

Panama: A Week at the Canopy Lodge

Saturday December 11 to Sunday December 19, 2010

Guided by Gary Rosenberg

Price \$2400

Short tour Saturday to Sunday that stays at one very comfortable lodge. Excellent compliment to Canopy Tower tour. Six nights at Canopy Lodge in the foothills of central Panama mountains north of Panama City. Beautiful scenery and good birding around lodge. Several well-maintained trails and roads allow for easy birding. Excellent trip for foothill species, including lots of fancy tanagers and hummingbirds. Chance for mind-boggling rarities such as Black-crowned Antpitta and Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo. Wide variety of habitats including dry forest, and both east and west slope foothills. Tour begins and ends in Panama City. Views of Panama Canal.

For such a small country, Panama is incredibly diverse. Birders are now fortunate that the owners of the famous Canopy Tower have built a very birder-friendly lodge in the low mountains north of Panama City. This comfortable lodge is situated in a beautiful setting and makes an excellent base of operations to visit the many habitats and birding locations near El Valle. The birding here is really fun, and we will have the opportunity to visit lush foothill forest on both the Pacific and Caribbean slopes, both offering different specialties. We'll also visit an area of dry forest in the Pacific lowlands, which will produce a number of unique species for the tour. The lodge itself is lovely, and the service is excellent.

Seven full days of birding will allow us ample opportunity to hit all the different habitats. In the drier Pacific-slope forest we can see fancy birds such as Pearl Kite, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lance-tailed Manakin and Rosy-thrush Tanager. The list of foothill species found in striking distance of the lodge is impressive. One private reserve we will visit offers the chance for incredible birds such as the rare Tody Motmot, and the unique White-tipped Sicklebill. We'll leisurely bird another set of gardens where fun species including Red-crowned Woodpecker and Flame-rumped Tanager come in to the feeders. Foothill forest birding will be the main attraction of this tour, and some of the many target birds we'll search for includes White Hawk, Orange-bellied Trogon, Violet Saberwing, Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, the incredible Snowcap, Spotted Woodcreeper, Brown-billed Scythebill, Fasciated and Russet Antshrikes, White-ruffed Manakin, Ochraceous Wren, and lots of fancy tanager, including Black-and-yellow, Dusky-faced, Tawny-crested, Silver-throated, and Plain-colored, to name a few. On most days we'll travel short distances and return to the lodge for lunch and siesta, while on a couple of days, we'll venture further a field, with the use of 4x4 SUVs.

For those looking for a longer trip, this tour can be taken in conjunction with our Panama: Canopy Tower tour.

Day 1: The tour begins this evening at 7:00 pm in Panama City. We'll have an introductory meeting, followed by dinner. **Night in Panama City.**

Hotel: Riande

Days 2-7: We'll depart early on Day 2 for the Canopy Lodge, our accommodations for the next six nights. The trip takes us north of Panama City, across the famous Panama Canal, and up into the low mountains of central Panama. The drive is about two hours, but we'll likely make a stop or two en route. We'll arrive at the Lodge in time for lunch, and then have all afternoon to explore the grounds of the lodge, with feeders and excellent birding, which may include a nice variety of flycatchers and tanagers. Fun birds such as Crimson-backed, Dusky-faced, and Plain-colored Tanagers, as well as Violet-headed Hummingbird, Barred Antshrike, and common (but still fun) species such as Social Flycatcher, Clay-colored Robin, Blue-gray-Tanager, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. We'll have numerous opportunities to just relax and enjoy birding the local grounds.

The real enticing aspect of the Canopy Lodge will be the visits to the cloud-forest and foothill forest, where we have the opportunity to see many incredible species, some of which are quite rare and seldom seen. Some of the more special birds we'll search for include White, Barred, and Tiny Hawks, Black Guan, Sunbittern, Purplish-backed Quail-Dove (rare), Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo (very rare but possible!), Mottled Owl, White-tipped Sicklebill, Green Hermit, Rufous-crested Coquette, White-tailed Emerald, Snowcap, Orange-bellied Trogon, Tody Motmot (rare), Blue-crowned Motmot, Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Spotted Barbtail , Spotted Woodcreeper, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-crowned Antpitta (very secretive), White-ruffed Manakin, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Long-tailed Tyrant, Ochraceous Wren, several fancy tanagers, such as Emerald, Silver-throated, Bay-headed, Black-and-yellow, and Olive, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, just to name a few.

