

PANAMA: CHIRIQUÍ HIGHLANDS **JANUARY 23-31, 2010**

PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER **JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 6, 2010**

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION **FEBRUARY 5-10, 2010**

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Panama is without doubt one of the premier birding destinations in the Neotropics. It is famed for its rare combination of easy access to extensive, high-quality habitat, good food and water, comfortable accommodations, and high diversity of birds—all within a compact geographic area. While ideal for those new to the Neotropics, VENT's Panama tours also offer plenty of challenges and local specialties for those who have birded elsewhere in the region. Our focus will be on finding, identifying, and observing a wealth of wonderful tropical birds, including trogons, toucans, motmots, puffbirds, manakins, antbirds, and tanagers. We'll take time to sort out the look-a-likes, learn a bit about the plant associations and habitats, and call up many of the more skulking species.

Perched astride the Panama/Costa Rica border are a chain of volcanic mountains that host one of the most unique avifaunas in Central America. Chiriquí Highlands combines perfectly with a Central Panama trip, offering a plethora of distinctive bird species, attractive lodging, and a pleasantly cool mountain climate.

Of course, the true glamour bird here is the Resplendent Quetzal, and they are truly breathtaking. But what about Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Blue-throated Toucanet, Red-headed Barbet, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, White-throated Mountain-Gem, Violet Sabrewing, Collared Redstart, and Flame-throated Warbler?

Among the pleasures of a visit to Panama is the opportunity to stay at the Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, a lodge located amidst spectacular birding in Soberania National Park. Offering the chance to hear the dawn chorus, to gaze upon seldom-seen denizens of the upper reaches of the forest, and to remain in such beautiful surroundings without sacrificing amenities, this innovative venture has taken its place as one of Central America's very finest ecotourist hotels.

The quaint community of El Valle de Antón lies sixty miles to the west of Panama City. Nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano and surrounded by stark ridges and forested hills, El Valle is considered a 'secret' and scenic getaway for many Panamanians. A cool and refreshing climate makes for a welcome change from the warmer lowlands, and at nearly 2000 feet, this part of Panama presents visual and sensual differences from the area around the Canal Zone.

Featuring excellent cuisine, beautiful accommodations, and an abundance of birds, the pleasures of a stay at the Canopy Lodge are revealed immediately upon arrival. Feeding stations set amid flower-filled gardens host a dazzling array of beautiful tropical tanagers, euphonias, motmots, and honeycreepers for what has to be one of the most enchanting experiences in the American tropics.

Nearby, verdant forests and gardens support an alluring diversity of birds that one simply cannot find around the Canopy Tower. Field trips into the foothills may produce such species as Blue-throated Toucanet, Orange-bellied Trogon, Black-crowned Antpitta, Tody Motmot, and Silver-throated, Bay-headed, and Dusky-faced tanagers. A day trip to Altos del Maria provides opportunities for a whole new suite of higher elevation species as well.

Our specific day-to-day itinerary of each section of these tours will be kept flexible, allowing us to take advantage of local weather and birding conditions. Having such comfortable bases in the midst of so much fine birding gives us leeway in planning our activities.

PANAMA: CHIRIQUÍ HIGHLANDS

JANUARY 23-31, 2010

January 23, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Country Inn & Suites Canal. Participants arriving in Panama City (Tocumen International Airport) anytime this afternoon or evening will be met and transferred to the Country Inn & Suites Canal where a room will be reserved in your name.

NIGHT: Country Inn & Suites Canal, Panama City

January 24, Day 2: Panama City to Cerro Punta Area. After the approximately one hour flight from Panama City to David, the capital city of Chiriquí Province, we'll board a comfortable small bus and begin our exploration of the western reaches of Panama. Our first stops will likely be in the lowlands near David, where, we will search for Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Brown-throated and Orange-chinned parakeets, Striped Cuckoo, the near-endemic Veraguan Mango, Mangrove Swallow, Red-breasted Blackbird, and a number of other lowland species typical of open country. Depending on recent rainfall patterns, a variety of raptors, waterbirds and seedeaters are also possible. Later, we'll gradually work our way up through the mid-elevations to the town of Volcán, where we'll watch for a wide variety of edge and open country species, possibly including White-crowned Parrot, Fiery-billed Aracari, Orange-collared Manakin, Riverside Wren, Cherrie's (Scarlet-rumped) Tanager, Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia, and Spot-crowned Euphonia, among others. Driving up the slope from Volcán toward Cerro Punta, we'll notice a welcome drop in temperature. This higher-elevation area serves as a weekend retreat for a lucky few from Panama City and other lowland regions. The fertile volcanic soil supports intensive agriculture, mostly vegetables.

