Panama – Mammals of the Canopy Tower

Naturetrek Tour Report

4th - 15th July 2023



Geoffroy's Tamarin



Nine-banded Armadillo



White-nosed Coati



Mantled Howler Monkey

Tour report kindly compiled by client Rowan Hillson, photos by Martin Koganovitch



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Tour participants: Alexis Sanchez (Leader), Eric (Assistant Guide) with 10 Naturetrek clients

Summary

We had an enjoyable and productive trip, with excellent guides.

The focus was on mammals including daily sloth sightings; seeing a Water Opossum was a special highlight. We saw many birds including the rarely seen Least Bittern, and the beautiful Blue Cotinga. There were lots of reptiles, and butterflies, and, of course, the Panama Canal. The group spent eight nights at the Canopy Tower, and two at the Canopy Lodge.

Each morning at Canopy Tower after the Howler Monkey wake-up calls, those who wished, rose just after dawn to bird watch with coffee on the observation deck. Then a good breakfast followed by a morning walk or other activity, then lunch back at the Tower and a siesta. We had further expeditions in the afternoon, then dinner. On some nights we had night walks or drives.

Canopy Tower is in the rainforest, and Canopy Lodge is in the cloud forest so, unsurprisingly, it rained most days, mainly in the afternoon, often with dramatic thunderstorms, and then sunshine. It was hot and humid at Canopy Tower, less so at Canopy Lodge. We still completed all our planned activities in these beautiful surroundings each day.

Day 1 Tuesday 4th July

KLM cancelled the planned flight from Amsterdam so some of the group arrived at the Canopy Tower today and enjoyed the views from observation deck, especially a Blue Cotinga. Later they saw an Olingo.

Day 2 Wednesday 5th July

The Canopy Tower is surrounded by rainforest but as well as assorted birds, those on the observation deck could see a distant section of the Panama Canal and some ships going through. The remaining four arrived via Paris, just in time for the evening meal. There were Little Mastiff Bats flying around the dining area.

Day 3 Thursday 6th July

The Howler Monkeys were close, calling to each other across the forest. We spent a while by the humming bird feeders which were much in demand. Visitors included a White-necked Jacobin, a White-vented Plumeleteer, Bluechested, and Violet-bellied Hummingbirds. Waiting above, disguised as a branch, was a small Boa Constrictor. In the morning we walked down Semaphore Hill through the rainforest, seeing an Central American Agouti on the track and sloths in the trees. After small scramble up the bank, we found a tank with orange-bellied Sylvia's Tree Frogs swimming around.

There was a big thunderstorm over lunch; undaunted, we set out for the Ammo Ponds, Gamboa, in "El Tinamou", the Tower's big open-topped safari vehicle. It was a bit wet. We stopped by the Canal and watched a container ship with its tug guiding it from the stern. We had been encouraged out by the promise of Least Capybara but

none were visible. However, there were White-nosed Coati on the ground and good bird sightings including Greyheaded Chachalaca and a Rufescent Tiger Heron. Around the corner we found a Least Bittern hiding in the reeds. This bird is rarely seen. Later, back in the Canopy Tower we watched the local Geoffroy's (Red-crested) Tamarins – our daily neighbours during our stay.

Day 4 Friday 7th July

In the morning we drove to the Pipeline Road, meeting a Great Tinamou with young en route. We saw several sloths, including a good view of a male Brown-throated Sloth with a clearly a marked patch on its back. There were more White-nosed Coati. Against a tree trunk, almost invisible, there was a Great Potoo. Overhead, as on every day, we could see vultures – Black and Turkey.

At lunchtime there was a particularly dramatic thunderstorm which shook the building. After lunch, ever optimistic, we drove to the Botanical Gardens. As usual, the rain eventually stopped and the sun came out. There were lots of Agoutis, and we saw a Tent-making Bat in a hollow tree. We also saw a Common Nighthawk, We visited the Harpy Eagle, reared in captivity in her aviary. She was very interested in Chris's rucksack. Afterwards we went to the Summit Ponds where there were Pond Sliders, an Anhinga and a Neotropic Cormorant. We saw three different trogons during the day. That night we saw a Woolly Opossum.