Another area we'll visit is the drier habitats on the west slope, where a different set of birds is possible. Some of the highlights here might include Pearl Kite, Brown-throated Parakeet, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lance-tailed Manakin, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rufous-and-white Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Rosy Thrush-Tanager. The bird list for the lodge and surrounding area accessible to us exceeds 300 species. December will also be an excellent time for North American migrants, including an impressive diversity of wintering warblers, thrushes and vireos. In all this tour has a nice combination of nice relaxing birding with good accommodations, with the chance at some spectacular birds such as Snowcap and others.

Day 8: After a final relaxing morning at the Canopy Lodge and birding locally, after lunch we'll be transferred back to Panama City and our comfortable hotel near the airport. We'll have time to relax, perhaps have a dip in the pool, and meet for a farewell dinner and to recall the wonderful week of birding we have had. **Night in Panama City.**

Hotel: Riande

Day 9: The tour ends this morning in Panama City. There are no birding activities planned.

Note: If you are continuing on to the Canopy Lodge on the **Panama: Canopy Lodge** tour, we'll be departing from Panama City early this morning.

This tour can be combined with the Panama: Canopy Lodge tour.

Maximum size of group: The maximum group size for our Panama: Canopy Tower tour is nine.

Tour Leader for your Panama Tour: Gary Rosenberg

Gary Rosenberg lives in Tucson, where he has designed and led about 15 birding tours to Panama, including several to the Canopy Tower, and has also birded in nearby Costa Rica more than 50 times. He has been birding since early childhood, studied Ornithology for a Master's degree at Louisiana State University, and is the author or co-author of numerous scientific and popular articles on bird identification and behavior. Gary is also a passionate photographer, and has had numerous bird photos published in magazines and books. He is currently the secretary of the Arizona Bird Committee, which evaluates rare bird reports within Arizona. His current areas of expertise, apart from Panama, include most areas in North America, in particular Arizona, Florida, and Alaska, as well as Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Peru.

Pace of the tour: The pace of this tour is Easy. Most of the birding will be done from along roads, and well-maintained forest trails. The trails are generally wide (like road-cuts), but a couple of trails are a bit narrower, and only a little hilly at times. The best birding in the Neotropics is done in the early mornings, so one should expect relatively early breakfasts (5:00 - 5:30). We would like to note here that Panama is in the "eastern" edge of a time zone, and the sun is already up at 5:30 am! The good news is that it also gets dark earlier (around 5:30 pm), so we usually have relatively early evenings. We will try and schedule mid-day siestas during the hottest part of the day. On at least a couple of nights, there will be before-dinner owling excursions that may shorten our normal break between birding and dinner. The tour is designed to stay at one comfortable lodge, with a night in Panama City at the beginning and end of the trip, minimizing the number of hotel changes.

Tour Price: \$2400. The cost of the tour includes all accommodations, food, within-tour transportation, baggage handling (when needed), entrance fees, water during the day's tour activities, and guide services, as indicated by the itinerary. In general the hotels and lodges we use on the tours are nice and comfortable, and often the best-available in the more remote areas we visit. In the cities we stay in above average (but not necessarily the most expensive) hotels. Meals are typically taken in local restaurants at or near the hotels and lodges.

The following items are not included in the tour price: travel to and from the location the tour begins and ends, laundry, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: \$790 Please note that the Canopy lodge has eight double rooms and 4 single rooms in a separate building. The single rooms are smaller and less fancy than the double rooms. Participants can pay the single supplement above to secure a “double” room as a single, or pay the regular price and be in one of the smaller rooms as a single. Singles will be accommodated on a first come first serve basis.

Combined Price for Panama: Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge tours. For those wishing to take both Panama tours, the combined price will be discounted \$200 for a total of \$4600 per person

Deposit policy: PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT THE DEPOSIT POLICY FOR THIS TOUR IS DIFFERENT THAN OTHER AVIAN JOURNEYS TRIPS. At the time of booking a tour, a \$300 deposit is required to secure a space on the tour. This deposit is refundable or transferable up until **180 days** prior to the departure date of the tour. The deposit must be received within 14 days of booking, or the reserved space will be released. Up to the 180 day prior to departure date, a deposit may be transferred to another Avian Journeys tour without penalty. **Cancellation of a reservation within 180 days of the tour departure date will result in forfeit of the deposit.** ** The reason for this policy is that both the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge require a non-refundable deposit from Avian Journeys inside of 180 days.

