

NEW YEAR AT PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER

DECEMBER 27, 2006 – JANUARY 3, 2007

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HOLIDAY SEASON IN PANAMA

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Guides: Steve Hilty with Panamanian guides José Soto and Carlos Bentacourt

Panama's unique combination of history, wildlife, and convenient lodging for naturalists makes it one of the New World tropics' most compelling travel destinations. The Canopy Tower, our hotel base for this trip, represents—better than almost any other in Panama—this combination of convenience and comfort.

We awoke to fog on our first morning at the Canopy Tower and were unable to observe much from the circular lookout deck atop the hotel, a converted military radar station, but it was thrilling just to hear the unseen sounds of the tropical forest beneath us. Within a few hours the fog cleared and we began walking downhill from the Canopy Lodge, enjoying a morning filled with manakins, motmots, and antbirds.

The first afternoon brought an amazing show of colorful fruit-eating birds at Gamboa and a chat with the owner of the fruit and nectar feeders. I cannot recall ever seeing a more spectacular assemblage of birds at feeders with, ultimately, more than 130 individual birds of 16 species fidgeting with impatience as they appraised the banana banquet spread beneath their feet and the nectar feeders nearby. Strings of honeycreepers lined up on wires, like a phalanx of twitching toys, waiting for a selfish flock of Orange-chinned Parakeets to finish drinking their share (more than their share) of the proffered nectar. This colorful multitude at the feeders, in one sense, set the tone for the trip, because over the next several days we were treated to a remarkable array of new tropical birds with unfamiliar shapes and color patterns, and belonging to families equally unfamiliar. Along the way we learned something about graduated tails and racquet tails, about army ants and antbirds that follow ants (and about the throngs of antbirds that don't), and about manakin displays, woodpeckers that eat fruit, and odd flycatchers that specialize on leafhoppers, bees, or fruit.

We did not see much evidence of nesting (here, at the close of the rainy season, there is relatively little breeding activity), but we saw mixed-species flocks in the forests, gatherings of birds at fruiting trees, and specialized, obligate army ant followers that garner their food by snapping up the hordes of invertebrates fleeing the carnivorous ants. And, we observed another specialization in these rich forests—Double-toothed Kites that use primates (mainly capuchin monkeys) as “beaters” to flush prey. Another species, the Semiplumbeous Hawk, has this same behavior, and when we observed this hawk eating a lizard in the presence of a group of these monkeys, we could only assume it had been using the monkeys for “beaters” too.

The Canopy Tower offers convenient access to a good variety of habitats—marshy ponds, tropical dry forest, mature moist forest and, by ranging to the Caribbean slope, lowland humid forest. All in all it's a terrific way to spend a holiday week at any time of the year. There were enough birds, both common and rare, large and small, colorful and mundane, and easy to observe, as well as shy and retiring, to please the most discriminating traveler. I would rank as especially good finds, because of scarcity, the Great Tinamou, Boat-billed Heron, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Chocó Screech-Owl, White-tipped Sicklebill, Ocellated Antbird, Spectacled Antpitta, Blue Cotinga, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, and Song Wren. Then add all those hummingbirds, motmots, puffbirds, trogons, and all those gorgeous little honeycreepers and tanagers, and you just know you've been to the tropics!

We finished our visit to the Caribbean canal zone with a memorable and, at some times riotous, train trip across the isthmus on the Panama Canal Railway. During that hour we telescoped more than ten years of canal-making history, and almost a hundred years of canal operation into a single hour as Carlos led us on a bird-spotting spree that ended just shy of 50 species on that brief journey.

I hope you enjoyed the trip as much as I did, and as much as my wife Bev did—it was her first opportunity to accompany me on a VENT tour. I'd love to see all of you again somewhere on another trip. Happy New Year!

