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Panama: March 17 to April 5, 2009 Trip Log

Log by Jim Danzenbaker
 All photos by Bill Page

Disclaimer: This trip log has been written from my experience. Your actual notes may differ. Any errors are mine alone. – *Jim Danzenbaker*



March 17 - 20	Canopy Tower – Gamboa
March 21 - 24	Canopy Lodge – El Valle
March 25 - 28	Los Quetzales – Cerro Punte-Volcan
March 29 -30	Finca Lerida – Boquete
March 31 - April 1	Centre Nattur– Colon
April 2 - 5	Casa de Campo – Cerro Azul/Cerro Jefe

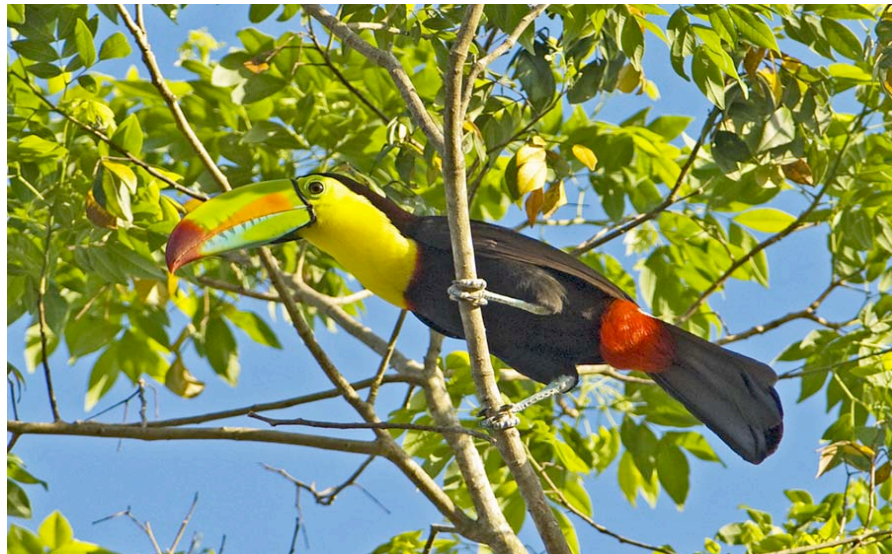
March 17 Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to Canopy Tower:

For many, a diurnal arrival at Panama City's Tocumen International Airport and an introduction to why this tour was designed to avoid Panama City – the transfer to the Canopy Tower was not without traffic jams, honking horns and creative driving. Thankfully, Bill's missing baggage appeared at the 11th hour. We breathed a sigh of relief as we entered the Canopy Tower for the first time. Rooms secured and welcome drinks a pleasant sight, we headed to the observation deck to see the surrounding countryside and a few of the local birds – a Short-tailed Hawk, Mississippi Kite, and Swainson's Hawk and groups of Short-tailed and Band-rumped Swifts hawking insects. However, nothing could keep us from happy hour and dinner – the first of many belly filling meals which would be a staple for the next three weeks. Pam, Penelope, Sue and Russ all arrived later in the evening and enjoyed dinner and an introduction to the Canopy Tower.

March 18: Canopy Tower, Semaphore Hill and Ammunition Ponds

An early morning wake-up call to greet the dawn on the observation deck at the Tower. Soon, birds were presenting themselves: a raucous group of Red-lore Parrots, Keel-billed Toucans (aptly named flying bananas) and Scaled Pigeons, which dotted far-off treetops. Soon, the tu-tu of one of the hallmark birds of the tower was heard... but would we be able to find it? Cheesemans karma was working for us and we had prolonged excellent views of a Green Shrike-Vireo, a bright green bird with yellow throat and hooked bill and a master at the art of avoiding binoculars. A fantastic start to the trip considering this was the only one we saw

although its piercing call was a virtual constant in the forest canopy. Further study of far off treetops yielded a female Blue Cotinga, Mealy Parrots, and more toucans. Blue Dacnis and Chestnut-sided Warblers searched for food in the nearby trees. After breakfast, we walked down Semaphore Hill and encountered some of



Many Keel-billed Toucans ("Flying Banana") were seen at or near the Canopy Tower.

the avian denizens of the forest – churring Western Slaty

Antshrikes, displaying Red-capped Manakin, a Slate-colored Grosbeak that chipped like a Northern Cardinal, numerous Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, a cooperative Black-throated