We'll spend all our nights here at charming Los Quetzales, located on the edge of tiny Guadalupe village, just above Cerro Punta, where human development ends and forest stretches up the slope. Los Quetzales is wonderfully intimate, with a surprisingly cosmopolitan feeling. Great food is served in a beautiful natural wood dining room and bar area. However, it's the warm hospitality of owner Carlos Alfaro and his staff that really make this place delightful.

NIGHT: Los Quetzales, Guadalupe

January 25, Day 3: Los Quetzales Area. Today will be devoted to exploring the lovely forest just above town, at the edge of La Amistad National Park. A bumpy 15-20 minute ride will take us to Mr. Alfaro's spectacular wooded cabins, where birds are numerous and relatively easy to see. Several species of hummingbirds will be

mobbing the feeders, including White-throated Mountain-Gem, Magnificent, Green Violet-ear, the scarce Stripe-tailed, and the large and pugnacious Violet Sabrewing. Bizarre Large-footed Finches and comical Yellow-thighed Finches prowl the undergrowth, while a mixed flock working overhead could include Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Barred Becard, Yellow-winged Vireo, Collared Redstart, Black-cheeked Warbler, Flame-throated Warbler (stunning), Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager, Golden-browed Chlorophonia (spectacular) and many others. Quite a few of these species are endemic to the highlands astride the Panama and Costa Rica border, and nearly all are limited to higher elevations. Thus, a high proportion of the birds we see will be new for the trip, and likely new to most participants who have not birded Costa Rica. As if this weren't enough, we'll have the comfort of access to a cabin for hot drinks, bathrooms, and a place to escape any inclement weather. It should be a wonderful day!

Of course, the true prize bird in the region is the Resplendent Quetzal, and we might even see one without leaving our base, as there is a wild avocado tree nearby, which produces the favored food source of this famous bird. Failing that, we'll explore a few local trails, and have excellent chances of spotting a few quetzals. This is a great time of year to see adult males with shimmering green trains (actually not tails).

After lunch, and a break, we may descend to the Volcán area, where, in addition to marshes and more open country, there are lower elevation woodlands that are home to such prizes as Red-headed Barbet, Collared Trogon, Blue-crowned Motmot, Red-faced Spinetail, Spectacled Foliage-gleaner, Slaty Antwren, White-throated Spadebill, Black-chested Jay and many others. The exact sequence in which we visit the various sites will remain flexible, and will be dependent both on weather and on what species we have or have not seen to this point.

NIGHT: Los Quetzales, Guadalupe

January 26, Day 4: Finca Hartmann. After an early breakfast, we'll drive back down past Volcán and on to the Costa Rican frontier, where we'll be guests of the Hartmann family at their coffee farm, or finca. Ratibor Hartmann and his family have been producing traditional shade-grown coffee at this site for decades and have preserved much intact forest as well. Their property has been the site of a long-running bird population study by the Smithsonian. In addition to learning about both coffee and ornithology, Finca Hartmann should offer us the chance to find a number of sought-after birds including Fiery-billed Aracari, Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Collared Trogon, Blue-crowned Motmot, Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and the splendid Red-headed Barbet. With luck, we may even find the threatened and spectacular Turquoise Cotinga. There will also be a good selection of warblers and other Neotropical migrants, now preparing to make the long journey northward.

