

**HOLIDAY SEASON IN PANAMA:
CHRISTMAS AT EL VALLE'S
CANOPY LODGE PRE-TRIP**

DECEMBER 22 – 27, 2008

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A pleasant experience awaits those who choose to interchange the traditional custom of celebrating the holidays at home for an altogether unique adventure in a foreign country. The participants on our 2008-2009 "Holiday Season in Panama" tours quickly discovered that the differences were most pleasant indeed, such as the exchange of winter clothing for summer clothing. The most notable difference was that the familiar backyard bird species were mostly replaced by exotic tropical species (I say "mostly" because many backyard species had also opted to leave colder climates to migrate to the warmth of Panama).

I have led many tours in Panama, and yet I never tire of the sights and sounds of this premier birding destination. Even at our hotel beside the Canal in Panama City we began to see such tropical exotics as Orange-chinned Parakeet and Blue-headed Parrot, as well as Blue-gray Tanager, Palm Tanager, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia. And yet the real holiday excitement began at the Canopy Lodge. Upon arrival, we concentrated our attention on the bird feeders where bananas attracted a colorful variety of species. There were multiple Thick-billed Euphonias feeding beside Crimson-backed Tanagers, Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers, Dusky-faced Tanagers, White-shouldered Tanagers, Flame-rumped Tanagers, and Red-legged Honeycreepers, just to name a few. Gray-headed Chachalacas fed in the *Cecropia* trees overhead, while Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds visited the flowers beside the feeders. A Rufous Motmot came in to enjoy the bananas as we all concluded that yes, indeed, Panama was a good choice for celebrating the holidays.

After a superb lunch in the open-air restaurant, where the birding continues between bites of tropical delicacies, we walked around the grounds and up the road near the Canopy Lodge. It was here that we would get our first of daily sightings of Black-chested Jays and Keel-billed Toucans. A pair of Bay Wrens sang loudly and showed themselves in the shrubs beside the road. Chestnut-headed Oropendolas flew about in the trees nearby as Yellow-faced Grassquits continuously moved along the road in front of us. The rain would start and stop and start, but it could not dampen our moods as we enjoyed the sights and smells of the tropical environs. Of course, there were many other spectacular sightings of birds during our holiday stay at the Canopy Lodge, as well as visits to beautiful landscapes.

On our second full day of birding we drove down to El Valle Chiquito where the stunning sunlit landscapes of the afternoon already made the short drive worthwhile. It was here that one of the many highlights of our holidays will long be remembered, for a pair of Tody Motmots responding to playback sat out in the open, as scopes and binoculars focused intently upon this normally hard to see species. We all had several looks at them through the scope before we decided to continue our walk, where we managed to see Fasciated Antshrike, Broad-billed Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin, Black-bellied Wren,

and Yellow-backed Oriole, as well as others, but it was the Tody Motmot that exceeded expectations.

Another highlight of the trip came during our day-trip down to the coast to bird at El Chiru. Here we witnessed over half-a-dozen Crested Bobwhites escaping the heat of the tropical sun as they lazily hung out in the shade along a footpath beside the road. To add an exclamation point to the sighting, a Blue-crowned Motmot dropped down among them from a nearby branch to grab an insect, before lighting on another open branch to enjoy his newfound meal. Yet another highlight we witnessed here was a pair of Aplomado Falcons mobbing a Savanna Hawk that had innocently flown in too close to their nest. These attractive and graceful rare to uncommon falcons of grassy savannas displayed their agitation by repeatedly dive-bombing and screaming at the much larger Savanna Hawk, which eventually had enough and flew to another nearby tree. El Chiru proved to be a very productive site where we also saw Brown-throated Parakeets, Veraguan Mango, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Scrub Greenlet, and various others.

Another significant sighting worth mentioning came during our failed attempt to make it to Los Altos de Maria due to a mudslide on the road. Not to be thwarted, we made the best of it by birding at Mato Ahogado. Here we watched a majestic White Hawk rise slowly up and over the hill where we stood, presenting a beautiful contrast against the dark green of the forest canopy. It was here also that we had great looks at the Blue-throated Toucanet, a female Snowcap hummingbird, Dull-mantled Antbird, Black-and-Yellow Tanager, and Tawny-capped Euphonia. Oh, the serendipity of an unexpected change of plans!