Trogon, diminutive Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher and Long-billed Gnatwrens, Agoutis and coatimundis, 3-toed Sloth, 2 toed Sloth and the first of many migrant warblers returning to their breeding grounds in North America. The first of many kettles of northbound raptors rode unseen overhead thermals. Lunch was brought out on our return to the Tower and we ate like we hadn't eaten all day. Some decided to stay at the Tower in the early afternoon while others bucked the tide of good reason and walked down the Hill and searched for mid-afternoon bird flocks. We were rewarded with a flock that held our first antwrens, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Blue-black Grosbeaks, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Cocoa Woodcreeper, and many White-shouldered Tanagers. The others were entertained by Violet-bellied Hummingbirds and White-necked Jacobins at the feeders and Scarlet-rumped Caciques commuting to their nest overhanging the parking lot. We ventured out later in the afternoon to the Ammo Ponds, a quick 20 minute ride on "El Tinamou" our Birdmobile (don't forget to chain the door!). Situated close to the impressive Panama Canal and our first water birding, new birds were everywhere and soon we were watching Rufescent Tiger-Heron on a nest (nido), Black-throated Mango on a nest, Lesser Kiskadees, Wattled Jacanas with young, another female Blue Cotinga, Black-striped Sparrows, Yellow-tailed Orioles, and so much more. A White-throated Crake was glimpsed by a few while others watched Gray-breasted Martins, Clay-colored Robins, Buff-throated Saltators, stunning Crimson-backed Tanagers, and Golden-fronted Greenlets. On our way back to the Tower, we found a Fork-tailed Flycatcher near the bridge which we saw most every day in that area and we glimpsed a Yellow-headed Caracara and Roadside Hawk. A great introduction to the world of Panama birds! Dinner, once again, was delicious and we all realized that our waistlines were in serious jeopardy of expanding if we didn't walk up Semaphor Hill three times daily.

March 19: Canopy Tower: Pipeline Road

An early morning start (a surprise?) and coffee and breakfast. Our day would be spent on Pipeline Road, world famous neo-tropical lowland rainforest birding road and home to numerous species of birds and mammals. Birding started early and we soon were face to face with Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Rufous Mourner, Cinnamon and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Panama Flycatcher, and White-winged Becard. Our entry to Pipeline Road was followed moments later by scope views of White-necked Puffbird, Black-striped Woodcreeper, and Slaty-tailed Trogon. A brief walk into the woods yielded a secretive Spectacled Antpitta that Carlos skillfully lured into scope view and several Yellow-backed Orioles that sang from the surrounding vegetation. Later, a Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, one of the neo-tropics smallest birds, played hide and seek with prying eyes while a Tiny Hawk hunkered down on its nest but not before all saw its head and leering eyes! A roosting Common Potoo, more Slaty-tailed Trogons, a cooperative Fasciated Antshrike and scopable Spot-crowned Antvireos rounded out a beautiful morning. Lunch back at El Tinamou with table and raincoat tablecloth and delicious build it yourself sandwiches and coffeecake and drinks. Who said birding in the tropics was uncomfortable! Our afternoon walk had us glimpsing Blue-crowned Manakins, a family group of Song Wrens, and a



*The Spectacled Antpitta (legged egg)
was skillfully lured into view by
Carlos.*

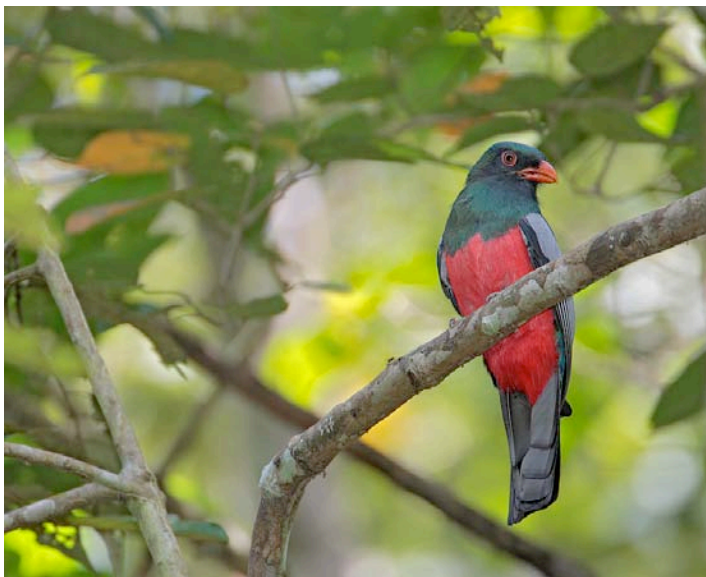
Bicolored Antbird. Several Mantle Howler Monkeys watched us from their arboreal perches. Late in the afternoon we returned to the Tower and evening raptor watching which included many Swainson's and Broad-wing Hawks and 250 Mississippi Kites flying west with Panama City as a background. Another beautiful day in Panama! Dinner, as always, really hit the spot.

March 20: Canopy Tower: Old Gamboa Road, Semaphore Hill and Plantation Road



A river of raptors rode unseen thermals.