Day 5 Saturday 8th July

We travelled to the San Lorenzo National Park on the Caribbean side of Panama. We walked along a track in the morning where, among other species, we saw a Yellow-throated Toucan, a White-whiskered Puffbird, a Dotwinged Antwren and a Black-crowned Antshrike. And we found the wonderfully named Checker-throated Stipplethroat. We drove across the bridge crossing the Panama Canal and had a picnic lunch by the old Spanish Fortress of San Lorenzo. Most of the group visited the fort afterwards. Earlier we'd watched a long goods train with two big red locomotives on the Panama Canal Railway but, sadly, since the pandemic, the railway no longer carries passengers.

Day 6 Sunday 9th July

In the leafy Metropolitan Park in Panama City, Alex found a family of three Night Monkeys peering at us with huge eyes from a hollow tree. Passing children were fascinated to see them through the telescope. We drove to Culebra Point to see the Pacific and Crab-eating Racoons. There were lots of sloths, including two very close. The Frog museum gave a good opportunity for close views of living local frogs (if we could find them amidst the foliage). There were open aquaria, and a cool (both air-conditioned and informative) natural history museum with a very keen guide.

Our visit to the Sloth Rescue centre also included a frog exhibit with Green and Black, and Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs, a butterfly centre with Blue Morphos and more. One of the staff gave a detailed talk about the work of the Sloth Rescue centre, and there were several residents to see, including a little sloth curled up asleep in a small wicker basket. We hit the shop enthusiastically!

Our night walk down Semaphore Hill included a Brown Vine Snake, Tree Boa, and Oriole Snake, as well as a Vesper Rat high in a tree, and a scurrying Nine-banded Armadillo.

Day 7

Monday 10th July

We boarded a boat on the Chagres River then travelled under the Gamboa Bridge onto the Panama Canal, watching huge ships pass along.

The boat took us past a Magnificent Frigatebird to Monkey Island with Geoffrey's Tamarins, a Panamanian White-faced Capuchin, and a line of Proboscis Bats up a tree trunk. Herons included a Rufescent Tiger Heron, a Green Heron, and a Great Blue Heron. It was a very pleasant boat ride. On the way home we had good views of a Ninebanded Armadillo.

In the afternoon we travelled to the Panama Rainforest Discovery Centre and climbed the 30 metre-high observation tower – a solidly built staircase to a 360 degree platform and wonderful rainforest views. We found the Keel-billed Toucans' social tree and watched them fly to and fro; later there were views of a Blue Cotinga, while down below a sloth slumbered. We had dinner al fresco.

That evening we had a night-drive bouncing on El Tinamou along the tracks and road all the way back to the Canopy Tower. The driver did an emergency stop to avoid squashing a snake and we all slid off our seats on top of each other. Once people had disentangled themselves the reptile was inspected – a Cat's Eye Snake – which showed no gratitude for being saved.

Day 8

Tuesday 11th July

That morning we travelled to various places in the Gamboa region. Returning for the third time to the Ammo Ponds, Alex discovered a large Boa Constrictor at the base of a tree in the hedge – its head was as big as his hand with arm-thickness coils. Perhaps that is why we couldn't find any Lesser Capybara there (although we didn't see them anywhere else either).

In the afternoon we visited the Milleflores lock and watched a huge ship passing through the lock, guided by six "mules", three on each side of the canal – the double-engined locomotives that use steel hawsers to guide the ship (moving slowly under its own power) and prevent it touching the side of the lock (the gap was about one foot). This awesome sight was followed by an excellent iMax film about the canal.

Day 9

Wednesday 12th July

We had a last look around the Canopy Tower observation deck and were rewarded by a close Blue Cotinga. After a forest walk, we set off for Canopy Lodge in the cloud forest of El Valle de Anton. We walked over the little river bridge in the grounds to enjoy lunch in the covered, open-sided dining and sitting area which overlooks the well-stocked bird feeder. We found our rooms. Some of us had a Clay-coloured Thrush's nest outside our windows, with two chicks. Then we walked up the road to walk the trail to Chorro El Macho – a local waterfall. No one was keen to try the zip wire over the falls.

After the usual rain storm, the river through the Lodge grounds turned into a roaring torrent. Walking by the river that evening we had a rare sighting of a Water Opossum swimming strongly upstream. Later we saw a Four-eyed Opossum in a tree. The rain had left the ground rather boggy, so frogs abounded, including a Glass Frog. We met a huge Cane Toad.

Day 10

Thursday 13th July

We drove to Las Minas and had a pleasant walk. Then we walked the start of the Cerro Gaital Trail, meeting hardy souls aiming to do the whole arduous hike to the top. There were some beautiful flowers en route. After lunch, some people had a walk around the grounds.

