

Panama – Harpy Eagle Special 2019

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Arrival & overnight in Panama City.
- Day 2/7** Based at Canopy Camp, with daily excursions in search of the speciality birds of the area including Harpy Eagle.
- Day 8** Arrive UK

Departs

April – see website.

Focus

Birds (mainly) & other wildlife.

Grading

Mostly Grade A. Generally, easy birding walks only.

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code PAN04).

Highlights

- Visit the active nest site of the Harpy Eagle
- Nusagandi foothills
- African safari-style walk-in tents
- Bird true Central American wilderness
- Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren & Orange-crowned Oriole
- White-eared Conebill, Green-naped Tanager & Great Curassow among target species
- Crested Eagle possible
- Led by expert local birding guides



Harpy Eagle, Golden Headed Manakin and Camp Tent



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2019 Update

Following the great success of our 'Panama – Harpy Eagle Special' tours in 2017 and 2018 there is again a wonderful opportunity to see this magnificent raptor in 2019. The added bonus this year is that we are also able to visit an active Crested Eagle nest. This near threatened species is even harder to observe than Harpy Eagle and we are delighted to be able to offer this opportunity. Both nest sites are visited in a way that will not disturb the birds. Everyone visiting is indeed contributing to the conservation of these magnificent birds.

At both the Harpy Eagle nests and the Crested Eagle nest the chicks are currently about 4 to 5 months old. At the moment the adult female birds are often seen bringing in prey (every 3/4 days) with the male seen occasionally too.

The nest, which we are able to visit in such a way to not cause disturbance, is accessible along a largely flat path with just one short slightly steep section. Natural 'steps' have been cut into the terrain here and a hand rail has also been put up in order to make the walk as easy as possible. The walk is 4.5 km, or 2.8 miles in one direction and then this repeated on the return so 5.8 miles in total but taken very slowly with help from local porters if needed. The Harpy day is the longest day of the itinerary with a very early start and arriving back to the camp at around 5-6pm. The Crested Eagle nest is a short 15 minute walk. Drink and food is taken into the field and snacks and lunch are carried by local porters. Our 2018 groups enjoyed some superb views of this sought-after species, and we are hopeful that this success will be repeated in 2019.

Again although the Harpy Eagle is our ultimate target on this tour, a host of other species are possible in this famously endemic-rich region. We will be based at the very comfortable Canopy Camp lodge which offers large very comfortable, safari-style tented accommodation with private bathroom facilities. Gray-cheeked Nunlet, White-headed Wren and Pale-bellied Hermit are among the specialities around the camp grounds, along with an excellent variety of tanagers, woodpeckers, puffbirds, kingfishers, flycatchers and raptors.

Introduction

The Darién, as this entire easternmost region of Panama is called, is one of the most diverse and species-rich regions of Central America. Here, some of the last large, relatively untouched swathes of lowland rainforest await exploration! Long revered by avid birders as a haven for rare species, including the majestic Harpy Eagle, Panama's national bird, this region is now readily accessible by a new highway, extending through the spine of Panama right into the heart of this bird-rich land. During this exciting, 6-night adventure, we visit various exciting birding sites as described below with a special day dedicated to seeing the mighty Harpy Eagle at an active nest site!



Canopy Camp Bathroom

We will spend all our nights (except night 1) at the Canopy Camp, where we will enjoy comfortable, large, Safari-style tent accommodation, each with full-sized beds, private bathroom facilities with hot water and flush toilets, electricity and a fan. The protected forests of the Filo de Tallo Hydrological Reserve surround the camp. In the vicinity of the camp itself we will enjoy such regional specialties as Gray-cheeked Nunlet, White-headed Wren and Pale-bellied Hermit right in the gardens! This tour offers other surprises, such as Spectacled Parrotlet, Red-

rumped Woodpecker, Double-banded Graytail, King Vulture and the spectacular Great Curassow. With an active Harpy Eagle nest near to camp it is a wonderful time to visit.

We are sure you will have a birding adventure of a lifetime!

