

***Birds of the Isthmus of Panama
Trip Report, March 26 – April 8, 2008***



As our plane approached Tocumen International Airport, the first recognizable nighttime landmark below was the brightly illuminated Rod Carew National Baseball Stadium. As a longtime Minnesota Twins fan, I quickly realized that Panama might be much more American than I'd considered.

But I wasn't headed to Panama for baseball. A lifelong interest in birds was the reason for this vacation. After surfing the Internet for birding tours to Costa Rica, a gold standard for many birders, I settled on Panama, considered by some as the "new Costa Rica" for birding. It was a more affordable tour package, with very reasonable air fares.



I was met at the airport by guide Jose Garcia, the operator of Birding Panama (bird touring company). We joined our small group at a bed and breakfast in Gamboa, alongside the Panama Canal. My three birding companions hailed from Ottawa, Ontario, and Atlanta. This small group, daily led by one or two guides, made for a much more personalized trip than is possible with a larger group.

Transportation was by all by air-conditioned van, a necessary luxury in the heat and humidity of Panama's canal-side jungles. We began by visiting what is often considered the best place to bird anywhere on Earth - Pipeline Road in Soberania ("Sovereignty") National Park.

Here, along a World War II road created to service a petroleum pipeline in the event of an enemy attack on the canal, can be seen some of the planet's greatest bird diversity. Pipeline Road holds a world record 357, the most species of birds ever observed in one place in a single day. We weren't shortchanged, observing nearly 60 varieties never seen by any of us on the tour in a mere four hours.

More Rare Sights

Over the next two days we tallied another 100-plus species along the Panama Canal, Chagres River, Plantation Road and Achiotte Road, all premier bird habitats now mostly designated as national parks to protect the canal's precious water supply. We also visited Panama City's Metropolitan National Park, one of the largest tropical forest parks on Earth within a major city limit.



Besides viewing spectacular Violaceous Trogons, Pheasant Cuckoos and White-necked Puffbirds, we had a spectacular view of Panama City's towering skyline.

Next, we were off to Cerro Azul, a hilly region southeast of Panama City, popular for vacation cabin sites to those fleeing the heat and humidity of the canal's lowlands. Miles of commercial chicken farms festoon the edges of winding mountain roads until reaching the refreshing 3,000-foot altitude of Cerro Azul. This is hummingbird heaven, with many homes sporting hummingbird feeders attracting nearly a dozen different tiny avian gems.

In Search of the Resplendent Quetzal

At mid-trip we boarded a small plane for David in western Panama. There, we ascended the Chiriqui highlands, part of the Talamanca Mountains shared with Costa Rica. We lodged at the famed Los Quetzales ("the Quetzals") EcoLodge, named for the region's most famed resident and one of the world's most sought-after birds.



From our base town of Guadalupe we scoured plantations of shade-grown ("bird-friendly") coffee, cattle ranches and misty cloud forests on the side of Baru Volcano. After viewing spectacular toucans, parakeets, silky flycatchers and secretive mountain thrushes, we achieved nirvana when finally encountering Resplendent Quetzals.

These birds are so indescribably beautiful that they were worshipped by ancient Mayans and other native cultures. If you're into birding, observing your first quetzal can leave you awestruck.

Accommodations ranged from good (B&B) to excellent (Los Quetzales). Meals received similar mixed reviews. The EcoLodge's restaurant ranked at the top. For anyone who likes rice, served with chicken, pork, shrimp, beef or something just called "red meat" (we declined); Panama's cafes keep visitors well-filled.

My return to Iowa in early April was met by a barren landscape, buffeted by damp winds and mostly absent of birds. It was nothing short of going cold turkey following a week of birding beyond belief.