Key:

Boldface = unusual or of special interest

* (asterisk) = heard; also abbreviated as hd

[] brackets = leader only

various abbreviations include Metro for Metropolitan Park; pk for park; Semaphore for Semaphore Hill; Ammo for Ammo dump ponds

List of birds:

Great Tinamou	<i>Tinamus major</i>
Least Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea Egretta caerulea</i>
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Boat-billed Heron	<i>Cochlearius cochlearius</i>

Rufescent Tiger-Heron	<i>Tigrisoma lineatum</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
King Vulture	<i>Sarcoramphus papa</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Gray-headed Kite	<i>Leptodon cayanensis</i>
Hook-billed Kite	<i>Chondrohierax uncinatus</i>
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>
Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>
Double-toothed Kite	<i>Harpagus bidentatus</i>
Semiplumbeous Hawk	<i>Leucopternis semiplumbea</i>
White Hawk	<i>Leucopternis albicollis</i>
Great Black-Hawk	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>
Savanna Hawk	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>
Gray Hawk	<i>Buteo nitidus</i>
Short-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo Brachyurus</i>
Zone-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>
Black Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus tyrannus</i>
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
Yellow-headed Caracara	<i>Milvago chimachima</i>
*Collared Forest-Falcon	<i>Micrastur semitorquatus</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Bat Falcon	<i>Falco ruficularis</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Gray-headed Chachalaca	<i>Ortalis cinereiceps</i>
*Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
*White-throated Crake	<i>Laterallus albigularis</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Wattled Jacana	<i>Jacana jacana</i>
Southern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>
sandpiper spp.	Unidentified flock at Miraflores locks;
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
Laughing Gull	<i>Larus atricilla</i>
tern sp (prob Royal Tern)	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Pale-vented Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas cayennensis</i>
Short-billed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas nigrirostris</i>
Ruddy Ground-Dove	<i>Columbina talpacoti</i>
White-tipped Dove	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>

Gray-chested Dove	<i>Leptotila cassini</i>
Orange-chinned Parakeet	<i>Brotogeris jugularis</i>
Brown-hooded Parrot	<i>Pionopsitta haematotis</i>
Blue-headed Parrot	<i>Pionus menstruus</i>
Red-lored Parrot	<i>Amazona autumnalis</i>
Mealy Parrot	<i>Amazona farinosa</i>
Squirrel Cuckoo	<i>Piaya cayana</i>
Greater Ani	<i>Crotophaga major</i>
Smooth-billed Ani	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
<u>Chocó Screech-Owl</u>	<i>Megascops chocoensis</i> (split from <i>M. guatemalae</i>)
*Mottled Owl	<i>Ciccaba virgata</i>
<u>Spectacled Owl</u>	<i>Pulsatrix perspicillata</i>
Band-rumped Swift	<i>Chaetura spinicauda</i>
Short-tailed Swift	<i>Chaetura brachyura</i>
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift	<i>Panyptila cayennensis</i>
<u>White-tipped Sicklebill</u>	<i>Eutoxeres aquila</i>
Rufous-breasted Hermit	<i>Glaucis hirsute</i>
Band-tailed Barbthroat	<i>Threnetes ruckeri</i>
Green Hermit	<i>Phaethornis guy</i>
(1 repeatedly at feeders); also in forest	
Western Long-tailed Hermit	<i>Phaethornis longirostris</i>
Stripe-throated (Little) Hermit	<i>Phaethornis striigularis</i>
White-necked Jacobin	<i>Florisuga mellivora</i>
Black-throated Mango	<i>Anthracothorax nigricollis</i>
<u>Violet-capped Hummingbird</u>	<i>Goldmania violiceps</i>
Violet-crowned Woodnymph	<i>Thalurania colombica</i>
Violet-bellied Hummingbird	<i>Damophila julie</i>
Sapphire-throated Hummingbird	<i>Lepidopyga coeruleogularis</i>
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird	<i>Amazilia tzacatl</i>
Blue-chested Hummingbird	<i>Amazilia amabilis</i>
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird	<i>Amazilia edwardi</i>
White-vented Plumeleteer	<i>Chalybura buffoni</i>
<u>Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer</u>	<i>Chalybura urochrysis</i>
Purple-crowned Fairy	<i>Heliothryx barroti</i>
White-tailed Trogon	<i>Trogon viridis</i>
Violaceous Trogon	<i>Trogon violaceus</i>
Black-throated Trogon	<i>Trogon rufus</i>
Black-tailed Trogon	<i>Trogon</i>
Slaty-tailed Trogon	<i>Trogon Massena</i>
Ringed Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle torquata</i>
Amazon Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle amazona</i>
Green Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>
<u>American Pygmy Kingfisher</u>	<i>Chloroceryle aenea</i>
Blue-crowned Motmot	<i>Momotus momota</i>