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrival in Panama

We leave the UK in the morning bound for Panama City, via Amsterdam. On arrival in Panama, we will transfer to the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, just 5 minutes from Tocumen International Airport by hotel bus. While we acclimatise to the tropical heat with a cold drink, we can watch the birds in the grounds of the hotel. Great-tailed Grackle, Clay-coloured Thrush, Variable Seedeater, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and more await our visit to the gardens.

Day 2

Morning: Orientation & Bayano Lake

This morning we will enjoy a delicious early breakfast at 5am in the hotel restaurant. Our guide will be there for a briefing and soon after breakfast, we'll be heading for eastern Panama. The journey to our final destination is approximately 5 hours, but we will make stops along the way in exciting birding areas. As we drive east along the Pan-American Highway, we will scan for roadside birds and open-field raptors including Savanna Hawk and Crested Caracara.

As we drive along the Pan-American Highway, we will scan for roadside birds and open-field raptors including Savanna Hawk and Crested Caracara. At the bridge at Bayano Lake, a great opportunity awaits to see what we can see along the lakeside. This reservoir supports great amounts of water birds, including a large colony of Neotropic Cormorants, as well as Anhinga, Cocoi Heron and the rare Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. We will scan the water's edge for Purple Gallinule, Pied Water-Tyrant, Smooth-billed Ani and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. A short trail leading from the water's edge is a great place to search for Black Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Rufous-winged Antwren and Golden-collared Manakin. Just 10 minutes down the road at Río Mono Bridge, the surrounding forest is home to One-colored Becard, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Blue Cotinga, Pied Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, Blue Ground-Dove and more. We will also scan the river below for Green-and-rufous Kingfisher and the elusive Fasciated Tiger-Heron. The forest edge and scrubby roadsides around Rio Torti offer good opportunities to see Pacific Antwren, Double-banded Graytail and Little Cuckoo. At a lovely Panamanian restaurant in Torti, the hummingbirds at the feeders will no doubt capture our attention, as Long-billed Starthroat, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango and more take their lunch as well; great hummingbird photo opportunities all throughout this Panama wildlife tour!



Canopy Camp twin bedroom

After lunch, we will head back to the Pan-American Highway and continue east to the Canopy Camp Darien, and arrive before daylight fades so we can settle into our tents and get acquainted with the setting. After a delicious dinner of fresh American and Panamanian fare, we will gather to have a briefing about the days to come, and settle into our tents for the night.

Afternoon: Bayano Region & Arrival at Canopy Camp Darién

After lunch, we will head back to the Pan-American Highway and continue east to the Canopy Camp Darien, and arrive before daylight fades so we can settle into our tents and get acquainted with the setting. After a delicious dinner of fresh American and Panamanian fare, we will gather to have a briefing about the days to come, and settle into our tents for the night.

Day 3

Morning: Canopy Camp Trails

We will meet before sunrise for a hot drink and to enjoy the sounds of the birds. Black-mandibled and Keel-billed Toucans call from the towering Cuipo trees; Red-lored and Mealy Parrots fly overhead; White-bellied Antbird, Bright-rumped Attila, White-headed Wren and Golden-headed Manakin sing from the

surrounding forests; while Pale-bellied Hermit and Sapphire-throated Hummingbird visit the flowers around camp.



Barred Puffbird by Cindy Beckman

Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Barred Puffbird are also seen frequently around the campsite. We will be served a hearty breakfast at 7:30 am. After breakfast we will work our way into the forest on "Nando's Trail," in the hope of finding Tiny Hawk, Black and Great Antshrikes, Olive-backed Quail-dove, Cinnamon Becard, Black-tailed Trogon, Double-banded Graytail, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Yellow-breasted and Royal Flycatchers and Russet-winged Schiffornis. We will also be looking for groups of Red-throated Caracara, King Vulture and Short-tailed Hawk overhead in the clearings. Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Plumbeous and Zone-tailed Hawks are also possible. Lunch at Canopy Camp.

