

# Panama – Mammals of the Canopy Tower

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 20th May 2023



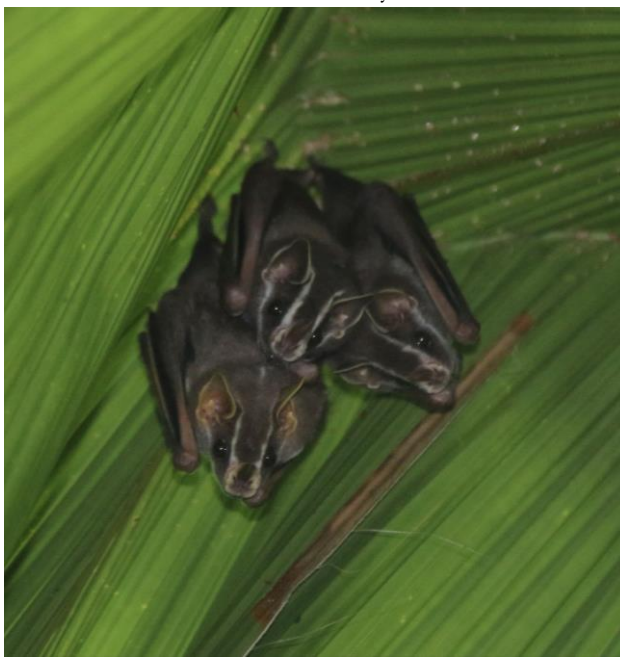
Northern Tamandua by Alan & Carol de Witt



Nine-banded Armadillo by Alan & Carol de Witt



Panamanian Night Monkey by Jan Gane



Tent-making Bats by Jan Gane

Tour report kindly written by client Jan Gane with editing by Carol De Witt



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Tour participants: Alexis (Alex) Sánchez and Erick Rodríguez (leaders) with eight Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Wednesday 10th May

We all met at Panama City airport after our journey from various regional airports of the UK via Amsterdam, and three who had arrived in Panama the previous day - a group of eight and were met by our driver.

We had about an hour drive to our accommodation, the Canopy Tower, an old radar tower built by the American military, now surrounded by rainforest. Here we were met by our guide, Alex and introduced to our other guide, Eric, both would be with us for the whole trip. We were shown to our rooms and had dinner straight away, then a quick briefing from Alex before bed. Our first mammal was a bat flying through the dining room, probably a Mastiff bat and reptiles, the House Geckos.



## Day 2

Thursday 11th May

We were awakened early by the calls of the Mantled Howler Monkeys. Climbing up to the viewing platform before breakfast, we had wonderful views over the forest and of the Panama Canal. Everything was very wet due to a heavy dew. Alex and Eric pointed out our first Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, that was well camouflaged in a nearby tree. Being level with the treetops was an amazing experience, and there were lots of birds flying about including Palm Tanagers, a couple of Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, Collared Acari, Mealy Parrots and Keel-billed Toucan

Whilst we were having breakfast some Geoffroy's Tamarins arrived for banana, giving us excellent views of these primates.

After breakfast we walked around the compound checking out the various feeders for hummingbirds including Blue-chested, Long-billed Hermit and White-vented Plumeleteer. We also saw a small Boa Constrictor on the tree

near the hummingbird feeders, probably hoping to catch a meal. Scarlet-rumped Cacique nests hung from the trees. We were watching two sloths high in the canopy when one decided to descend the tree surprisingly quickly.

Our first trip out was a walk down Semaphore Hill, we saw Black and White Owls, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Plain Brown Woodcreeper, and many others as well as more Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths, a White-nosed Coati, a Central American Agouti and Common Basilisks. On the road was a dead racer snake.

The driver brought us a welcome cold drink to the bottom and drove us back up again. It is a very steep hill so we were glad not to have to walk back. On route we saw a large, obviously male, Mantled Howler Monkey, soon joined by others.