NIGHT: Los Quetzales, Guadalupe

January 27, Day 5: Respingo: Drive to Boquete. This morning's plan will remain flexible, and will center largely on optimizing our chances to try to clean up any missing species. Most likely, we will visit the Respingo area, along the ridge above Guadalupe. Here we will probably hike a section of the Sendero de los Quetzales (Trail of the Quetzals) where the high-elevation cloud forest will afford many interesting birding opportunities. Quetzals will be possible and we'll make a special effort to find its relative, the regionally endemic Orange-bellied Trogon. Other target birds here will be the elusive Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, the odd Wrenthrush (also known as Zeledonia), Volcano and Fiery-throated hummingbirds, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Mountain Robin, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and Spangle-cheeked Tanager, among others. Rarer possibilities include the Highland Tinamou, which might be heard (unlikely to be seen), the striking Black Guan, Silvery-throated Jay, and Ochraceous Pewee.

After this last morning of birding in the Cerro Punta area, we will return to Los Quetzales for lunch before striking out for the charming little town of Boquete, situated on the east side of the Volcan Barú massif. This picturesque region is a popular montane getaway destination for Panamanians looking to escape the heat of the lowlands. It is also prime coffee-growing country. Boquete typically receives more rainfall than Cerro Punta

(which lies on the west side of the volcano), resulting in an even lush forest formation and some concomitant differences in bird species composition. The two locations complement one another nicely, and, in combination, offer a wonderful cross-section of the highly endemic avifauna of the Panamanian-Costa Rican highlands. Our base for exploring the Boquete area is Lérída Lodge – part ecotourism lodge and part active coffee plantation, set at about 6000' elevation. Finca Lérída is ornithologically famous as a historical collecting site, from which many significant records were obtained. With comfortable rooms, great food, wonderful ambiance, and exceptional birding right on the grounds, it will provide us with the perfect base for the next three days.

NIGHT: Lérída Lodge, Boquete

January 28, Day 6: All Day Birding around Finca Lérída. We will have the entire day to enjoy the avian riches of Finca Lérída. Our exact schedule will remain flexible, and will in part be determined by what we have seen or not seen in the Cerro Punta region. Although each side of Volcan Barú has its specialties, there is also a certain amount of overlap in species composition, thereby giving us a fair amount of flexibility regarding our itinerary. We will almost certainly divide our time between the coffee finca and surrounding second-growth, both of which can be exceptionally birdy, and the pristine cloud forest trails above the lodge. Among the many possibilities are Spotted Wood-Quail, Barred and Sulphur-winged parakeets, Stripe-tailed and Scintillant hummingbirds, Orange-bellied Trogon, the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal (sometimes found nesting right on the finca property), Emerald (Blue-throated) Toucanet, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Elegant Euphonia, White-winged and Flame-colored tanagers, and White-naped Brush-Finch, among many others.

NIGHT: Lérída Lodge, Boquete

January 29, Day 7: Day Trip to Fortuna Road. An early start will take us to the Fortuna Forest Reserve, a protected area of nearly 20,000 hectares of mostly pristine cloud forest straddling the Continental Divide. The area was set aside to protect the watershed surrounding the Fortuna Hydroelectric Project, but it has also proven to be a boon to birders. In addition to offering a number of the montane endemics typical of the western highlands (e.g. Black Guan, Prong-billed Barbet, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Three-wattled Bellbird, Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Wrenthrush), it is also one of the few readily accessible spots in Panama for finding a number of species more typical of the middle elevations of the lush Caribbean slope. Among these are such exciting specialties as Red-fronted Parrotlet, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Snowcap, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Brown-billed Scythebill, Dull-mantled Antbird, Rufous-rumped Antwren, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Black-and-white Becard, Azure-hooded Jay, Blue-and-gold Tanager, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Emerald Tanager and Sooty-faced Finch. This is also perhaps the best place in Panama to see the spectacular Bare-necked Umbrellabird (although late January is not the best season for seeing them).

The reserve is dissected by a pipeline road built to connect ports on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. This road provides a nice transect through the reserve from about 3,000–4,000 feet elevation. Here, the moisture-laden air of the Caribbean lowlands, propelled upslope by prevailing winds, frequently envelopes the crest of the Divide in sheets of mist and rain. The weather (and consequently the birding) here is particularly unpredictable, and we could encounter wind, fog, rain, or all of the above. But the birding possibilities are so enticing that the potential payoff is huge. Our time in the reserve will be split between birding the road and working one or more of the area's many forest trails. We will take our lunch with us, and (weather permitting) be gone for most of the day, returning to Boquete in late afternoon.