Afternoon: Quebrada Felix Abajo

Just a short drive from the Canopy Camp, we reach the open areas and rice fields of Quebrada Felix Abajo. We'll drive slowly along the winding road through fields and pastures mixed with tall Cuipo and Panama trees. Crossing the Quebrada (stream) Felix, we will watch for kingfishers and Rufescent Tiger-Heron, hunting quietly for fish and frogs. Scanning the fields beside us, we hope to find Red-breasted Blackbird, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground-doves, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Red-billed Scythebill, Muscovy Duck, Orange-crowned Oriole, Chestnut-fronted Macaw and raptors, including Laughing Falcon and Red-throated Caracara may be seen. In small thickets along the way, Black Antshrike and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher may be lurking around. At the rice fields, water birds—Southern Lapwing, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Limpkin, Cocoi Heron and if lucky, a Gray-breasted Crake—are around and more raptors including Aplomado Falcon, Savanna Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture can be seen foraging in the flooded field. On the way back, mixed flocks of White-eared Conebill, tanagers and other birds may be encountered. Geoffroy's Tamarins and Gray Fox are mammals that can be found here.

We will return to camp in time to freshen up for dinner. After dinner we will gather to look for owls, including Striped, Crested, Barn, Black-and-white and Mottled Owls, as well as Common and Great Potoos and hopefully some nocturnal mammals. We will end the day with our checklist, tallying our sightings for our first full day at the Canopy Camp! Dinner at Canopy Camp.



Black Oropendola

Day 4

All day: Aruza Lagoons

Today we visit the area of Aruza Lagoons and Aruza Road. This road extends 12 km south off the Pan-American Highway through open farmland, dry scrub and roadside habitat. The road eventually crosses a small stream and ends at small ponds. Along the roadsides, we hope to find Red-breasted Blackbird, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, White-headed Wren, Smooth-billed and Greater Ani, Muscovy Duck, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Southern Lapwing, Blue-headed Parrot, Striped Cuckoo, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Buff-breasted Wren, Bananaquit, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds, Crested Oropendola and Laughing and Aplomado Falcon. If we're lucky, we may get a glimpse of a Chestnut-fronted Macaw or a shy Little Cuckoo, both having been seen along this road. We will break for lunch in a shady spot along the road. This afternoon at the lagoons, Pied Water-Tyrant, Capped Heron, the beautiful Yellow-hooded Blackbird and the extraordinary Black-capped Donacobius are found here, a great habitat for all these wonderful species! Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 5

All day: Harpy Eagle Nest

Today we will spend the day trying to see the mighty Harpy Eagle. A nesting pair of Harpy Eagles, one of the largest eagles in the world, has recently been located and the birds can reliably be seen for a considerable period of time as the parents regularly visit the nest in the early stages and then the fledged juvenile remains close to the nest for up to a year!



Harpy Eagle at its nest

A pair of Harpy Eagles usually only raise one chick every few years, and once they choose a nest site the primary egg is incubated for about 56 days. After another 36 days, the

chick starts awkwardly standing and walking. At about 6 months of age the chick will fledge, but is still fed by its parents for a further 6-10 months and becomes more visible as it perches in or close to the nesting tree. This means the chances of seeing this impressive bird are very high during 2017! The national bird of Panama, and among the largest eagles in the world, similar in weight to the Philippine Eagle and Steller's Sea Eagle, but the Harpy has a more compact wingspan, perfect for navigating the sprawling tropical forests to which it is confined. Apex predators at the top of the food chain, Harpy Eagles prey primarily on tree-dwelling mammals, which research has shown to be about 79% sloths and 11.6% monkeys. Monkeys that are commonly preyed upon include Saki, Capuchin, Howler, Squirrel, Titi, and Spider Monkeys. Smaller monkeys, such as Marmosets and Tamarins, seem to be ignored by the great Harpy Eagle.

We will spend time trying to obtain views and enjoy the many other species that are in the area.

