



Sunrise Birding LLC  
**PANAMA**  
September 4 – 14, 2014  
**TRIP REPORT**



Report by Diego Calderon

Photos (top to bottom): Capped Heron by Carlos Bethancourt, Violet-capped Hummingbird by Diego Calderon, Orange-breasted Falcon by Diego Calderon, Group birding with Carlos on the top of Canopy Tower by Diego Calderon.

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# PANAMA: Canopy Tower & Lodge

## TRIP REPORT

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**Leaders: Diego Calderon & local guides**

**September 4** - On a rainy afternoon our group got to the Canopy Tower after smooth flights from US, UK and Colombia. Some Mantled Howler Monkeys were happily munching Cecropia leaves welcoming us, while Keel-billed Toucans, a couple of Red-fronted Parrot and some hummers at the entrance feeders distracted some of us from Carlos' orientation... We met for dinner and enjoyed delicious food as it is going to be customary on this tour! Everyone went early to bed and to rest to get ready for Panama's bird-, forest-, people-, landscape-, etc.-wise exuberance!

**September 5** - Today's birding started with enjoying the sunrise and Mantled Howler Monkeys from the tower deck. An amazing canopy view covered in white clouds and mist in the background was inspiring sight! Couples of Red-lored and Mealy Parrots (Amazons) were all over the place, plus little groups of Band-rumped Swifts flying eye level for easier identification. A fruiting Cecropia tree just 3 meters from the Tower held a Blue Cotinga female and young male (with some bluish tint already on his back), as well as Thick-billed and Fulvous-vented Euphonias, Blue Dacnis, and Green Honeycreeper. Golden-hooded and Plain-colored Tanagers visited the Cecropia several times. We then had a nice breakfast and birded down the entrance (Semaphore Hill) road loading up with birds whose name started with the word ANT like Bicolored, Spotted (couple nesting) and Dusky Antbirds, Black-crowned (formerly known as Western-Slaty) and Fasciated Antshrikes, and Checker-throated, White-flanked and Dot-winged Antwrens. The most cooperative ever Black-faced Antthrush walked by in the understory singing and offering unique views and even some photographic opportunities.

After lunch and relaxing time (some people returned to see some birds from the upper deck), we hit the Ammo Ponds near Gambia town; traveling in the open roof Rainfomobile from the Canopy Tower. Along the way we enjoyed the Chagres River and Canal views with its monster ships passing by from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans. At the Ammo Ponds,



we got nice views of a lot of open area flycatchers like Rusty-margined and Social, also Great Kiskadees, Panama Flycatchers, and some more tanagers including Crimson-backed, Blue-gray and Palm. We returned to the Tower for canapés and wine before dinner and checklist. Some were eager to go our owling so we did. Mottled Owls were heard but none cooperated with us.

**September 6** - Today we spent almost all day long on the famous Pipeline Road! We started with Scarlet-rumped Caciques, Purple-throated Fruitcrows, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Black-breasted Puffbird, Blue-headed Parrot, a pair of Forest Elaenias nesting, Purple-crowned Fairy, the not so common Hook-billed Kite, and a lifer for me: Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser at a very busy spot near the parking lot at the entrance of the road. We kept walking along the road and found a lovely couple of Great Jacamars, Slaty-tailed and White-tailed Trogons, Rufous Motmot, a Fasciated Antshrike couple feeding a young, and some superbly displaying Red-capped Manakins. One of the coolest attractions of the day was when Lynda and Charly our driver found us a Tiny Hawk (61.5 to 75g, and 23 cm) with a big prey hanging from its talons. The prey looked like a Black-breasted Puffbird (60 to 69g, and 22cm) almost bigger/heavier than the hawk; this was the trans-Andean *fontanieri* subspecies that only occurs in Central America and Caribbean Colombia, and named after V. H. Fontanier, a French collector in Colombia in 1850.



