

Panama

9-15 April 2009



Last year's trip was a 2-week expedition to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, so this year we decided on something shorter and closer to home – a few days in Panama during spring. None of us had previously birded Panama, although I had made several trips to nearby Costa Rica. This year the trip participants were Stephen J. Dinsmore (Ames, IA), Gordon Brown (Cary, NC), George Brown (Big Stone Gap, VA), Jay Gilliam (Norwalk, IA), and Peter Frechtel (Falls Church, VA). Our rental vehicle was a 2007 4WD Toyota Land Cruiser Prado from Budget Rental (\$486 for the week) and it was well suited to our driving needs on this trip.

9 April

This was our travel day. Jay and I met Gordon and George in Houston and we all flew to Panama City together, where we arrived at 1 p.m. Peter was on a separate flight from Miami that was delayed and arrived an hour later. We made our way out of the airport and Panama City with relative ease and arrived at Ivan's Bed and Breakfast

(<http://www.gamboaecotours.com/>) in Gamboa at 3:45 p.m. We quickly settled into our rooms and spent a few minutes birding the grounds where we saw Gray-headed Chachalaca, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Short-tailed Swift, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Lesser Elaenia plus 2 Agoutis. Ivan then took us on a quick tour of town, ending at Ammo Dump Pond at dusk. We saw lots of birds including Great Tinamou,

Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Bat Falcon, White-throated Crake, Wattled Jacana, Keel-billed Toucan, Broad-billed Motmot, Masked Tityra, and Scarlet-rumped Cacique. We returned to the B&B for dinner at 7 p.m.



(steak in white sauce with mushrooms and onions, potatoes, broccoli, and ice cream for dessert). [mostly clear, temperature 31-36° C, winds SE 5- 15 mph; 51 km]

10 April



We awoke at 5 a.m. and hiked up the road to the Gamboa Rainforest Resort property for the dawn chorus. Birds seen included Squirrel Cuckoo, Blue-crowned Motmot, White-bellied Antbird, Lesser Kiskadee, Rufous-breasted Wren, and Flame-rumped Tanager. We returned to the B&B by 7:30 a.m. for a breakfast of scrambled eggs, toast, fresh fruit, and coffee or juice. On our way out of town we encountered someone removing an injured Coral Snake from the road. We arrived at Pipeline Road at 8 a.m. and birded the first 3 km until 11:30 a.m. The birding was slow, but we still managed to see several large kettles of migrating Mississippi Kites, Short-billed Pigeon, White-tailed Trogon, White-necked Puffbird, Blue Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, White-shouldered Tanager, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. We also enjoyed a large troop of Howler

Monkeys and several White-nosed Coatis.

We ate a buffet lunch (\$28 apiece!) at the Gamboa Rainforest Resort restaurant on the Chagres River and the food was excellent. Main dishes included a seafood stir-fry, grilled chicken in chirimolli sauce, ribs, and fish with vegetables and rice plus a full complement of salads, ceviche, and desserts. We birded from the restaurant and saw Striated Heron, Purple Gallinule, and Royal Tern. We left at 12:45 p.m. and drove to the Summit Botanical Garden where we birded until 3 p.m. The place was mobbed with tourists (it was Good Friday) and it was mid-afternoon, but we still managed to see an enormous kettle of 5,000+ Mississippi Kites, Double-toothed Kite, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Crimson-backed Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, and Giant Cowbird. We also enjoyed the many wildlife exhibits, including a captive Harpy Eagle. We next checked the Miraflores Lakes (nothing) and spent more than a half hour watching a couple of ships move through the Miraflores Lock on the Panama Canal. From here, we decided to bird the Old Gamboa Road (a.k.a. Summit Road) for the remainder of the day and were there from 4 to 6:15 p.m. Birding was the best of the day and we saw Boat-billed Heron, Solitary Sandpiper, Green Kingfisher, Panama Flycatcher, Blue Dacnis, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. But the highlight may have been extended looks at 3 Geoffrey's Tamarins, a small monkey. We were back at the B&B by 6:30 p.m. for dinner (chicken and local nafiti for dessert). [partly cloudy, temperature 26-36° C, winds S 10-20 mph; 46 km]