After lunch there was time for another visit to the viewing platform or a rest before our afternoon excursion. We set off for the Ammo Ponds near Gamboa on the larger “Birdmobile”, ‘El Tinamu’. Quite an experience on public roads. The area proved to be very productive for birds, we saw quite a variety including Rufous Tiger Heron, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Purple Gallinule, Common Jacana, Tody-flycatcher, Streaked and Social flycatchers. We watched as a fairly large Bird-eating Snake as it moved through the rushes. Pond Sliders and American Crocodiles were on the pond edge. Mammals included Central American Agouti, Variegated Squirrel and two Lesser Capybaras which just emerged from the vegetation and walked past everyone as they crossed the road. Black Iguanas on the rail tracks caused us to stop on the return journey.

We met to do the checklist before dinner. After dinner we were excited to be visited by a Kinkajou for banana.

A total of 9 mammals were seen.

## Day 3

## Friday 12th May

Before breakfast there was a visit to the viewing platform. This was very much a repeat of the previous morning.

After breakfast we made a check on the baby boa who had moved trees, before setting off for a trip to the Caribbean side of Panama. We crossed the new Atlantic bridge over the Panama Canal giving us good views of the big locks.

We visited the San Lorenzo National Park where the group walked along a track in the forest and had views of a group Panamanian White-faced Capuchins as they crossed the road and a very fleeting view of a pocket mouse. Eric spotted several Hoffmans Two-toed sloths very well hidden high in the trees, as well a Central American Agouti and White-nosed Coati.

Our second walk was alongside an old USA Army training base. Razor wire was along the top of the 6ft fence. At the end our access was blocked, and we glimpsed Oropendola nests and the birds through the gate. Birds included Black-throated Trogon, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Red-capped Manakin. While having our coffee break we had good views of a Yellow-throated Toucan.

We moved on to the historic San Lorenzo Fort where we watched a short film on the history of the fort before making a tour of the grounds, with views out over the Caribbean and the River Chagres. Birds included Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Orange-chinned Parakeets and Black-chested Jay.

In one of the buildings we saw a pair of Greater White-stripe Bats roosting in an arched roof. There were Brown Pelicans flying in formation over the sea, a Royal Tern was circling on the estuary and a Yellow-headed Caracara posed well on the fort walls and cannon.

Alex had laid out a delicious picnic lunch under the mango trees and while we ate, we were entertained by a line of Leaf-cutter Ants carrying leaves, a Central American Agouti and a Four-lined Ameiva lizard.

We then drove down to shoreline and observed an immature Blue Heron, a Tricoloured Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, Tropical Mockingbird and a Sandwich Tern before heading back to the Canopy Tower.

Alex came to a sudden stop for a Northern Tamandua crossing the road on the way back up Semaphore Hill before it climbed a tree and disappeared into the foliage.

Back at the tower we completed the list before dinner.

After dinner we went on a night drive, spotlighting. It was quiet, but we did see a Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth moving above our heads.

## Day 4

Saturday 13th May

Early morning we were once again on the viewing platform where we saw Mealy and Red-lored Parrots, Blue Dacnis, Palm Tanagers and an Eastern Wood Pewee.

At breakfast a Collared Acari and a Black-cheeked Woodpecker visited the tree outside the window.

We made the now usual check on the Boa, which had moved again and was actually on the hummingbird feeder pole. The hummingbirds flew around the feeders and a Squirrel Cuckoo was spotted high in a tree.

We were then driven to the Pipeline Road. The road covers a pipeline that the Americans had built during WW2, but it had never been used. On route we had good views of a Rufescent Tiger Heron on the Ammo ponds as well as Mangrove Swallow and Streaked Flycatcher and Magnificent Frigatebird.

The van was parked up and the group started walking up the road through rainforest. We saw Streaked Flycatcher, Green Shrike-Vireo, a Fasciated Antshrike, Bright-rumped Attila, and a Plain-brown Woodcreeper. A Purple-throated Fruit Crow, which isn't a crow and doesn't eat fruit, called from a high tree.

Alex found us a Great Potoo, a nocturnal bird which was fast asleep on a branch. A Black-tailed Trogon female excavated a termite nest whilst the male looked on. In front of us a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys with babies crossed over the track.

