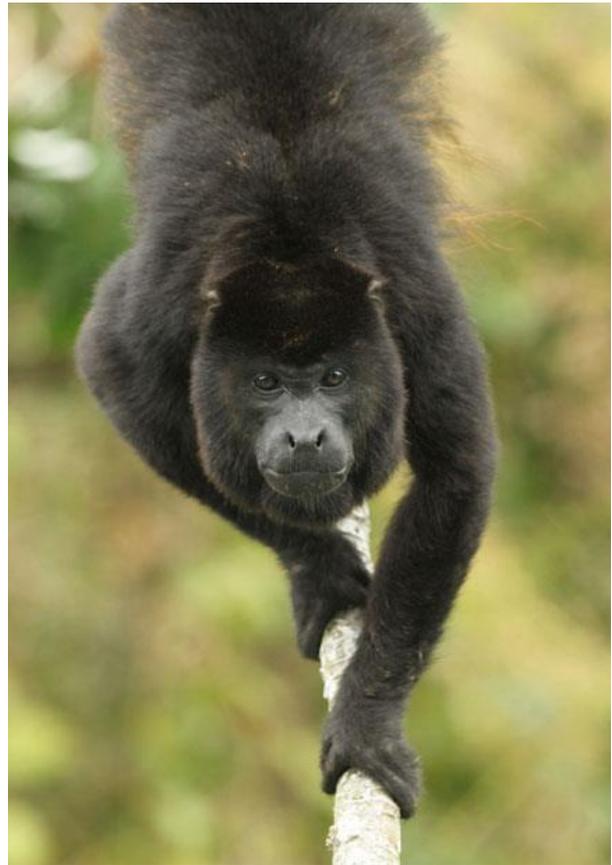


Panama Birding & Nature | Trip Report

January 14 – 23, 2018 | Written by Pat Lueders

With Guide Pat Lueders
and participants Linda,
Don, Judy, Craig, Mark,
and Dick



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Sun., Jan. 14 Arrival in Panama City | Evening at Riande Airport Hotel

Everyone in the group was very excited to leave the harsh US winter and arrive in Panama City to a sunny 80 degrees. The welcoming Riande Airport Hotel was the perfect place to relax and enjoy some of the beautiful resident birds of Panama before our adventure began. Poolside, we enjoyed vocalizing Tropical Kingbirds, Blue-gray Tanagers, White-tipped Dove, the cute Common Tody-Flycatcher nest building, and a vocal Garden Emerald. Our welcoming dinner gave us the opportunity to become acquainted before we left for the famous Canopy Tower in the morning.

Mon., Jan. 15 Visit to Panama Viejo en Route to Canopy Tower

Our van stopped at Panama Viejo flats at low tide on the outskirts of Panama City to give us scope looks at many shorebirds and waders feeding on the mud. We were excited to have our only look at a Cocoi Heron roosting in the mangroves. A Wood Stork flew by as we viewed Little Blue Heron, Great Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, and White and Brown Pelicans. Shorebirds included a number of Whimbrels, Willets, Southern Lapwings, Spotted Sandpipers, and a Collared Plover. Above us in a tree on the shore, we were thrilled to see a Mangrove Warbler, a life subspecies for many.

After this successful start, we left bustling Panama City and wound our way into the tropical jungle to the Canopy Tower, our home for the next five days. After lunch, with our first visit by a Geoffroy's

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Tamarin family, we traveled in the bird-mobile to the Ammo Ponds, getting our first view of the Panama Canal at the site of the world famous Titan Crane. Magnificent Frigatebirds circled above the canal as we heard White-throated Crakes, and finally got looks at one of these furtive species. A Rufescent Tiger-Heron posed close by for great pictures, and we had our first Smooth-billed Anis, Squirrel Cuckoo, Wattled Jacana, Barred Antshrike, Lesser Kiskadee, and a visit from a very friendly Isthmian Wren. Our Canopy guide, Elieser, heard a key species for this location, the Yellow-tailed Oriole, and we got close looks at a pair. One highlight of this excursion was a pair of Keel-billed Toucans battling with a pair of Yellow-throated Toucans for food in a fruiting tree! During our delicious dinner and checklist session, we all marveled at what an exciting first day this had been!

