

Panama - Canopy Tower

Naturetrek Tour Report

5 - 18 November 2017



Streak-chested Antpitta



Geoffroy's Tamarin



3-toed Sloth



Golden-collared Manakin

Report kindly compiled by client Jill Preston
Images courtesy of John Spaul



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Alexis Sanchez (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Sunday 5th November

We set off from Heathrow to Panama at 6.30 am, travelling in the wrong direction to start with via Amsterdam was easy. The transit was straightforward and the main flight was fine, albeit long. Some members of the group flew virtually over their own house as we crossed the UK en route!

Picking up luggage and getting out of the airport was quite straightforward and we were met by the Naturetrek rep (really the Canopy Tower driver). Having introduced ourselves, we settled down to an uneventful drive to Canopy Tower. It was pretty well dark by the time we arrived at the bottom of Semaphore Hill which leads up to the Tower so it was too dark to see much but we were all amazed by the steepness of the hill and the fact that the road kept going on and on. We finally got to the top and were checked in and shown to our rooms in the Tower. We met Alex our guide for the coming days and after a short break had the first of the great meals that we experienced at both the Tower and the Lodge. Most of us had been up for nearly 24 hours by that time so everyone soon turned in ready for the coming day.

Day 2

Monday 6th November

Everyone was up early to ascend to the observation deck and see what was about. The first time you climb those stairs and see the view from the top of the Tower is truly amazing. We heard Tinamou calling from the forest floor below and saw our first birds: the Eastern Wood Pewee that was flitting around on every occasion we went up there, the ubiquitous vultures and pigeons, Plain, Blue-grey and Palm Tanager and the Bay-breasted Warbler who was in the same tree every day.

After breakfast, we walked gently down Semaphore Hill, spotting so many birds as we did. Broad-billed Motmot, Black-throated Trogon, Black-breasted Puffbird, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Blue Dacnis. We saw Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky Antbird, Black-crowned Antshrike, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, not forgetting the Howler and Night Monkeys, the Agouti, Coati and squirrels. It was hot and at one point the van from the Tower arrived with cool drinks – bliss! When we reached the bottom of the hill, this saved our legs and took us back up ready for lunch.

In the afternoon, we drove to the Ammo Dump ponds. Before we even got to the ponds we spent a while birding an adjacent field near to the Canal and saw Yellow-tailed and Baltimore Oriole, Crimson-backed and Summer Tanager, Yellow and Tennessee Warbler, Lesser Greenlet, Dusky-capped and Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Tropical Gnatwren. By the Canal we saw various swallows and martins, Yellow-headed Caracara, Royal Tern, Tropical Mockingbird and Magnificent Frigatebird. At the ponds themselves we saw Rufescent Tiger Heron, Anhinga, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Wattled Jacana. We tried hard for the elusive White-throated Crake but despite its regular calls, we had no sight of it.

Day 3

Tuesday 7th November

The day started with the excitement of an Ocelot trapped in the Canopy Tower compound. It had been there all night and was quite stressed by the morning so, once everyone had had a chance to see and photograph it, we let

it out. Although everyone assumed this was a one off, never to be repeated experience since no one at the Tower had previously ever seen an Ocelot, it came back again two nights later!

Today was our first visit to Pipeline Road and we weren't disappointed. Before we'd even set foot on the road and just as we were parking we saw Great Crested Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, White-necked Puffbird (or was it Pied?), Black-cheeked Woodpecker. Alex was joined this morning by Jorge, a trainee guide, so we had two pairs of eyes looking out for us. The road was hot and, in places, very muddy and at times we had heavy rain but that didn't deter us. At one point we came across an ant swarm and with so many birds flitting around it was difficult at times to catch each one. This yielded White-flanked, Checker-throated and Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed, Bicoloured and Spotted Antbirds and, best of all, a Streak-chested Antpitta. A branch pointed out by Alex and Jorge turned out to be a roosting Great Potoo (reliably almost always in the same place). Just as we stopped for lunch to eat our sandwiches, we spotted a Black-capped Pygmy Tyrant, one of the smallest passerines in the world and normally a bird of the high forest canopy, building a nest right by the roadway. Our Manakin count started with Blue-crowned and Red-capped; our Trogon count continued with White-tailed and Black-throated. We also saw Green Kingfisher, Black- (formerly Chestnut-) mandibled Toucan, Cinnamon- and Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Plain Brown, Northern Barred, Cocoa and Black-striped Woodcreeper, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Grey-headed Tanager and Red-throated Ant Tanager.