**Picnic Lunch at Pipeline Road**

There were no swarms of army ants, so trawling for Ocellated Antbirds compensated and we got to see a very nice young individual. We started leaving the road after a bit of a shower, that eventually became torrential storm that got some of us riding in the open top

BirdMobile truck soaking wet. We stop at the entrance of the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center to shelter where a couple of Mealy Parrots noisily left after our arrival. With less rain, we headed to take a quick check on the Summit Ponds and we got a Boat-billed Heron nesting but behind thick vegetation so no one really got a decent view this afternoon. Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers were seen there as well as a Striated Heron in the rain. On the way back to the Tower, one of the cars flushed a Great Tinamou and some could glimpse it.

**September 7** - What a good day this was! We ascended up to Cerro Azul to get some higher elevation specialties not far from Panama City. We got out of the van to pay our entrance fee and make a bathroom stop and got some neat tanagers: Bay-headed, Hepatic, and Crimson-backed. Later inside the gated community we had a big flock of Carmiol's (Olive) Tanagers and got to see also White-ruffed Manakin, Scaled Pigeon, and Blue-black Grosbeak. As we headed to our first hummingbird feeder stop and we got to see and enjoy for some 10 minutes, superb views of a very rare raptor in Panama: Orange-breasted Falcon; this huge beast (compared to the similar Bat Falcon) had very long and much more powerful talons and broader yellow eye-ring giving it a meaner look.

We then visited Jerry and Linda's place where hummers were swarming: Long-billed and Green Hermits, White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, White-vented and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Violet-capped, Blue-chested, Snowy-bellied and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds were all seen very well while enjoying mid-morning coffee, snacks, and great local company. Then we moved to the base of Cerro Jefe and easily got our main target, the Panamanian endemic **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker** while enjoying Rufous-winged Tanagers in a flock. We then moved to another house with hummingbird feeders for lunch and added the nice and rare Violet-headed Hummingbird, Paltry Tyrannulet, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Yellow-crowned Euphonias, White Hawk, and our other main target in the mountain: a lovely couple of Yellow-eared Toucanets showing superbly. Driving back to the Tower we stopped at the old bay area (Panamá Viejo) to pad our list with several water birds including some egrets, both night-herons, several plovers, sandpipers, yellowlegs, dowitchers, and other shorebirds.



**September 8** - Some of us today got a super early quick fruit, yogurt and coffee breakfast at 4:30 am and left for the Atlantic Ocean to go birding the famous Achiote Road. The break of the dawn got us crossing the Panama Canal through the huge Gatun Locks. We stopped for proper picnic breakfast at a small tienda in town starting our list with Clay-colored Thrush, Bananaquit, and some got to see a Rufous-breasted Hermit zipping by.



We then moved to the road for some birding and got point-blank-views of a lovely male **Blue Cotinga** before it started to rain pretty hard. We spent some time sheltering from rain but watched Crested Oropendola, Lemon-rumped (AKA Flame-rumped if lumped) Tanager, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. We moved to a corner of a side road near town, still in the rain, and added Greater Ani, Lesser Kiskadee, Orange-chinned Parakeet, and very nice views of Black-chested Jays, Yellow-backed Orioles, finally Stripe-throated Hermits, and a nice Lesser Elaenia feeding on fruit. Returning to town was slow because we stop for several roadside birds including Plumbeous Kite, Collared Aracaris, Cocoa Woodcreeper, American Kestrel, among others. With a drier afternoon we tried for our target wren (White-headed) unsuccessfully, but got many Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, more aracaris, Slaty-tailed Trogons, and finally caught up with Pied Puffbird. We then had to start moving back so we birded in the San Lorenzo area near the Gatun Locks area of the Canal adding Southern Lapwing, Red-breasted Blackbird, Common Black-Hawk, White-necked Puffbird, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, and Common Tody-Flycatcher. Later on, we returned to the Tower to enjoy our very last night at this wonderful place.