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Places

CP = Central Panama

Metropolitan Nature Park
Pipeline Road
Ammo Dumps
Old Gamboa Road,
Plantation Road,
Summit Gardens

CA = Cerro Azul

Birders' View, Maipo

CH = Chiriqui lowlands and Highlands

David Airport
Los Quetzales Trail
La Amistad I.P
Finca Hartmman
Finca Dracula
Cerro Punta

D = Darien Lowlands



Bird list

Tinamous (2)

Great Tinamou – CP; *only heard*
Little Tinamou – CP; *only heard*

Ducks, Swans, and Geese (3)

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - CP
Muscovy duck - CP
Blue-winged Teal - CP

Guans, and Chachalacas (1)

Gray-headed Chachalaca - CP

Pelicans (1)

Brown Pelican - CP

Cormorants (1)

Neotropic Cormorant - CP

Darters (1)

Anhinga - CP

Frigatebirds (1)

Magnificent Frigatebird - CP

Hérons (13)

Rufescent Tiger-Heron – CP; *nice views at the Ammunition Dumps, Gamboa*

Great Blue Heron - CP

Cocoi Heron – CP; *a single bird at Tocumen Marsh*

Great Egret – CP, CH

Snowy Egret - CP

Little Blue Heron - CP

Tricolored Heron – CP

Cattle Egret – CP, CH

Green Heron - CP

Striated Heron - CP

Black-crowned Night-Heron - CP

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron - CP

Boat-billed Heron – CP; *several birds were scoped at the Summit Ponds*

Ibises (1)

White Ibis - CP

Storks (1)

Wood Stork - CP

Vultures (3)

Black Vulture – CP, CH, D

Turkey Vulture – CP, CH, D

King Vulture – CP; *fantastic views of a soaring adult at Old Gamboa Road*

Hawks, Eagles, and Kites (17)

Osprey - CP

Gray-headed Kite – CP, CH

Swallow-tailed Kite – CP, CH

Pearl Kite – CP; *great looks at Tocumen Marsh*

White-tailed Kite – CP

Snail Kite - CP

Double-toothed Kite - CH

Crane Hawk - CP

White Hawk – CP; *flying over Achiote Road*

Gray Hawk - CP

Great Black-Hawk - CP

Savanna Hawk - CP

Roadside Hawk - CP

Broad-winged Hawk - CH

Short-tailed Hawk - CP

Swainson's Hawk - CH

Red-tailed Hawk - CH

Falcons and Caracaras (9)

Barred Forest-Falcon – CH; *heard and then seen at Finca Hartmann, this was one the highlights of the*

Chiriqui trip

Collared Forest-Falcon – D; *only heard*
Red-throated Caracara – D; *noisy flocks were seen and heard several times*
Crested Caracara – CP, CH
Yellow-headed Caracara – CP, CH
Laughing Falcon – CH; *seen and scoped for several minutes at Bajo Frio*
American Kestrel - CA
Bat Falcon - CP
Peregrine Falcon - CP

Rails and Gallinules (4)

White-throated Crane – CP; *we found one of this elusive crakes at Tocumen Marsh*
Gray-necked Wood-Rail - CP
Purple Gallinule - CP
Common Moorhen - CP

Plovers and Lapwings (2)

Southern Lapwing - CP
Black-bellied Plover – CP; *seen at the Panama Mudflats*

Jacanas (1)

Wattled Jacana - CP

Sandpipers and Allies (9)

Greater Yellowlegs - CP
Lesser Yellowlegs - CP
Willet - CP
Spotted Sandpiper - CP
Whimbrel - CP
Marbled Godwit - CP
Semipalmated Sandpiper - CP
Western Sandpiper - CP
Short-billed Dowitcher - CP

Gulls, Terns, and Allies (1)

Laughing Gull - CP

Pigeons and Doves (12)

Rock Pigeon – CP, CH
Pale-vented Pigeon – CP, CH; *regularly recorded throughout*
Scaled Pigeon – CP, CH
Band-tailed Pigeon - CH
Ruddy Pigeon – CH; *only heard at Finca Pancho Rios*
Short-billed Pigeon; CP
Mourning Dove; CH
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove – CH, CP
Ruddy Ground-Dove – CP, CH
Blue Ground-Dove - CH
White-tipped Dove – CP, CH, D
Gray-chested Dove – CP; *only heard*