One last highlight I would like to mention took place during a drizzly on-and-off-again bird walk along the road just outside of the Canopy Lodge. As we had all decided to return to the lodge, the sun made a brief appearance, and to our surprise, inside the bushes in a puddle on the ground, various birds began to bathe. An Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, which is usually very hard to see as it keeps to the dense low vegetation, dropped down into the puddle and splashed and shook and splashed as it bathed before our very eyes. No sooner had it sat on a branch to preen and dry, but an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher took its place to bathe, and then a White-lined Tanager, followed by a Bay-headed Tanager, and next a Chestnut-sided Warbler, and then a Bay-breasted Warbler, followed by a Mourning Warbler, then a Canada Warbler, and lastly a Rufous-capped Warbler. We watched in delight as each species splashed about in the puddle of rain as it bathed itself.

It is moments like the highlights mentioned above that truly make each and every VENT tour special in its own right, and this holiday tour was saturated (no pun intended) with such moments. And although I am convinced that there is no inadvisable time to choose a VENT tour to Panama, I can honestly inform you that a "Holiday Season in Panama Tour" is a very productive and favorable time indeed!

Itinerary

- December 22, 2008- Arrival and transfer to Country Inn.
December 23, 2008- Transfer to Canopy Lodge with some birding in route, remainder of day spent birding Canopy Lodge grounds.
December 24, 2008- Morning birding at La Mesa; after lunch and some birding at Canopy Lodge grounds, we spent the afternoon at El Valle Chiquita.
December 25, 2008- Day Trip to El Chiru and Playa Santa Clara.
December 26, 2008- Due to mudslide we were unable to make it to Los Altos de Maria, but had productive morning at Mato Ahogado. Returned to bird around Canopy Lodge before spending afternoon at Las Minas.
December 27, 2008- After breakfast birding at Canopy Lodge, spent morning at El Gaital. After lunch we spent some time at local market before transfer and birding to Canopy Tower.

Bird List

Ducks, Geese, & Swans

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck

Anatidae

Dendrocygna autumnalis

Guans & Chachalacas

Gray-headed Chachalaca

Cracidae

Ortalis cinereiceps

New World Quails

Crested bobwhite

Odontophoridae

Colinus cristatus

Pelicans

Brown Pelican

Pelecanidae

Pelecanus occidentalis

Cormorants

Neotropic cormorant

Phalacrocoracidae

Phalacrocorax brasilianus

Frigatebirds

Magnificent Frigatebird

Fregatidae

Fregata magnificens

Hérons, Egrets, & bitterns

Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Cattle Egret

Ibises & Spoonbill

Roseate Spoonbill

New World Vultures

Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture

Hawks, Eagles, & Kites

Osprey
Pearl Kite
White-tailed Kite
Barred Hawk
White Hawk
Savanna Hawk
Roadside Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Zone-tailed Hawk
Black Hawk-Eagle

Falcons & Caracaras

Yellow-headed Caracara
Aplomado Falcon

Rails, Gallinules, & Coots

Gray-necked Wood-Rail

Sandpipers & allies

Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Whimbrel
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling

Gulls & Terns

Laughing Gull

Ardeidae

Ardea herodias
Ardea alba
Egretta thula
Bubulcus ibis

Threskiornithidae**Cathartidae**

Coragyps atratus
Cathartes aura
Cathartes burrovianus

Accipitridae

Pandion haliaetus
Gampsonyx swainsonii
Elanus leucurus
Leucopternis princeps
Leucopternis albicollis
Buteogallus meridionalis
Buteo magnirostris
Buteo platypterus
Buteo brachyurus
Buteo albonotatus
Spizaetus tyrannus

Falconidae

Milvago chimachima
Falco femoralis

Rallidae

Aramides cajanea

Scolopacidae

Actitis macularius
Tringa semipalmata
Numenius phaeopus
Arenaria interpres
Calidris alba

Laridae

Larus atricilla

Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern

Doves & Pigeons

Rock Pigeon
Pale-vented Pigeon
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove
Ruddy Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove

Parrots, Macaws, & Allies

Brown-throated Parakeet
Orange-chinned Parakeet
Brown-hooded Parrot
Blue-headed Parrot

Cuckoos

Squirrel Cuckoo
Smooth-billed Ani

Typical Owls

Tropical Screech-Owl
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

Swifts

White-collared Swift
Band-rumped Swift

Hummingbirds

Green Hermit
Stripe-throated Hermit
White-tipped Sicklebill
White-necked Jacobin
Veraguan Mango
Green Thorntail
Garden Emerald
Violet-crowned Woodnymph
Sapphire-throated Hummingbird
Snowy-bellied Hummingbird
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
Snowcap
White-vented Plumeleteer
Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer
Long-billed Starthroat