11 April



This morning we decided to again arise at 5:30 a.m. for a pre-breakfast hike to the Rainforest Resort property. The 1.5 hour walk was extremely productive and we saw Garden Emerald, Cinnamon Becard, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Rufous-breasted Wren, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, Blue-black Grassquit, and Yellow-tailed Oriole. We returned to the B&B for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. (egg and cheese omelet, toast, fruit cocktail, and juice or coffee) and then drove to Pipeline Road. We birded the road (km 2 to 5) and the Rainforest Discovery Center from 8:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. and saw King Vulture, 9 species of hummingbirds, Paltry Tyrannulet, 2 male Blue Cotingas (from the tower), Black-breasted Puffbird, Checker-throated Antwren, Golden-collared Manakin, and Gray-headed Tanager. We also enjoyed brief looks

at a small troop of White-faced Capuchins. We then returned to Gamboa and ventured east to Plantation Road. The afternoon weather was pleasant when we left the parking area at 3:45 p.m., but within 30 minutes it was raining hard and we left at 4:45 p.m. without seeing many birds. The rain soon ended and we spent the last daylight hours at Ammo Dump pond where we saw several White-throated Crakes, Greater Ani, Barred Antshrike, Scrub Greenlet, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. A non-bird highlight was a large Capybara wallowing in one of the main ponds by the gate. We returned to the B&B by 6:30 p.m. and enjoyed dinner outside (grilled chicken with pasta and mixed vegetables, flan for dessert). [clear becoming overcast, temperature 28-35° C, winds variable 5-20 mph, heavy afternoon rain showers; 29 km]



12 April



It was Easter Sunday, so we decided (on the advice on Ivan) to bird some areas east of Panama City because traffic would be light. We departed at 5 a.m. after breakfast (fresh fruit, granola bars, peanuts, and juice) and drove straight to Cerro Azul, arriving there at 6:05 a.m. We discovered that the area is now gated and we were told we needed a permit from the main office in Panama City for entry, no exceptions. On to plan B! We continued east up the road, skirting the national park, and began the ascent to Cerro Jefe. This road goes from bad to worse in a hurry and is passable only with a high

clearance vehicle. We finally reached the radio towers and soon discovered that someone had recently dug a deep trench across the road just beyond the towers, presumably to cut off the back entrance to Cerro Azul. The lack of access was a major disappointment and we spent the next 2 hours birding the main road as we headed back towards Panama City. Birds seen here and in the park included Swallow-tailed Kite, Scaled Pigeon, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Paltry Tyrannulet, Bay Wren, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Golden-winged Warbler, Scarlet-thighed Tanager, and White-lined Tanager. It was now 10 a.m. and we re-evaluated our plans for the day. The mid-day heat was setting in so we decided to make a couple of quick stops in the forest before spending mid-day in Panama City looking for shorebirds. We returned south on the main highway and stopped at Monte Fresco and Goofy Lake where we saw few birds, but did enjoy close scolding by a troop of Geoffrey's Tamarins. We ate a sack lunch (sandwiches, cookies, and fruit juice) after our walk along Monte Fresco and then headed for Panama City where we arrived at 12:30 p.m.