Parrots (7)

Sulphur-winged Parakeet - CH
Crimson-fronted Parakeet - CH
Brown-throated Parakeet - CH
Orange-chinned Parakeet – CP, CH, D; *commonly recorded throughout*
Blue-headed Parrot – CP, CH, D
White-crowned Parrot - CH
Red-lored Parrot – CP, CH, D

Cuckoos (5)

Squirrel Cuckoo – CP, CH, D
Striped Cuckoo – CH, D; *scoped for several minutes, it was next to the David Airport*
Pheasant Cuckoo – CP; *seen at the Metropolitan Park. After playing the song several times it flew over some of the birders. It kept singing but didn't come out again*
Greater Ani - CP
Smooth-billed Ani – CP, CH

Typical Owls (1)

Spectacled Owl – CP; *localized at the Old Gamboa Road*

Nightjars (2)

Dusky Nightjar – CH; *localized, we had great looks, thanks to Ito, this regional endemic was resting on a rocky cliff near los Quetzales Lodge*
Common Pauraque – CP; *seen during a night walk at Gamboa*

Potoos (1)

Common Potoo – CP; *seen at night in a well known spot of the Panama Canal Area*

Swifts (5)

White-collared Swift - CH
Vaux's Swift - CH
Short-tailed Swift – CP; *regularly seen in small numbers.*
Band-rumped Swift - CP
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift – CP, D

Hummingbirds (31)

Rufous-breasted Hermit - D
Band-tailed Barbthroat - D
Green Hermit – CA, CH
Long-billed Hermit – CP, CA, CH
Stripe-throated Hermit – CP, CA, CH
Scaly-breasted Hummingbird – CH
Violet Sabrewing - CH
White-necked Jacobin – CP, CA, CH
Green Violet-ear - CH
Black-throated Mango – CP, CH
Violet-headed Hummingbird - CA
Rufous-crested Coquette – CA; *one female at Cerro Azul, amazing little jewel!*
Garden Emerald – CA, CH
Violet-crowned Woodnymph – CA, CH, CP
Violet-bellied Hummingbird - CP

Sapphire-throated Hummingbird – CP, D
Blue-throated Goldentail - D
Violet-capped Hummingbird - CA
Blue-chested Hummingbird - CP
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird - CP
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird – CP, CH, D; *fairly common throughout*
Stripe-tailed (Little) Hummingbird - CH
White-tailed Emerald - CH
White-vented Plumeleteer – CP, D
Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer - CA
White-throated Mountain-gem - CH
Green-crowned Brilliant - CH
Magnificent Hummingbird - CH
Purple-crowned Fairy – CP, CA
Volcano Hummingbird - CH
Scintillant Hummingbird - CH

Trogons (6)

White-tailed Trogon - CP
Violaceous Trogon – CP;
Black-throated Trogon - CP
Black-tailed Trogon - D
Slaty-tailed Trogon – CP; *a nice couple perched together at Plantation Road*
Resplendent Quetzal – CH; *splendid Male and Female were seen at different locations of the Volcan Baru N. P*

Motmots (3)

Blue-crowned Motmot; CP, CH; *the racket-tip of the Motmots tail is always nice to watch*
Rufous Motmot – CP, CH
Broad-billed Motmot - CP

Kingfishers (3)

Ringed Kingfisher - CP
Amazon Kingfisher - CP
Green Kingfisher - CP

Puffbirds (5)

Barred Puffbird – D; *after playing the call it came to a nice perch on a Cecropia tree were the group had great looks at it!*
White-necked Puffbird - CP
Black-breasted Puffbird - CP
Pied Puffbird – CP; *the smallest of our Puffbirds, it was seen at Achiote Road*
White-whiskered Puffbird – CP; *found at Plantation Road*

Barbets and Toucans (8)