NIGHT: Lérída Lodge, Boquete

January 30, Day 8: Morning Birding at Finca Lérída; Afternoon Drive to David; Late Afternoon Flight to Panama City. Though very rich in birds, cloud forest habitats, like forests everywhere, can go through periods of seeming stillness. Thus, it's good to have multiple days and areas for the best chance of producing a well-rounded list. This morning we'll have time to take a last look for species we may have missed, as well as some of the regulars, before returning to David and boarding an afternoon flight to Panama City. Upon arrival,

participants continuing on Panama's Canopy Tower (January 30-February 6, 2010) will be transferred to the Canopy Tower while participants not continuing on the tour will transfer to a hotel in Panama City.

NIGHT: Country Inn and Suites Canal, Panama City

January 31, Day 9: Departure for Home. Participants will be provided with transfers to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER

JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 6, 2010

January 30, Day 1: Arrival in Panama City and Transfer to the Canopy Tower. Newly arriving participants are encouraged to fly to Panama City on either American Airlines Flight 959 from Miami or Continental Airlines Flight 888 from Houston, which are both scheduled to arrive in the evening. Passengers on either flight will be met at the airport and transferred to the Canopy Tower, which is about 45 minutes away. For those not on either of these flights, private transfers can be arranged for an additional fee.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 31, Day 2: Canopy Tower and Entrance Road. An early start this morning (6:00 am) will find us on top of the Tower enjoying a cup of coffee or tea while watching the sunrise over the forested hillsides. The predawn chorus often includes the strange barks and moans of forest-falcons, the haunting calls of a tinamou, or the last hoots of an owl. As the light hits the treetops, the forest really begins to come alive. Birds begin singing and actively foraging, many of them close and often below us. Species regularly seen from here include incredible Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled toucans, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Masked Tityra, wintering Bay-breasted Warblers and Yellow-throated Vireos, and the stunning Slate-colored Grosbeak. Fruiting cecropias often harbor a nice variety of tanagers, including Plain-colored, White-shouldered, and Palm; Fulvous-vented Euphonia; and gorgeous Green Honeycreepers. We'll also keep a sharp eye out for two of the true prizes of the tree tops, the spectacular Blue Cotinga (increasingly scarce) and the brilliant Green Shrike-Vireo. We've had good luck seeing cotingas here (about half of our trips), often at close range, and the shrike-vireo, whose monotonous titmouse-like song can be heard in many areas of the tropics, can perhaps be viewed best here at the Tower. It can be hard to tear oneself away from the show to go inside for breakfast. Fortunately, the dining room has panoramic windows that will allow us to keep an eye out even while eating!

By mid-morning we'll tear ourselves away from the Tower and begin working our way down the one-mile entrance road. As we descend Semaphore Hill, a host of new birds will greet us. Broad-billed and Rufous motmots, various trogons, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Blue-crowned and Red-capped manakins are among the many possibilities. Ant swarms are sometimes encountered along this road as well, with a variety of attendant antbirds and woodcreepers possible.

After lunch and an afternoon siesta, we will likely spend some time watching the hummingbird feeders around the base of the tower. While there is much seasonal variation, up to eight species are possible here. Among the more regular visitors are the stunning White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed Hermit, the incomparable Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, and White-vented Plumeleteer.

In the mid-afternoon we will head for the small town of Gamboa. Feeders here may produce a dazzling variety of tanagers (Crimson-backed, Flame-rumped, Blue-gray, and Palm), honeycreepers (Red-legged and green), as well as other species. Near Gamboa there are some nice wetlands where we'll seek out a whole new group of birds. Tiny White-throated Crakes dart about the marsh. Wattled Jacanas and Purple Gallinules walk on the floating vegetation. Greater Anis are often seen atop the brushy tangles, while Lesser Kiskadees prefer perches closer to the water. Sometimes a Capybara strolls by, and Rufescent Tiger-Herons are regular. A careful check of the shoreline