Rufous Motmot	<i>Baryphthengus martii</i>
Broad-billed Motmot	<i>Electron platyrhynchum</i>
White-necked Puffbird	<i>Notharchus macrorhynchos</i>
Black-breasted Puffbird	<i>Notharchus pectoralis</i>
*Pied Puffbird	<i>Notharchus tectus</i>
<u>White-whiskered Puffbird</u>	<i>Malacoptila panamensis</i>
<u>Spot-crowned Barbet</u>	<i>Capito maculicoronatus</i>
Collared Aracari	<i>Pteroglossus torquatus</i>
Keel-billed Toucan	<i>Ramphastos sulphuratus</i>
Chestnut-mandibled Toucan	<i>Ramphastos swainsonii</i>
Black-cheeked Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes pucherani</i>
Red-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes rubricapillus</i>
<u>Cinnamon Woodpecker</u>	<i>Celeus loricatus</i>
Lineated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus lineatus</i>
Crimson-crested Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus melanoleucus</i>
Plain Xenops	<i>Xenops minutus</i>
<u>Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser</u>	<i>Sclerurus guatemalensis</i>
Plain-brown Woodcreeper	<i>Dendrocincla fuliginosa</i>
Cocoa Woodcreeper	<i>Xiphorhynchus susurrans</i>
*Black-striped Woodcreeper	<i>Xiphorhynchus lachrymosus</i>
Fasciated Antshrike	<i>Cymbilaimus lineatus</i>
*Great Antshrike	<i>Taraba major</i>
Barred Antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus doliatus</i>
Western Slaty-Antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus atrinucha</i>
Spot-crowned Antwren	<i>Dysithamnus punctures</i>
Checker-throated Antwren	<i>Myrmotherula fulviventris</i>
White-flanked Antwren	<i>Myrmotherula axillaris</i>
Dot-winged Antwren	<i>Microhoppas quixensis</i>
Dusky Antbird	<i>Cercomacra tyrannina</i>
*Jet Antbird	<i>Cercomacra nigricans</i>
White-bellied Antbird	<i>Myrmeciza longipes</i>
Chestnut-backed Antbird	<i>Myrmeciza exult</i>
<u>Bicolored Antbird</u>	<i>Gymnocichla nudiceps</i>
<u>Spotted Antbird</u>	<i>Hylophylax naevioides</i>
<u>Ocellated Antbird</u>	<i>Phaenostictus mcleannani</i>
*Black-faced Antthrush	<i>Formicarius analis</i>
<u>Streak-chested (Spectacled) Antpitta</u>	<i>Hylopezus perspicillatus</i>
<u>Blue Cotinga</u>	<i>Cotinga nattererii</i>
Purple-throated Fruitcrow	<i>Querula purpurata</i>
Golden-collared Manakin	<i>Manacus vitellinus</i>
<u>White-ruffed Manakin</u>	<i>Corapipo altera</i>
<u>Lance-tailed Manakin</u>	<i>Chiroxiphia lanceolata</i>
Blue-crowned Manakin	<i>Lepidothrix coronata</i>
Red-capped Manakin	<i>Pipra mentalis</i>
*Thrush-like Schiffornis	<i>Schiffornis turdinus</i>