Spot-crowned Barbet –CP; *nice views at Achiote Road*
Prong-billed Barbet – CH; *they were very responsive at Los Quetzales Cabins and near La Amistad International Park*
Blue-throated (Emerald) Toucanet – CH; *close views at finca Hartmann. Splited in several forms. Blue-throated Toucanet is found from Costa Rica to Western and Central Panama. Violet-*

throated Toucanet from Eastern Panama to Colombia

Collared Aracari – CP, CH
Fiery-billed Aracari – CH; *great views at Finca Hartmann*
Yellow-eared Toucanet - CA
Keel-billed Toucan –CP, CH, D
Chestnut-mandibled Toucan - CP

Woodpeckers (8)

Olivaceous Piculet – D; *this was a great bird to see, there were a couple of them next to the Embera Indian village*
Acorn Woodpecker – CH; *very common around Finca Pancho Rios*
Black-cheeked Woodpecker – CP, CH
Red-crowned Woodpecker – CP, CH, D
Hairy Woodpecker - CH
Cinnamon Woodpecker - CP
Lineated Woodpecker – CP, CH
Crimson-crested Woodpecker – CP, CH

Ovenbirds, Woodcreepers and Allies (14)

Pale-breasted Spinetail – CH; *an immature seen at Bajo Frio*
Slaty Spinetail - CH
Red-faced Spinetail - CH
Ruddy Treerunner - CH
Lineated Foliage-gleaner – CH; *responsive, behind Los Quetzales Cabins*
Plain Xenops - CP
Plain-brown Woodcreeper - CP
Olivaceous Woodcreeper - CP
Northern Barred-Woodcreeper – CP, CA
Cocoa Woodcreeper – CP
Black-striped Woodcreeper – CP, CA
Spotted Woodcreeper – CA, CH
Streak-headed Woodcreeper – CP, CH
Spot-crowned Woodcreeper - CH

Antbirds (17)

Fasciated Antshrike - CP
Great Antshrike - D
Barred Antshrike - CP
Western Slaty-Antshrike - CP
Plain Antvireo -CH
Checker-throated Antwren - CP
White-flanked Antwren –CP, CH, D
Dot-winged Antwren – CP, CH, D
Dusky Antbird - CP
Jet Antbird - CP
Bare-crowned Antbird - D
White-bellied Antbird – CP; *only heard, very elusive and hard to see*
Chestnut-backed Antbird; CP, D
Dull-mantled Antbird – D; *very responsive in a small creek, near the village*
Spotted Antbird – CP, D

Bicolored Antbird – CP, D
Ocellated Antbird - CP

Antthrushes and Antpittas (2)

Black-faced Antthrush – CP; *only heard*
Streak-chested Antpitta – CP; *only heard*

Tapaculos (1)

Silvery-fronted Tapaculo – CH; *after playing the call several times the bird was seen well, but for few seconds, in a short trail behind Los Quezales cabins. We were able to take some photos but none came good.*

Tyrant Flycatchers (52)

Brown-capped Tyrannulet- CP, CH
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet- CP
Mouse-colored Tyrannulet- CH
Yellow Tyrannulet - CH
Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet - CH
Forest Elaenia – CP
Greenish Elaenia - CP
Yellow-bellied Elaenia – CP, CH
Lesser Elaenia - CH
Mountain Elaenia - CH
Torrent Tyrannulet - CH
Olive-striped Flycatcher - CA
Paltry Tyrannulet – CP, CH, D
Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant – CP; *only heard at Pipeline Road*
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant – CA, CH; *superb views of this tiny bird at Birders View*
Southern Bentbill - CP
Common Tody-Flycatcher – CP, CA, CH, D
Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher – D; *only heard*
Eye-ringed Flatbill - CH
Olivaceous Flatbill - CP
Yellow-olive Flycatcher - CP
Yellow-margined Flycatcher - CP
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher – CP, D
Black-tailed Flycatcher- CP, D
Olive-sided Flycatcher - CA
Dark Pewee - CH
Western Wood-Pewee - CH
Tropical Pewee - CP
Black Phoebe – CA, CH
Pied Water-Tyrant - CP
Long-tailed Tyrant - CP
Bright-rumped Attila - CP
Rufous Mourner - CP
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – CP, CH, D
Panama Flycatcher – CP, CH, D
Great Crested Flycatcher – CP, D
Lesser Kiskadee - CP
Great Kiskadee – CP, CH, CA, D

