

SUMMER AT EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE

AUGUST 9 – 14, 2008

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TOUR REPORT
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By Michael O'Brien

Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano and at an elevation of nearly 2,000 feet, El Valle is both picturesque and refreshingly cooler than the lowlands of Panama. It also has a great diversity of birds, including many species not found around the Canopy Tower. Run by the same owner as Canopy Tower, the food here is just as exquisite and the accommodations are very comfortable.

At the conclusion of our Canopy Tower tour, those of us continuing on to El Valle enjoyed a final delightful morning atop the Canopy Tower. A late morning departure brought us to El Valle's Canopy Lodge around lunchtime. Right away we were greeted by a flurry of birds around the garden and feeders. Violet-headed, Snowy-bellied, and Rufous-tailed hummingbirds, Garden Emerald, and White-vented Plumeleteer were all buzzing around the garden. Bananaquit; White-lined, Crimson-backed, Lemon-rumped, Blue-gray, and Palm tanagers; Green and Red-legged honeycreepers; Streaked Saltator; and dozens of Thick-billed Euphonias were crowding the feeders. Bay Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Black-striped Sparrow were lurking in the surrounding vegetation. All this as we were settling into our rooms and waiting for lunch to be served! Each day the grounds would be similarly active with many of the same species becoming familiar friends, and occasionally a new one thrown into the mix.

After lunch, we headed for the nearby Canopy Adventure Trail. Though afternoon walks can often be a little slower than birding first thing in the morning, we found a marvelous mix of birds including Gray-headed Chachalaca, Tody and Rufous motmots, Fasciated Antshrike, Black-chested Jay, Long-billed Starthroat, Rufous-breasted Wren, Buff-rumped Warbler, Tawny-crested and Bay-headed tanagers, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Orange-billed Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator, and Blue-black Grosbeak. Everyone's favorite, however, was the pair of Mottled Owls that sat motionless in their daytime roost, watching us as we watched them.

Day two began with a few exciting sightings right on the grounds including a Green Thorntail and a pair of Great Antshrikes. We also enjoyed watching (from a safe distance!) a fer-de-lance as it slithered along the stone wall by the footbridge. Our main destination this morning was Las Minas Trail, a mix of forest and grassland a short distance uphill from El Valle. As it turned out, this outing would be abandoned due to heavy rain, but not before we found a few nice birds including Blue-throated Toucanet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Spotted Woodcreeper, Silver-throated Tanager, and Black-headed Saltator. Back at the lodge, we watched the feeders as the rain intensified. Birds were surprisingly active there except during the heaviest downpours. Despite less than optimal conditions, we were thrilled to find the very scarce Spot-crowned Barbet seeking shelter under a cecropia leaf!

After a quick shopping spree at the El Valle market, our afternoon destination was Cara Iguana Trail at the south rim of the El Valle crater. The rain held off for much of this walk, allowing us to find several nice birds including Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Yellow-green Vireo, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia. The real prize though was the Rosy Thrush-Tanager, a simply spectacular bird that gave us a prolonged scope view.

Due to a bleak weather forecast for the highlands, on day three we headed south to the Pacific Coast around El Chiru. Visiting a variety of sites from open grassland to agricultural fields to orchards and second-growth forest edge, we found an amazing diversity of birds, and most we saw very well. Among the many highlights were Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Pearl and White-tailed kites, Crested and Yellow-headed caracaras, Aplomado Falcon, Plain-breasted and Blue ground-doves, Brown-throated Parakeet, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, roosting Common Pauraque and Common Potoo, Barred Antshrike, Panama and Fork-tailed flycatchers, Lance-tailed Manakin, Scrub and Golden-fronted greenlets, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Red-breasted Blackbird. We had lunch at a private residence along the Pacific shoreline where, under the palm trees, we enjoyed watching Brown Booby, Magnificent Frigatebird, and mixed flocks of Black and Sandwich terns offshore, and a beautiful Sapphire-throated Hummingbird in the garden. On the drive home, we stopped for up-close views of a Crested Bobwhite that had paused along the roadside!