This morning, we loaded up in El Tinamou and ventured to Old Gamboa Road and Summit Ponds for some memorable birding. Our first stop had us rapidly pointing our colorful northbound migrants, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Baltimore Orioles, Yellow and Bay-breasted Warblers, and Indigo Buntings. However, Forest Eleanias, Boat-billed Flycatchers, Streaked Flycatchers, and Yellow-rumped Caciques didn't go unnoticed. At the Summit Ponds (aka Police Academy Ponds) – our attention was diverted to Boat-billed Herons, Amazon and Green Kingfisher, Greater Anis, and a river of raptors which kettled overhead. Carlos took us to see a roosting Spectacled Owl amid huge stands of bamboo and a Golden-collared Manakin, which stuck its head out of a researcher's hand. A Jet Antbird was lured to the edge of the road as we sidestepped holes and likely chigger spots. Many birds vied for our attention but the clock urged our return to the Tower for another delicious lunch. Those with sense stayed at the Tower to photograph hummingbirds while the rest of us ventured down Semaphore Hill again for a hoped for return visit to the local bird flock. We were lucky to find a Black-bellied Wren, Cocoa Woodcreeper and many Checker-throated, Dot-winged and White-flanked Antwrens. A chance look upwards had us studying a diurnal roosting Lesser Tamandua, a mammal highlight



Slaty-tailed Trogon was one of many beautiful species seen in the lowlands.

which we hoped to show the rest of the group. However, we didn't have a chance to stay with it for long as the others had found our much sought after army ant swarm up the hill. We ran uphill (thus motoring through at least one meal), and we were soon studying at leisure Ocellated, Bicolored, and Spotted Antbirds, a Black-faced Antthrush, Northern Barred and Plain-brown Woodcreepers and a White-breasted Wood-Wren! To me, an army ant swarm is one of the most exciting avian spectacles to watch in the neotropics and we were fortunate to be able to study them from the blacktop of the road. Careful ground surveillance, however, was needed to ensure that the

army ants were kept at a safe distance. We were too late to visit Summit Gardens and the Harpy Eagle but our consolation prize was a visit to Plantation Road where we were rewarded with a stunning White Hawk in the scope, a pair of beautifully cooperative Sunbitterns that perched on an exposed eye level branch and a troop of White-faced Capuchins. A Nine-banded Armadillo foraged in the leaf litter. We beat a retreat to the Tower where we enjoyed a delicious farewell barbecue dinner with wine and stories and memories revisited. Afterwards, we loaded up El Tinamou and enjoyed a night ride down the hill with Choco Screech-Owl, both sloths, the elusive Olingo, and Common Opossum being found by Carlos and the ever piercing flashlight.

March 21: Canopy Tower and transfer to Canopy Lodge

We had decided earlier to return to Pipeline Road and visit the Rainforest Canopy Tower. Our efforts were rewarded with a Semiplumbeous Hawk, Great Black-Hawk, and male Blue Cotingas greeting the dawn and a White-tailed Trogon, Purple-throated Fruitcrows, Blue Dacnis, Chimney Swifts, Lineated and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers and hoards of flying bananas sharing the canopy with us. A Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher nest was at the base of the tower for those catching up on birds previously missed Snacks at the visitor center among a hoard of hummers which included Western Long-tailed Hermit, Blue-chested, Rufous-tailed, Violet-bellied Hummers, White-necked Jacobin, White-vented Plumeleteer, and a Cinnamon Becard. Wear your hardhat and be prepared to duck! A 10:30 departure and ride to Canopy Lodge in a vehicle with windows and a door! We arrived at the Canopy Lodge in time for noon lunch and feeder watching. Thick-billed Euphonias were, well, thick, and four species of tanagers vied for tray space with saltators, honeycreepers, oropendolas and banana eating Tennessee Warblers. A photographer's dream! Snowy-bellied and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds fed in the surrounding vervaine. An afternoon walk up the road had us pitted against our first non-responsive Tody Motmots. However, a pair of roosting Mottled Owls made up for it. A Golden-winged Warbler, Dusky Antbird, and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager were but a taste of the avian treats awaiting us in El Valle, the Canopy Lodge and the surrounding area. Dinner was once again, a delicious way to end the day!



One of a pair of Mottled Owls at a diurnal roost near the Canopy Lodge.



Bay-headed Tanagers added more color to the forest.