Boat-billed Flycatcher – CP, CH, CA, D
Rusty-margined Flycatcher – CP, D
Social Flycatcher – CP, CH, D; *one of the commonest and most familiar Panama birds*
Gray-capped Flycatcher – CP, D
Streaked Flycatcher – CP, CH, CA, D
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher - CP
Piratic Flycatcher –CP, CH, D
Tropical Kingbird – CP, CH, D, CA
Fork-tailed Flycatcher - CP
Cinnamon Becard – CP
White-winged Becard – CP, D; *great looks of this Becard at the Discovery Center*
One-colored Becard - D
Masked Tityra – CP, CH
Black-crowned Tityra - CP

Cotingas (3)

Turquoise Cotinga – CH; *spectacular views at Finca Hartmann*
Purple-throated Fruitcrow - CP
Three-wattled Bellbird – CH; *only heard on the higher slopes of Finca Hartmann*

Manakins (6)

Golden-collared Manakin – CP; *a beautiful male seen at Old Gamboa Road*
White-ruffed Manakin - CH
Lance-tailed Manakin – CP; *seen at the Metropolitan Park*
Blue-crowned Manakin - CP
Golden-headed Manakin - D
Red-capped Manakin - CP

Vireos (10)

Yellow-throated Vireo - CH
Yellow-winged Vireo - CH
Brown-capped Vireo - CH
Red-eyed Vireo - CH
Yellow-green Vireo – CP, CH, D
Scrub Greenlet- CP
Golden-fronted Greenlet - CP
Lesser Greenlet – CP, CH
Green Shrike-Vireo - CP
Rufous-browed Peppershrike – CH; *seen several times very high, finally Ito found a nest and we scoped the bird*

Jays and Crows (1)

Black-chested Jay - CP

Swallows (6)

Gray-breasted Martin - CP
Mangrove Swallow - CP
Blue-and-white Swallow - CH
Northern Rough-winged Swallow - CP
Southern Rough-winged Swallow - CP
Barn Swallow - CH

Wrens (11)

Black-bellied Wren – CP, D
Bay Wren - CP
Rufous-breasted Wren – CP, CH
Rufous-and-white Wren – CP, CH
Buff-breasted Wren - CP
Plain Wren – CP, CH
House Wren – CP, CH, D, CA
White-breasted Wood-Wren - CP
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren - CH
Southern Nightingale-Wren – CA; *only heard*
Song Wren - CP

Dippers (1)

American Dipper - CH

Old World Warblers (2)

Long-billed Gnatwren – CP, CH
Tropical Gnatcatcher - CP

Thrushes (8)

Black-faced Solitaire – CH; *only heard*
Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush - CH; *seen and photographed at Los Quetzales Trail*
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush - CH; *seen near Finca Hartmann*
Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush – CH
Swainson's Thrush - CH
Mountain Thrush - CH
Clay-colored Thrush – CP, CH, CA
White-throated Thrush - CH

Mockingbirds and Allies (1)

Tropical Mockingbird - CP

Silky-Flycatchers (2)

Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher - CH
Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher – CH; *very easy to see around Los Quetzales Trail*

Wood-Warblers (17)

Tennessee Warbler - CH
Flame-throated Warbler - CH
Tropical Parula - CH
Yellow Warbler – CP, CH
Chestnut-sided Warbler – CP, CH
Black-throated Green Warbler - CH
Blackburnian Warbler - CH
Bay-breasted Warbler - CH
Black-and-white Warbler - CH
Prothonotary Warbler – CP
Northern Waterthrush - CH
Wilson's Warbler – CH; *a very common warbler of the Chiriqui Highlands*

Slate-throated Redstart - CH

Collared Redstart - CH

Rufous-capped Warbler - CA

Black-cheeked Warbler - CH

Wrenthrush (Zeledonia) – CH; *seen at close range at Los Quetzales Trail. It played the song several times as the bird was hopping in the dense tangle very active, for a couple of seconds it came out to the open and the group could see it well.*