**September 9** - Today traffic was difficult around Panama City due to some protesting so instead visiting the Metropolitan Park, we enjoyed an additional bit of birding on the Tower deck, and then after breakfast we did Summit Ponds and the Old Gambia Road. We started with neat views of few Boat-billed Herons which we needed after the bad rainy views we got earlier on the trip. We also had a lovely Capped Heron that showed beautifully and we got the much desired American Pygmy Kingfisher. Lesser Kiskadees were also at the pond along with quite good size Central American Crocodiles. We then birded the Old Gamboa Road (now a wide trail) to find very nice and showy Red-throated Ant-Tanagers and some not bad glimpses of Rosy Thrush-Tanager! Golden-collared Manakins were not offering open views but most of us got pieces and bits of nice males and females. We then returned to the Tower for our last lunch there in the canopy itself, took a group photo and said good bye to Carlos that had been wonderfully showing us the

wonderful birds of his beloved Panama! We drove a couple of hours to the west along the coast and then headed north up into the El Valle area and got to the superb Canopy Lodge which greeted us with Black-chested Jays, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Buff-rumped Warbler, and the lovely noisy Gray-necked Wood-Rail.



**September 10** - Early daylight got us enjoying Orange-billed Sparrow in the lodge gardens and one of our main –not easy- targets for this trip just on the lodge itself: Tody Motmot! Eliecer found a lovely pair just next to the lodge kitchen and we accepted them as an appetizer before breakfast. Also, a breathtaking show of a group of some 300 Mississippi Kites was passing through between the Cerro Gaital hill and the Lodge. We ate a delicious breakfast, as habitual on this tour, and went up into the hills above El Valle to find Silvery-throated Tanagers, Tawny-capped Euphonias, Southern Lapwings, and 18 lovely Swallow-tailed Kites soaring quite low above our heads.

On the Las Minas ridge, we found one of our main targets - an **Orange-bellied Trogon**; this is still treated as a subspecies of Collared Trogon by some, but it is a distinctive form restricted to the Central American highlands only in Costa Rica and Panama. The other main target, Black-crowned Antpitta (AKA Black-crowned Pittasoma, and



recently AKA Black-crowned Gnatpitta) was not around today. Returning to the Lodge, we added another of our main targets: the Blue-throated Toucanet also only found in Panamanian and Costa Rican highlands. In the afternoon we had rain and rain and rain, so we birded from the lodge seeing plenty of Black-chested Jays, Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, Thick-billed Euphonias, and both Eastern Wood-Pewee and Olive-sided Flycatcher. We added a Yellow-green Vireo to our trip list and even went for a late afternoon walk in the road outside the lodge when the rain had stopped, adding Lesser Goldfinch and seeing very nice Gray-headed Chachalacas.

**September 11** - After an early breakfast we left for Altos del Maria gated community. Our first stop was rich in new birds for the trip including Black-and-yellow Tanager, Common Bush-Tanager, and Ochraceous Wren some of the most enjoyed and wanted ones; at this very same spot, a Northern Schiffornis and a White-tipped Sicklebill proved very elusive though. We then continued exploring the lovely cloud forest areas of this gated community stopping to look at nice flocks that delivered Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Barbtail, Garden Emerald, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, White-vented Euphonia, and Pale-breasted Thrush. Snowcaps were foraging actively in shrubs with flowers, while a couple of Russet Antshrikes entertained us with close views.

Then we continued roving the labyrinth of roads of this gated community, adding Brown Violetear to our list and enjoying superb views of a pair of **Yellow-eared Toucanets** at close range. Lunch came and we stopped on a shelter kiosk by a lake where a magnificent White Hawk came and perched not far away allowing prolonged scope views for everyone interested in studying this immaculate beast. Still raining, we took a trail that gave us Plain Antvireo, a much better view of Spotted Barbtail, and quick crappy views of a diminutive White-throated Spadebill. A pair of Chestnut-backed Antbirds also showed up and this was my first time seeing the Western Panama race that lacks the white spots in the wings. Rain was so heavy that we returned to the lodge. It never stopped, so everyone went to have clean dry clothes and came for appetizers and drinks before dinner.