Tues., Jan. 16

World Famous Pipeline Road & Summit Ponds | Night Drive

We got an early start this morning to visit the world-famous Pipeline Road, and we weren't disappointed! Elieser heard a Little Tinamou and with a short stake-out we got views and pictures of this secretive species. In this same area, we found our first Broad-billed Motmot, Yellow-backed Oriole, and beautiful Cinnamon Woodpeckers. As we walked the road, the number of species swirling around us included all four trogon species, all three motmot species, Black-crowned Antshrike; Checker-throated, White-flanked, and Dot-winged Antwrens; Bicolored and Spotted Antbirds, and three woodcreeper

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species. Our heads were spinning! As we left, Elieser treated us to a roosting Great Potoo, Brown-throated Three-Toed Sloth, and Mantled Howler Monkeys along the trail. Wow!

After lunch and a short rest, we returned to the bird-mobile for a short ride to the Summit Ponds and trail. The chatter of Orange-chinned Parakeets greeted us as we arrived, and a fruiting tree was loaded with birds including Blue Dacnis, Red-legged Honeycreepers, Green Honeycreepers, and Golden-collared Manakin. What a cacophony of color! As we watched the pond for American Pygmy, Amazon, and Ringed Kingfishers, a Tiny Hawk that was chasing one of them landed a few feet from us. One of those National Geographic moments! We heard the beautiful Blue Cotinga but failed to find it. We did, however, find so many other colorful species including the Lance-tailed Manakin, Black-chested Jay, and Golden-hooded and Crimson-backed Tanagers.

After dinner, a banana enticed a Central American Woolly Opossum to come near the dining room window, providing an unusually close view of this nocturnal mammal. We took a short night drive down Semaphore Road seeing other nocturnal mammals including the Two-Toed Sloth, Allen's Olingo, White-nosed Coati, Night Monkeys, and a Kinkajou. We slept soundly even with Howler Monkeys loudly vocalizing in the distance.



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Wed., Jan. 17

Chagres River Cruise | Canal Lake Gatun | Semaphore Road

We enjoyed our morning coffee birding from the top of the Tower as the sun climbed over the jungle and the canal. The whistle of the Great Tinamou was close, and the Red-lored, Mealy, and Blue-headed Parrots were seen feeding in pairs at the treetops. The constant song of the Green Shrike-Vireo was tempting, and we finally saw this challenging green bird in green trees. The Tropical Gnatcatchers and Lesser Greenlets also signaled their locations. Coffee never tasted so good!

Our destination today was the Chagres River and the Panama Canal's Lake Gatun. We boarded our covered boat for the cruise, and the captain expertly hugged the shore for views of Purple and Common Gallinule, Wattled Jacana, Piratic and Rusty-margined Flycatchers, a nesting Social Flycatcher, and nest building Yellow-rumped Caciques. What a relaxing way to bird!

We continued out into the canal and felt very small compared to the huge container ships taking their turns in the canal. We turned off the main channel into a series of islands, and our captain heard White-faced Capuchins that came close to our boat out of curiosity. Many Snail Kites, adults and juveniles, were feeding in the area, oblivious to our presence. Limpkin and Greater Ani also were feeding on these protected islands that served as a sanctuary for many birds.

After lunch and a short break, we birded the Semaphore Hill Road that led to the Canopy Tower. Elieser heard our first puff birds, and we found the Black-breasted Puffbird sitting quietly. A White-breasted Wood-Wren, normally heard and seldom seen, led us away from his nest and down the road. A surprise Double-toothed Kite was sitting in clear view over the road, showing why he has that name. The diminutive Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher and Olivaceous Flatbill were seen by all. We quietly strayed off the road to see two Night Monkeys roosting in their tree cavity, which resulted in the first of our nightly reports at the checklist, this one by Pat on the world populations of Night Monkeys.

Thurs., Jan. 18 Trip to Colon | Achote Road | Fort San Lorenzo | Panama Canal Railroad

This morning we left early to travel to Colon, located on the Caribbean Sea and the north entrance to the canal. We crossed the newly opened gate and saw up close the huge ships moving through the canal. The frequent rain had caused tremendous amounts of water to be released at the dam, so unusual that local residents were taking pictures of this unprecedented release. Red-breasted Meadowlarks and an American Kestrel were found in this area. We started to bird Achote Road and luckily saw a few of our key birds, including Spot-crowned Barbet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Pied Puffbird, Masked Tityra, and Black-bellied Wren before the sky opened with torrential rain. A charming town we drove through featured many puzzling swan yard fixtures and very colorfully painted homes.