Bananaquit (1)

Bananaquit – CA, CH

Tanagers (28)

Common Bush-Tanager- CH

Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager - CH

Rosy Thrush-Tanager – CP; only heard

Carmioli's (Olive) Tanager- CA

Gray-headed Tanager - CP

White-shouldered Tanager - CP

Red-throated Ant-Tanager - CP

Hepatic Tanager – CA

Summer Tanager – CP, CH

Scarlet Tanager - CH

Flame-colored Tanager - CH

White-winged Tanager - CH

Crimson-backed Tanager – CP, CH

Cherrie's Tanager – CH; *formerly lumped with Passerini's Tanager into Scarlet-rumped Tanager. In Panama, Cherrie's Tanager is found on the Pacific Slope of Chiriqui. Passerini's Tanager is found on the Atlantic slope of Bocas del Toro*

Flame-rumped Tanager - CP

Blue-gray Tanager- CP, CH, D, CA

Palm Tanager – CP, CH, D

Plain-colored Tanager – CP, CH, CA

Emerald Tanager – CA, CH

Silver-throated Tanager - CH

Speckled Tanager – CA, CH; *they were stunning at Cerro Azul*

Bay-headed Tanager – CA, CH; *outstanding views at Cerro Azul*

Golden-hooded Tanager – CP, CA, CH

Scarlet-thighed Dacnis – CA, CH

Blue Dacnis – CP, CA, CH

Green Honeycreeper – CA, CH

Shining Honeycreeper - CH

Red-legged Honeycreeper – CP, CA

Buntings and Allies (14)

Blue-black Grassquit – CP, CH, D, CA

Variable Seedeater – CP, CH, D, CA

Yellow-bellied Seedeater - CP

Ruddy-breasted Seedeater – CP; *small numbers were seen at Tocumen Marsh*

Lesser Seed-Finch – CP, D

Yellow-faced Grassquit – CA, CH

Slaty Finch - CH

Slaty Flowerpiercer - CH
Saffron Finch - CP
Yellow-thighed Finch - CH
Large-footed Finch - CH
White-naped (Yellow-throated) Brush-Finch - CH
Black-striped Sparrow – CP, CH
Rufous-collared Sparrow - CH

Cardinals and Allies (7)

Streaked Saltator – CP, CH
Buff-throated Saltator – CP, CH, CA; *fairly common throughout*
Black-headed Saltator - CP
Slate-colored Grosbeak - CP
Black-thighed Grosbeak – CH
Rose-breasted Grosbeak – CP, CH
Blue-black Grosbeak - CP

American Blackbirds (17)

Red-breasted Blackbird - CP
Eastern Meadowlark – CP, CH
Great-tailed Grackle –CP, CH
Shiny Cowbird - D
Bronzed Cowbird - CH
Giant Cowbird - D
Orchard Oriole - CH
Yellow-backed Oriole -CP
Orange-crowned Oriole – D; *we had good views of this lovely oriole*
Yellow-tailed Oriole - CP
Baltimore Oriole - CP
Yellow-billed Cacique – CP, CH
Scarlet-rumped Cacique – CP, CH; *regularly seen at different locations*
Yellow-rumped Cacique - CP
Crested Oropendola – CP, CH
Chestnut-headed Oropendola – CP
Black Oropendola – D; *one of the specialties of the Darien Lowlands*

Goldfinches and Allies (9)

Yellow-crowned Euphonia –CP, CH, CA
Thick-billed Euphonia – CP, CH, CA
Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia - CH; *striking males were seen several times at La Amistad International Park and also at Finca Pancho Rios.*
Fulvous-vented Euphonia –CA
White-vented Euphonia – CA
Tawny-capped Euphonia - CA
Golden-browed Chlorophonia – CH; *a superb male at Finca Pancho Rios*
Yellow-bellied Siskin - CH
Lesser Goldfinch – CH