On day four, with more promising weather, we headed back to Las Minas Trail to see what we had missed in the rain two days earlier. It turns out we had missed plenty! A long walk through mixed forest and pasture produced many nice birds including White Hawk, Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Lesser Elaenia, Paltry Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Tufted Flycatcher, Tropical Pewee, White-ruffed Manakin, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Pale-vented Thrush, Common Bush-Tanager, Hepatic and Golden-hooded tanagers, Yellow-bellied Seedeater, Thick-billed Seedfinch, Tawny-capped Euphonia, and (though not a bird at all!) fine views of a brown-throated three-toed sloth. In the afternoon we visited La Mesa, just uphill from Las Minas Road. Though we had spells of heavy rain to deal with again, we did manage to see a number of nice birds including Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Bran-colored Flycatcher, and White-breasted Wood-Wren. Best of all, we enjoyed a prolonged study of a perched subadult Barred Forest-Falcon.

On our final morning, we loaded up in 4-wheel-drive vehicles and followed a rough dirt trail all the way to Altos del Maria. Here, in the cloud forest, we found White Hawk, Orange-bellied Trogon, Blue-throated Toucanet, Black-cheeked and Stripe-cheeked woodpeckers, Plain Antvireo, Rufous Mourner, Thrush-like Schiffornis, Black-and-yellow Tanager, and one of the cutest mammals you'll ever see, the Alfaro's pygmy squirrel. We also heard Black-crowned Antpitta and saw a nice kettle of soaring Swallow-tailed and Plumbeous kites. After a final fabulous lunch and some more garden-watching, we transferred back to Panama City in the afternoon.

ITINERARY

Day 1, 9 August: 10 am transfer from Canopy Tower to El Valle; Canopy Lodge to Canopy Adventure trail; night at Canopy Lodge.

Day 2, 10 August: Las Minas Trail; El Valle market; Cara Iguana Trail; night at Canopy Lodge.

Day 3, 11 August: El Chiru (joined by Ken Allaire); night at Canopy Lodge.

Day 4, 12 August: Las Minas Trail; La Mesa; night at Canopy Lodge.

Day 5, 13 August: Altos del Maria; 2 pm departure to Panama City.

Day 6, 14 August: Departures.

BIRDS

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – seen at El Chiru and El Valle

Gray-headed Chachalaca – seen near Canopy Lodge and Las Minas Trail

Crested Bobwhite – heard at El Chiru and seen on the roadside near El Valle on the drive back!

Brown Booby – a few seen offshore at El Chiru

Brown Pelican – numerous offshore at El Chiru

Neotropic Cormorant – seen at El Chiru and Panama City

Magnificent Frigatebird – seen at El Chiru

Great Egret – seen at El Chiru

Little Blue Heron – seen at El Chiru

Tricolored Heron – seen at El Chiru

Cattle Egret – seen at El Chiru

Green Heron – seen at El Chiru

Black-crowned Night-Heron – seen at El Chiru

White Ibis – seen at El Chiru

Glossy Ibis – seen at El Chiru

Black Vulture – seen daily

Turkey Vulture – seen daily

Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture – seen at El Chiru

Swallow-tailed Kite – several at Altos del Maria

Pearl Kite – 2 seen at El Chiru

White-tailed Kite – 2 seen at El Chiru

Plumbeous Kite – flock seen over Altos del Maria

White Hawk – seen at La Mesa and Altos del Maria

Great Black-Hawk – 1 at Altos del Maria

Roadside Hawk – 2 at El Chiru

Barred Forest-Falcon – nice views of a perched subadult at La Mesa

Crested Caracara – several at El Chiru

Yellow-headed Caracara – several at El Chiru

Aplomado Falcon – 2 at El Chiru

Gray-breasted Crake – heard at Las Minas Trail

Gray-necked Wood-Rail – heard several times at Canopy Lodge

Southern Lapwing – 2 at El Chiru

Willet – 2 birds of the interior-breeding subspecies, *T. s. inornata*, at El Chiru

Laughing Gull – several offshore from El Chiru

Black Tern – 40+ feeding offshore from El Chiru

Sandwich Tern – several feeding offshore from El Chiru

Rock Pigeon (I) – a few seen in urban/suburban areas

Pale-vented Pigeon – a few seen on the drive to El Chiru

Scaled Pigeon – seen several times around El Valle, Las Minas Trail, and Altos del Maria