Brown-capped Tyrannulet	<i>Ornithion brunneicapillum</i>
Southern Beardless Tyrannulet	<i>Camptostoma obsoletum</i>
Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet	<i>Tyrannulus elatus</i>
Forest Elaenia	<i>Myiopagis gaimardii</i>
Greenish Elaenia	<i>Myiopagis viridicata</i>
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>
[Olive-striped Flycatcher	<i>Mionectes olivaceus</i>
[Yellow-green Tyrannulet	<i>Phylloscartes flavovirens</i>
Paltry Tyrannulet	<i>Zimmerius vilissimus</i>
*Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant	<i>Myiornis atricapillus</i>
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant	<i>Lophotriccus pileatus</i>
Southern Bentbill	<i>Oncostoma olivaceum</i>
Common Tody-Flycatcher	<i>Todirostrum cinereum</i>
Brownish (Flycatcher) Twistwing	<i>Cnipodectes subbrunneus</i>
Olivaceous Flatbill	<i>Rhynchocyclus olivaceus</i>
[*Yellow-olive Flycatcher	<i>Tolmomyias sulphurescens</i>
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Terenotriccus erythrurus</i>
Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>
Long-tailed Tyrant	<i>Colonia colonus</i>
*Bright-rumped Attila	<i>Attila spadiceus</i>
*Rufous Mourner	<i>Rhytipterna holerythra</i>
Panama Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus panamensis</i>
Great-crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>
Lesser Kiskadee	<i>Philohydor lictor</i>
Great Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>
Boat-billed Flycatcher	<i>Megarynchus pitangua</i>
Rusty-margined Flycatcher	<i>Myiozetetes cayennensis</i>
Social Flycatcher	<i>Myiozetetes similis</i>
Streaked Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i>
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes luteiventris</i>
Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>
Gray Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
Fork-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus savanna</i>
White-winged Becard	<i>Pachyramphus polychopterus</i>
Masked Tityra	<i>Tityra semifasciata</i>
Black-crowned Tityra	<i>Tityra inquisitor</i>
Gray-breasted Martin	<i>Progne chalybea</i>
Mangrove Swallow	<i>Tachycineta albilinea</i>
Southern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx ruficollis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
*White-headed Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus albobrunneus</i>
*Black-bellied Wren	<i>Thryothorus fasciatoventris</i>
Rufous-breasted Wren	<i>Thryothorus ruficapillus</i>
*Bay Wren	<i>Thryothorus nigricapillus</i>
Rufous-and-white Wren	<i>Thryothorus rufalbus</i>

*Plain Wren	<i>Thryothorus modestus</i>
*Buff-breasted Wren	<i>Thryothorus leucotis</i>
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
*White-breasted Wood-Wren	<i>Henicorhina leucosticta</i>
Song Wren	<i>Cyphorhinus phaeocephalus</i>
Tropical Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>
Clay-colored Robin	<i>Turdus grayi</i>
Long-billed Gnatwren	<i>Ramphocaenus melanurus</i>
Tropical Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila plumbea</i>
Black-chested Jay	<i>Cyanocorax affinis</i>
Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>
*Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Scrub Greenlet	<i>Hylophilus flavipes</i>
Golden-fronted Greenlet	<i>Hylophilus aurantiifrons</i>
Lesser Greenlet	<i>Hylophilus decurtatus</i>
Green Shrike-Vireo	<i>Vireolanius pulchellus</i>
Yellow-crowned Euphonia	<i>Euphonia luteicapilla</i>
Thick-billed Euphonia	<i>Euphonia laniirostris</i>
[Fulvous-vented Euphonia	<i>Euphonia fulvicrissa</i>
Tawny-capped Euphonia	<i>Euphonia anae</i>
Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>
Golden-winged Warbler	<i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>
Tennessee Warbler	<i>Vermivora peregrina</i>
Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>
Chestnut-sided Warbler	<i>Dendroica pennsylvanica</i>
Bay-breasted Warbler	<i>Dendroica castanea</i>
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Prothonotary Warbler	<i>Protonotaria citrea</i>
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>
Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>
*Rosy Thrush-Tanager	<i>Rhodinocichla rosea</i>
Gray-headed Tanager	<i>Eucometis penicillata</i>
White-shouldered Tanager	<i>Tachyphonus luctuosus</i>
Red-throated Ant-Tanager	<i>Habia fuscicauda</i>
Highland Hepatic-Tanager	<i>Piranga lutea</i>
Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>
Crimson-backed Tanager	<i>Ramphocelus dimidiatus</i>
Flame-rumped (Lemon-rumped) Tanager	<i>Ramphocelus flammigerus</i>
Blue-gray Tanager	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>
Palm Tanager	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>
Plain-colored Tanager	<i>Tangara inornata</i>
Emerald Tanager	<i>Tangara florida</i>
Bay-headed Tanager	<i>Tangara gyrola</i>
Golden-hooded Tanager	<i>Tangara larvata</i>

