perform maintenance on the pipeline that was installed during World War II, we saw **Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, Black-tailed Flycatcher, White-necked Puffbird, Dusky-capped Tanager**, and some people saw **Gray-headed Tanager**, although I missed it. Carlos pointed out the songs or calls of **Bright-rumped Attila, Southern Bentbill, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, and Chestnut-mandibled Toucan**. While it's understandable to hear and not see the tiny Bentbill, we were becoming frustrated by our failure to find a Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, a species that is normally fairly common in the Canal Zone. But the most frustrating "heard but not seen" bird on today's list was undoubtedly the **Pheasant Cuckoo**. Carlos took us to a spot where he knew the elusive bird had been seen recently, and we immediately began hearing the call. We followed the sound off the trail, through an area where it sounded like the bird was right on



White-whiskered Puffbird, male



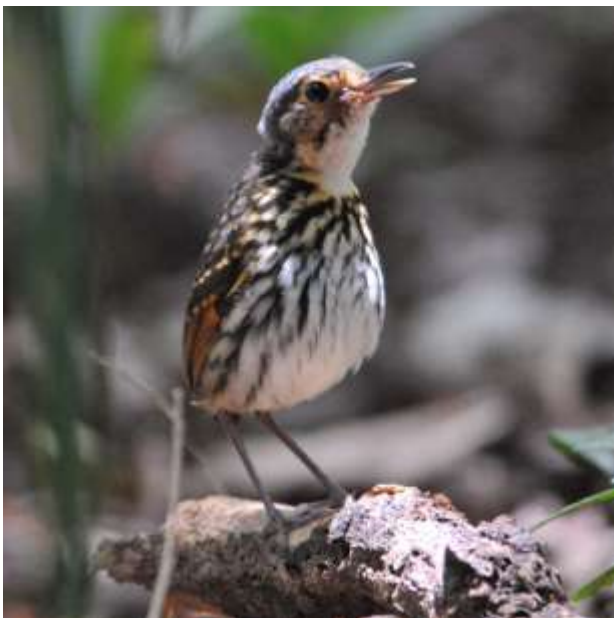
White-whiskered Puffbird, female

top of us. We had been searching in silence for quite awhile when another song caught Carlos's attention - a **Streak-chested Antpitta** (aka Spectacled Antpitta). This bird was much easier to locate, and we all enjoyed watching it puff up its chest and release its high pitched call for several minutes. Not a bad consolation prize! You can see a video of the calling bird on the following page of our website:

<http://www.cheepersbirding.com/canopy-tower-april-2011.html>

(Scroll down the page to the end of the description of activities for Day 5.)

The **White-bellied Antbird** that had eluded us at the beginning of the day was seen as it darted across the path in front of us. We were pleased to get excellent views of the tiny **Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant** perched on an overhead branch. At just 6.5 cm, this bird is the smallest passerine in its range. It's faint call can be confused with an insect or frog, so we owe this sighting completely to Carlos's expertise.



Streak-chested Antpitta



Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant

We returned to the Tower for lunch and enjoyed a midday rest to the sounds of a tropical thunder storm. When we left again at 3:00 PM to bird the area around the Chagres River, we all had our rain gear with us but not ON as it started to rain gently. Even a gentle rain can be uncomfortable when you're riding in the back of an open vehicle, so we all scrambled to cover ourselves until we reached our destination. We birded a bit in a sprinkle before the sky opened up and it started to pour in a torrent only possible in the tropical rain forest. We ran for shelter under a porch at an orchid farm and waited out the storm. As soon as the rain stopped, we started birding again, with a **Rosy Thrush-Tanager** the first bird seen. We had heard this species with Danilo and Moyo, but it had eluded us. This time, the bird was singing and preening as it dried off from the shower and we all got good looks. The rain didn't hold off for too long and we found ourselves running for cover again, but not before we had located a **Red-throated Ant-tanager**. This time the rain didn't last long and we enjoyed the rest of the afternoon with very little rain, arriving at the entrance road to the Canopy Tower until after 6:00 PM. Unfortunately, we had a flat tire and had to wait to proceed up the hill, but by now the weather was clear and we didn't mind. Some members of the group decided to walk up Semaphore Hill to bird along the way, but they quickly realized the uphill walk was more difficult than they first thought and gladly accepted a ride when we caught up to them on the road. In spite of the rain, we finished the day with 85 species (71 seen and 14 heard).

