

Panama: A Week at the Canopy Tower

Saturday December 4 to Sunday December 12, 2010

Guided by Gary Rosenberg

Price \$2400

Short Saturday to Sunday tour to comfortable Canopy Tower. Located in the heart of the rainforest within a National Park that protects the famous Panama Canal. Fun Canopy birding from the roof of the lodge. Easy tropical birding from roads and mostly flat trails. Excellent introduction to Neotropical birding, with toucans, puffbirds, jacamars, antbirds, and ovenbirds. Includes a visit to famous Pipeline Road. More than 500 species known from surrounding area. Tour can be combined with our Canopy Lodge tour.

Panama is famous for its canal, but what few birders may realize is that the “Canal Zone” is mostly protected by two large National Parks, and has some of the best remaining tropical rainforest in all of Central America. Unique within its surroundings, the Canopy Tower is situated at the top of a large hill in the heart of the rainforest, and allows easy access to some of the best birding locations in Panama. Our week long tour (Saturday to Sunday) will afford us seven full days of birding in this wonderful park. The birding will be at a relaxed pace, with virtually all the trails level and easy to walk. The lodge itself is unique, a modified military facility transformed into a fun and comfortable hotel. Several mornings will be spent on the roof of the lodge sipping coffee while overlooking the incredible rainforest canopy, with an unbelievable view of the Panama Canal itself! We’ll visit numerous trails, such as Plantation Road and the famous Pipeline Road. The total bird list for the lodge and surroundings is amazing, and exceeds 500 species. Early December is also a great time for Neotropical migrants from North America. This tour is an excellent introduction to tropical birding, and we will see representatives of all the Neotropical bird families, including a very nice selection of antbirds, ovenbirds, toucans, puffbirds, and flycatchers, at the same time enjoying the comfort and excellent service of the Canopy Tower.

One of the nice aspects of birding at the Canopy Tower is that virtually all of the birding is done within relatively untouched rainforest. Working the numerous mixed-species flocks will be fun, and some of the specialty birds we’ll search for includes fancy antbirds such as White-bellied, Spotted, Ocellated, and Bare-crowned. Additionally, the general birding is difficult to surpass, and some of the fun birds we’ll look for includes Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon, Pheasant Cuckoo, Great Potoo, Black-and-white Owl, Brown-hooded Parrot, Crested Guan, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, White-necked Puffbird, Spot-crowned Barbet, Rufous Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Blue Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Golden-collared and Lance-tailed Manakins, Green Shrike-Vireo, Song Wren, and Flame-rumped and Rosy Thrush-Tanagers. One day we’ll venture to the Caribbean side of the Canal Zone and visit the Achiote Road area, where we can expect a different set of birds, including the possibility for new

specialties such as Jet Antbird, Pacific Antwren, White-headed Wren, and Black-chested Jay. The tour will end in Panama City.

For those who would like a longer tour, this trip can be combined with our Panama: Canopy Lodge tour.

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1: The tour begins this evening in Panama City. Our hotel is located very close to the airport for convenience. We will meet at 7:00 pm for a short introductory meeting, followed by dinner. **Night in Panama City.**

Hotel: Riande

Days 2-7: We'll depart early on Day 2 for the Canopy Tower, our lodge and base for the next six nights. While at the Tower, our birding will be divided into birding locally near or from the Canopy Tower, and venturing short distances to various trails. The tower itself allows us to sample the wonderful canopy environment – the view from the roof of the tower is wonderful, looking out over the treetops of rich tropical rainforest, as well as providing an excellent view of the Panama Canal. Birding from the tower is always fun and unpredictable. We'll look for specialties such as Blue Cotinga and Green Shrike-Vireo, and it is always a great place to see fancy birds such as Keel-billed Toucan and Collared Aracari, a variety of parrots, and raptors soaring up in the mid-morning thermals. Since it is part of our lodge, we'll have numerous opportunities to relax and bird from the tower.