Day 6

Morning: El Salto Road

We will meet for an early breakfast, then head to El Salto Road for the morning. El Salto Road extends 6 km north from the Pan-American Highway and ends at the mighty Río Chucunaque. This open road and surrounding dry forest is a great place to search for regional specialties including Golden-green Woodpecker, Double-banded Graytail, Blue-and-gold and Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Black and Crested Oropendolas, Blue Cotinga, White-eared Conebill, Black-breasted Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole and the majestic King Vulture. A trail at the end of the road will take us into low-canopy forest, where we hope to find Bare-crowned Antbird, Pale-bellied Hermit, Olivaceous Piculet, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Forest Elaenia. Lunch at Canopy Camp.

Afternoon: Tierra Nueva Foundation

After some relaxation time during the hottest part of the day, we will visit the property of the Tierra Nueva



Canopy Camp Social Area

Foundation. Fundación Tierra Nueva is a non-profit organization whose main mission is "working towards the sustainable development of people of the Darién Rainforest". The property is the home of a technical school focusing on applications in agriculture. We will explore the trails of this large property, in the hope of finding Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Yellow-breasted and Black-billed Flycatchers, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Slaty-backed Forest-falcon, Cinnamon, Cinereous and One-coloured Becards, White-eared Conebill, White-headed Wren and

the magnificent Great Curassow. We will also search for the eastern race of the Chestnut-backed Antbird, which shows white spots on the wings. Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 7

Morning: San Francisco Nature Reserve

We will wake before dawn to pack and have an early breakfast, say our goodbyes to the Canopy Camp, and start our journey back to Panama City. We will stop at San Francisco Nature Reserve, a private forest reserve owned and managed by the St. Francis Foundation, covering 1,300 acres in eastern Panama Province, and we will spend the morning birding at this fantastic site. The San Francisco Reserve was established in 2001 by Father Pablo Kasuboski, an American priest from Wisconsin who came to Panama in 1988. The reserve serves as a wildlife refuge and protects the headwaters of the main rivers of the area. The foundation created by Padre Pablo, as Father Kasuboski is called, also works on infrastructure development in the area by building and maintaining aqueducts, roads, schools and churches. In fact, the St. Francis Foundation built and maintains the largest private rural aqueduct in all of Panama and Central America. The reserve has a variety of habitats including primary, secondary and riparian forests, forest edge, fields, farmland, ponds and wetlands. During our morning here, we will explore some of the different habitats along the short road that enters the reserve. We will hope to find Great Jacamar, Broad-billed Motmot, Collared Aracari, Russet-winged Schiffornis, Royal Flycatcher, White-fronted Nunbird, Brownish Twistwing, Yellow-green Tyrannulet, Central American Pygmy-owl, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground-doves, and if we're very lucky, a Black-and-white Hawk-eagle soaring overhead or a Wing-banded Antbird along the trails! Lunch in Torti, and all too soon it will be time for us to head back to the airport for our flight home.



White-fronted Nunbird by Carlos Bethancourt

Day 8

Arrival in UK during the late afternoon.

Accommodation & group size

We will be staying in the new Canopy Camp Darién, which has spacious and comfortable walk-in safari tents, each with full-sized beds, private bathroom facilities with hot water and flush toilets, electricity and a fan.

Nest Site Visit

For the full day tour to the Harpy Eagle nest site there will be no charge locally.

Guide

Led by expert local birding guides.

Flights

Flights will either be KLM via Amsterdam, Iberia via Madrid or Air France via Paris

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. It is by no means a strenuous or difficult tour though, and all outings and walks are optional.

Weather

The climate in Panama will be generally warm and humid. Short bursts of rain are likely at times, but not to the detriment of our birding aims.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

The tour price includes all lodging, taxes, meals, wine with dinner, natural fruit juices, sodas, Wi-Fi, arrival night at Riande Airport Hotel with dinner, all tours stated in the itinerary, bilingual professional guides, snacks and beverages during all outings.

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks not mentioned above, laundry, tips and souvenirs.



How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.