That afternoon there was a particularly heavy thunderstorm. As Jean had not returned from her walk a search party set off with large umbrellas and found her in good shelter. Once the rain stopped, we drove to a private estate where Alex found two Spectacled Owls. That evening we packed.

Day 11 & Day 12

Friday & Saturday 14th/15th July

We said our goodbyes and travelled home, leaving two lucky people behind to do a transit of the Canal.







Rufous Motmot, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Wattled Jacana

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Species lists

Mammals

		July 2023											
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
Derby's Woolly Opossum	Caluromys derbianus				√	√	√						
Water Opossum	Chironectes minimus									√			
Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth	Choloepus hoffmanni			√			√	√		√			
Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth	Bradypus variegatus			√	√	√	√		√		√		
Nine-banded Armadillo	Dasypus novemcinctus						√	√					
Western Lowland Olingo	Bassaricyon medius			√									
White-nosed Coati	Nasua narica			√	√				√				
Kinkajou	Potos flavus						√						
Crab-eating Raccoon	Procyon cancrivorus						√						
Common Tent-making Bat	Uroderma bilobatum				√								
Proboscis Bat	Rhynchonycteris naso							√					
Colombian White-faced Capuchin	Cebus capucinus							√					
Geoffroy's Tamarin	Saguinus geoffroyi			√			√	√	√				
Panamanian Night Monkey	Aotus zonalis						√						
Mantled Howler	Alouatta palliata			√	√	Н	Н	Н	Н	Н			
Central American Agouti	Dasyprocta punctata			√									
Red-tailed Squirrel	Sciurus granatensis					√							
Variegated Squirrel	Sciurus variegatoides								√				
Sumichrast's Vesper Rat	Nyctomys sumichrasti								√				
Gabb's Cottontail	Sylvilagus brasiliensis							✓					
Black Mastiff Bat	Molossus rufus			√	√								
Four-eyed Opossum	Philander opossum									√			

Panama – Mammals of the Canopy Tower

Tour Report

Birds (H = Heard only)

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Great Tinamou	Tinamus major				✓							
Black-bellied Whistling Duck	Dendrocygna autumnalis							✓				
Muscovy Duck	Cairina moschata							√				
Grey-headed Chachalaca	Ortalis cinereiceps			√					✓	✓		
Crested Guan	Penelope purpurascens						✓					
Common Nighthawk	Chordeiles minor				✓							
Great Potoo	Nyctibius grandis				√							
Band-rumped Swift	Chaetura spinicaudus											
Short-tailed Swift	Chaetura brachyura				√							
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift	Panyptila cayennensis											
White-necked Jacobin	Florisuga mellivora			√				√				
Stripe-throated Hermit	Phaethornis striigularis							√		√		
Green Hermit	Phaethornis guy										√	
Long-billed Hermit	Phaethornis longirostris				√		√	✓				
Long-billed Starthroat	Heliomaster longirostris										√	
Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer	Chalybura urochrysia										√	
White-vented Plumeleteer	Chalybura buffonii			√								
Crowned Woodnymph	Thalurania colombica					√		√			√	
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird - N	Saucerottia edward										√	
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird	Amazilia tzacatl				√			√		√		
Blue-chested Hummingbird	Polyerata amabilis			√				√				
Violet-bellied Hummingbird	Chlorestes julie			√		√		√				
Greater Ani	Crotophaga major			√	√							
Smooth-billed Ani	Crotophaga ani			√	-				√		√	
Squirrel Cuckoo	Piaya cayana									√		
Scaled Pigeon	Patagioenas speciosa							√				
Pale-vented Pigeon	Patagioenas cayennensis			√	√			✓	√			
Ruddy Quail-Dove	Geotrygon montana				√			-				