The Canopy Tower is well situated to birdwatch at a number of fun and exciting trails and roads nearby, all within the National Park. We'll visit places such as Plantation Trail, Summit Road, Gamboa, The Chagres River, and of course famous Pipeline Road. Each trail has excellent forest birding, and being here for a full week will allow us to visit and re-visit individual trails, never feeling rushed. Even the entrance road to the lodge has excellent birding. The list of birds from these areas is very impressive. Some of the fancier species we'll look for near the lodge include, Great Tinamou, Crested Guan, King Vulture, Gray-headed Kite, Double-toothed Kite, Black Hawk-Eagle, Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon, Bat Falcon, Short-billed Pigeon, Blue-headed and Mealy Parrots, Squirrel Cuckoo, Spectacled Owl, Great Potoo, White-necked Jacobin, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Violaceous and Slaty-tailed Trogons, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, White-necked Puffbird, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Plain Xenops, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Fasciated and Western Slaty-Antshrike, Dusky, White-bellied, Spotted, and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Royal Flycatcher, Masked and Black-crowned Tityras, Golden-collared, blue-crowned and Red-capped Manakins, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Green Shrike-Vireo, Black-bellied, Bay, and Rufous-breasted Wrens, Song Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren, Tropical Mockingbird, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, White-shouldered Tanager, Crimson-backed Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Green

and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Buff-throated Saltator, and Yellow-backed Oriole, just to name a few.

We'll make at least a couple of trips to famous Pipeline Road, one of the finest birding localities in Central America. The number of incredible birds found along this road is certainly too long to list, but apart from all the ones listed above, we'll look for more primary forest specialties such as Great Currawong, Semiplumbeous Hawk, White Hawk, Barred Forest-Falcon, Blue Ground-Dove, Brown-hooded Parrot, Pheasant Cuckoo, Crested Owl, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Long-billed Hermit, numerous hummingbirds including Rufous-crested Coquette, White-tailed and Black-throated Trogons, White-whiskered and Pied Puffbirds, Great Jacamar, black-cheeked, Cinnamon, and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, several species of woodcreepers, Great Antshrike, Checker-throated and Dot-winged Antwrens, Bare-crowned, Bicolored and Ocellated Antbirds, Yellow-green Tyrannulet, Olivaceous Flatbill, Bright-rumped Attila, Cinnamon and White-winged Becards, Golden-collared Manakin, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Scaly-breasted Wren, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Blue Dacnis, Orange-billed Sparrow, Blue-black Grosbeak, and Crested Oropendolas. There is even a chance for a mega-rarity along the road, such as Plumbeous Hawk, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo or Broad-billed Sapayoa. To give you an idea of the wildness of the area, Harpy Eagle has been seen there (but is admittedly unlikely!).

At a small pond on the way to Pipeline Road, we'll can see a number of water edge birds such as Least Grebe, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Wattled Jacana, Purple Gallinule, White-throated Crake, Snail Kite, Pygmy, Green, Amazon, and Ringed Kingfishers, as well as lots of more open country or forest edge species such as Yellow-headed Caracara, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lance-tailed Manakin, and Yellow-backed Oriole.

On one day we'll venture across to the Caribbean side of the Canal Zone to Achiotte Road. This long day trip will be very rewarding, as a number of species are easier on that side, as opposed to near the Canopy Tower. Some of the Many new species we'll look for include White Hawk, Mealy Parrot, Black-breasted Puffbird, Spot-crowned Barbet, Jet Antbird, White-headed Wren, Yellow-rumped Tanager, Black-headed Saltator, and Red-breasted Blackbird. We'll also visit the old Spanish fortress at San Lorenzo which protected the entrance of the Chagres River. **Nights at the Canopy Tower.**

Day 8: After a final relaxing morning at the Canopy Tower 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

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 the Canopy Tower requires 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.

Responsibility: Avian Journeys, LLC, acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by airplane, bus, van, train, or boat, and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Avian Journeys and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated.

The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect August 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. Prior to acceptance on any tour, the participant must read and sign a liability waiver included in the registration form.