might reveal a skulking Gray-necked Wood-Rail or a gorgeous American Pygmy-Kingfisher hiding in the shadows. The open field and edge habitats surrounding the marsh can be good for Squirrel Cuckoo, Barred Antshrike, Black-striped Sparrow, and Yellow-billed Cacique, in addition to a variety of raptors, hummingbirds, parrots, and flycatchers.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 1, Day 3: Bayano Lowlands. An early start (about 4:30 a.m.) will take us to the lowlands of eastern Panama Province and the region surrounding Bayano Reservoir. Much of the area between here and Panama City has been deforested and converted to cattle pasture, but there is still extensive selectively logged forest beyond the reservoir. Open country en route is good for Savanna Hawk, Pearl Kite, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-breasted Blackbird and a number of other species. The margins of the reservoir are good places to find Cocoli Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Pied Water-Tyrant and several species of kingfishers. However, it is the forest where we will concentrate our time. The forest here has an interesting composition, with pockets of drier, semideciduous forest with abundant cuipo trees interdigitated with more typical humid evergreen forest. Several bird species more typical of Colombia and the Darien lowlands reach the western (northern) limit of their range in the Bayano region, and finding these will be our primary focus. However, the forest here is often extremely birdy, and affords abundant opportunities for seeing many species typical of the Canal Zone, none of which will be ignored. Among the many Bayano specialties that we might hope for are Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Barred Puffbird, Red-rumped and Golden-green woodpeckers, Red-billed Scythebill, the range-restricted Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren, Black-billed Flycatcher, One-colored Becard, White-headed and Stripe-throated wrens, White-eared Conebill, and Orange-crowned Oriole. We will search for all of these and more along various old logging roads that cut through the forest.. We'll bring lunch with us, and, depending on weather and birding conditions, may be gone for much of the day.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 2, Day 4: Pipeline Road. Beginning just beyond the old Canal Zone town of Gamboa, Pipeline Road winds for miles through the forests and foothills of Soberania National Park. The combination of rich primary and secondary forests; clear, beautiful streams; lack of traffic (the road dead ends); and abundant birdlife make this arguably the most famous birding road in the world. One never knows quite what to expect here, but there will certainly be much to see. Perhaps we'll find a fruiting matchwood tree with three species of toucans and several trogons feeding in it. Maybe it will be a Black-breasted Puffbird or Broad-billed Motmot perched motionless at eye level, or a noisy troop of Purple-throated Fruitcrows working the forest edge. We may locate a lek of spectacular Golden-collared Manakins displaying on sunlit patches of the forest floor. The wild frenzy of wing snapping and jumping is truly an amazing sight. Fruiting cecropias lure honeycreepers, tanagers, and dacnis to their fruiting spikes. We'll always be on the alert for a foraging ant swarm with its attendant antbirds (the Spotted, Bicolored, and perhaps the stunning Ocellated) and woodcreepers (Northern Barred and Plain-brown among the possibilities). Other than the Darien, the very remote frontier zone between Panama and Colombia, Pipeline Road is the best area we've found in the Neotropics for locating ant swarms. Surely the whirl of activity around a swarm is one of the most exciting phenomena of the bird world. As the voracious ants march along the forest floor seeking smaller terrestrial prey, the birds pursue larger, more mobile insects and other arthropods. Because the birds are so intent on feeding, it is often possible to get very close views of them.

Some of the other birds we may encounter in the Pipeline Road area are Black Hawk-Eagle, Blue-headed and Mealy parrots, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated trogons, Rufous Motmot, Great Jacamar, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Fasciated and Western-Slaty antshrikes, Spot-crowned Antvireo, Streak-chested Antpitta (secretive), Brownish Flycatcher (Twistwing), and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. We'll have a full day to enjoy the riches of this area.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 3, Day 5: Achiotte Road and Fort San Lorenzo. Another early morning departure (about 4:30 a.m.) will find us heading towards Colon on Panama's Atlantic coast and crossing the locks to the west side of the Canal. Our destination will be Achiotte Road, one of Central Panama's most famous birding spots. The early morning activity along this road is marvelous. Semiplumbeous Hawk; Double-toothed Kite; Violaceous, Slaty-tailed, and White-tailed trogons; Blue-headed Parrot; Black-breasted and Pied puffbirds; Cinnamon Woodpecker; Purple-throated Fruitcrow; Golden-collared Manakin; Black-chested Jay; Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles; and Scarlet-rumped and Yellow-rumped caciques can all be seen here. Though harder to find, Achiotte specialties such as Spot-crowned Barbet, Bare-crowned Antbird, and White-headed Wren will be targeted as well.

