

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION

FEBRUARY 7 – 12, 2009

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As always, the El Valle area treated us to some great birds, beautiful accommodations, and some unexpected surprises. We did encounter a brief stretch of foul weather (rain, wind, and mist) on our day at Los Altos del Maria, and unusually persistent strong winds negatively impacted birding throughout the trip—the weather everywhere seems off these days. In spite of this, we managed to find a number of good birds, while enjoying repeat views of a lot of the more widespread foothill species.

The feeder show at the Canopy Lodge is not to be missed! At peak times, it can be nearly impossible to tear a group away from the lodge feeders to go anywhere else! Not only was activity at the feeders frenetic, but the diversity of birds attracted was truly remarkable. To see such normally skulking birds as Rufous-capped Warbler, Dusky-faced Tanager, and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager attending feeders is a rare treat, and the spectacular Rufous Motmots are grand icing on the cake.

Our day at Altos del Maria was memorable for a number of things. The vistas were spectacular, the weather atop the ridge was frustrating, and the birds were simultaneously challenging and thrilling. We scored an adult male of the much sought-after Snowcap, along with multiple Rufous-browed Tyrannulets (exceptionally good views), dazzling Black-and-yellow Tanagers, endearing Tufted Flycatchers, and the diminutive Ochraceous Wren. We spent considerable time trying to see a pair (or possibly family group) of spectacular Black-crowned Antpittas that were attending a small swarm of army ants. The antpittas stayed mostly in a dense *Heliconia* thicket, only occasionally offering good views for a few of us. We made one last stop back at the thicket at the end of the day, on the theory that the third time was a charm. Just as we were getting into position, a plump bird flushed from the ground and landed on an exposed limb about 10 feet above the ground. Danilo initially identified it as a juvenile Black-crowned Antpitta, but as soon as I could see the bird in my binoculars, it was clear that it was actually a Scaled Antpitta! No sooner did I voice this than the bird flipped around on the branch and faced us, clearly revealing its distinctive facial and throat markings. Unfortunately, the bird was visible only through a relatively narrow window, and in the ensuing scramble of people trying to get an angle, the bird flew and was never seen again. This secretive species is undoubtedly more common than the relatively few records would suggest, but nonetheless, it is a rarely seen bird in Central America. I've seen other subspecies in Mexico and South America, but in 20+ years of birding Panama and Costa Rica, this was my first Scaled Antpitta in Central America. None of the local Canopy Lodge guides had seen this species since they found a nesting bird at Cerro Gaital seven years ago!

The El Valle area has an interesting mix of habitats, and we explored as many as possible during our short visit. One of the most interesting is the semi-deciduous forest, examples of which we visited at El Valle Chiquito and along the Cara Iguana Trail. Here, we secured nice studies of the spectacular Rosy Thrush-Tanager (how can anything be that pink?), the comical Barred Antshrike, the furtive White-bellied Antbird, and the impressive Blue-crowned Motmot. But our biggest triumph came in finally pinning down a pair of Tody Motmots (after hearing multiple individuals at various spots), and enjoying scope-filling views.

The dry lowlands around El Chirú stood in stark contrast to the lushness of Los Altos del Maria and El Valle itself, and provided us with a completely different mix of birds, highlighted by great views of the near-endemic Veraguan Mango, perched Brown-throated Parakeets, Panama Flycatcher, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl being mobbed by a number of smaller birds.

But two hummingbirds at El Valle really stole the show. A patient stakeout of a *Heliconia* patch on La Mesa finally yielded repeat great views of the bizarre and seldom-seen White-tipped Sicklebill (after a few of us had just glimpsed the species at Los Altos del Maria). Then, at the eleventh hour, we finally scored on a stunning male Rufous-crested Coquette at a flowering vervain in front of the Canopy Adventure. The bird was known by local guides to be frequenting this particular spot, but several previous tries by us had been unsuccessful. Furthermore, the flower patch seemed to be zealously guarded by a territorial Violet-crowned Woodnymph, which didn't seem to bode well for the continued presence of the much smaller coquette. I visited the spot during our lunch break on our last full day in El Valle, and was delighted to find that the coquette was still there. I decided to try again with the group at the same time of day on our last day, on the reasoning that hummers are often creatures of habit when it comes to making the rounds of favored feeding spots. Virginia, for whom hummers rank a notch higher than all other birds, went to the spot a little ahead of the rest of us, who were still settling bills and checking out of the lodge. When we drove to the spot, Virginia's grin immediately answered the question of whether or not the coquette had been in. We piled out of the van, and Virginia was still relaying the details of her sighting when the coquette reappeared, almost too close to focus on with our binoculars. It spent the next several minutes methodically working from one flower in the shrub to the next, seeming to levitate or float between perches rather than actually fly, its wispy rufous crest bobbing in the wind. It was a most dramatic and soul-satisfying conclusion to a very enjoyable trip!