Lunch at the marina got us out of the rain, and we spotted a Common Black Hawk being mobbed by Fork-tailed Flycatchers. When we arrived at Fort San Lorenzo, the rain had stopped, and we toured the newly renovated area around the ruins. A sleeping Three-Toed Sloth stimulated questions by Judy, and she volunteered to do the next evening report on the life of sloths. On the drive back, Elieser spotted a White-necked Puffbird on a wire for all to see.

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The Panama Canal Railroad, so crucial to the success of building of the canal, still operates between Colon and Panama City, and we returned to the city in the comfort of the lounge car, the perfect ending to a memorable day!

Fri., Jan. 19

Plantation Road | Journey to the Canopy Lodge | Camp Adventure Road

Our last morning at the Tower was spent birding during coffee at the top. Two Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrants were seen busily feeding in a blooming tree as were three males and one female Red-capped Manakins. A Violet-capped Hummingbird made a quick appearance, and a male and female Blue Dacnis caused excitement among the birders.

After breakfast, we walked the Plantation Trail at the entrance to the Tower's Semaphore Road. The elusive Crimson-crested Woodpecker was heard, and Mark found it behind us for close looks. On our last morning we found some new species, including Orange-billed Sparrow and Golden-crowned Spadebill. Sadly, our stay at the Lodge had ended, and we traveled the Pan American Highway over the Centennial Bridge to our new location, the Canopy Lodge. During our drive, Elieser spotted a perched Pearl Kite on a wire and a soaring Short-tailed Hawk.

We drove through the lovely town of El Valle, arriving at the Lodge in time for our first of many delicious meals. After spending time watching birds at the fruit feeders, seeing Spot-crowned Barbet, Red-

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crowned Woodpeckers, Flame-rumped (Lemon-rumped) Tanagers, Gray-headed Chachalacas, and Crimson-collared Tanagers, we took our first walk up the Adventure Road to the Camp Adventure area.

As we began, our Lodge guide, Tino, spotted for us a male and female Green Thorntail feeding in a flowering tree. Along the road we found an Olive-striped Flycatcher, Social Flycatchers, and a mixed flock of warblers including Tennessee, Bay-breasted, and Yellow. At the compost pile, we got great views of the vocal Buff-throated Saltator, a Panama resident. We walked up to the waterfall, which was raging from the recent rains. Dusky-faced Tanagers were very vocal near the entrance, and we also found perched our first Lesson's Motmot, White-vented Plumeleteer and Crowned Woodnymph.

With such a great beginning to our visit to the Canopy Lodge, we excitedly settled into our comfortable new surroundings after a delicious dinner and an interesting report from Judy on the lives of sloths.

Sat., Jan. 20 Birding La Mesa | Las Minas | Cara Iguana

What a treat to enjoy breakfast on the open patio of the Canopy Lodge! Today we were walking some of the best birding trails in the El Valle area. Our first stop was along the road where we found a perched Gray-headed Kite; Lineated, Black-cheeked and Red-crowned Woodpeckers; Paltry Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Becard, Black-headed Saltator, and a large flock of mixed warblers. We didn't know which direction to look there were so many birds! At the entrance to La Mesa Road, we found a fruiting tree filled with a mixed flock of tanagers, including Golden-hooded, Plain-colored, Bay-headed, Silver-throated, Tawny-crested, and four of the rarer Emerald Tanager. Joining them were White-ruffed Manakin, Tawny-capped Euphonia, and Yellow-faced Grassquits, and a Black-striped Sparrow on the

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ground. Wow, what a treat! We stayed there and watched for quite a while as the large variety of colorful species came and went.

Walking down the road, we got a fleeting glimpse of one of our target birds, the Northern Emerald-Toucanet. We did have good looks at the Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Checker-throated Antwren and the Russet Antshrike.

As we returned to the van, Tino spotted a Northern Emerald-Toucanet along the road, low in a tree feeding on fruit for great looks and pictures! Success!

After lunch and a short rest, we traveled back through El Valle to bird the Cara Iguana Road. We walked a short distance to find a roosting Spectacled Owl that had nested in this area for the last three years. Before showers chased us from the area, we found two Yellow-crowned Euphonias and a Summer Tanager. On our return, we passed the Lodge and continued up the road to a roosting site of Tropical Screech-Owls and found two nestled close to each other near the tree trunk.