March 22: Canopy Lodge: La Mesa and Cerro Gaital Trail

An early wake-up to breakfast with the feeder birds before our departure to La Mesa. A bumpy ride in our four wheel

drive vehicles to our appointment with an army ant swarm and hoped for antbirds and other swarm followers. We saw the tree that housed the army ants and we saw the ants that oozed like toothpaste around the base of the tree but the birds eluded us. Danielo glimpsed the prize bird but we did not see the Ground-cuckoo although not for lack of trying. A close patch of flowers yielded Bronze-tailed Plumeleteers and a Snowcap and a few other unidentified canopy twitterers. An Orange-bellied Trogon put in an appearance and the presence of a Barred Forest-Falcon was first noticed by an attack Forest Rabbit that ran to Penelope for protection. We returned to the Lodge for lunch and some feeder watching before returning to La Mesa for another attempt at the special birds that we knew were there. As is sometimes the case, a search for special birds can yield other treats, this time, the treat had a long furry tail and big eyes – our second Olingo and a rare diurnal view of this nocturnal mammal. We ended the afternoon with a visit to the Cerro Gaital Trail, which held a raucous flock of Tawny-crested Tanagers, a single Green-crowned Brilliant and an eye level Three-toed Sloth which was a rare addition to Dennis' 20 foot rule list.

March 23: Canopy Lodge: Altos Maria – Happy Birthday Sue!

An all day trip to Altos Maria was on schedule for today and transportation in a bus! A rest stop allowed for a McDonald's coffee break before heading up to the heights. Unfortunately, a windy foggy morning greeted us and our first stop was a challenging hide and seek episode with a Brown-billed Scythebill. Wind protected areas yielded Tufted and Sulphur-rumped Flycatchers, Black-and-yellow Tanagers, and a male Green Thorntail. A Red-faced Spinetail lured Bill and his camera to its nest – the outcome was uncertain. A stop before lunch yielded another canopy dweller that is more often heard than seen – a calling Bright-rumped Attila that conveniently stayed for a scope view. We all remarked at what this area would look like in ten years – little strips of cloud forest left among the oversized manors being built – properties called cloud forest roost where once stood a cloud forest? A stop at the information center for Altos Maria had us face to face with a salesman giddy with the thought of selling property to us. Oh well, nature enthusiasts always, real estate magnates – not so much. Back at the Canopy Lodge, we enjoyed an afternoon at the feeders and a short walk up the road for wayward motmots now called Toby Notnots! How many slices of pineapple upside-down birthday cake did you have?

March 24: Canopy Lodge: Las Animas Trail

This morning, we stayed low and birded the Las Animas trail on the drier side of the El Valle basin. Birds were numerous and included such notables as Lance-tailed Manakins, Canada Warblers, Sepia-capped and Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, and a Rosy Thrush Tanager on the lawn! Screeching overhead gave away the presence of a pair of Black Hawk-Eagles and a pair of White Hawks. Further up, a White-bellied Antbird called from near the trail but proved



A stunning pair of White Hawks graced the sky over El Valle.

elusive with only brief glimpses before it flew across the trail. A pleasant surprise was a nesting Long-billed Starthroat. Yellow-bellied Eleanias and Ruddy Ground-Doves greeted us back at the bus before we returned to the Lodge. An afternoon walk above the Canopy Adventure added another spot for motmots without the motmots although a tree full of Scarlet Tanagers was nice! On the other side of the road, Danielo beckoned us along a streamside trail to where motmots were calling. However, the start of nesting season made these birds more elusive and they remained calls shrouded in forest vegetation. We returned to the Lodge for a final evening of tanager watching and no-windows dining was enjoyed by all.

March 25: Canopy Lodge: Barbets and Cerro Gaital Trail and transfer to Los Quetzales

A morning drive in our 4x4s took us downslope to another banana feeding station that produced another avian rainbow – Blue-gray, Palm, Crimson-backed and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Thick-billed Euphonias, and the prize of the morning, a pair of Spot-crowned Barbets – the color and variety of birds was only limited by the size of the feeding tray! A Long-tailed Tyrant perched far in the distance. A



A pair of Spot-crowned Barbets were a real treat!

brief stop at the beginning of the sendero del Cerro Gaital yielded Barred Hawk, Black-faced Grosbeak, White-ruffed and Golden-collared Manakins, Lesser Eleania, and a beautiful Blackburnian Warbler enroute to a faraway boreal forest. Our magical stay at the Canopy Lodge was nearing an end and we departed at 11:30 with memories of tanagers, coquettes, manakins, and Olingoes dancing in our heads. A brief stop at Miraflores Locks along the Panama Canal let us learn about this engineering marvel, such a vital waterway

for our global economy. Of course, binoculars were never far away and we watched Magnificent Frigatebirds and Laughing Gulls pluck unseen food from the Canal's surface. A short drive to Albrook Airport followed and our one hour flight to the provincial capital of David in Chiriqui near the Costa Rican border. Although flying in a rectangular shaped plane may sound like fun, my ears thought differently! Our bus awaited us and we were soon leaving the outskirts of David and heading into the mountains and our for night stay at Los Quetzales.