**September 12** - Today we went for a completely different habitat and set of birds: drier forests and more open areas with scrub and rice fields bordering the Pacific coast, a couple of areas known as Anton and Juan Hombron. We started with a twitch near El Valle early morning: Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, and saw Whooping Motmot and some Crested Bobwhites during road stops. We did several stops in open and semi-open areas adding raptors (Black, Turkey and Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, White-tailed Kite,

Common Black-Hawk, Savanna and Roadside Hawks, and Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras) and water birds including Little Blue Heron, Snowy, Cattle and Great Egrets, Green Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Glossy Ibis, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. We did some special barbwire fence trespassing to get views of very nice Lance-tailed Manakins that did not want to show from the road. We looked everywhere for the Veraguan Mango but we were unsuccessful unfortunately this year; on the other hand, we got several new birds for the list (and life birds for our clients!) like Pale-breasted Spinetail, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, Tropical Pewee, Gray Kingbird, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike. Lunchtime at the very nice beach house of Canopy Tower owner Raul Arias de Para in Santa Clara delivered Brown Pelican, Blue-footed Booby, Neotropic Cormorant, Magnificent Frigatebird, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Willet, Whimbrel, Sanderling, and Royal Tern.

**September 13** – This morning, we drove our 4x4 for some 30 minutes before doing our first stop where we got Dusky-faced Tanagers, a nesting Rufous-breasted Hermit, and a quick glimpse at a Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. We then continued descending in elevation alongside the Jordanal River that flows into the Atlantic and found Emerald Tanagers, Cinnamon Becard, and the three Saltators that occur in the area (Streaked, Black-headed and Buff-throated). A pair of **Spot-crowned Barbets**, one of our main targets, perched just above our heads in an Inga tree. We kept going as it became a very hot sunny day which yielded a couple of Barred Puffbirds and a female Rufous-crested Coquette found by Danilo high in the canopy. Black-headed Tody-Flycatchers and Chestnut-backed Antbirds also cooperated and entertained us in the sunny hot noontime. We finally reached Jordanal town where we got lunch and enjoyed the local kids marching band rehearsal. Birding around town was very productive and using the tape or simply whistling the Barred Puffbird calls, we got a load of birds perched in the open for us: Plain-colored, Blue-Gray, Palm and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Gray-capped, Rusty-margined, Social and Piratic Flycatchers, Tropical Gnatcatcher, some pewees, and others. Some Sulphur-rumped Tanagers were in the area but very, very elusive. Eliecer kept finding one or two individuals on distant groups and they were gone when we scoped the area or tried to see them... a new bird for me that still eludes me. We then returned to Lodge, trying along the way for Antpittas again. We succeeded with Streak-chested for half of the group but the Black-crowned never responded.



**September 14** - Our last morning of the trip was devoted to trying for some missing targets like the Antpittas and the Spectacled Owls. We went up to Las Minas Road above El Valle adding Long-billed Gnatwren, Spot-crowned Antwren, and Slaty Antwren to the trip list. Then we moved to some other trails in the La Mesa area where the Toledano Company has chicken farms. In one of these trails, we got a very cooperative Streak-chested Antpitta showing up really well for everyone allowing for photos and videos. We tried yet another place for Black-crowned Antpitta but no single bird responded to the tape. Here, as a kind of a consolation prize, we struggled with the dense foliage and got bits and pieces of a couple of White-bellied Antbirds that were new for the trip. A quick visit to the Cariguana area in town delivered three Tody Motmots and two roosting Spectacled Owls before returning for lunch. We then drove to Panama City where our fantastic trip ended.

Some took planes, others stayed overnight at hotels in Panama, and I went straight with Colombian friends toward the Darien on the Colombian border to climb up and explore Pirre Mountains. Our results could not be better: we scored all the endemics of the area (but a Treerunner) and all the big raptors including the mighty Harpy Eagle. Come with us next year on the Panama Sunrise Birding trip that will include Canopy Camp Darien also to enjoy these lush vast jungles.

I have to thank everyone on our crew for such great times... a superb group of clients, our fine local guides Carlos and Eliecer, and also Danilo Jr. who is quickly learning, all our drivers and all Canopy Family staff have always made this a perfect sharply tuned trip for Sunrise Birding... GRACIAS!



**Barred Puffbird**



**Violet-bellied Hummingbird**

Photos by Diego Calderon and Carlos Bethancourt.