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
White-tipped Dove	Leptotila verreauxi				✓			√		√	√	
Grey-cowled Wood Rail	Aramides cajaneus							√		√		
Common Gallinule	Gallinula galeata						√	√				
Purple Gallinule	Porphyrio martinica			✓			√	√				
Limpkin	Aramus guarauna						√					
Black-necked Stilt	Himantopus mexicanus							√				
Southern Lapwing	Vanellus chilensis				√			√				
Wattled Jacana	Jacana jacana			√			√	√	√			
Magnificent Frigatebird	Fregata magnificens						√	√				
Anhinga	Anhinga anhinga				/				√		√	
Neotropic Cormorant	Nannopterum brasilianum				✓		√		√			
American White Ibis	Eudocimus albus						√					
Rufescent Tiger Heron	Tigrisoma lineatum			√			√	√				
Least Bittern	Ixobrychus exilis			√								
Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax							√				
Green Heron	Butorides virescens						√	√				
Western Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis					√						
Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias						√	√				
Cocoi Heron	Ardea cocoi							√				
Great Egret	Ardea alba			√					√			
Tricoloured Heron	Egretta tricolor						√	√				
Little Blue Heron	Egretta caerulea							√				
Brown Pelican	Pelecanus occidentalis				/	√	√	√				
King Vulture	Sarcoramphus papa			√								
Black Vulture	Coragyps atratus			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Harpy Eagle	Harpia harpyja				Caged	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·						
Grey-headed Kite	Leptodon cayanensis								√			
Swallow-tailed Kite	Elanoides forficatus									/		

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Double-toothed Kite	Harpagus bidentatus							✓				
Snail Kite	Rostrhamus sociabilis						√	√	√			
Common Black Hawk	Buteogallus anthracinus											
Savanna Hawk	Buteogallus meridionalis					√			√			
Roadside Hawk	Rupornis magnirostris									√		
Spectacled Owl	Pulsatrix perspicillata										√	
Mottled Owl	Strix virgata						√					
Slaty-tailed Trogon	Trogon massena				√				√			
Black-tailed Trogon	Trogon melanurus			√	√							
White-tailed Trogon	Trogon chionurus							√				
Gartered Trogon	Trogon caligatus				√				√			
Black-throated Trogon	Trogon rufus			√		√	√					
Collared Trogon	Trogon collaris											
Amazon Kingfisher	Chloroceryle amazona											
American Pygmy Kingfisher	Chloroceryle aenea						√					
Green Kingfisher	Chloroceryle americana				√							
Ringed Kingfisher	Megaceryle torquata							√				
Whooping Motmot	Momotus subrufescens				√							
Rufous Motmot	Baryphthengus martii					Н				√	/	
Broad-billed Motmot	Electron platyrhynchum			√						√		
Black-breasted Puffbird	Notharchus pectoralis									√		
Barred Puffbird	Nystalus radiatus											
White-whiskered Puffbird	Malacoptila panamensis					√						
Collared Aracari	Pteroglossus torquatus							√				
Keel-billed Toucan	Ramphastos sulfuratus			√	√		√	✓	√	√	√	
Yellow-throated Toucan	Ramphastos ambiguus					√						
Black-cheeked Woodpecker	Melanerpes pucherani			√			√	√		√		
Red-crowned Woodpecker	Melanerpes rubricapillus				√			✓			Н	
Lineated Woodpecker	Dryocopus lineatus						√					

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Crested Caracara	Caracara plancus											
Yellow-headed Caracara	Milvago chimachima			√				✓	√			
Orange-chinned Parakeet	Brotogeris jugularis				√							
Brown-hooded Parrot	Pyrilia haematotis			√						√		
Blue-headed Parrot	Pionus menstruus							√			√	
Red-lored Amazon	Amazona autumnalis			√			√	√		√		
Southern Mealy Amazon	Amazona farinosa			√			√	√		√		
Northern Barred Woodcreeper	Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae					√						
Cocoa Woodcreeper	Xiphorhynchus susurrans			√			√				√	
Dot-winged Antwren	Microrhopias quixensis					√						
Checker-throated Stipplethroat	Epinecrophylla fulviventris				√							
Barred Antshrike	Thamnophilus doliatus								√			
Black-crowned Antshrike	Thamnophilus atrinucha			√		√						
Brown-capped Tyrannulet	Ornithion brunneicapillus				√							
Sepia-capped Flycatcher	Leptopogon amaurocephalus										√	
Southern Bentbill - N	Oncostoma olivaceum					√						
Common Tody-Flycatcher	Todirostrum cinereum			√			√					
Piratic Flycatcher	Legatus leucophaius										√	
Rusty-margined Flycatcher	Myiozetetes cayanensis								√			
Social Flycatcher	Myiozetetes similis								√		/	
Great Kiskadee	Pitangus sulphuratus				√		√	√			√	
Lesser Kiskadee	Philohydor lictor								√			
Streaked Flycatcher	Myiodynastes maculatus				√			√				
Boat-billed Flycatcher	Megarynchus pitangua				√							
Tropical Kingbird	Tyrannus melancholicus			√	√	√		√	√		√	
Dusky-capped Flycatcher	Myiarchus tuberculifer				√							
Blue Cotinga	Cotinga nattererii		√					√		√		
White-ruffed Manakin	Corapipo altera											
Red-capped Manakin	Ceratopipra mentalis					Н						