Day 9, Sunday, April 25: We started off the morning like every other, with some time on the observation deck of the Canopy Tower. Even when there are no birds to be readily seen, the views and the possibility of just about anything landing right in front of you make the time spent there go very quickly. This morning we were treated to stunning views of a **Cinnamon Woodpecker** just a few feet from the deck's railing. We all enjoyed watching the bird as it sang and foraged and preened, and we also enjoyed watching the **Blue Dacnis** as the male took food to the female on the nest. I took dozens of photos with my D300 and Carlos got some shots through the scope with my small Lumix.



Cinnamon woodpecker

As everyone was descending the steps for breakfast in the dining room below, I commented to Cathy that the dried-up Cecropia leaf in front of us almost looked like an animal. To our surprise, the "dried-up leaf" moved, and there was a Three-toed sloth peering up at us!



Three-toed Sloth



Spectacled owl

After breakfast, we drove to Summit Ponds. Workers from the nearby Police Academy were clearing the vegetation on the sides of the road that led back to the ponds, so we didn't see as many birds along that stretch of road as we might have otherwise. When we got to the ponds, there were more workers there, and unfortunately there was a lot of loud music playing as we tried to find birds near the ponds. We managed to find the resident **Boat-billed Heron** in the thick vegetation around the north pond. Three species of **Kingfisher** were present, **Ringed** (new for the trip), **Amazon**, and **Green**. We picked out the **Mangrove Swallows** as they swooped over the ponds with other swallow species. After a short time, we walked down Old Gamboa Road, once the main road between Gamboa and Panama City.

As we walked, we found many species previously seen, but Carlos had two very special species in mind for us today. The first was a pair of **Spectacled Owls** that have been reliable along Old Gamboa Road for many years. The first time I visited this spot back in 2003, the owls could be seen from the road. Over the years, the number of birders combined with other hikers and now the construction work associated with building the new locks for the Panama Canal, have caused the birds to retreat further into the forest. Still reliable, you just have to hunt a little harder to find them.

After seeing the owls, Carlos led us to another spot off the main path where we saw some makeshift markers, a sure sign that another guide or other birders had seen something special here. Carlos was a little vague at first about what we were hoping to find, but after awhile he told us that a **Rufous Nightjar** was nesting there. Perfectly camouflaged on the forest floor, this is a bird that is nearly impossible to find. After many minutes of searching, we gave up and continued down the road. We observed **Gray-headed Kite** overhead, **Greater Ani** in some of the brushy spots, and **Jet Antbird** in

the undergrowth. On our way back to the ponds, we were fortunate to see two species of woodpecker in the same dead tree - a male and female **Lineated** seemed to be challenging a male and female **Crimson-crested Woodpecker** for ownership of the tree. It was an unusual opportunity to compare the field marks of the males with the females, as well as both sexes of the two different species. When we approached the spot where the **Rufous Nightjar** was supposed to be nesting, Carlos wanted to try one more time to find the bird. This time, after a few minutes of searching, Carlos found the bird among the dried leaves that seemed to match its feathers perfectly. It took a few minutes to get everyone on the well-camouflaged nightjar, and then on closer inspection, as Carlos was trying to get some photographs, he saw a fuzzy white chick next to the adult. Astounding!



Rufous Nightjar with chick

We returned to the Canopy Tower for lunch and a brief rest, and then drove to the Gamboa Marina for some afternoon birding. There, between showers, we saw **Striated Heron, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Snail Kite, Purple Gallinule, Common Moorhen, Limpkin, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow Tyrannulet, Lesser Kiskadee, Gray Catbird, and Lesser Greenlet**. We heard but could not find **Black-headed Tody-flycatcher**. **Gray-necked Wood-Rail** was seen in transit.