Our goal in Panama City was shorebirds at Panama Viejo, which we easily found at low tide. We saw many shorebirds and herons, but most birds appeared to be on the other side of the interstate farther east. We explored a few back roads and eventually located the mouth of the river where thousands of birds were congregated. We birded here for an hour and saw 11 species of shorebirds (a flock of 200+ Marbled Godwits and many Southern Lapwings were the best finds), Ring-billed, Herring, and Lesser Black-backed (1 juvenile) gulls, many Gull-billed and single Caspian and Elegant terns, and at least two adult Peregrine Falcons that were actively chasing shorebirds (one eventually caught a small passerine). The mid-day heat was oppressive and we opted to leave in time to bird Old Gamboa Road again in late afternoon. A 2+ hour walk east beginning at 4 p.m. produced Little Tinamou

(spectacular close looks!), Spectacled Owl, Lesser Nighthawk, Jet Antbird, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, and Green Shrike-Vireo. At a small drying pond we found 9 baby Spectacled Caimans. After a long day afield, dinner tasted especially good this evening (steak and rice with gravy, fruit salad, ice cream sundae for dessert). [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 22-35° C, winds light and variable; 168 km]

13 April

For the second day in a row we arose early (4 a.m.) for a long drive to the mountains. This time, our destination was Altos de Campana National Park (Cerro Campana) so we left the B&B by 5 a.m., crossed the Panama Canal, and arrived at 6 a.m. We birded the park headquarters for an hour and finally located a pair of Wedge-tailed Grass-Finches plus Lesser Elaenia and Hepatic Tanager. From here we climbed into the park and spent the remainder of the morning hiking several main trails. Initially, the weather was

uncooperative with wind and heavy fog, but this burned off by 9 a.m. We enjoyed seeing Rufous Motmot (a group of 6+ furiously calling birds), Black-faced Antthrush, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Blue-crowned Manakin, White-throated Thrush, and Black-and-yellow, Blue-and-gold, Plain-colored, Silver-throated, and Tawny-crested tanagers.

We decided to make a trip to Capira for lunch (deli style with rice or noodles, a choice of meat, and cold drinks) before returning to the park for a few hours of afternoon birding. The afternoon was slow bird-wise but we still managed to see Gray-chested Dove, Thrush-like Schiffornis, and Plain Antvireo. At 4:30 p.m. we began the long drive to the B&B where we arrived at 5:45 p.m. We enjoyed a nice dinner (steak medallions, garlic bread, and local naiti for dessert) before retiring to bed. [cloudy and foggy becoming mostly clear, temperature 21-33° C, winds S 10-20 mph, scattered light afternoon showers; 180 km]



14 April



This was our last full day in Panama and we decided to spend the morning at Metropolitan Park in Panama City, which is a famous and impressive urban wildlife sanctuary. We left the B&B at 5:45 a.m. expecting a quick drive to the park.

Unfortunately, we hit the morning rush hour and it took us more than 45 minutes to reach the city. After some missed turns and a stop for breakfast (bacon and egg croissants, hash browns, juice or soda), we finally arrived at the park at 7 a.m. We hiked the main trail slowly and were back at headquarters by 11:30 a.m. The birding was excellent and we saw Double-toothed Kite, Striped and Pheasant (a cooperative calling pair) cuckoos, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Plain Xenops,

White-necked Puffbird, many displaying Lance-tailed Manakins, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager. The trails weren't too busy and we enjoyed a few minutes at the visitor center after our hike.

After leaving the park we made an unsuccessful attempt to find some local souvenir shops before stopping at a local strip mall for lunch (Mrs. Mendoza's; Mexican entrees, chips and Pico de Gallo sauce, drinks). Our next stop was the Miraflores Lock and Dam, where we took a quick tour, watched 2 small pleasure boats and 2 large container ships (dubbed Panamax) lock



through, and relaxed in the air conditioning. We left at 3:30 p.m. and drove to Semaphore Hill where we birded until dark. The main road to the top was quite birdy and we saw Plain Xenops, Checker-throated Antwren, White-whiskered Puffbird, Olivaceous Flatbill, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Song Wren, and Emerald Tanager. Other highlights were a Nine-banded Armadillo and a small troop of Howler Monkeys. We detoured for a quick stop at an ATM machine in Gamboa before returning to the B&B for dinner at 7 p.m. (steak in white sauce, mashed potatoes, fried plantain, tossed salad with tomato, and cheesecake for dessert). [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 24-35° C, winds SW 10-25 mph; 63 km]