Edge habitats near the town itself could yield Greater Ani, Long-tailed Tyrant and Thick-billed Seed-Finch. A quick stop on our return at Gatun Locks might reveal Savanna Hawk and Red-breasted Blackbird.

We'll end the day by boarding a train in Colon for the 50-mile journey from sea to sea. This was the first trans-continental railroad in the world and has recently been privatized and completely rebuilt. Crossing the isthmus at sunset should provide a perfect ending to the day. En route we'll keep a watch out for Snail Kites and other birds in Gatun Lake. Upon arrival at the station near Panama City, we'll be met and transferred back to the Canopy Tower.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 4, Day 6: Gamboa and Summit Gardens. Much of the morning will be spent walking along Old Gamboa Road. The trail here leads through more open country and thus yields a different variety of birds. Jet Antbird; Rufous-breasted, Buff-breasted, and Plain wrens; Lance-tailed Manakin; and Rosy Thrush-Tanager are among the many possibilities. The nearby police academy ponds often produce Boat-billed Heron, kingfishers, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Lesser Kiskadee, and Rusty-margined Flycatcher. More common open country species such as Orange-chinned Parakeet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Buff-throated and Streaked saltators should also be in evidence.

Our afternoon plans will be somewhat flexible depending upon which species we are missing. We may choose to walk along Plantation Road just below the tower. The forests here harbor a good variety of species including such possibilities as Black-throated and Slaty-tailed trogon, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Rufous Motmot, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Checker-throated and White-flanked antwren, White-necked Puffbird, and Blue-black Grosbeak. Alternatively, we may head for Summit Gardens, which can be good for a variety of edge species.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 5, Day 7: Metropolitan Natural Park. The entire morning will be devoted to the drier forests of the Metropolitan Natural Park area. The avifauna here is quite different from that around the Canopy Tower. Among the many possibilities are Gray-headed Chachalaca, Pheasant Cuckoo (scarce and seasonal), Blue-crowned Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Lineated Woodpecker, Fasciated Antshrike, White-bellied and Dusky antbirds, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Lance-tailed Manakin, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Rufous-breasted and Rufous-and-white wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Crimson-backed Tanager. In addition, we'll spend some time searching for two of the real specialty birds of this area: the endemic Yellow-green Tyrannulet (rare) and the magnificent Rosy Thrush-Tanager, both of which can be found in this park.

In the afternoon we will head to the Miraflores Locks to watch a ship transit the locks and spend time in the newly built visitor center.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 6, Day 8: Departure for Home or Begin Extension. Participants not continuing on our Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension will be provided with group transfers from the Canopy Tower to the airport in time for various morning flights home.

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION

FEBRUARY 6-11, 2010

February 6, Day 1: Canopy Tower to El Valle. We'll depart the Canopy Tower some time this morning, arriving in El Valle in time for lunch. En route, we may make some stops in the dry Pacific lowlands. Though this region is heavily settled, birds are abundant throughout the fields and woodlots.

Soon after diverging from the Pan-American Highway, we'll come to charming El Valle de Antón. At nearly 2000 feet, the climate is cooler here and less humid than in the lowlands, but still dominated by dry Pacific weather. The three forested peaks of Cerro Gaital Natural Monument loom over the valley and impart a sense of tranquility. Everywhere around the town are lovely landscaped gardens, colorful with flowers and shaded by open groves of trees, while nearby hillsides are covered in secondary forest. Birds are abundant in this patchwork of habitats. We will make our way through the bustling little town en route to the Canopy Lodge, our home for the next four nights.

The Canopy Lodge's guestrooms offer large comfortable beds, private baths (doubles only), and tasteful interior decoration. The grounds meanwhile, are a birder's paradise! The gardens and walkways are often loaded with birds. In fact, it is not uncommon to record 60 species from the property alone in a single visit. Greatly enhancing the delightful setting are feeding stations that attract hordes of birds every morning and afternoon. This is indeed an incredible way to bird. For added effect, a beautiful clear stream tumbles past the open-air dining room.

After a tasty lunch we will spend the remainder of the afternoon birding and exploring the expansive grounds, paying close attention to the feeders and flowering bushes. We may see Gray-headed Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Black-chested Jay, Bananaquit, Blue-gray and White-lined tanagers, Black-striped Sparrow, Buff-throated Saltator, and Chestnut-headed Oropendola (a colony of which nests on the hillside above).

Your introduction to El Valle will conclude this evening with a delicious meal.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 7, Day 2: Canopy Lodge, La Mesa and Cariguana. Today we will begin exploring out from the lodge, but not before spending the first hour after breakfast working the lodge grounds another time. Though birding is good here throughout the day, it is these early morning hours when activity is at its peak. Predictably, the birding will be extraordinary. Freshly stocked feeding trays brim with birds. Red-legged Honeycreepers and Thick-billed Euphonias dance through the bushes and onto the feeding trays, looking all the world like living jewels. Clay-colored Robins appear by the dozens, seemingly everywhere, and Black-chested Jays survey the scene imperiously from exposed snags. Even the Rufous Motmot visits the feeders. Surely one of Panama's most glorious birds, it appears with a flourish, brandishing an impossibly burnt orange breast and belly.

A procession of tanagers appears like clockwork. First come the soft Blue-grays, followed by the velvety Flame-rumped and Crimson-backed. Then come the rest: White-lined, Palm, and the odd olive and black Dusky-faced. Even the Red-crowned Ant-Tanager has overcome its distrust of open space and ventures forth from the nearby forest.

Wandering through the flower-lined walkways can produce a good variety of hummingbirds. Rufous-tailed is the most common, but many others are seen almost as often. Radiating metallic colors in the morning light, these feathered sprites appear from out of nowhere, often bearing angelic names as beautiful as the birds themselves. Possibilities include Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, White-vented Plumeleteer, Snowy-bellied and

Violet-headed hummingbirds, Purple-crowned Fairy, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Garden Emerald, and Stripe-throated Hermit.

Remarkably, the rarely seen Rufous-crested Coquette occurs in the garden on a somewhat regular basis. This diminutive bird is not regularly found on any other VENT tour aside from the Canopy Lodge.

From El Valle, a country road leads a short distance up through scattered farms and forest to the back side of three tall peaks, a flat area known locally as "La Mesa," where we will spend the remainder of the morning. At 2800 feet, this area sits below the crest of the Continental Divide. For much of the year, it is brushed by clouds passing over from the Caribbean slope. The frequent misting creates a super moist environment, where the remaining forests are fantastically sculpted and laden with epiphytes that shade the dense understory.

This area is home to some fantastic foothill birds not found in the forests below or in the Canal Zone. Among these, tanagers are the dominant group, with potential for gems like Emerald, Bay-headed, Golden-hooded, Flame-rumped, Tawny-crested, and Silver-throated. But up here, there is a seemingly endless supply of birds of all kinds. We'll naturally look at whatever we come across, which likely will be a lot. A good representation of the birds of this elevation includes Bat Falcon, Lineated Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, Blue-throated Toucanet, Orange-bellied Trogon, Spotted Woodcreeper, Paltry Tyrannulet, Tawny-capped Euphonia and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, while Canada and Mourning warblers are found here in the winter months.

Following lunch at the lodge and an afternoon break, we'll head across the narrow valley to the other side of El Valle and a trip to Cariguana. Literally translated to "Iguana's Face," this area is said to be named for the appearance of a nearby mountain. To us, the main interest here is the birds, and the afternoon is a prime time to look for a number of special species. A gradually ascending gravel road skirts a large patch of dense forest where the fabulous Tody Motmot resides. We'll try to locate it, in addition to such other dandies as Blue-crowned Motmot, Lance-tailed Manakin, Yellow Tryannulet, White-bellied Antbird, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 8, Day 3: Altos del Maria. This morning we'll load up in four-wheel drive vehicles for a trip across the mountains to Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest habitat at 3000 feet. Altos del Maria, literally translated to "Highlands of Maria," represents the altitudinal highpoint of the trip, and because it sits on the Caribbean slope, gives us chances for a number of species not possible elsewhere on our route.