Itinerary:

February 6 – arrival in Panama City; night at Amador Country Inn & Suites

February 7 – newly arriving participants are transferred to the Canopy Tower in Gamboa, to join those participants continuing on from the Canopy Tower tour. All participants then driven to El Valle (left Canopy Tower at ca. 1000 hours) and the Canopy Lodge in time for lunch. After spending some time watching the show of birds coming into the lodge feeders, we then birded our way on foot to the adjacent Canopy

Adventure property, where we spent the remainder of the afternoon birding the trails and the main road.

February 8 – morning birding La Mesa and the Las Minas trail, returning to the lodge for lunch. Afternoon excursion to El Valle Chiquito.

February 9 – all day excursion to Los Altos del Maria.

February 10 – morning birding at La Mesa and the lower portion of the Cerro Gaital trail; afternoon along the Cara Iguana Trail.

February 11 – morning trip to the lowlands around El Chirú; return to lodge for lunch and check-out; 11th-hour stop at Canopy Adventure to look (successfully) for the Rufous-crested Coquette, followed by 2-hour drive back to Panama City.

February 12 – flights home

Key:

CL = Canopy Lodge grounds (particularly the feeders) & adjacent Canopy Adventure

LM = La Mesa (including Las Minas and Cerro Gaital trails)

VC = El Valle Chiquito trail

CI = Cara Iguana Trail

AM = Los Altos del Maria

EC = lowlands in the El Chirú region

* = heard only

Birds:

Gray-headed Chachalaca (*Ortalis cinereiceps*) - LM

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) - Panama City

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) - Panama City

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificans*) - Panama City

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) - VC to CL, Panama City

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) - CL

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) - LM, to and from VC, to and from AM, EC

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) - daily

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) - daily

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) - EC

White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*) - LM

Savanna Hawk (*Buteogallus meridionalis*) - CL to Panama City

Roadside Hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*) - LM

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) - LM

Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*) - EC

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) - VC, EC

Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*) - LM, EC

Bat Falcon (*Falco ruficularis*)* - CI*

Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*) - to and from AM, EC

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) - CL to Panama City

Scaled Pigeon (*Patagioenas speciosa*)* - VC*

Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) - LM, to and from AM, EC

White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*) - daily
Brown-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga pertinax*) - EC
Orange-chinned Parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*) - LM, VC, CI, EC
Blue-headed Parrot (*Pionus menstruus*) - LM
Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*) - LM, VC, AM
Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) - EC
Tropical Screech-Owl (*Megascops choliba*)* - CL*
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) - EC (nice scope studies)
Mottled Owl (*Ciccaba virgata*) - CL (An incredibly camouflaged, day-roosting bird.)
White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) - LM
Rufous-breasted Hermit (*Glaucis hirsutus*) - LM
Green Hermit (*Phaethornis guy*) - LM, AM
Stripe-throated Hermit (*Phaethornis strigularis*) - CL, LM
White-tipped Sicklebill (*Eutoxeres aquila*) - AM, LM (Excellent views of this striking and seldom-seen hummer.)
Veraguan Mango (*Anthracothorax veraguensis*) - EC (Multiple great studies of males. This species is a near-endemic of Panama, having only recently been found just across the border into Costa Rica.)
Violet-headed Hummingbird (*Klais guimeti*) - CL
Rufous-crested Coquette (*Lophornis delattrei*) - CL (A spectacular male feeding on vervain at the Canopy Adventure!)
Garden Emerald (*Chlorostilbon assimilis*) - CL, CI
Violet-crowned Woodnymph (*Thalurania colombica*) - daily
Sapphire-throated Hummingbird (*Lepidopyga coeruleogularis*) - EC
Blue-chested Hummingbird (*Amazilia amabilis*) - LM, CL, CI
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird (*Amazilia edward*) - daily
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*) - daily
Snowcap (*Microchera albocoronata*) - AM (A male seen foraging and perched briefly high in a tree.)
White-vented Plumeleteer (*Chalybura buffoni*) - CL
Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer (*Chalybura urochrysia*) - AM (In the Heliconia thicket where we had our antpittas.)
Purple-crowned Fairy (*Heliothryx barroti*) - CL
Long-billed Starthroat (*Heliomaster longirostris*) - CI
Tody Motmot (*Hylomanes momotula*) - CL*, VC (After some work, we eventually had nice looks at multiple birds.), CI*
Blue-crowned Motmot (*Momotus momota*) - CI (Great studies.)
Rufous Motmot (*Baryphthengus martii*) - CL (Seen daily at the lodge feeders – what a feeder bird!)
Broad-billed Motmot (*Electron platyrhynchum*)* - CL*
White-whiskered Puffbird (*Malacoptila panamensis*) - The first “official” bird of the tour. I spotted one from the van as we drove down Semaphore Hill from the Canopy Tower (en route to El Valle) on the first day. We backed up and had nice looks.
Emerald Toucanet (*Aulacorhynchus prasinus caeruleogularis*) - LM {This wide-ranging species has been split by some taxonomists into as many as 7 species. Under this treatment, the Central American forms sort out as follows: Wagler’s Toucanet (highlands