Further along the track a beautiful Blue Morpho butterfly flew past us, and an Anole Lizard climbed up a fern frond. A Green Iguana posed on a tree root and a Three-toed Sloth was spotted up a tree. We saw several agoutis and some Red-tailed Squirrels. There was a Scarlet-rumped Cacique, a Keel-billed toucan and a Whooping Motmot hidden in the foliage.

Fortunately Alex then appeared with the Birdmobile and cold drinks as the temperature had soared, and we turned around and returned to the tower for lunch.

After lunch, we had some downtime before leaving for the sloth sanctuary. This was in the grounds of a resort with swimming pools, bar and restaurant with beautiful views of the Chagres River. In contrast it was set amidst the remains of the old USA base. Some buildings were being renovated, but others were in need of a lot of attention.

In the sloth sanctuary we met a four-year old orphan Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth called Angela. She was the ambassador for the sanctuary. We also had a tour of the Frog Enclosure to see a variety of tiny poison dart frogs in various colours. There was also a visit to a butterfly house where we saw a variety of colourful butterflies including the Juliet and Blue Morpho.

On our exit from the resort a Yellow-headed Caracara sat on a post and we had good views of a Central American Agouti.

We returned in time for the checklist and dinner.

After dinner, we all went on a night drive down Semaphore Hill, the first spot was a Roosting Tinamou and a Mealy Parrot. We had our first views of Nine-banded Armadillos and a glimpse of a Common Opossum as well as a sleeping Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth.

## Day 5

## Sunday 14th May

Today's excursion headed towards Panama City to the Forests of the Metropolitan National Park. The hill was a popular site for locals to perform their Sunday morning exercise and was quite a busy path. As we climbed the steep hill, we glimpsed Mantled Howler Monkeys and agoutis, saw Red-throated Tanager, a 3-toed sloth, Collared Aracari and Mealy Parrot.

At a view point, we had great views of a small group of Keel-billed Toucans.

Further on we came to a tree with a hole in it and when Alex shook a nearby bush a little head appeared and checked us out. It was a Panamanian Night Monkey. We had really good views of this incredible creature.

Nearby we got good views of a family of Crimson-headed Woodpeckers hammering on a tree trunk and a lone, White-nosed Coati crossed the path in front of us. We heard a Rufous-and-white Wren and saw a Short-tailed Hawk perched in a tree. As we reached the bottom we came across some shy White-tailed Deer and a Yellow-headed Gecko

We then moved from Panama City to Pinta Culebra. It is run by the Smithsonian Institute and from here you can see the Pacific end of the canal.

We watched, fascinated, by a stand-off between a Crab-eating Raccoon and a large Green Iguana on a tree branch. Eventually, the racoon found a way to pass the Iguana and headed down to the ground. We saw a couple more racoons and several Hoffman's Two-toed Sloths gave excellent views in the treetops. The area had several very large Green Iguanas who were not at all bothered by people.

An indoor exhibition of Poison Dart frogs was interesting and provided good views of several species. A group of Brown Pelicans flew overhead followed by Magnificent Frigatebirds. On the ground were a Mockingbird, Grackle and a Mangrove Warbler. Cormorants perched drying their feathers in the sun.



After Lunch at the tower, we had a visit to the Panama Canal Museum and lock. We watched a monohull yacht, a tri-hull catamaran and a large container ship move through the lock. The container ship's passage was controlled by 8 mule engines, four on each side which kept it central in the lock and controlled its descent. A group of visiting diplomats watched the scene from on front of the barriers.