Thalasseus maxima
Thalasseus sandvicensis

Columbidae

Columba livia
Patagioenas cayennensis
Columbina minuta
Columbina talpacoti
Leptotila verreauxi

Psittacidae

Aratinga pertinax
Brotogeris jugularis
Pionopsitta haematotis
Pionus menstruus

Cuculidae

Piaya cayana
Crotophaga ani

Strigidae

Megascops choliba
Glaucidium brasilianum

Apodidae

Streptoprocne zonaris
Chaetura spinicaudus

Trochilidae

Phaethornis guy
Phaethornis striigularis
Eutoxeres aquila
Florisuga mellivora
Anthracothorax veraguensis
Discosura conversii
Chlorostilbon assimilis
Thalurania colombica
Lepidopyga coeruleogularis
Amazilia (Saucerottia) edward
Amazilia tzacatl
Microchera albocoronata
Chalybura buffonii
Chalybura urochrysa
Heliomaster longirostris

Trogons

Orange-bellied Trogon

Motmots

Tody Motmot

Blue-crowned Motmot

Rufous Motmot

Broad-billed Motmot

Kingfishers

Amazon Kingfisher

Toucans

Blue-throated Toucanet

Collared Aracari

Keel-billed Toucan

Woodpeckers & Allies

Red-crowned Woodpecker

Lineated Woodpecker

Ovenbirds & Woodcreepers

Red-faced Spinetail

Plain Xenops

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper

Cocoa Woodcreeper

Spotted Woodcreeper

Brown-billed Scythebill

(heard only)

Typical Antbirds

Fasciated Antshrike

Great Antshrike

Barred Antshrike

Russet Antshrike

Plain Antwvireo

Spot-crowned Antwvireo

Slaty Antwren

Dusky Antbird

Chestnut-backed Antbird

Dull-mantled Antbird

Antthrushes & Antpittas

Black-faced Antthrush

(heard only)

Trogonidae

Trogon aurantiiventris

Momotidae

Hylomanes momotula

Momotus momota

Baryphthengus martii

Electron platyrhynchum

Alcedinidae

Chloroceryle amazona

Ramphastidae

Aulacorhynchus prasinus

Pteroglossus torquatus

Ramphastos sulfuratus

Picidae

Melanerpes rubricapillus

Dryocopus lineatus

Furnariidae

Cranioleuca erythroptus

Xenops minutus

Glyphorhynchus spirurus

Xiphorhynchus susurrans

Xiphorhynchus erythropygius

Campylorhamphus pusillus

Thamnophilidae

Cymbilaimus lineatus

Taraba major

Thamnophilus doliatus

Thamnistes anabatinus

Dysithamnus mentalis

Dysithamnus puncticeps

Myrmotherula schisticolor

Cercomacra tyrannina

Myrmeciza exsul

Myrmeciza laemosticta

Formicariidae

Formicarius analis

Tyrant Flycatchers

Yellow-bellied Elaenia
Olive-striped Flycatcher
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
Paltry Tyrannulet
Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant
Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant
Common Tody-Flycatcher
Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher
Tufted Flycatcher
Acadian Flycatcher
Dusky-capped Flycatcher
Panama Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Social Flycatcher
Tropical Kingbird
Fork-tailed Flycatcher

Genera incertae sedis

Thrush-like Schiffornis
(heard only)

Manakins

Golden-collared Manakin
White-ruffed Manakin

Vireos & Allies

Yellow-throated vireo
Scrub Greenlet
Lesser Greenlet
Rufous-browed Peppershrike

Crows, Jays, & Magpies

Black-chested Jay

Swallows

Gray-breasted Martin
Blue-and-White Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Southern Rough-winged Swallow
Barn Swallow

Wrens

Black-bellied Wren
Bay Wren

Tyrannidae

Elaenia flavogaster
Mionectes olivaceus
Mionectes oleaginous
Zimmerius villssimus
Lophotriccus pileatus
Lophotriccus pilaris
Todiostrostrum cinereum
Terenotriccus erythrurus
Mitrephanes phaeocercus
Empidonax virescens
Myiarchus tuberculifer
Myiarchus panamensis
Pitangus sulphuratus
Myiozetetes similis
Tyrannus melancholicus
Tyrannus savanna

Schiffornis turdina

Pipridae

Manacus vitellinus
Corapipo altera

Vireonidae

Vireo flavifrons
Hylophilus flavipes
Hylophilus decurtatus
Cyclarhis gujanensis

Corvidae

Cyanocorax affinis

Hirundinidae

Progne chalybea
Pygochelidon cyanoleuca
Stelgidopteryx serripennis
Stelgidopteryx ruficollis
Hirundo rustica