15 April



We awoke at 4:45 a.m. for an early start because this was our last day in Panama. The plan was to bird Semaphore Hill before breakfast and then pack and reach the airport by 10:30 a.m. We left at 5 a.m. and birded Semaphore Hill until 8:15 a.m. We saw fewer birds than the evening before, but the list included Mottled Owl, Blue-headed Parrot, Black-breasted and White-whiskered puffbirds, Black-faced Antthrush, Ocellated Antbird, and many displaying Red-capped Manakins. Breakfast (scrambled eggs, fried corn tortilla, a meat roll, fruit cup, and juice or coffee) was at 8:30 a.m. and we spent the next 45 minutes showering, packing, and settling our bill before departing for Panama City at 9:45 a.m. We hit a major traffic jam on the north edge of the city and were parked for almost an hour before traffic began moving again. We finally arrived at Tocumen International Airport at 11:15 a.m. and spent nearly 45 minutes returning our rental car. After check-in and lunch we were on our way home by 1 p.m. [partly cloudy, temperature 25-36° C, winds light; 59 km]



General comments

Weather during the trip was hot and humid, but surprisingly cool at night. We had rain showers on just two afternoons, and both were light and short-lived. Bugs were almost non-existent – a few mosquitoes and biting no-see-um's, but nothing else that was a problem. The roads were in good shape, driving was relatively easy (even in Panama City!), and finding key birding locales was not a problem. All told, it was a smooth trip!

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SPECIES LISTS

Mammals (9 species)

Variegated Squirrel
Capybara
Nine-banded Armadillo
White-nosed Coati
Agouti
Howler Monkey
White-faced Capuchin
Geoffrey's Tamarin
Bat sp.

Birds (259 species)

Great Tinamou
Little Tinamou
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
Brown Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Anhinga
Magnificent Frigatebird
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Tricolored Heron
Little Blue Heron
Snowy Egret
Striated Heron

Green Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Boat-billed Heron
Rufescent Tiger-Heron
White Ibis
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
King Vulture
Osprey
Swallow-tailed Kite
Double-toothed Kite
Mississippi Kite
Common Black-Hawk
Gray Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
Crested Caracara
Yellow-headed Caracara
Bat Falcon
Peregrine Falcon
Gray-headed Chachalaca
White-throated Crane
Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen

Wattled Jacana
Southern Lapwing
Black-bellied Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Whimbrel
Marbled Godwit
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Elegant Tern
Sandwich Tern
Royal Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Pigeon
Scaled Pigeon

Pale-vented Pigeon	Garden Emerald	Plain Xenops
Short-billed Pigeon	Violet-crowned Woodnymph	Plain-brown Woodcreeper
Ruddy Ground-Dove	Violet-bellied Hummingbird	Long-tailed Woodcreeper
White-tipped Dove	Rufous-tailed Hummingbird	Buff-throated (Cocoa) Woodcreeper
Gray-chested Dove	Blue-chested Hummingbird	Streak-headed Woodcreeper
Orange-chinned Parakeet	Snowy-bellied Hummingbird	Fasciated Antshrike
Blue-headed Parrot	White-vented Plumeleteer	Barred Antshrike
Red-lored Parrot	Purple-crowned Fairy	Western Slaty-Antshrike
Yellow-crowned Parrot	White-tailed Trogon	Plain Antvireo
Mealy Parrot	Violaceous Trogon	Checker-throated Antwren
Squirrel Cuckoo	Slaty-tailed Trogon	Dot-winged Antwren
Greater Ani	Ringed Kingfisher	Dusky Antbird
Smooth-billed Ani	Green Kingfisher	Jet Antbird
Striped Cuckoo	Blue-crowned Motmot	White-bellied Antbird
Pheasant Cuckoo	Rufous Motmot	Chestnut-backed Antbird
Mottled Owl	Broad-billed Motmot	Spotted Antbird
Spectacled Owl	White-necked Puffbird	Ocellated Antbird
Lesser Nighthawk	Black-breasted Puffbird	Black-faced Antthrush
Pauraque	White-whiskered Puffbird	Blue Cotinga
White-collared Swift	Collared Aracari	Purple-throated Fruitcrow
Band-rumped Swift	Keel-billed Toucan	Golden-collared Manakin
Short-tailed Swift	Chestnut-mandibled Toucan	White-ruffed Manakin
Eastern Long-tailed Hermit	Black-cheeked Woodpecker	Lance-tailed Manakin
Stripe-throated Hermit	Red-crowned Woodpecker	Blue-crowned Manakin
White-necked Jacobin	Lineated Woodpecker	Red-capped Manakin
Black-throated Mango	Crimson-crested Woodpecker	Brown-capped Tyrannulet

Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet	Masked Tityra	Yellow-green Vireo
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	Black-crowned Tityra	Scrub Greenlet
Lesser Elaenia	Gray-breasted Martin	Golden-fronted Greenlet
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher	Mangrove Swallow	Lesser Greenlet
Yellow-green Tyrannulet	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Green Shrike-Vireo
Paltry Tyrannulet	Southern Rough-winged Swallow	Golden-winged Warbler
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant	Bank Swallow	Yellow Warbler
Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant	Cliff Swallow	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Southern Bentbill	Cave Swallow	Magnolia Warbler
Common Tody-Flycatcher	Barn Swallow	Black-throated Green Warbler
Olivaceous Flatbill	Rufous-breasted Wren	Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow-olive Flycatcher	Bay Wren	Bay-breasted Warbler
Yellow-margined Flycatcher	Rufous-and-white Wren	Northern Waterthrush
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher	Plain Wren	Wilson's Warbler
Empidonax sp.	Buff-breasted Wren	Canada Warbler
Dusky-capped Flycatcher	House Wren	Rufous-capped Warbler
Panama Flycatcher	White-breasted Wood-Wren	Bananaquit
Lesser Kiskadee	Song Wren	Black-and-yellow Tanager
Great Kiskadee	Tropical Mockingbird	Rosy Thrush-Tanager
Social Flycatcher	Swainson's Thrush	Dusky-faced Tanager
Streaked Flycatcher	Clay-colored Robin	Gray-headed Tanager
Tropical Kingbird	Long-billed Gnatwren	White-shouldered Tanager
Eastern Kingbird	Tropical Gnatcatcher	Tawny-crested Tanager
Fork-tailed Flycatcher	White-throated Robin	White-lined Tanager
Thrush-like Schiffornis	Red-eyed Vireo	Red-throated Ant-Tanager
Cinnamon Becard		Hepatic Tanager

Scarlet Tanager	Streaked Saltator
Summer Tanager	Buff-throated Saltator
Crimson-backed Tanager	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Flame-rumped Tanager	Blue-black Grosbeak
Blue-gray Tanager	Eastern Meadowlark
Palm Tanager	Great-tailed Grackle
Yellow-crowned Euphonia	Bronzed Cowbird
Thick-billed Euphonia	Giant Cowbird
Fulvous-vented Euphonia	Yellow-backed Oriole
Plain-colored Tanager	Yellow-tailed Oriole
Emerald Tanager	Baltimore Oriole
Silver-throated Tanager	Yellow-rumped Cacique
Bay-headed Tanager	Scarlet-rumped Cacique
Golden-hooded Tanager	Crested Oropendola
Scarlet-thighed Dacnis	Chestnut-headed Oropendola
Blue Dacnis	
Green Honeycreeper	
Red-legged Honeycreeper	
Blue-black Grassquit	
Variable Seedeater	
Yellow-bellied Seedeater	
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater	
Yellow-faced Grassquit	
Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch	
Orange-billed Sparrow	
Black-striped Sparrow	