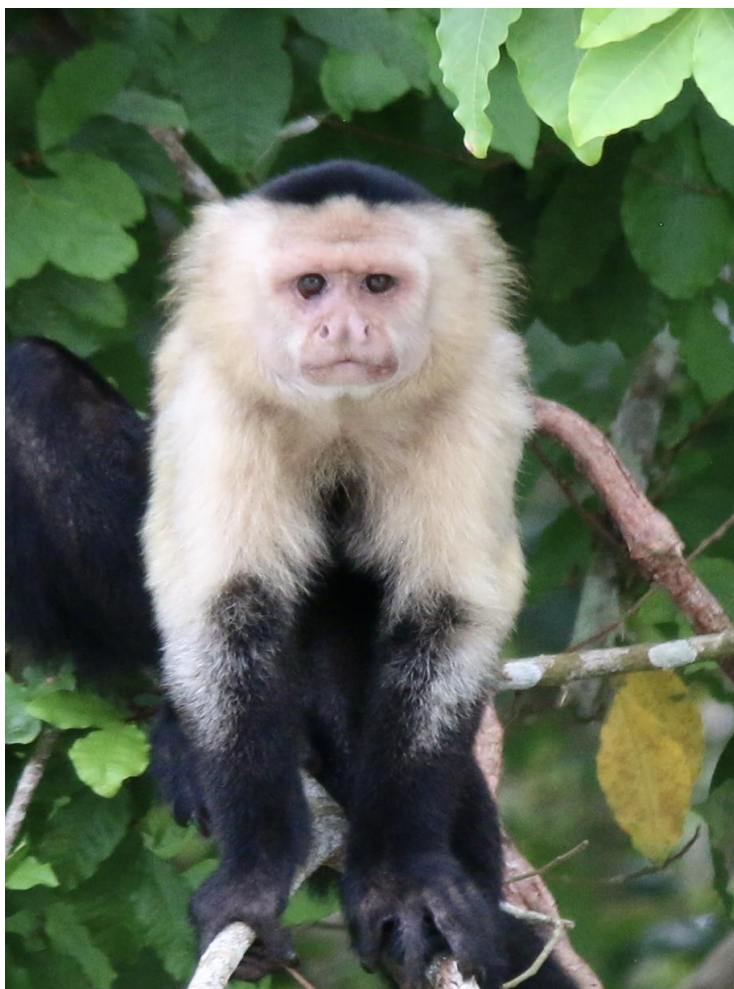
Later we sat in a cool cinema and watched a 3-D film, narrated by Morgan Freeman, on the canal and its history.

Afterwards we headed back to the tower and the checklist before dinner. Once again, the Kinkajou visited to eat bananas giving us excellent views.

## Day 6

## Monday 15th May

After breakfast we made rounds of the feeders and played 'Where is the boa today?', before heading off for a boat trip to Lake Gatun. Starting in the Chagres River, the boatman skilfully manoeuvred the boat into creeks and close to the shore. Here we saw lots of water birds including, Great Blue, Little Blue, Green, Striated and Rufous Tiger Herons, Whistling Ducks, Wattled Jacana, Purple Gallinule and Ringed Kingfisher. We saw several Snail Kites whose numbers have increased because of the increase in the Apple Snail numbers. Black-necked Stilts, crocodiles and Pond Slider also were present.



Panamanian White-faced Capuchin Monkey

We then motored out into the Panama Canal where we were dwarfed by the big cargo ships, passing Magnificent Frigatebirds and Sandwich and Elegant Terns resting on a marker buoy. On Lake Gatun, we headed to islands

where we saw Panamanian White-faced Capuchin Monkeys, Geoffroy's Tamarins and Mantled Howler Monkeys. A colony of Proboscis Bats lined up on a tree trunk. Large Basilisks, Green Iguanas and American Crocodiles hugged the banks.

Limpkins probed the mud for food as Grey-cowled Woodrails crept through the reeds. We also saw a Neotropical Cormorant, Yellow-headed Caracara and many more Snail Kites - one of them had a snail in its beak. A Keel-billed Toucan persistently chased a bat. Perched on a branch we saw a Ringed Kingfisher looking for fish.

We thanked our excellent boat driver and returned to base for lunch.

A thunderstorm meant a late start to the afternoon's excursion to the Rainforest Discovery centre. As we drove along the Pipeline Road some of the group managed to see pair of Great Curassow on the road before they disappeared back into the forest. A Ruddy Quail-Dove perched on a log. On arrival we headed to the Hummingbird feeders where we managed a new species, Crowned Woodnymph.

In the poor light Alex found us a Choco Screech Owl and its chick hidden in the branches.

Then some of the group climbed the observation tower. There were 174 steps to the top and good views over the canopy. Although the mist was rising, a group of Mantled Howler Monkeys could be seen roosting. The remainder of the group opted to watch the hummingbirds on the feeders.