On the way back from Pipeline Road, we stopped again at the Ammo Dump ponds, where Alex was keen to bag the elusive White-throated Crake. We heard several of them and, after much patience, we finally had good views of one. We also saw Green and Striated Heron and our only Grey-lined Hawk.

Day 4

Wednesday 8th November

This morning we drove to the bottom of Semaphore Hill to walk on Plantation Trail but there was very little around and it was hot and came on to rain. In the afternoon, we had been planning to go to Summit Gardens but it was too wet so we finally drove down to a playing field and development of holiday homes by the Chagres River. Although it continued to rain for much of the time we were there, we still had some good spots including Prothonotary Warbler, Black-bellied and Song Wren, Squirrel Cuckoo, Purple Gallinule, Cocoi Heron, Snail Kite and, due to Alex's excellent spotting skills, a White Hawk which, without his scope, was no more than a white dot over the other side of the river.

Day 5

Thursday 9th November

The morning started well with a Blue Cotinga spotted from the observation deck far down the valley, its vibrant blue standing out in the dawn light. After breakfast we drove to Old Gamboa Road, a green easy-to-walk trail adjacent to the National Police College that would probably have yielded more birds had it not rained so hard. By the lakes we spotted Boat-billed and Green Heron, Ringed and Amazon Kingfisher and on the trail Whooping Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker, Poultry Tyrannulet, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, and Black-chested Jay. We continued along the trail to a point where Alex hoped we might find a roosting owl but it was nowhere to be seen.

In the afternoon, the weather cleared up sufficiently for the drive to Summit Gardens which is a beautiful park and zoo with various captive native animals and birds and lots of wild animals and birds too. Here we spotted

Yellow-backed Oriole, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Golden-collared Manikin, Red-eyed Vireo, Panama Flycatcher, Bright-rumped Attila, Great Black Hawk. We also marvelled at the size of the captive Harpy Eagle that lives in the park.

After dinner we set out on a night drive, torches and searchlight at the ready, but saw very little apart from a Common Potoo and a sloth hanging right over the road.

Day 6

Friday 10th November

The morning started with a return visit to Pipeline Road to see if we could spot some of the birds that we might have missed first time round. Alex was keen to find an Ocellated Antbird (which sadly we didn't find) but we were very lucky to see an Agami Heron which more than made up for it. We also saw for the first time Great Tinamou, Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogon and Plain Brown Woodcreeper.

In the afternoon, we took a break from birding to visit the Miraflores Locks on the Panama Canal. This coincided with a bank holiday so there were lots of people at the visitor centre but that didn't prevent us from marvelling at the size of the container ships passing through the Canal and the complexity of the lock's engineering. Clearly much of Panama's wealth comes from the Canal which operates 24/7 on every day of the year. We were told that it costs \$130,000 for a medium-sized ship to pass through the Canal. Even at the Canal we birded. Some of us saw an Osprey (the only one of the trip) plus there were pelicans and frigatebirds all around.

After dinner, Alex spotted a Black-and-white Owl right outside the window of the Tower and we all had wonderful views.

Day 7

Saturday 11th November

Today we went further afield to Cerro Azul where we wandered around parts of a private housing estate. We started well with the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker and a mixed tanager flock including Emerald, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded and Black-and-yellow Tanagers. We also had Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and White-ruffed Manakin and our only King Vulture. We broke for lunch which we ate at a private house belonging to the President of the Audubon Society of Panama. Having braved the steepest and mossiest trail to get there, the beautiful gardens and copious hummingbirds were well worth the effort. Alex and our driver cooked a delicious lunch whilst we birded and took photos. At one point, a Green Honeycreeper chasing a hummingbird crashed into a window in the house and stunned themselves. As Alex rescued them, it was lovely to see them close up and they both seemed none the worse for this once they'd had the chance to rest and recover.