of sw. Mexico), Emerald Toucanet (e. Mexico to El Salvador), Blue-throated Toucanet (Costa Rica & w. Panama), and Violet-throated Toucanet (e. Panama to Colombia). The birds we saw were “Blue-throated Toucanets”. The AOU check-list committees remain unconvinced, and are still recognizing a single, polytypic species for the time being, but this is likely to change. }

Collared Aracari (*Pteroglossus torquatus*) - LM*, AM
Keel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos sulfuratus*) - CI, El Valle
Red-crowned Woodpecker (*Melanerpes rubricapillus*) - daily
Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*) - LM*, EC (Fabulous prolonged views.)
Red-faced Spinetail (*Cranioleuca erythrops*)* - AM*
Spotted Barbtail (*Premnoplex brunnescens*) - AM
Plain Xenops (*Xenops minutus*)* - CL*
Cocoa Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus susurrans*) - CL, CI (Seen creeping up a gate post!)
Spotted Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus erythropygius*) - LM
Fasciated Antshrike (*Cymbilaimus lineatus*)* - CL*, LM*
Great Antshrike (*Taraba major*)* - CL*
Barred Antshrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*) - CI (Fantastic studies!), EC
Plain Antvireo (*Dysithamnus mentalis*) - AM*, LM
Spot-crowned Antvireo (*Dysithamnus puncticeps*)* - LM*
Dusky Antbird (*Cercomacra tyrannina*) - VC
White-bellied Antbird (*Myrmeciza longipes*) - CI (Nice looks at this skulker.)
Chestnut-backed Antbird (*Myrmeciza exsul*)* - LM*
Black-faced Antthrush (*Formicarius analis*)* - LM*
Black-crowned Antpitta (*Pittasoma michleri*) - AM (Heard by all and seen well by a few of us. There were either 2 or 3 birds attending a small army ant swarm. We heard others at various spots.)
Scaled Antpitta (*Grallaria guatemalensis*) - AM (Seen well by me and the two local guides; glimpsed by others in the group. This is a very rarely seen bird in Panama – Danilo had not seen one in 7 years!)
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma obsoletum*) - CI, EC
Mouse-colored Tyrannulet (*Phaeomyias murinus*) - EC
Yellow-bellied Elaenia (*Elaenia flavogaster*) - CI, EC
Olive-striped Flycatcher (*Mionectes olivaceus*) - AM
Sepia-capped Flycatcher (*Leptopogon amaurocephalus*) - LM
Rufous-browed Tyrannulet (*Phylloscartes superciliaris*) - AM (Fabulous looks at a couple of these snazzy little tyrannulets.)
Paltry Tyrannulet (*Zimmerius vilissimus*) - LM, AM*
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant (*Lophotriccus pileatus*)* - AM*, LM*
Common Tody-Flycatcher (*Todirostrum cinereum*) - EC
Yellow-margined Flycatcher (*Tolmomyias assimilis*) - LM
Bran-colored Flycatcher (*Myiophobus fasciatus*) - LM (Nice looks.)
Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) - LM, AM
Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*)* - CI*
Panama Flycatcher (*Myiarchus panamensis*) - EC (A nice opportunity to study this species.)