March 26: Los Quetzales Forest and Cabanas

Birding started early around the grounds and our first Scintillant Hummingbirds and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers popped into view. A full breakfast at the hotel had us well fed before we boarded our 4x4 wheel vehicles (just big enough for our merry group of 11 plus guides/drivers Jonathan and Jose) for the bumpy ride to Cabins #2 and #3. However, we enjoyed the finest that Los Quetzales had to offer when we emerged shaken but not stirred from the vehicles. A pair of Black-and yellow Silky-Flycatchers (Phainoptilas) was nest building where we parked



We enjoyed unobstructed views of a pair of nest-building Golden-browed Chlorophonias.

and a Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush bounced along the roadside. We sidestepped the trout pools filled with varying sizes of trout on our way to Cabins 2 & 3. We spent the better part of five hours there marveling at the myriad of hummingbirds darting back and forth to the feeders. At no time were the feeders left unattended by these avian jewels. Brilliant Violet Sabrewings sparred with Magnificent Hummingbirds and White-throated Mountain-Gems for feeder space while Stripe-tailed and Fiery-throated Hummingbirds timed their own feeding frenzies. Green Violetears and Green-crowned Brilliants rounded out the hummer fest. Hard hats definitely required! However, these were only a part of the show. Large-footed and Yellow-thighed Finches, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finches came to hanging feeders and to the seed strewn ground below. A Slaty Finch, a species not often encountered, was also attracted to the seed. A Black Guan was as surprised by us as we were of it when it flew down to the vegetation close to our viewing spot. This species is also much sought after but not often seen at Los Quetzales. Our attention was soon diverted to several Flame-throated Warblers that brought along their own sun to brighten up the forest. As if this weren't enough, a pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonias (aka crayola birds) was nest building in the moss and epiphytes of an exposed eye level limb that created mega photographic moments. On this morning of dazzling color, what more could we ask for? Question answered by a group of Resplendant Quetzals that performed aerial acrobatics for us at eye level and unobstructed views! Appearances by Prong-billed Barbets, colorful and cheery Collared Redstarts and Barred Becards completed the avian parade. Lunch followed in the cabin but it was difficult to concentrate on food when so many birds were in view! An afternoon walk along the Las Minas trail produced a calling Costa Rican Pygmy Owl which was first found by hummingbirds and then our searching eyes. Black-cheeked Warblers and Brown-capped and Yellow-winged Vireos were foraging in the background. Plans were modified and four of us stayed at the cabins while others returned to the lodge to pick up pizzas, wine and flashlights and another roundtrip 4x4 wheel massage. A delicious meal set in the splendor of the forest with the modern conveniences of the cabin – a true highlight! Dusk turned to darkness and the hummingbirds were replaced by nectar sipping bats. Eventually, the stars



An amazing number of nectar sipping bats at the cabin.

of the night emerged – Bill's long awaited Kinkajou appeared to feed on bananas and was soon followed by another that had a young one in tow. Wow, such a memorable moment shared with pleasant company! Unfortunately, the Bare-shanked Screech-Owl had not received the e-mail from the Cheesemans to be calling on demand, another casualty of the truck accident that caused a town-wide Internet blackout during our stay.



After a lifetime of anticipation, Bill got his Kinkajous!

March 27: Los Quetzales and Sendero Los Quetzales and La Armistad Park

A later breakfast by half an hour and loading of our 4x4s to the beginning of the road that leads to the Sendero Los Quetzales. Yesterday's five quetzals was bested by this morning's seven and Black-faced Solitaires and Ruddy-capped Nightingale Thrush called and were seen well. A Volcano Hummingbird worked the flowering bushes where we parked. Carlos gained us entry to a local yard and access to a pond which was a beautiful serene scene. We eventually walked uphill and encountered neck bending Ruddy Treerunners and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers. The rocky road led onwards and we soon found out why the road and trail were closed to Boquete - impressive evidence of a flood and mudslides that had occurred several months earlier that had heavily damaged the trail and had negatively impacted several structures at Los Quetzales Lodge! A return to the lodge for lunch and then a visit to La Armistad International Park followed. One



We stopped to watch every one of these magnificent quetzals!

third of this huge forested park is shared with Costa Rica and is traversed by trails that we walked...at least until heavy rain persuaded us to head for shelter and a snack. Late afternoon exploration of the hotel grounds yielded views of the Torrent Tyrannulet behind Casa Costello and a chance to catch up on journals and local photography.