Mourning Dove – 20+ seen at El Chiru
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove – a few at El Chiru
Ruddy Ground-Dove – seen on most days in open areas
Blue Ground-Dove – 2 seen briefly at El Chiru
White-tipped Dove – seen on most days; especially common around El Chiru
Gray-chested Dove – heard at Las Minas Trail
Brown-throated Parakeet – several at El Chiru
Squirrel Cuckoo – heard at Altos del Maria
Smooth-billed Ani – 2 at Las Minas Trail
Groove-billed Ani – numerous at El Chiru
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl – 1 at El Chiru
Mottled Owl – 2 near Canopy Lodge
Common Pauraque – 1 roosting at El Chiru
Common Potoo – 1 roosting at El Chiru
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift – 1 near El Valle
Green Hermit – 1 at Altos del Maria
Stripe-throated Hermit – seen at La Mesa and Altos del Maria
Violet-headed Hummingbird – seen several times at Canopy Lodge
Green Thorntail – seen once at Canopy Lodge
Garden Emerald – seen every day at Canopy Lodge
Violet-crowned Woodnymph – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Sapphire-throated Hummingbird – seen at El Chiru
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird – seen several times at Canopy Lodge
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird – seen daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
White-vented Plumeleteer – seen every day at Canopy Lodge
Long-billed Starthroat – seen several times at Canopy Lodge
Orange-bellied Trogon – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Tody Motmot – seen on Canopy Adventure Trail
Blue-crowned Motmot – seen on the drive to El Chiru
Rufous Motmot – seen daily at Canopy Lodge, sometimes at the feeders
Broad-billed Motmot – heard at Las Minas Trail
Spot-crowned Barbet – 1 female seen on a very rainy day at Canopy Lodge
Blue-throated Toucanet – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Collared Aracari – seen at Canopy Lodge (one bird so startlingly beautiful it caused the leader to spill coffee all over himself!)
Keel-billed Toucan – heard at Las Minas Trail
Black-cheeked Woodpecker – seen at Altos del Maria
Red-crowned Woodpecker – seen daily
Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker (E) – seen at Altos del Maria
Lineated Woodpecker – seen at El Chiru and Las Minas Trail
Plain Xenops – seen at Las Minas Trail
Plain-brown Woodcreeper – heard at Canopy Lodge
Wedge-billed Woodcreeper – seen at La Mesa
Spotted Woodcreeper – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Fasciated Antshrike – pair seen at Canopy Adventure Trail
Great Antshrike – seen at Canopy Lodge
Barred Antshrike – seen at El Chiru
Plain Antvireo – seen at Altos del Maria
Spot-crowned Antvireo – seen at La Mesa
Dusky Antbird – heard at Canopy Adventure Trail
Black-crowned Antpitta – heard at Altos del Maria

Yellow-bellied Elaenia – seen at Las Minas Trail and El Chiru
Lesser Elaenia – 1 at Las Minas Trail
Paltry Tyrannulet – seen at Las Minas Trail
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant – seen at Las Minas Trail
Common Tody-Flycatcher – seen at El Chiru and Canopy Lodge
Bran-colored Flycatcher - 1 at La Mesa
Tufted Flycatcher – 1 at Las Minas Trail
Tropical Pewee – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Rufous Mourner – 1 at Altos del Maria
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – 2 at Altos del Maria
Panama Flycatcher – seen at El Chiru and Las Minas Trail
Great Kiskadee – seen at El Chiru
Boat-billed Flycatcher – seen at El Chiru and Altos del Maria
Rusty-margined Flycatcher – seen at Las Minas Trail
Social Flycatcher – seen daily in open areas
Tropical Kingbird – seen daily in open areas
Fork-tailed Flycatcher – several at El Chiru
Thrush-like Schiffornis – seen at Altos del Maria
White-winged Becard – seen at Cara Iguana Trail
Golden-collared Manakin – heard at Canopy Adventure Trail
White-ruffed Manakin – seen at La Mesa and Altos del Maria
Lance-tailed Manakin – seen at El Chiru; heard at Cara Iguana Trail
Yellow-green Vireo – seen at Cara Iguana Trail and El Chiru
Scrub Greenlet – seen at El Chiru
Golden-fronted Greenlet – seen at El Chiru
Rufous-browed Peppershrike – seen at El Chiru
Black-chested Jay – a few seen almost daily at Canopy Lodge, Las Minas Trail, and Altos del Maria
Gray-breasted Martin – seen at El Chiru
Southern Rough-winged Swallow – seen at El Chiru
Cliff Swallow – seen at El Chiru
Barn Swallow – seen at El Chiru
Bay Wren – seen at Canopy Adventure Trail and Canopy Lodge
Rufous-breasted Wren – seen at Canopy Adventure Trail; heard at Las Minas Trail
Rufous-and-white Wren – seen at Cara Iguana Trail
Plain Wren – heard at Las Minas Trail
House Wren – seen daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
White-breasted Wood-Wren – seen at Las Minas Trail
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren – seen at Las Minas Trail
Scaly-breasted Wren – heard at Canopy Lodge and Canopy Adventure Trail
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush – heard at Canopy Lodge and Canopy Adventure Trail
Pale-vented Thrush – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Clay-colored Robin – seen daily
Tropical Mockingbird (I) – seen in Panama City
Yellow Warbler – seen at El Chiru
Rufous-capped Warbler – seen at Canopy Lodge and Las Minas Trail
Buff-rumped Warbler – seen at Canopy Lodge
Bananaquit – seen daily at Canopy Lodge feeders and elsewhere
Common Bush-Tanager – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Black-and-yellow Tanager – seen at Altos del Maria
Rosy Thrush-Tanager – seen at Cara Iguana Trail