On the way home, we drove back to the Tower via the Costa del Este, a beach teeming with waders and pelicans. Here we saw Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Heron, hundreds of Brown Pelicans and one lone White Pelican (listed as very rare in the checklist and book but this individual has apparently attached itself to the brown colony so can often be seen there), Roseate Spoonbill, Black-necked Stilt, Wilson's and Semipalmated Plover, Willet, Whimbrel and Western Sandpiper, Laughing Gull and Gull-billed Tern. As it came

on to rain we drove back through downtown Panama City with its amazing architecture, across a bay teeming with hundreds more waders and pelicans.

Day 8

Sunday 12th November

Today we started with great birding from the tower, seeing Crane Hawk and Short-tailed Hawk and, for some of us, a Blue Cotinga before breakfast. Mike and Marion left us to return to the UK and the rest of us were driven to Canopy Lodge, about two hours' drive. away from the tower in a beautiful woodland setting with a mountain stream running through the grounds. A quick wander round the grounds before lunch produced various warblers, including Bay-rumped, Green Kingfisher, Buff-throated Saltator, Grey-necked Wood Rail and Orange-chinned Parakeet. For much of the afternoon it poured with rain which turned the mountain stream into a raging torrent. We contented ourselves with relaxing and watching the feeders and birds in the garden (Dusky-faced, Flame-rumped, Crimson-backed Tanagers and Bananaquit until the rain eventually eased and Alex returned to take us for a stroll up the road (accompanied by a dog!). We saw our one-and-only Bay Wren (although we continued to hear its explosive calls throughout this second phase of the holiday) Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Broad billed-Motmot.

Day 9

Monday 13th November

This morning we set off to walk an upland trail and saw Crested and Chestnut-headed Oropendula en route, whilst searching for roosting owls (in what turned out to be the wrong tree!). On the trail we had wonderful views of Eastern Meadowlark, along with Wedge-tailed Grass Finch and Silver-throated Tanager. After lunch at the lodge, we set out in the pouring rain to search for a Spectacled Owl roost. With umbrellas up, we slipped and slid down our way down a wooded hillside and eventually reached our target. From there we drove to the Cara Iguana trail, essentially a tarmaced road along the edge of a sloping grassed area with various types of tree. Here we saw Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers, American Redstart, Black-chested Jay, Acadian Flycatcher, Spot-crowned Ant Vireo, Lineated Woodpecker, Roadside Hawk.

Day 10

Tuesday 14th November

Today we drove down to the coastal lowlands and had a largely dry day which produced a completely different set of birds, including Savannah Hawk, American Kestrel, Crested Caracara, Crested Bobwhite, more Eastern Meadowlarks, Fork-tailed Flycatcher (an amazing bird), Lance-tailed Manakin (Alex clearly knew exactly where to look for this one), Panama and Boat-billed Flycatchers and Grey Kingbird, Barred Antshrike (a really striking bird), Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. Towards lunchtime, we drove to the Pacific (catching Pearly Kite, Veraguan Mango, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird en route plus Willet, Whimbrel and Sanderling on the beach) to have a picnic at the beach house belonging to the Canopy Tower/Lodge owner. We paddled in the Pacific as Brown Boobies and pelicans drifted overhead. On the way back, we found a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls.

Day 11

Wednesday 15th November

The feeders at the lodge produced Spot-crowned Barbet this morning which was great. John and Katrina had seen these the previous day so it was good that they returned for more food! This morning we drove further up the hill from the lodge, finally catching the roosting Vermiculated Screech Owls by searching in the correct tree

this time, although they were very difficult to see and moved further into the cover as they realised we were looking for them. On the road we saw another Barred Antshrike and also Chestnut-capped Brush Finch, Tawny-crested Tanager, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper.

In the afternoon, we walked to the nearby waterfall (that we had missed due to the poor weather on our first day at the lodge). Uphill walking was made much easier by the use of wooden walking poles and we found Tody Motmot and also roosting Mottled Owl (our 5th owl). Afterwards we returned to Cara Iguana trail and saw Golden-winged Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Masked Tityra, White-winged Becard, Red-crowned Woodpecker.