Troglodytidae

Thryothorus fasciatoventris
Thryothorus nigricapillus

Rufous-breasted Wren
Rufous-and-White Wren
Plain Wren
House Wren
White-breasted Wood-Wren
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren

Old World Warblers

Long-billed Gnatwren
Tropical Gnatcatcher

Thrushes & Allies

Orange-billed
Nightingale-Thrush
Pale-vented Thrush
Clay-colored Robin

Mockingbirds & Thrashers

Tropical Mockingbird

New World Warblers

Golden-winged Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Black-and-White Warbler
Northern Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Canada Warbler
Rufous-capped Warbler
Genus incertae sedis
Bananaquit

Tanagers & Allies

Common Bush-Tanager
Black-and-Yellow Tanager
Rosy Thrush-Tanager
Dusky-faced Tanager
Olive Tanager
White-shouldered Tanager
Tawny-crested Tanager
White-lined Tanager
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager

Thryothorus rutilus
Thryothorus rufalbus
Thryothorus modestus
Troglodytes aedon
Henicorhina leucosticta
Henicorhina leucophrys

Sylviidae

Ramphocaenus melanurus
Polioptila plumbea

Turdidae

Catharus aurantiirostris

Turdus obsoletus
Turdus grayi

Mimidae

Mimus gilvus

Parulidae

Vermivora chrysoptera
Vermivora peregrina
Dendroica petechia
Dendroica pensylvanica
Dendroica virens
Dendroica fusca
Dendroica castanea
Mniotilta varia
Seiurus noveboracensis
Oporornis Philadelphia
Wilsonia Canadensis
Basileuterus rufifrons

Coereba flaveola

Thraupidae

Chlorospingus ophthalmicus
Chrysothlypis chrysomelas
Rhodinocichla rosea
Mitrospingus cassinii
Chlorothraupis carmioli
Tachyphonus luctuosus
Tachyphonus delatrii
Tachyphonus rufus
Habia rubica

Hepatic Tanager
Summer Tanager
Crimson-backed Tanager
Flame-rumped Tanager
Blue-gray Tanager
Palm Tanager
Plain-colored Tanager
Silver-throated Tanager
Bay-headed Tanager
Golden-hooded Tanager
Green Honeycreeper
Red-legged Honeycreeper

Buntings, Sparrows, & Allies

Blue-black Grassquit
Variable Seedeater
Yellow-faced Grassquit
Saffron Finch
Orange-billed sparrow
Black-striped Sparrow

Saltators & Cardinals

Streaked Saltator
Buff-throated Saltator
Black-headed Saltator
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Blue-black Grosbeak

Troupials & Allies

Eastern Meadowlark
Great-tailed Grackle
Yellow-backed Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Yellow-billed Cacique
Chestnut-headed Oropendola

Siskins, Crossbills, & Allies

Yellow-crowned Euphonia
Thick-billed Euphonia
Tawny-capped Euphonia

Mammal List

Variegated Squirrel
Red-tailed Squirrel
Hoffman-s Two-toed Sloth

Piranga flava
Piranga rubra
Ramphocelus dimidiatus
Ramphocelus flammigerus
Thraupis episcopus
Thraupis palmarum
Tanagara inornata
Tanagara icterocephala
Tanagara gyrola
Tanagara larvata
Chlorophanes spiza
Cyanerpes cyaneus

Emberizidae

Volatinia jacarina
Sporophila (corvine) americana
Tiaris olivaceus
Sicalis flaveola
Arremon aurantirostris
Arremon conirostris

Cardinalidae

Saltator striatipectus
Saltator maximus
Saltator atriceps
Pheucticus ludovicianus
Cyanocompsa cyanoides

Icteridae

Sturnella magna
Quiscalus mexicanus
Icterus chrysater
Icterus galbula
Amblycercus holosericeus
Psarocolius wagleri

Fringillidae

Euphonia luteicapilla
Euphonia laniirostris
Euphonia anae

Sciurus variegatoides
Sciurus granatensis
Choloepus hoffmanni

Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth
Central American Dwarf-Squirrel
Central American Agouti

Bradypus variegates
Microsciurus alfari
Dasyprocta punctata

Reptile List

Green Iguana
Central American Whiptail
Common Basilisk
Frog sp.

Iguana iguana
Ameiva festiva
Basiliscus basiliscus