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) - CL, EC
Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*) - CL, EC
Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) - daily
Streaked Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes maculatus*) - EC
Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) - daily
Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savanna*) - LM, EC
Thrush-like Schiffornis (*Schiffornis turdinus*)* - LM
Golden-collared Manakin (*Manacus vitellinus*) - LM
White-ruffed Manakin (*Corapipo altera*) - LM
Lance-tailed Manakin (*Chiroxiphia lanceolata*) - VC, CI
Yellow-green Vireo (*Vireo flavoviridis*) - EC
Scrub Greenlet (*Hylophilus flavipes*) - EC
Lesser Greenlet (*Hylophilus decurtatus*)* - CI*
Rufous-browed Peppershrike (*Cyclarhis gujanensis*) - EC
Black-chested Jay (*Cyanocorax affinis*) - CL, VC
Gray-breasted Martin (*Progne chalybea*) - to and from AM
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) - en route to El Valle
Southern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*) - LM
Bay Wren (*Thryothorus nigricapillus*) - CL (where seen or heard daily)
Rufous-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus rutilus*) - CL, VC, CI*, EC*
Rufous-and-white Wren (*Thryothorus rufalbus*)* - VC*
Plain Wren (*Thryothorus modestus*) - LM
House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) - daily
Ochraceous Wren (*Troglodytes ochraceus*) - AM
White-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucosticta*)* - LM*
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucophrys*) - AM*, LM
Scaly-breasted Wren (*Microcerculus marginatus*) - CL, LM {The taxonomy in this group is a mess. Stiles & Skutch, in *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*, treat this population as a separate species, *M. luscinia* (= Whistling Wren) from both northern Middle American populations (*M. philomela*, Nightingale Wren) and from South American populations (true *M. marginatus* group, known variously as Scaly-breasted Wren or Southern Nightingale-Wren). All three groups differ from one another morphologically and, especially, vocally, and I think that Stile's approach is the correct one. The English name of "Scaly-breasted Wren" is particularly unfortunate, given that of the entire complex, only the north Andean races are truly scaly-breasted. The AOU is still treating Panamanian *luscinia* as conspecific with *marginatus*, but don't be surprised if they are ultimately split.}
Tawny-faced Gnatwren (*Microbates cinereiventris*) -LM
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus aurantiirostris*)* - LM
Pale-vented Thrush (*Turdus obsoletus*) - LM
Clay-colored Robin (*Turdus grayi*) - daily
Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) - EC
Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) - LM
Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*) - daily
Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) - EC
Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) - LM

Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) - LM
Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) - CI
American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) - CI
Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*) - VC, AM
Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*) - daily (except for EC)
Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) - daily
Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*) - LM, CI, EC
Common Bush-Tanager (*Chlorospingus ophthalmicus*) - LM, AM
Black-and-yellow Tanager (*Chrysothlypis chrysomelas*) - AM
Rosy Thrush-Tanager (*Rhodinocichla rosea*) - VC (Nice looks at this beautiful and bizarre bird.), CI*
Dusky-faced Tanager (*Mitrospingus cassinii*) - daily at the CL feeders
White-lined Tanager (*Tachyphonus rufus*) - daily
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager (*Habia rubica*) - daily at the CL feeders
Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) - CL*, LM, AM
Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) - CL, EC
Crimson-backed Tanager (*Ramphocelus dimidiatus*) - daily at the CL feeders
Flame-rumped Tanager (*Ramphocelus flammigerus*) - daily at the CL feeders
Blue-gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*) - daily
Palm Tanager (*Thraupis palmarum*) - daily
Plain-colored Tanager (*Tangara inornata*) - LM
Silver-throated Tanager (*Tangara icterocephala*) - LM, AM, VC
Bay-headed Tanager (*Tangara gyrola*) - CL, LM
Golden-hooded Tanager (*Tangara larvata*) - LM
Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*) - daily at CL feeders
Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*) - daily (except AM)
Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila americana*) - AM, LM
Yellow-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris olivaceus*) - daily (except EC)
Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch (*Buarremon brunneinucha*)* - LM*, AM*
Orange-billed Sparrow (*Arremon aurantirostris*) - CL
Black-striped Sparrow (*Arremonops conirostris*) - LM
Streaked Saltator (*Saltator striatipectus*) - daily at CL feeders
Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator maximus*) - daily at CL feeders
Black-faced Grosbeak (*Caryothraustes poliogaster*)* - LM*
Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)* - LM*
Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) - daily
Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) - LM
Giant Cowbird (*Molothrus oryzivorus*) - LM
Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) - EC
Yellow-backed Oriole (*Icterus chrysater*)* - VC*
Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) - EC
Yellow-billed Cacique (*Amblycercus holosericeus*) - VC
Chestnut-headed Oropendola (*Psarocolius wagleri*) - daily
Yellow-crowned Euphonia (*Euphonia luteicapilla*) - CI, EC
Thick-billed Euphonia (*Euphonia laniirostris*) - daily

Tawny-capped Euphonia (*Euphonia anneae*) - LM
Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) - EC

Mammals:

Red-tailed Squirrel
Variegated Squirrel
Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth
Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth