

# **PANAMA: DARIEN WILDERNESS**

**FEBRUARY 23 – MARCH 4, 2007**



**LEADERS: DAVID WOLF & IVAN HOYOS**

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## DARIEN, PANAMA TOUR

February 23-March 4, 2007

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As the charter plane began its descent from high over the Bay of Panama, and turned inland over the remote Darien jungles, I gazed in awe at the terrain below. We passed vast marshes ringed by mangrove swamps, unbroken forest dominated by bare cuipo trees, and dark hill forest blanketing the ridges, all of it little explored ornithologically. Filled with anticipation, we were headed right into the heart of this region, to the old gold mining community of Cana, nestled at the head of a narrow valley at the base of remote Cerro Pirre. Cana certainly did not let us down, and, from the first macaws that greeted us as we got off the plane to the egrets and King Vulture as we took off, we found birds—and then more birds!

Because the Cana area is a melange of secondary and primary habitats, and elevations range from 1,800-5,000 ft., the avifauna here is exceptionally diverse. For a wonderful week we took advantage of this as we explored the area on foot. Our birding began as we walked the short distance from the airstrip to the lodge, on its neatly manicured knoll with a commanding view. Before we had even settled into our rooms we realized that the brilliant flowering *Erythrina* trees were attracting a constant parade of birds, from spectacular Blue-and-yellow Macaws to parakeets, xenops, flycatchers, and tanagers. This was to be a constant theme throughout our stay, and every time we watched an *Erythrina* it produced sightings of note.

Each day we ranged a bit further afield from the lodge and explored more habitats. At the more open forest edge we laughed at a comical Barred Puffbird peering down at us, watched zippy Dusky-backed Jacamars capture fast-flying butterflies, and thrilled to a male Black-tipped Cotinga sitting prominently atop the canopy for all the world to see. Noisy Red-throated Caracaras flew in to check us out, a glittering Great Jacamar perched in an emergent tree on the edge, and the forest interior produced great looks at specialties like antpittas, Stripe-throated Wren, and Lemon-spectacled Tanager. The canopy mixed-flocks proved frustrating, but at times included special birds like the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker.

Army ant swarms are a feature of this region and we were lucky to find one close to the trail near camp, offering a great opportunity to observe the birds feeding on prey flushed by the ants. The dominant species was the Bicolored Antbird, the classic “obligate” ant-follower, but also present were several family groups of the shy Ocellated Antbirds, a swarm of clean-cut Spotted Antbirds, and a very obliging Tody Motmot that was very selective about its prey items.

In many ways the most special part of the week was the hike up Cerro Pirre. This ridge, barely reaching 5,500 ft. at its highest point, is so isolated that a number of endemic species are found only here and on nearby ridges. To reach them we ascended from dry

tropical forest on the lower slopes to the lush cloud forests of the subtropical zone. We arrived in camp tired, but lively enough to enjoy a big fast-paced mixed-flock in the trees overhead, in it rarities like a Sharpbill and a stunning pair of Yellow-collared Chlorophonias. Noisy Crested Guans awoke us at dawn the next morning and soon we were working our way to the top of the ridge. Here the forest was noticeably wetter, shorter in stature, and covered in epiphytes. Birds were scarce, but everything seen was special, from the Tooth-billed Hummingbird feeding at a bromeliad flower to the chunky Pirre Bush-Tanagers building a nest in the epiphytes and the endemic Green-naped Tanagers in the fruiting melostome trees overhead. Perhaps the ultimate experience on the mountain was simply gazing out from the lookout to an ever-changing panorama of ridges and valleys blanketed in forest as far as the eye could see, with no evidence of man's hand nor artificial sounds.

A final day back down below continued to produce great surprises, including a covey of Marbled Wood-Quail, a Tiny Hawk perched in the crown of an open tree, and Dave's lifer Black-billed Flycatcher, a scarce and inconspicuous regional specialty. Right up until it was time to leave we found special birds, from a very cooperative pair of Black-tailed Trogons to an incredible Black-crowned Antpitta sitting on a log close at hand.

All too soon the plane came to whisk us away from this peaceful wilderness and back to "civilization," where a complete lunar eclipse as the full moon rose over Panama Bay capped our final dinner.

### **Itinerary:**

**February 23, 2007:** the group gathers at the Country Inn & Suites in Amador (Panama City).

**February 24, 2007:** morning charter flight to Cana airstrip in the Darien, arriving about 12:45 p.m. Afternoon settling into the lodge and birding around the clearing and airstrip at Cana.

**February 25, 2007:** morning birding around the edge of the clearing at Cana on the Locomotive Trail and the first part of the Boca de Cupe trail. Afternoon birding around the lodge and the Rio Seteganti trail to the Rio Cana.

**February 26, 2007:** morning birding around the Old Mine loop. Afternoon at the antswarm on this loop and along the airstrip.

**February 27, 2007:** prompt dawn departure for the hike up to the Mountain Camp on Cerro Pirre at 4000 ft, arriving there by 3 p.m, leaving time to relax and bird from the clearing and lookout.

**February 28, 2007:** 7:30 morning departure for a day hike up to the elfin cloud forest along the top of Cerro Pirre at ca 4800 ft. Return to camp by 5 p.m., with time for afternoon birding there.

**March 1, 2007:** birding from the Mountain Camp clearing and lookout before hiking back down the mountain to Cana, everyone arriving by late afternoon.

**March 2, 2007:** all day birding along the Boca del Cupe Trail out as far as the Escucha del Ruido stream, some of us lingering along the trail and airstrip in the late afternoon.

**March 3, 2007:** a great final morning of birding, along the airstrip and first part of the Boca de Cupe trail; some also checked the Old Mine Trail before lunch and the flight back to Panama City.

**March 4, 2007:** departure for home or on-going birding adventures.

**Bird List:** A few highlights and rarities are underscored, while birds noted by group members around the Country Inn & Suites Amador (Panama City) on February 24 are listed separately at the end.

Great Tinamou - mostly heard, but seen independently by three group members.  
Little Tinamou - heard only (in young second-growth around the clearing and airstrip).

Gray-headed Chachalaca - including from the back porch.

**Crested Guan** - seen often and well; wonderfully numerous and calm here.

Great Curassow - female on the Boca de Cupe trail in the late afternoon.

**Marbled Wood-Quail** - two groups seen slipping away through the forest floor.

Great Egret - from the plane as we left the Cana area

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture

King Vulture

Hook-billed Kite - one perched down low at the edge of the clearing.

Swallow-tailed Kite

Plumbeous Kite

Tiny Hawk - long scope study of a perched sub-adult at the Rio Escucha de Ruido.

**Semiplumbeous Hawk** - long looks at two different birds in one day.

**White Hawk** - including the remarkably close bird hunting the edge of the clearing.

Great Black-Hawk - one adult low over the Mountain Camp.

Broad-winged Hawk - 5 early migrants over the Mountain Camp.

Swainson's Hawk - early migrants detected on two days.

Black Hawk-Eagle

**Ornate Hawk-Eagle** - perched adult on the hike down the mountain.

**Red-throated Caracara** - this declining species was noisy and conspicuous, several times landing right overhead to vociferously protest our presence.

Bat Falcon - from the lookout at the mountain camp.

White-throated Crake - heard only, by John S.

Gray-necked Wood-Rail

**Purple Gallinule** - a close study of a juvenile in rank morning glories along the airstrip our final morning was a surprise.

Scaled Pigeon - several along the airstrip our final morning.

Plumbeous Pigeon - heard only; at mid and upper-elevations on the mountain.

Ruddy Pigeon - seen well and heard in the lower forests around the Cana valley.

Ruddy Ground-Dove - "singing" males along the airstrip.

White-tipped Dove

Gray-chested Dove - mostly heard or glimpsed when flushed; seen well by a few.

Russet-crowned Quail-Dove - heard only; possibly flushed on the mountain several

times.

Chestnut-fronted Macaw - conspicuous around the valley at Cana.

**Great Green Macaw** - the Darien may well be the world headquarters for this declining and threatened species.

Red-and-green Macaw - seen only in flight, but still spectacular.

**Blue-and-yellow Macaw** - including close studies of birds feeding in the flowering *Erythrina* trees around Cana.

Orange-chinned Parakeet

Blue-headed Parrot - abundant!

Red-ored Parrot - one pair seen our final morning.

Mealy Parrot

Squirrel Cuckoo

**Little Cuckoo** - several great looks at this secretive bird in the swampy vine tangles.

Smooth-billed Ani

Choco Screech-Owl (*Megascops chocoensis*) - heard only; heard by some from the Mountain Camp; this is a split from Vermiculated Screech-Owl (formerly *Otus vermiculatus*, now *Megascops vermiculatus*)

Spectacled Owl - heard only (but for much of the night, right above our tents).

**Central American Pygmy-Owl** - we saw almost 50 species of birds mobbing it.

Mottled Owl - heard only; heard by a few from the Cana lodge.

Common Pauraque - mostly heard; seen (sort of) near the lodge.

White-collared Swift

Band-rumped Swift

Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift

Green Hermit

Long-billed Hermit - split from the Long-tailed Hermit.

Stripe-throated Hermit - split from the Little Hermit.

Tooth-billed Hummingbird - seen well by some in the elfin forest.

White-necked Jacobin

Rufous-crested Coquette - seen by a few, mobbing the pygmy-owl high up in the canopy.

Green-crowned Woodnymph

Violet-bellied Hummingbird

Rufous-cheeked (Pirre) Hummingbird - hard to find this year and seen by only a few, at a flowering "hot lips" in the Mountain Camp.

Blue-chested Hummingbird

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird

White-vented Plumeleteer

Green-crowned Brilliant - seen by a few in the upper cloud forest.

**Greenish Puffleg** - the commonest hummer at upper elevations on Cerro Pirre.

Purple-crowned Fairy

**Purple-throated Woodstar** - a perched male from the lookout at the mountain camp our final morning; a real rarity.

White-tailed Trogon

Violaceous Trogon

Collared Trogon - mid and upper elevations on the mountain.

Black-throated Trogon - seen only at tropical elevations on the mountain.

**Black-tailed Trogon** - great looks at all of the trogons; this was the last species to be seen.

Slaty-tailed Trogon - only at mid-elevations on the mountain.

**Tody Motmot** - long close looks at one feeding at the ant swarm.

Rufous Motmot - beautiful pair that came up out of a gully on the Old Mine trail.

Broad-billed Motmot - heard only, at the Old Mine.

Green Kingfisher

**Barred Puffbird** - scope studies of one in the open cecropia woodland along the river.

Pied Puffbird

White-whiskered Puffbird - a forest interior species, perched low for great looks.

White-fronted Nunbird

**Dusky-backed Jacamar** - a distinctive species endemic to this small area of eastern Panama and northwestern Colombia; seen regularly in the open second-growth and forest edge around Cana.

**Great Jacamar** - great study of this glittering forest bird when it came out of the forest.

**Spot-crowned Barbet** - a regional specialty, seen in flowering *Erythrina* trees several times.

Red-headed Barbet

Blue-throated Toucanet - the Blue-throated is a recent split from Emerald Toucanet; sometimes the form here on Cerro Pirre is further split as the "Violet-throated" Toucanet.

Collared Aracari

**Yellow-eared Toucanet** - great looks at these clowns around the Mountain Camp clearing.

Keel-billed Toucan

Black-mandibled Toucan - "Chesnut-mandibled" Toucan (*Ramphastos swainsonii*), the form that we saw, has now been lumped with the "Black-mandibled" (*Ramphastos ambiguus*).

Olivaceous Piculet

Black-cheeked Woodpecker

Red-rumped Woodpecker

**Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker** - a Panama endemic, seen in three different mixed-flocks, but always rather high up in the canopy.

Cinnamon Woodpecker

Lineated Woodpecker

Crimson-crested Woodpecker

Slaty Spinetail

(Double-banded Graytail - old nests seen, but no sign of the birds)

Spotted Barbtail

Beautiful Treerunner - seen by a few who persisted in remaining in the elfin forest a bit longer.

Lineated Foliage-gleaner

Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner

Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner

Plain Xenops

Streaked Xenops - seen twice in flowering *Erythrina* trees.

**Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser** - great looks at a very responsive bird.

Plain-brown Woodcreeper

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper

Northern Barred-Woodcreeper

Cocoa Woodcreeper - a recent split from Buff-throated Woodcreeper.

**Black-striped Woodcreeper** - by far the most beautiful of the woodcreepers seen.

Spotted Woodcreeper

Streak-headed Woodcreeper

Red-billed Scythebill - in the tangled young second-growth around Cana.

**Brown-billed Scythebill** - a wonderful surprise our final morning in the Mountain Camp.

Fasciated Antshrike

Great Antshrike

**Black Antshrike** - beautiful looks at a responsive female, right where Ivan saw one a few weeks ago. This is the first time that this Darien lowland specialty has been confirmed in the Cana area (photographs and tape-recordings).

Western Slaty-Antshrike

Russet Antshrike - with mixed-flocks at mid-elevations on the mountain.

Moustached Antwren - a recent split from Pygmy Antwren.

Pacific Antwren - a recent split from Streaked Antwren.

Checker-throated Antwren - a "dead-leaf" specialist.

White-flanked Antwren

**Rufous-winged Antwren** - fairly common and seen quite well for this canopy species.

Dot-winged Antwren

Rufous-rumped Antwren - heard only; from the mountain camp lookout.

Dusky Antbird

**Jet Antbird** - great looks at this uncommon and secretive antbird of rank second-growth.

Bare-crowned Antbird

Chestnut-backed Antbird

Dull-mantled Antbird - heard only; on our final walk on the Old Mine trail.

Bicolored Antbird - up to 15 present at the big ant swarm.

Spotted Antbird

**Wing-banded Antbird** - this rarely-seen ground foraging antbird was seen once.

**Ocellated Antbird** - this obligate ant-follower is one of the most beautiful of all of the antbirds; up to 8 were present at the large ant swarm that we watched.

Black-faced Antthrush - mostly heard only; Charles saw one.

**Black-crowned Antpitta**

**Streak-chested Antpitta** - this "egg with legs" called up beautifully for the whole group.

Thicket (Fulvous-bellied) Antpitta - a real challenge to see this one, but some of us did.

Choco Tapaculo (*Scytalopus chocoensis*) - heard only; note that this is the species present here, not the Narino (*S. viciniior*).

Brown-capped Tyrannulet

Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet - by a few at Cana our final morning.

Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet

Forest Elaenia

Gray Elaenia

Greenish Elaenia

Yellow-bellied Elaenia

**Lesser Elaenia** - after further reading I still feel confident that this is what we saw in the pasture/open woodland just below the lodge on the Rio Seteganti trail; unknown in Darien.

Olive-striped Flycatcher

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher - heard only; in the dry palm zone on the lower slopes.

Slaty-capped Flycatcher

**Yellow-green Tyrannulet** - this obscure Panama endemic was identified in the canopy mixed-flocks on the ridge several times.

Sooty-headed Tyrannulet - heard only; high overhead on the Boca de Cupe trail.

Paltry Tyrannulet - seen by a few in the canopy mixed-flocks on the mountain.

**Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant** - this truly "cute" little bird eventually came down low from the canopy, giving us great looks at the smallest passerine in the New World.

Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant

Southern Bentbill

Common Tody-Flycatcher

Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher

Brownish Flycatcher - heard only

Eye-ringed Flatbill - seen by a few in a mixed-flock in the upper cloud forest.

Olivaceous Flatbill

Yellow-margined Flycatcher

Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher

Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher

Black-tailed Flycatcher

**Black-billed Flycatcher** - long studies of one in young forest on the Boca de Cupe trail; a lifer for Dave.

Eastern Wood-Pewee - once

Acadian Flycatcher - heard far more often than seen

Long-tailed Tyrant

Bright-rumped Attila

Rufous Mourner

Dusky-capped Flycatcher

Great Crested Flycatcher

Social Flycatcher - a pair around the lodge clearing seen several times; unexpected here.

Rusty-margined Flycatcher

Gray-capped Flycatcher

**White-ringed Flycatcher** - especially nice looks at this canopy species when a big mixed-flock came through the Mountain Camp.

Streaked Flycatcher

Piratic Flycatcher

Tropical Kingbird

Thrush-like Schiffornis - heard often; seen only once.

Rufous Piha

**Speckled Mourner** - long close looks at this rarity as it foraged in the open midstory along the Boca del Cupe Trail.

**Cinereous Becard** - single sightings of a male and a female; a rarity.

Cinnamon Becard

One-colored Becard

Masked Tityra

Black-crowned Tityra

**Blue Cotinga** - two beautiful males teed-up below the Mountain Camp lookout and several females in canopy mixed-flocks.

**Black-tipped Cotinga** - a magnificent male displaying on the hillside almost daily at Cana.

Purple-throated Fruitcrow

Golden-collared Manakin

**White-ruffed Manakin** - displaying males were conspicuous on the mountain this year.

Blue-crowned Manakin

Golden-headed Manakin

**Sharpbill** - several looks at this enigmatic species of the hill forest canopy.

Yellow-throated Vireo

Lesser Greenlet

Yellow-browed Shrike-Vireo - heard only

**Black-chested Jay** - readily seen in the more open woodlands around Cana.

**White-thighed Swallow** - common here and we had great looks at perched flocks.

Southern Rough-winged Swallow

**White-headed Wren** - a noisy and un-wrenlike regional specialty.

**Sooty-headed Wren** - great looks at this elusive songster in the bamboo.

Black-bellied Wren

Bay Wren

**Stripe-throated Wren**

Ochraceous Wren

White-breasted Wood-Wren

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren - only in the damp elfin forest along the top of the ridge.

Scaly-breasted (Southern Nightingale) Wren - mostly heard; quick look for a few.

Slate-throated Gnatcatcher - seen by a few in our final canopy flock.

**Varied Solitaire** - their beautiful song was heard throughout the upper cloud forest.

Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush

Clay-colored Robin - leader only, in open woodland near the lodge; a rarity here.

White-throated Robin - seen by a few; this form is sometimes split as "Dagua"

Thrush.

**Cedar Waxwing** - a very rare stray this far south (has only been recorded in South America as a vagrant a few times), but this has been a big flight year throughout Central America.

Golden-winged Warbler - singles seen twice

Tennessee Warbler - abundant in the flowering *Erythrina* trees.

Tropical Parula - mostly heard in the canopy, but one male seen well our last morning.

Chestnut-sided Warbler - three singles recorded

Black-throated Green Warbler - one male in a canopy flock on the lower slopes.

Blackburnian Warbler - fairly common in the flocks higher up on the mountain.

Bay-breasted Warbler - inconspicuous, but common in the canopy flocks around

Cana.

Black-and-white Warbler

American Redstart - one bright adult male in mid-elevation forest.

Prothonotary Warbler - seen regularly at the flowering *Erythrina* trees.

Northern Waterthrush - one along the Rio Cana.

Mourning Warbler - hard to see, but surprisingly frequent in rank growth around the valley.

Canada Warbler - Karen's bird.

Slate-throated Redstart - common in the higher cloud forest.

Pirre Warbler - seen by a few

Buff-rumped Warbler - heard only

Bananaquit

**White-eared Conebill** - seen several times in the flowering *Erythrina* around the valley.

**Pirre Bush-Tanager** - this endemic was found from the Mountain Camp to the ridgetop, where we watched a pair nest-building.