A delicious dinner was brought from the Canopy Tower and we ate an excellent meal alfresco watching the hummingbird feeders. We exchanged vehicles with the kitchen staff and settled into the Great Tinamou bird mobile for our return to the Canopy Tower.

Spotlighting on way back to the Canopy Tower, our guides spotted a very well camouflaged Paraque nightjar nestled amongst the leaves, as well as a roosting Tinamou and a Slaty-tailed Trogon. The lights also picked up a cottontail, a Nine-banded Armadillo, Panamanian Night Monkeys in a palm tree, two and three-toed sloths and a Kinkajou.

The usual check list was completed before bed.

## Day 7

**Tuesday 16th May**

It had rained in the night and continued in the early morning delaying the start of the morning's excursion. After the usual check of the feeders and the boa, we set off for Pipeline Road, to walk to an area where you could actually see the pipeline. As a consequence of all the rain, there were quite a few reptiles and amphibians around, including Middle America Ameiva, Common Basilisks, Green Iguana, Leaf Litter Toad and a poison dart Rocket Frog. Later, after inspection of the photos, it was revealed to be a male Rocket Frog with tadpoles on its back.

Mammals included Red-tailed Squirrel, capuchins and howler monkeys, agouti and White-nosed Coati and a much better showing of a Pocket Mouse.

We had good views of Crimson-headed and Cinnamon Woodpeckers and we watched Red-headed Manakins bathing in the stream. There was also a Dot-winged Antwren and Red-lored Amazon parrot

We returned back to base for lunch. The afternoon excursion was to the nearby Summit Gardens in search of the colony of Tent-making Bats, which were found settled underneath a palm as we paid a visit to the captive female Harpy Eagle.

We walked around the grounds and spotted a Common Nighthawk in the rain and a Pond Slider. A House Wren, Song Wren, Clay-coloured Thrush, Lesser Kiskadee, Common Tody Flycatcher, Blue-headed Parrot and a Spotted Antbird were also seen. A family of agouti entertained us on our exit from the park.

As the light faded, we visited the nearby Summit ponds and under the watchful eye of the Border Patrol Guards we found three species of Kingfishers; Amazon, Green and, seen by some, Pygmy. Other birds included Anhinga, Variable Seedeater, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, Gartered Trogon, Smooth-billed Ani and a Panamanian Flycatcher.

We returned in time for the checklist and dinner

## Day 8

Wednesday 17th May

Moving on day. It was time to bid farewell to the tower. Went up on the viewing platform before breakfast, and saw the usual Mealy Parrots, Palm Tanagers and a Black-cheeked Woodpecker. After breakfast we paid our bills and said our goodbyes before leaving the amazing Canopy Tower. The next stop was Canopy Lodge for two nights.

We hadn't been driving long when Alex stopped the minibus to view Crested Caracaras near Summit park. But even better, we watched as staff in the park chased an escaped Geoffroy's Spider Monkey. We were of course rooting for the monkey - it was very entertaining.

It was about a two-hour journey through Panamanian countryside to the west of Canopy Tower, across the Centennial Bridge onto the highway to El Valle and our next stop, the Canopy Lodge. It is situated at 700 metres above sea level in the caldera of an extinct volcano. The temperature is cooler, and we were shown to our luxurious rooms where we had a short time to sort ourselves out before lunch.

Disappointingly, there was little activity on the feeding table, a large Basilisk was eating a banana and a Blue-grey Tanager made an appearance.

There was a Grey-headed Chachalaca in a tree near the rooms and agoutis with young, were feeding on the lawns in front of the rooms. A Green Kingfisher darted across the river, whilst Broad-billed Euphonias were building a nest in a hanging basket.

The afternoon walk was up El Macho Road where we saw a Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Double-toothed Kite, Dusky-faced Tanager, Rufous Motmot and a Roadside Hawk.

We walked to the El Macho Waterfall and spent time there cooling off in the shade admiring the view. Outside the Canopy Adventure we saw a new hummingbird, the Snowcap Hummingbird. A female Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth with a baby was showing well in a nearby tree.

Most continued on up the hill, two remained and were witness to the release of a rescued sloth at the waterfall

The walk up the hill to the stream took us past some beautiful plants growing as hedges, Morning Glory, Hibiscus, and Rainbow Eucalyptus trees with their colourful bark. We watched a trail of Leaf-cutter Ants walking to their



nest on the roadside bank. On our way back down the hill we saw Black-chested Jay and a Chestnut-headed Oropendola.

Unfortunately, we also saw a dead sloth hanging from the electricity pole where it had been electrocuted.

After dinner we did a night walk with Alex in the grounds of the lodge. As we walked alongside the river Alex caught a swimming Water Opossum in the spotlight, which we were very fortunate to see. For Alex it was only the second time he had ever seen one! Alex then spotted a Woolly Opossum high in a tree and it stayed put and gave us all good views, then we got a fleeting view of a Grey Four-eyed Opossum on the far bank before seeing the Water Opossum again. It was a great night for opossum viewing. Moving on near the pond we came across a large Smokey Jungle Frog and a Cane Toad.

## Day 9

## Thursday 18th May

After breakfast we headed up mountain to La Mesa plateau and the Gaital Candelaria Trail. En-route we stopped to view White-thighed Swallows sitting on a wire, in the same spot we found Flame-rumped Tanager, Blue-headed Parrot and Bay Wren

We parked up near some market gardens, and chicken farms. There were several Swallow-tailed Kites flying above the tree, Keel-billed Toucan, Great-tailed Grackle, a Red-crowned Ant-Tanager and a Buff-throated Saltator.

Leaving the fields, we walked a trail through the evergreen Cloud forest in search of the Alfaro's Pygmy Squirrel which unfortunately we did not find but we did find. However, we did find another Red-tailed Squirrel. Crowned Woodnymph, Bay and House Wrens, Plain-brown, Spotted and Wedge-billed Woodcreepers, and a bright green caterpillar of the Buck-eyed Moth. We also saw a beautiful bright Green Hermit Hummingbird flitting through the foliage.

As we emerged from the cloud forest, a bright green Leaf Grasshopper clung to a grass stem and near the road we saw Bananaquit and a Yellow-faced Grassquit.

We then moved on to Gaital National Monument for our second walk. Here we saw various invertebrates yet to be identified, a type of Soldier Grasshopper and a blue damselfly. Eric spotted the usual sloth busily scratching itself high in a tree.



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth

We then returned to the lodge for lunch.

After lunch, half of the group went to look for Spectacled Owls in El Valle and half chose to stay and enjoy the lovely grounds of the lodge and get a head start on the packing

The El Valle group located the owls in at the grounds of a private finca. The second stop was a quiet road next to a gated community. At the bottom of the hill Lesson's Motmots were feeding their chicks who were calling from a hole in the bank. On the way up they spotted Blue-grey Tanager, Golden-headed Tanager and Oropendola. A very large Tiger Ant was seen on a fallen log. As they descended the hill a group of Chachalacas were scratching in the grass

It was then back to the lodge for the checklist and dinner

## Day 10

Friday 19th May

Today was the last day of the tour, as we were leaving after lunch.

There was early morning excitement as a Sunbittern was spotted on the river, which gave a good opportunity for taking photographs. Also a Grey-cowled Wood-Rail and chicks were spotted.

After breakfast, the group split in two with half going to the Market in El Valle and the rest staying in the lodge grounds. The group in El Valle visited the church and the markets taking the opportunity to buy souvenirs.

In the lodge grounds, the group watched a Variegated Seedeater, Chachalacas, an agouti crossing the river, Thick-billed Euphonia, Social Flycatcher, and a Blue-grey Tanager.

We all had lunch, said our goodbyes to Alex and Eric who had been fantastic and knowledgeable guides. Then we started the return journey to the airport, where we said our goodbyes to the four staying on in Panama and checked in for the overnight flight.

The group had reached an amazing total of 27 mammal species for the trip

## Day 11

Saturday 20th May

Today we arrived back in UK via Amsterdam.



The group with Alex and Eric, at Canopy Lodge

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