March 28: Los Quetzales: Finca Hartmann and Vulcan Lakes

We spent most of the day at Finca Hartmann. At about 4500 feet, it was a different elevation and was very close to the Costa Rican border. Birds greeted us as we arrived – a stunning Fiery-billed Aracari in a nearby tree, Crimson-fronted Parakeets flying overhead, groups of strikingly plumaged Cherrie's Tanagers and a Double-toothed Kite which flew over several times. The beginning of our walk was interrupted by a hummingbird that was difficult to identify. It turned out to be an immature male Magenta-throated Woodstar with its gorget just starting to show. At the stream crossing, a single Buff-rumped Warbler cruised along, nervously twitching its tail like a Redstart. Further on, a flock yielded several Blue-crowned Motmots, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, warblers, Charming Hummingbird and a single White-tailed Emerald. Upon our return, a delicious lunch was awaiting which replenished our energy levels and prepared us for a post lunch hike. Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush again skulked ahead of us which only allowed brief glimpses, a Spotted Barbtail, Golden-Olive Woodpecker, and a Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant that were miraculously mostly at eye level but difficult to see. Various insects with incredible colors and sizes were found closer to the buildings by those who searched under trunk and chair.



A stunning Fiery-billed Aracari posed for Kowa views and photographs.

We stopped at Vulcan Lakes on the way back to Los Quetzales for a short walk through woods which led to several lakes – a Gray-necked Wood Rail glimpsed by a few and, Blue-winged Teal, Amazon Kingfisher with a large fish dinner, American Coots, Moorhens, Purple Gallinule, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Least and Pied-billed Grebe. Rain started which shortened our stay but we were glad to get the chance to visit and bird a different habitat. Dinner was filling and we were disappointed to see that it was our final evening at Los Quetzales.

March 29: Los Quetzales Forest and transfer to Finca Lerida

Our last morning at Los Quetzales was spent back in the forest picking up a few birds we had not seen on our first visit. We were ready for the bouncing ride through the gauntlet of rocks to the cabins although even mental preparation did nothing to ward off the bumps. We were rewarded with a pair of Buff-fronted Quail-Doves on the trail and Banded Becards, Black-thighed Grosbeak, and a close study of a Volcano Hummingbird. We tried to lure a Zelodonia into view but it proved to be unresponsive.



A pair of Buff-fronted Quail-Doves ambled across the trail.

A lite lunch at the restaurant at Los Quetzales proved to be anything but – soup and entrée and dessert – just what we needed before our two hour bus ride to Boquete. Afternoon bus ride to Finca Lerida with stops for Blue-headed Parrot and Gavilan Corticola (Short-tailed Hawk) en route. A stop at an overlook spot just before descending into Boquete let us see how Boquete has grown in recent years with large houses of norteamericanos dotting the hillsides. A brief stop in Boquete for internet access let us communicate with the outside world once more although with a bit of difficulty. We were greeted at Finca Lerida and given our room assignments with enough time to spare to look for birds and explore the property before dinner. The first bonking Bellbirds were heard and hummers were studied on the multitudes of flowers. We watched an immature Merlin dismantling its dinner before we devoured ours. Listing done in the huge common room in front of a, at times, very smoky fire!

March 30: Finca Lerida and Bellbirds

We enjoyed an all day hike in the forests at Finca Lerida after our breakfast buffet. Of course, our target was the Three-wattled Bellbird which played hide and seek with us for quite a while before it finally succumbed to binoculars, spotting scopes, and Bill's camera! Although we had already seen a dozen at Los Quetzales, a pair of quetzals by the trail kept our attention - I think it's sacrilegious to pass up any view of a quetzal! Further along, we were very fortunate to see a pair of Chiriqui Quail-Doves sauntering along in the middle of the trail for all to see. A covey of Spotted Wood-Quail was spooked further along which was another special bird. Plenty of Black-throated Green Warblers and a Dark Pewee sang from the trees but were reluctant to show themselves. Screaming Sulphur-winged Parakeets rocketed through the trees but didn't



Bill's amazing shot of a well fed bonking bellbird!

stop for views. A picnic lunch on the trail close to bonking bellbirds, nesting Hairy Woodpeckers, and Gray-breasted Wood-wrens singing their cheery tunes etched a lasting memory. The trail ended in the grandeur of a cathedral of 300-year-old trees. Back at the Lodge, we enjoyed a leisurely walk along the edge of the coffee plantation with many bellbirds, Elegant Euphonias, Yellow-throated Brush-Finches and loads of Indigo Buntings. A flock of migrant raptors descended from unseen thermals while hummingbirds sipped their evening meals. Once again, the Merlin returned to his perch with another juicy morsel for dinner.

March 31: Finca Lerida and transfer to Centre Nattur



A cooperative Tropical Screech Owl near the Centre Nattur cabins.