Blue Dacnis	<i>Dacnis cayana</i>
Green Honeycreeper	<i>Chlorophanes spiza</i>
Shining Honeycreeper	<i>Cyanerpes lucidus</i>
Red-legged Honeycreeper	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>
Variable Seedeater	<i>Sporophila corvine</i>
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater	<i>Sporophila minuta</i>
Yellow-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris olivacea</i>
Saffron Finch	<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>
Black-striped Sparrow	<i>Arremonops conirostris</i>
Streaked Saltator	<i>Saltator striatipectus</i>
Buff-throated Saltator	<i>Saltator maximus</i>
Black-headed Saltator	<i>Saltator atriceps</i>
Slate-colored Grosbeak	<i>Saltator (Pitylus) grossus</i>
[Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
Blue-black Grosbeak	<i>Cyanocompsa cyanoides</i>
Red-breasted Blackbird	<i>Sturnella militaris</i>
Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>
Giant Cowbird	<i>Molothrus oryzivorus</i>
Yellow-backed Oriole	<i>Icterus chrysater</i>
Yellow-tailed Oriole	<i>Icterus mesomelas</i>
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>
Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>
Yellow-rumped Cacique	<i>Cacicus cela</i>
Scarlet-rumped Cacique	<i>Cacicus uropygialis</i>
Crested Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius decumanus</i>
Chestnut-headed Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius wagleri</i>

NOTE: Our train trip across the isthmus netted 48 species of birds along with two sloths and a capybara (a very respectable showing). We tallied approximately 133 individuals of sixteen species of birds at the Gamboa feeders (an amazing number of birds and one of the most colorful assortments imaginable!).

MAMMALS:

Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, *Bradypus variegatus*, almost daily
 Agouti, *Dasyprocta punctata*, almost daily including around fruit feeders in Gamboa
 Variegated Squirrel, *Sciurus variegatoides*, Achioté
 Red-tailed Squirrel, *Sciurus granadensis*, Canopy Tower; Achioté
 White-nosed Coati, *Nasua narica*, Canopy Tower; Ammo dump (fat M) etc
 Mantled Howler Monkey, *Alouatta palliata*, Canopy Tower; Pipeline etc
 White-faced Capuchin, *Cebus*, Pipeline; Achioté
Geoffroy's Tamarin, *Saguinus geoffroyi*, seen often at Canopy Tower (beautiful)
Western Night-Monkey, *Aotus sp.*, family in hollow strangler fig
 Capybara, *Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris*, one spotted from train by Carlos
Southern Tamandua, *Tamandua sp.*, Pipeline road
 Lesser White-lined Bat, 3 or 4 clinging to side of tree trunk on trail at Achioté

HERPS:

Basilisk Lizard, Tocumen

Iguana, *Iguana iguana*, Ammo dump

Ameiva ameiva, Pipeline

American Crocodile, old French canal

Spectacled Caimen, one seen in Gatun lake (from train)