As we were driving home, Carlos got a call from someone alerting him to a special bird. Just as we reached the road that led up Semaphore Hill and back to the Canopy Tower, he pulled over and pointed out a **Great Potoo** in a tree alongside the road. What a perfect finish to a great day! 86 species were seen today with an additional 9 species heard only and one species, the **Blue Ground Dove**, seen only by Carlos.

Day 10, Monday, April 26: Scheduled today is our full day on Pipeline Road, where traveling via the Rainfo-mobile will allow us to bird on stretches of the road that I've never seen on any of my four previous trips to Panama. The group opted to pay an extra fee to visit the new Rain Forest Discovery Center, so we left early and were on the recently-built

tower shortly after sunrise. On the way to the RFDC tower, we saw **Southern Bentbill** and **Purple-throated Fruitcrow**. From our vantage point above the canopy, some 100 feet above the forest floor, we saw **Chestnut-mandibled Toucan** (finally!), **Black-breasted Puffbird**, **White-tailed Trogon**, **Short-billed Pigeon**, and **Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet**. We descended from the tower after about an hour and a half and went to view hummingbirds at the Rain Forest Discovery Center's Visitors' Center. We had already seen most of the hummingbird species that were present, but nonetheless enjoyed the spectacle at the feeders and added **Purple-crowned Fairy** to our list. After restroom breaks and some souvenir shopping, we went on to bird Pipeline Road. Pipeline Road is known for the occurrence of Army Ant swarms, which in turn scare up insects that dozens of species of birds come to feast upon. We were very fortunate to run into a couple of antswarms, the first one attracting a small group of birds that included **Bicolored Antbird**, **Spotted Antbirds**, and **Gray-headed Tanagers**, among others.



Spotted Antbird, male and female

Our sighting of **Black-tailed Trogon** gave us a sweep of all six of the Trogon species possible in Panama. We had another nice lunch in the field, and shortly after the rain returned, again in torrents. We stood under leaves, umbrellas, ponchos, anything we could find to shelter us from the downpour until it eased up a bit, and then continued birding Pipeline Road. We added a few new birds to our list, including **Moustached (Pygmy) And White-flanked Antwrens**, **Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher**, **Bright-rumped Attila**, and **Rufous Mourner**. We worked hard to see **Brownish Twistwing (Flycatcher)** but in the end all we saw was a flash of brown as it shot across the path at something near the speed of a bullet. **Thrush-like Schiffornis (Mourner)** was another new species and we also saw **White-winged Becard** for the second time this trip. By now, the rain was starting to fall again, and we decided we should head back to the Canopy Tower. As we drove, the rain stopped completely, and we asked Carlos to continue birding. He took us to a private area near the Gamboa Rainforest Resort where we found **Little Tinamou**, **Black-striped Woodpecker**, **Great Antshrike**, **Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher**, **Cinnamon Becard**, **Eastern Wood-Pewee**, and **White-breasted Wood-Wren**. We finished this rainy day with an impressive 122 species seen and another 13 heard only for a total of 135 species - our biggest day of the trip!

Day 11, Tuesday, April 27: We birded Plantation Trail in the morning, finding it very quiet compared to yesterday's birdy day on Pipeline Road. We spotted just 46 species this morning, with **Olivaceous Woodcreeper** the only species new for the trip. After lunch at the Canopy Tower, we visited the museum and Visitors' Center at Miraflores Locks. Everyone enjoyed learning a bit about the history of the canal and watching the huge ships go through the locks. We didn't stop birding as we visited the canal, and saw several birds including **Purple Martin**, which was new for the trip. We enjoyed our final dinner at the Canopy Tower and spent some time taking some last photos and saying our goodbyes to each other. We all agreed that we'd like to bird together again someday and discussed some of the possibilities, and then went to our rooms to prepare for our departure tomorrow morning.

Day 12, Wednesday, April 28: Transportation was provided to each person according to individual airline schedules, with Sarah, Jim, and I leaving at 4:30 in the morning. All of our birding friends from New York were on the same flight and were taken to the airport after an early breakfast.



Birding in the rain on Pipeline Road