An early morning hike around the edge of the coffee plantation yielded many buntings, seedeaters, warblers, woodpeckers, and bellbirds. Clouds of migrating raptors including Swainson's and Broad-wings formed kettles overhead and eventually flew out of sight to the west. Several Swallow-tailed Kites added elegance that only a Swallow-tailed Kite can provide. We departed at 11am for the airport and our return to Panama City. A quick airport meal and a quick flight to Panama City on board a plane that was better suited

for pressurized flight – happy ears all around! The bus was waiting for us at the airport and our Canopy Tower bags were already loaded. After a brief stop to buy water, we were on our way to Centre Nattur. A bumpy hair-raising ride that included oncoming vehicles made seats in the back of the bus the desired spots! Centre Nattur was a welcome site and we all filed into rooms that proved hot at first but this was to be expected since this was our stay in the lowland tropics. We explored one of the trails that introduced us to the local forest and ended with an overlook of Gatun Lake and a single Snail Kite. Several Three-toed Sloths were visible and reminded us of the early days of our trip. We finished with another hummingbird show that included hermits and Violet-bellied Hummingbirds and many White-necked Jacobins. What a deliciously simple dinner – one of the best of the trip! Owner Wilberto Martinez introduced us to the centre and gave us some history of the property. A Tropical Screech-Owl provided after dinner entertainment.

April 1: Centre Nattur: Achiote Road

An early breakfast and loading up the bus with lunch and water for our full day on Achiote Road. A clear early highlight was our last than three minute wait to cross Gatun Locks, renowned for its up to one hour delays, before entering the lowland forest on the west side of the canal. Toucans and parrots greeted us on the road but birding was fairly slow as the heat of the day

came early for us. A Rufous-breasted Hermit and a Stripe-throated Hermit fed in a stand of heliconia by the roadside. Sendero El Trogon proved to be well named with many Slaty-tailed and White-tailed Trogons calling continuously. On the edge of the forest, several female Blue Cotingas were seen and Black-crowned and Masked Tityras put in an appearance. White-headed Wren proved difficult to see. Crested Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques flew through the treetops. A female Spotted Antbird, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Eye-ringed and Olivaceous Flatbills and Southern Bentbills were denizens of the forest that were spied through our bins. A chance encounter with Canopy Tower Carlos on OUR trail was a surprise! The visitor center was closed but sharp eyes spotted a Black-headed Saltator in a nearby tree. A spillway close to the locks produced Little Blue Herons and a single Tricolored Heron along with Great Egrets and a few Spotted Sandpipers. A Savannah Hawk was buzzed by our only Bat Falcon of the trip. A delay free crossing at the locks allowed for a late afternoon visit to the butterfly house which found us face to face with beautiful butterflies which included a healthy population of stunning morphos. We also watched as a trapped Rufous-breasted Hermit tried unsuccessfully to find an opening to the outside world. The Tropical Screech Owl was calling again but it wasn't able to stir its black and white cousin.

April 2: Centre Nattur: Achiote Road/Centre Nattur and transfer to Casa de Campo – Happy Birthday Alice!

An earlier return trip to Achiote Road for some and a visit to the cicopeas near the butterfly house for others. Highlights were many on Achiote Road and included nest-building White-headed Wrens, a stunning Gray-headed Kite, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and a huge flock of swirling Mississippi Kites. White Hawk and Common Black-Hawks also rode unseen overhead air currents. Finally, a cooperative Southern Bentbill added itself to several bird lists. Near the spillway, a Great Kuiskadee allowed us a view into its nest full of begging youngsters and a Ruddy-breasted Seedeater perched on a nearby wire. American Kestrel, Snowy Egret, and Great Blue Heron were added to the trip list. For those at the Centre Nattur, tanagers and honeycreepers were served up in cecropeas including the first and only Shining Honeycreepers of the trip. Lunch was a typical Panamanian affair, which included a full sit down meal salad, main course and dessert. Afterwards, we departed for our three-hour transfer to Casa de Campo and the relative cool weather of Cerro Azul. A brief stop at McDonald's showed us what Fernando, our driver, could really do with that bus – amazingly maneuverable in tight spaces! Our arrival at Casa de Campo was a relief and Marta greeted us with keys to our unique rooms. What color shower curtain did you get? A brief walk down the road had us marveling at the aerodynamics of Swallow-tailed Kites. A neighbor invited us into their yard and we were again enjoying trays full of colorful tanagers and Pam's much sought after Black-striped Sparrows with black stripes. Thanks Jaime and Theresa! Happy Birthday Alice with binoculars in a drawer and a big birthday cake!