Yellow-backed Tanager - seen by a few in canopy flocks on the lower slopes.

**Black-and-yellow Tanager** - a dominant in the mixed-flock around the Mountain Camp.

Dusky-faced Tanager - seen best at the ant swarm.

**Lemon-spectacled Tanager** - superb looks in the humid forest near Cana.

Scarlet-browed Tanager - seen by a few in a canopy flock on the lower slopes.

White-shouldered Tanager

Hepatic Tanager

Summer Tanager

**Crimson-backed Tanager** - a real splash of color.

Flame-rumped Tanager

Blue-gray Tanager

Palm Tanager  
Plain-colored Tanager  
Silver-throated Tanager  
Speckled Tanager  
Bay-headed Tanager  
Golden-hooded Tanager

**Green-naped Tanager** - not the most beautiful of the *Tangara* seen, but endemic to the cloud forest high on Cerro Pirre.

Scarlet-thighed Dacnis  
Blue Dacnis  
Green Honeycreeper  
Purple Honeycreeper

**Swallow-Tanager** - this colorful favorite that was quite common and conspicuous around the lodge clearing, and always a delight to see.

Variable Seedeater  
Thick-billed Seed-Finch  
Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch  
Orange-billed Sparrow  
Black-striped Sparrow  
Buff-throated Saltator  
Slate-colored Grosbeak

**Yellow-green Grosbeak** - a specialty of the mid-elevation hill forest.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Blue-black Grosbeak  
Shiny Cowbird  
Giant Cowbird  
Yellow-tailed Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Yellow-billed Cacique  
Yellow-rumped Cacique  
Chestnut-headed Oropendola  
Fulvous-vented Euphonia  
White-vented Euphonia - seen by a few in a canopy flock.  
Orange-bellied Euphonia

**Yellow-collared Chlorophonia** - a pair of these stunningly beautiful little birds visited fruiting epiphytes in the mountain camp several times; rare and irregular here.

### **Mammal List:**

Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*)  
bats (of several sizes)  
Geoffroy's (Red-naped) Tamarin (*Saguinus geoffroyi*)  
White-faced Capuchin (*Cebus capucinus*)  
Mantled Howler (*Alouatta palliata*)  
Brown-headed Spider Monkey (*Ateles fusciceps*)  
Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)

Central American Agouti (*Dasyprocta punctata*)  
Forest Rabbit (*Sylvilagus brasiliensis*)  
Crab-eating Fox - a South American species just recently found at Cana.

**And other "neat stuff":** to mention just a few of our other sightings.

leaf toad  
"big gray snake" at the ant swarm  
small lizards  
helicopter damselfly  
giant grasshopper  
*Morpho* butterfly  
army ants (of several species)

**Birds noted by group members around the Country Inn & Suites, Amador (Feb 24):**

Brown Pelican  
Neotropic Cormorant  
Magnificent Frigatebird  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
Osprey  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Yellow-headed Caracara  
Laughing Gull  
Royal Tern  
Pale-vented Pigeon  
Ruddy Ground-Dove  
Orange-chinned Parakeet  
Red-lored Parrot  
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird  
Ringed Kingfisher  
Red-crowned Woodpecker  
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet  
Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet  
Yellow-bellied Elaenia  
Panama Flycatcher  
Great Kiskadee  
Social Flycatcher  
Tropical Kingbird  
Fork-tailed Flycatcher  
Gray-breasted Martin  
Mangrove Swallow  
Barn Swallow

Clay-colored Robin  
Tropical Mockingbird  
Yellow Warbler  
Crimson-backed Tanager  
Blue-gray Tanager  
Plain-colored Tanager  
Blue-black Grassquit  
Variable Seedeater  
Saffron Finch (introduced)  
Streaked Saltator  
Great-tailed Grackle  
Thick-billed Euphonia  
Lesser Goldfinch