Tour Registration: To register for this Panama tour, please first contact Avian Journeys by email or phone to check on availability. Once we have confirmed that there is space on the tour, please fill out the registration form, which is available on the “Register for a tour” page, and mail it to Avian Journeys. It is very important that you read all the information in this document, and then make sure you sign and date the waiver at the end of the registration form. A \$300 deposit is necessary to secure a space on the trip. Full payment for the tour will be invoiced 100 days prior to the departure date, and must be received within 90 days of departure.

Cancellation policy: Cancellation by a tour participant greater than or equal to 90 days prior to the departure date will result in full refund of payments to Avian Journeys (minus the deposit). Cancellation by a tour participant within 90 days of a tour will result in a refund of amounts we are able to recover from our hotels and ground agents. Fixed cost amounts can not be refunded. In general, the amount we can potentially refund may be as low as 50% or 25% of the cost of the tour.

Trip insurance. At the time of payment of your deposit for the tour, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. The following companies offer trip insurance, and/or emergency medical insurance: <http://www.travelinsured.com>, <http://www.accessamerica.com>, www.aaa.com. One never knows when personal illness, or an illness in the family is going to strike. Given that a cancellation by a participant

within 90 days of departure might result in a loss of most, if not all of the cost of a tour, trip insurance is a good idea. Furthermore, insurance is recommended in case of an illness on a tour, and in a worse case scenario, the need for an emergency medical evacuation, which can be prohibitively expensive. Purchasing insurance is a personal choice, and Avian Journeys does not recommend one company over another.

Travel to Panama

Once the tour is confirmed, you will need to purchase your airline ticket to Panama City, Panama. Several major airlines, such as American, Continental, Delta, etc... service Panama city. We strongly suggest planning your arrival in time for the Introductory Meeting on Day 1. If you are unable to arrive early on Day 1, please be aware that we often leave very early on Day 2, and there is the possibility that you will get very little sleep. If you decide to arrive a day early, we would be happy to arrange for an extra night's hotel in Panama.

In this age of the Internet, booking a flight online is easy! Each individual airline has their own web site for booking flights, such as www.AA.com for American Airlines, and www.continentalairlines.com for Continental Airlines. Alternatively, one can visit sites such as www.orbitz.com or www.expedia.com which list multiple airline options.

IMPORTANT. You will need a valid passport to enter Panama. The passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry. A visa is not needed to enter Panama – you will need to fill out an entry form provided to you by the airlines and present this along with your passport to immigration. You will also be asked to fill out a customs declaration.

Entering Panama

Entering Panama is easy and should be stress free. When you deplane, follow the crowd to immigration. Hopefully your line at immigration will not be long, although there is a chance that multiple planes arrive simultaneously, and the immigration line can be slow. Patience is a virtue! The immigration process is quick and professional. You may be handed back a small portion of your entry form. Please keep this piece of paper in your passport and try not to lose it. Don't worry though, if you do lose the paper, you will simply be asked to fill out a "new" one when you leave the country. Once through immigration you will arrive at the baggage claim area. Locate your carousel and retrieve your bags. You will next hand your customs declaration to a uniformed customs agent and likely be asked to pass your luggage through an x-ray machine. This is just a formality, and it is unlikely that they will ask you to open any bags.

Once through immigration and customs, you will pass through a door and be engulfed by a crowd of agents and loved ones meeting the flight. There will be a person with a sign with YOUR NAME on it, and/or CANOPY TOWER. Also look for AVIAN JOURNEYS. Our ground agent in Panama is CANOPY TOWER. One of these should be on the sign. The person making the transfer usually speaks English and will help you with

your luggage. They will transfer you to the hotel. The hotel is just a few minutes from the terminal.

The language of Panama is Spanish. While many Panamanians speak some English, please be aware that English is a second language. Typically the persons making the transfer, and those at the reception at the hotel speak perfect English. Learning a few important words, such as the Spanish word for “beer” is recommended.

The currency of Panama is the U.S. Dollar. All hotels accept cash or the major credit cards. We do not recommend bringing Travelers Checks – these have become more difficult to cash in recent years. ATM machines are usually available in the major cities.

Health Issues

We recommend checking with the CDC at www.cdc.com for recent warnings and recommendations for preventive medications and/or inoculations required (or suggested) for the areas you will be visiting in Panama. It is unlikely that you will need any special inoculations, and we know of no Malaria in the areas we visit in the country. But checking with the CDC to be sure is the safest course to take.