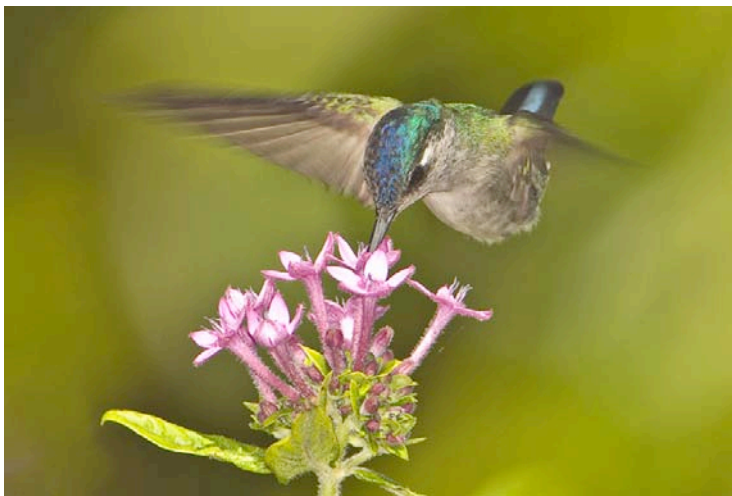


Alice with her new binoculars sees Tody Motmots!

April 3: Casa de Campo: Birder's View and Cerro Jefe Forest Reserve

Our entire day was spent in Cerro Azul so coolers supplied both breakfast and lunch as well as snacks. Our first stop was at the bridge where we watched Spotted Sandpiper, Black Phoebe and a beautiful Fasciated Tiger-Heron rock hopping in the river. This is a widely distributed species though nowhere common. Birder's View awaited us with its hummingbird feeders, tanager ripe trees and a view of Chagras National Park.

Olive and Emerald Tanagers were seen and the myriad of hummers included stunning views of Bronze-tailed Plumeleteers and Violet-headed Hummingbirds. A walk down the trail with Nando, the gardener and caretaker, was fantastic since he knew the area well and also knew where special birds were feeding. A grove of heliconia produced a White-tipped Sicklebill as well as Stripe-throated and the ubiquitous Western Long-tailed Hermits. Elsewhere, a group of Russet Antshrikes was lured in by the i-pod and we were in the presence of Tawny-faced Quail without seeing them. Back at Birder's View, scanning the sky reaped a reward – a beautiful Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle that flew over on long narrow wings! Swallow-tailed Kites stole the show though as they gracefully plied the sky and then stooped low to break off branches or grab moss in front of us – a precursor to nesting perhaps? An afternoon visit to Cerro Jefe Forest Reserve in search of tanager flocks was fruitless – sunny and no clouds led to no birds except a pair of beautiful Yellow-eared Toucanets. However, Joan and Susan glimpsed a Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker, one of our target birds. We returned to Birder's View for leftover hummingbirds and tanagers before packing up and returning to Casa de Campo for happy hour, dinner, and listing.



A beautiful female Violet-headed Hummingbird fed on nearby blossoms.



One of a pair of beautiful Yellow-eared Toucanets

April 4: Casa de Campo: Cerro Jefe Forest Reserve-Birder's View and Panama Viejo

A return to Cerro Jefe in the morning yielded not much more than what we had seen the previous afternoon although the conditions were much more favorable – cloudy and slightly windy. One flock of Black-and-yellow Tanagers had our hopes up but the flock never materialized and we melted away from the area in favor of a return to Birder's View. One group joined Nando in birding the sloping trail while others stayed along the road and worked the upper, less strenuous portion of the trail where a Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant was finally seen well. Nando's group encountered a Purplish-Backed Quail-Dove and Southern Nightingale-Wren among several other species although the wood-quail remained concealed. We then drove to Panama Viejo in the afternoon for shorebirds including Willets, Marbled Godwits, Western Sandpipers and many egrets and herons. Four species of terns and two gulls rounded out the show. The heat of the day took its toll and, with the continuing receding tide luring the shorebirds further away from us, we returned to Casa de Campo for a very late lunch and a chance to pack our bags and ready ourselves for flights home the next day. Our final evening dinner together was shared with Ana Maria and we publicly thanked Marta for all of her cooking. Farewell to Dennis and Alice whose flight allowed them to wake late on April 5th!



*Standing: Dennis Spriggs, Susan Martin, Russ Costello, Jim Danzenbaker, Joan Page, Bill Page, Sue Costello.
Sitting: Penelope Bowen, Pam Negri, Alice Spriggs, Ron Martin.*

April 5: Casa de Campo to home bases

Very early wake up call led to a bit of a stressful moment trying to find an oversleeping Fernando. Finally located and roused, we piled luggage and people into the bus and 40 minutes later and one close encounter with a Pauraque, we were at the airport saying our farewells as we splintered into ever-smaller groups.

I look back on our trip to Panama with many pleasant memories: nest building chlorophonias, an active army ant swarm, hummingbirds galore, incredible Quetzals, bonking bellbirds, feeding kinkajous, trays full of avian color, and the ongoing river of raptors. I am glad I had the opportunity to share these with you and I look forward to returning. I hope you had as much fun as I did! Please share your own experiences with your friends and talk up Panama as a fantastic nature-viewing destination. I hope our paths will cross again.