Dusky-faced Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge
Tawny-crested Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge and Canopy Adventure Trail
White-lined Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge and Las Minas Trail
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge and Las Minas Trail
Hepatic Tanager – seen at Las Minas Trail
Crimson-backed Tanager – seen daily and Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
Flame (Lemon)-rumped Tanager – seen almost daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
Blue-gray Tanager – seen daily
Palm Tanager – seen daily
Plain-colored Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge
Silver-throated Tanager – seen at La Mesa and Altos del Maria
Bay-headed Tanager – seen at Canopy Lodge, Las Minas Trail, and Altos del Maria
Golden-hooded Tanager – seen at Las Minas Trail
Scarlet-thighed Dacnis – seen at Las Minas Trail
Green Honeycreeper – seen almost daily at Canopy Lodge
Red-legged Honeycreeper – seen daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
Blue-black Grassquit – seen daily in open areas
Variable Seedeater – seen daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
Yellow-bellied Seedeater – seen at Las Minas Trail
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater – seen at El Chiru
Thick-billed Seed-Finch – seen at Las Minas Trail
Yellow-faced Grassquit – seen at Las Minas Trail and Las Minas
Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch – seen at Las Minas Trail
Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch – heard at La Mesa
Orange-billed Sparrow – seen at Canopy Lodge
Black-striped Sparrow – seen almost daily at Canopy Lodge
Streaked Saltator – seen daily at Canopy Lodge and elsewhere
Buff-throated Saltator – seen at Canopy Lodge and Las Minas Trail
Black-headed Saltator – seen at Las Minas Trail
Blue-black Grosbeak – seen at Canopy Adventure Trail
Red-breasted Blackbird – numerous at El Chiru
Eastern Meadowlark – numerous at El Chiru
Great-tailed Grackle – common in all lowland open areas
Shiny Cowbird – seen at El Chiru
Bronzed Cowbird – seen at La Mesa
Orchard Oriole – 1 adult male at El Chiru (an early migrant from North America)
Chestnut-headed Oropendola – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Yellow-crowned Euphonia – numerous at Cara Iguana Trail
Thick-billed Euphonia – seen daily at Canopy Lodge feeders and elsewhere
Tawny-capped Euphonia – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Lesser Goldfinch – seen at Cara Iguana Trail and El Chiru

MAMMALS

Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth – seen at several locales
Variegated Squirrel – several at Cara Iguana Trail
Red-tailed Squirrel – seen at Las Minas Trail and Altos del Maria
Alfaro's Pygmy-Squirrel – seen at Altos del Maria; calls sounded similar to Ochraceous Wren!

REPTILES & AMPHIBEANS

Green Iguana – seen at Canopy Lodge
Black Spiny-tailed Iguana – seen at Canopy Lodge

Central American Ameiva – seen at Altos del Maria

Fer-de-lance – seen at Canopy Lodge, on stone wall by feeders!