Day 12

Thursday 16th November

Our final day. We drove out in two 4x4s to Altos de Maria, a housing estate in the mountains with virtually no houses! We had to go through two security checks to reach tarmaced roads, some at almost 45 degrees, along which we birded. The irony being that if the houses had been there (the whole area was divided into plots) then the birds would not have been. En route we had spotted Orange-bellied Trogon at a spot where the road seemed to be carpeted with caterpillars! At Altos de Maria, after staking out a high tree which standing at an impossible angle, we saw Snowcap and also found a lovely Tufted Flycatcher, Blue-throated (Emerald) Toucanet, Green Thorntail, Silver-throated Tanager, Common Chlorospingus (otherwise known as Common Bush Tanager), Pale-vented Thrush, Northern Schiffonis. We moved on to a trail through the forest by a lake and found White-throated Spadebill, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Bat Falcon, Green Kingfisher and Spotted Sandpiper before stopping for a wonderful picnic lunch by the lake.

Day 13

Friday 17th November

Although this was our going-home day, Alex still took us out for a short period of birding in the morning, during which we managed to catch Lesser Goldfinch, Baltimore Oriole, Black-striped Sparrow, Grey-capped Flycatcher and I managed not to see a Yellow-throated Vireo!. We also spent a short while looking round the market in El Valle before returning to Panama City to catch our flight back to the UK via Amsterdam.

Day 14

Saturday 18th November

Arrive back in the UK

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!



Coral Snake



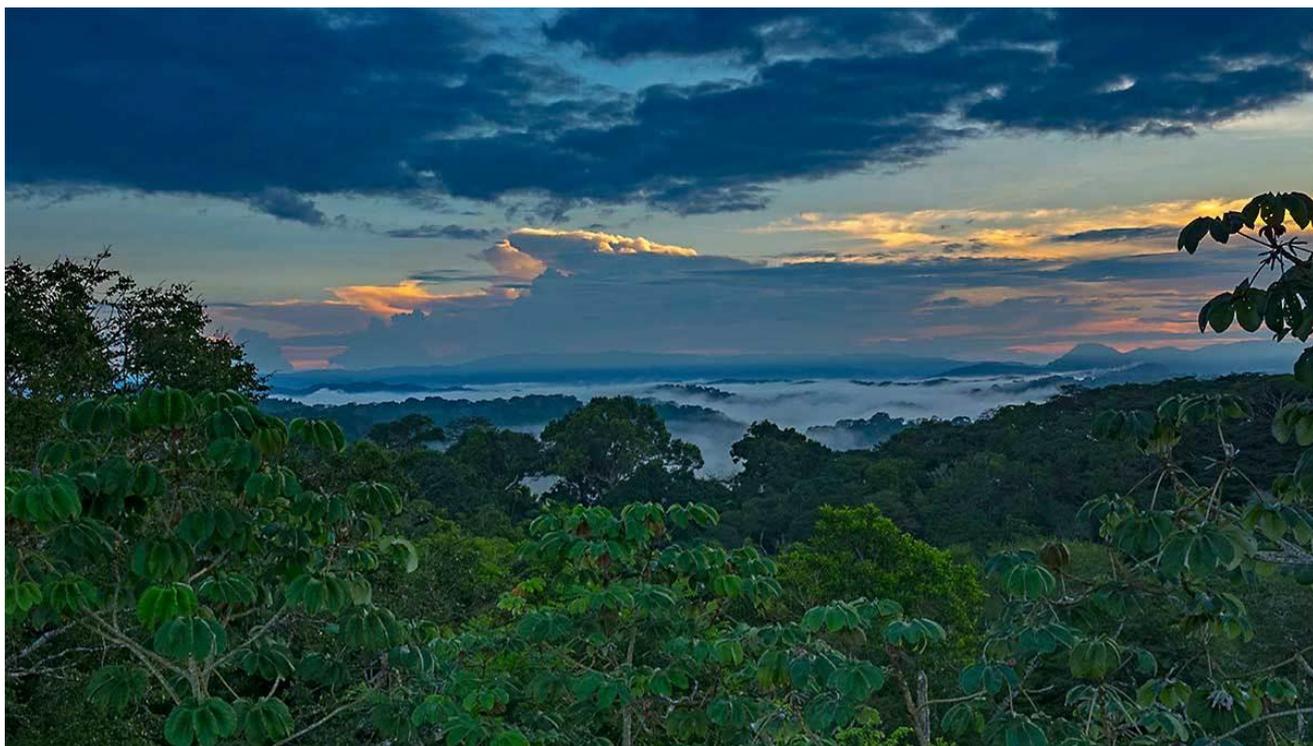
Long-billed Hermit



Black-breasted Puffbird



Tamandua



Canopy Tower Dawn