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Golden-collared Manakin - N	Manacus vitellinus							Н			√	
Masked Tityra	Tityra semifasciata			√								
Blue-Cappeded Manakin	Lepidothrix coronata											
Golden-fronted Greenlet	Pachysylvia aurantiifrons											
Black-chested Jay	Cyanocorax affinis									√	√	
Mangrove Swallow	Tachycineta albilinea			√			√	√				
Southern Rough-winged Swallow	Stelgidopteryx ruficollis										√	
Grey-breasted Martin	Progne chalybea			√				√				
House Wren	Troglodytes aedon				√					√	√	
Bay Wren	Cantorchilus nigricapillus									Н		
Tropical Mockingbird	Mimus gilvus				√	√			√			
Clay-coloured Thrush	Turdus grayi				√					√	√	
White-vented Euphonia	Euphonia minuta										√	
Thick-billed Euphonia	Euphonia laniirostris						√			√	√	
Tawny-capped Euphonia	Euphonia anneae										√	
Orange-billed Sparrow	Arremon aurantiirostris						√				√	
Chestnut-headed Oropendola	Psarocolius wagleri									√	√	
Scarlet-rumped Cacique	Cacicus microrhynchus											
Yellow-backed Oriole	Icterus chrysater				√							
Yellow-tailed Oriole	Icterus mesomelas			√								
Shiny Cowbird	Molothrus bonariensis										/	
Great-tailed Grackle	Quiscalus mexicanus				√	√		√	√	√	√	
Dusky-faced Tanager	Mitrospingus cassinii									√	/	
Green Honeycreeper	Chlorophanes spiza									√	/	
Blue Dacnis	Dacnis cayana						√	√		· ·		
Buff-throated Saltator	Saltator maximus										√	
Bananaquit	Coereba flaveola										√	
Yellow-faced Grassquit	Tiaris olivaceus										√	
Grey-headed Tanager	Eucometis penicillata											

		July 2023										
Common name	Scientific name	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Tawny-crested Tanager	Tachyphonus delatrii										√	
White-lined Tanager	Tachyphonus rufus										√	
Lemon-rumped Tanager	Ramphocelus icteronotus						√		√			
Crimson-backed Tanager	Ramphocelus dimidiatus			√			√			√	√	
Variable Seedeater	Sporophila corvina						√					
Yellow-bellied Seedeater	Sporophila nigricollis						√				√	
Blue-grey Tanager	Thraupis episcopus						√			√	√	
Palm Tanager	Thraupis palmarum			√			√	√	√	√	√	
Silver-throated Tanager	Tangara icterocephala										√	
Plain-coloured Tanager	Tangara inornata										√	
House Sparrow - I	Passer domesticus								√			

Reptiles & Amphibians noted

Common name	Scientific name
Pond Slider - I	Trachemys scripta
Brown Basilisk	Basiliscus vittatus
Green Iguana	Iguana iguana
Middle American Ameiva	Holcosus festivus
Four-lined Ameiva	Holcosus quadrilineatus
Boa Constrictor	Boa constrictor
Brown Vinesnake	Oxybelis aeneus
Common Caiman	Caiman crocodilus
American Crocodile	Crocodylus acutus
Mesoamerican Cane Toad	Rhinella horribilis
Tungara Frog	Engystomops pustulosus
Leaf Toad	
Sylvia's Tree Frog	Cruziohyla sylviae
House Gecko	
Smoky Tree Frog	Leptodactylus pentadactylus

Common name	Scientific name
Slender Anole	Anolis fuscoauratus
Land Crab	
Gladiator Tree Frog	Hypsiboas
Orange & white Coral Snake	
Cat-eyed Snake	Leptodeira
Oriole Snake	Spilotes pullatus
Tree Boa	Corallus ruschenbergerii
Green & Black Poison Dart Frog	Dendrobates auratus
Glass Frog	
Rain Frog	





Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth and Keel-billed Toucan