After dinner, we settled down to do the checklist when Tino spotted a Mottled Owl behind us on a birdfeeder. We got quick looks before it left to go hunting. Wow, a three owl day! After the checklist, Mark delivered an informative report on chiggers, which we had been avoiding by using powdered sulfur on our pants and boots.

Sun., Jan. 21 El Valle Market | El Nispiro Zoo | Mata Ahogado

The feeders were busy this morning with White-tipped Doves, Rufous Motmots, Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Clay-colored Thrush, Flame-rumped Tanagers, Thick-billed Euphonias, and Chestnut-headed Oropendolas all enjoying their breakfast. This morning we visited the large fruit, vegetable, and

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craft market in downtown El Valle. The selection of items available was expansive, and handcrafted souvenirs were popular.

Next we visited the local El Nispero Zoo and Garden, which houses the Golden Frog exhibit, thought to be extinct in the wild in Panama. Also very good for birding, we were thrilled when we found a bank of flowering bushes with a variety of birds including Rufous-crested Coquette, White-necked Jacobin, Garden Emerald, Snowy-bellied and Blue-chested Hummingbirds. Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Plain Xenops, and Rusty-margined Flycatchers enjoyed the large variety of plants in the garden. A walk down the road produced good looks at a Long-billed Gnatwren, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Rufous-breasted Wren.

We returned to the Lodge for another delicious meal and relaxed on the grounds. Unexpectedly, Tino found a Sunbittern feeding in the river, moving from rock to rock. Those that were luckily still on the patio watched this rare and secretive species work his way up the river. What a treat!

Our afternoon trip was to Camino a Mata Ahogado, a road near El Valle. The rain had followed us, but we heard and had quick glimpses of a Tody Motmot and Rosy Thrush-Tanagers. On our return to the Lodge, Linda spotted a Green Kingfisher on an overhanging branch; and four, colorful Collared Aracaris were enjoying fruit on the feeders.

At the frog exhibit today, Dick asked what the difference was between toads and frogs, resulting in his clever report after the checklist. Good job, Dick!

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Mon., Jan. 22 Cerro Gaital | Rio Indio | Valle Chiquito

We traveled to Cerro Gaital today (our final day), a protected natural area. Our first new species was the diminutive Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant followed by the Tawny-faced Gnatwren. The rain had stopped, so many of the ant birds are busy feeding, including Plain and Spot-crowned Antwren, and Dot-winged Antwren. A mixed flock of our U.S warblers included the beautiful Golden-winged Warbler. During our walk along the road, we heard the vocal Black-faced Antthrush and achieved great looks at this previously elusive bird. We also found a male and female Red-crowned Ant-Tanager and a very cooperative Broad-billed Motmot perched to dry off.

After lunch, Linda and I spotted a Silver-throated Tanager on the feeder, and we later discover this was a new first for the feeder cam. We spent our last afternoon at the Valle Chiquito Road hoping to find a few species previously heard, but not seen. A number of Rosy Thrush-Tanagers were vocalizing, but didn't show themselves. We did find Sepia-capped and Olive-stripped Flycatchers. Tino knew of one last stop for the Tody Motmot on the return to El Valle. Along the busy road, we heard one vocalize, and Tino expertly found this bird for us all to see! Success!

We sadly had our last dinner and checklist for our visit to the Canopy Lodge tonight. Don delivered our last report, on Central American pine trees, stimulated by our sightings of pine trees in El Valle.

Tues., Jan. 23 Departure to Panama City for the US & Costa Rica

We enjoyed our last breakfast and morning at the feeders before leaving to return to Panama City. Some of us were returning to the U.S. and some continued their travels to Costa Rica. We all agreed that this congenial, friendly group of strangers developed into a group of friends that had a wonderful vacation in Panama and will hopefully meet again on future travels!

Photo Credits: Black Howler Monkey, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Black-throated Trogon, NJS; Canopy Tower, Janice Petko; Three-toed Sloth, PA (Peg Abbott); Geoffroy's Tamarin, Howard Topoff; Collared Aracari, NJS; All other photos by Pat Lueders with the exception of the Spectacled Owl by Dick Voelker.