In general we believe you will probably be surprised by the lack of biting insects. While some areas might have some mosquitoes, and small biting flies (no-see-ums), they usually don't present much of a problem. Chiggers are also occasionally present. We do recommend a relatively strong insect repellent that contains “DEET”.

Hotels and Food

Avian Journeys and Canopy Tower (our ground agent in Panama) have many years experience organizing tours in Panama. The hotels and lodges we have selected are both comfortable and well-situated for the birding. All hotels and lodges provide rooms with private bathrooms. Our hotel in Panama City can store extra baggage if needed, if you are taking both Panama tours. Most of the hotels and lodges provide laundry service.

The food in Panama can be described as relatively standard international food (meat, chicken, fish) at the larger hotels, to nicely prepared local cuisine at some of the lodges (such as at the Canopy Tower). Most of the hotels and lodges we stay at cater to birders and provide early breakfasts for our groups, although some only provide “cold” breakfasts, which consist of cereal, breads with jam and butter, juice, coffee, and fresh fruit. Lunches are either taken at the hotel and lodges, or we have box lunches provided by them. All dinners will be at the hotels and lodges. A non-alcoholic beverage will be provided with all meals – bottled water is available everywhere. Beer and wine is available everywhere. Please note that alcoholic beverages are not included in the price of the tour.

Electricity

Panama has the same electric current as the United States – 110 volts. If you are from a country that uses 220 volts, please make certain that any charger you plan on using can function at 110 volts. Most chargers today have a voltage range of 100-240 volts.

Meeting the Group

There will be a meeting in the lobby of the hotel at 7:00 pm on Day 1. This meeting is designed to “get acquainted” with the other participants on the tour, and to meet the leader. Immediately following the meeting we will have dinner. Again, we recommend trying very hard to arrive in time for this meeting.

Climate

December is a lovely month to be in Panama. The entire Canal Zone is at sea level, so one should expect “tropical” climate, with temperature in the 70s and 80s, and only slightly cooler at night. There is always the chance for some rain – even on a daily basis, but in general the weather is typically very nice. On the Pacific coast, the weather is likely to be hot and dry. Sun is much more of an issue here, and we highly recommend lots of sunscreen, and a good hat.

What to Bring

Clothing – Over the years we have discovered that “everyone” has their own tastes regarding clothes. We will suggest that you consider quick-drying pants and shirts, particularly if you plan on doing your own laundry. Many of the higher quality field clothes available from companies such as “Ex Oficio” or “REI” also offer protection from UV rays. We also recommend clothes with “neutral” colors, such as browns, tans, and greens that blend with the natural environment, which is less threatening to forest birds. Bright reds and pinks should please be avoided.

Footwear – Comfortable footwear is perhaps the most important item to consider, as we are on our feet most of the day, every day! We suggest lightweight hiking boots, preferably waterproof to a certain degree. “Goretex” type boots are an excellent choice. Rubber boots are not needed for this trip.

The following items are important:

- Binoculars (waterproof)
- Camera (optional)
- Hat
- Rain Jacket (lightweight)
- Small Umbrella (ESSENTIAL!!)
- Small Flashlight w/ replacement batteries
- Small LED Headlamp (useful at poorly lit lodges)

Alarm Clock
Plastic Bags (to protect equipment)
Insect Repellant
Sunscreen (very important)
Water Bottle
Small backpack
Ear Plugs (optional)

Photography: Our leaders are typically very interested in photography, in particular “digiscoping”, and within the context of the tour, photography is encouraged. Certain sensible guidelines will be adhered to, such as not approaching a bird for photos until all in the group has had a satisfying look, and we will avoid unnecessary disturbance of a bird, particularly if it is nesting. At the end of the tour the leader will share his or her photo highlights, making them available on CD, or downloadable from a social network web site.

Field Guides and References. All books listed below are available from **Amazon.com**.

Field Guides

National Geographic Society. 2002. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 4th Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.

Ridgely, Robert S. and John A. Gwynne. 1989. Second edition. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best North American field guide.

References

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Kricher, J.C. 1989. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Skutch, Alexander. 1954,1960,1967. *Life Histories of Central American Birds*. Vol 1-3. Cooper Ornithological Society. Pacific Coast Avifauna Series. Nos 31, 34 and 35.

_____. 1976. *Parent Birds and their Young*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Good natural history reading.

_____. 1983. *Birds of Tropical America*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Good natural history reading.

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