Strategic stops at a number of locations will us expose us to several impressive stretches of forest. Birds are typically plentiful, but we will focus our efforts on finding more challenging species like Orange-bellied Trogon, Brown-billed Scythebill, Rufous-browed Tryannulet, Dull-mantled Antbird, Ochraceous and Rufous-and-white wrens, and the special local subspecies of Common Bush-Tanager. The greatest potential prize of this location is the stunning Black-crowned Antpitta. Though secretive and sometimes difficult to see, we have a decent chance of finding one of these spectacular ground dwellers.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 9, Day 4: El Chiru & La Zamia Trail. We will depart around 6:00 am to head for the dry Pacific lowlands around the small community of El Chiru. Many of the species here will be new for us, with some highly sought birds among the many possibilities. Savannah Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Pearl Kite, Crested Caracara, Crested Bobwhite, Brown-throated Parakeet, Sapphire-throated Hummingbird, Veraguan Mango, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike will all be targeted.

We will likely spend the afternoon walking a forest trail at La Zamia, a forest patch on the west side of El Valle. Sometimes moving a short distance can make a big difference in habitat and birdlife. Though only 15 minutes

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 10

from the lodge, time here may give us our best opportunity to find Blue-crowned Motmot and Black-faced Anthrush, among the more common species.

Time-permitting, a final afternoon on the lodge grounds will put us back in the company of some old friends and possibly some new acquaintances. Orange-chinned Parakeet, Social Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Barred Antshrike, and Palm Tanager are all expected.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 10, Day 5: El Valle and Return to Panama City. Just above El Valle lies "The Canopy Adventure," a private reserve that protects tall tropical moist forest along a clear foothill stream dominated by a 200 foot high waterfall. The goal of the preserve is to provide much-needed employment for the local population, which would otherwise be cutting the forests for fuel and agriculture. The refuge currently employs ten young men to safeguard its treasures.

On this final morning at El Valle, we'll work sections of the entire property, from the lodge grounds all the way to the Canopy Adventure. There are always so many birds around El Valle that each outing is sure to produce something new for the trip. Some distinct possibilities are White Hawk, Blue-headed Parrot, Collared Aracari, Green-crowned Brilliant, Bay Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Streaked Saltator, and Orange-billed Sparrow. The forest above the lodge will give us another chance for the Tody Motmot, found locally here, but typically elusive.

After a final delicious meal at the Canopy Lodge, we will transfer to our hotel in Panama City, where we'll enjoy a farewell dinner and spend our last evening together.

NIGHT: Country Inn and Suites Canal, Panama City

February 11, Day 6: Departure for Home. Participants will be provided with transfers to the airport in time for morning or early afternoon flights home.

TOUR SIZE: Each section will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Kevin Zimmer with the assistance of local leaders

Kevin Zimmer has authored three books and numerous papers dealing with field identification and bird-finding in North America. His book, *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*, deals with finding and identifying birds in the western United States. Living in Alaska contributed to his affection for the Far North, where he has anchored VENT's tour program since 1986. For the past 20 years he has concentrated his attention on the Neotropics, particularly on Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. He has directed VENT's Brazil program since 1991. Kevin has a PhD in biology (research emphasis in Avian Evolutionary Ecology) from New Mexico State University, and is currently a field associate of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology and a Research Associate of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. He has authored numerous technical papers on the taxonomy, distribution, and behavior of Neotropical birds, particularly those of the Amazon basin. In 2003 he completed (with co-author Mort Isler) the major chapter on the *Thamnophilidae* (antbirds) for the prestigious *Handbook of Birds of the World* series. In 2006, he and Curtis Marantz coauthored a six-CD compilation of *Bird Voices of Alta Floresta and Southeastern Amazonian Brazil* (produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds) that represents the most comprehensive set of commercially available bird recordings for any part of the Amazon Basin. He and Andrew Whittaker are currently at work on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil, to be published by Princeton University Press. Kevin lives in Atascadero, California with his wife Susan. Their daughter Marina completed her master's degree in psychology at Dominican University in May 2008. Recently married, she and her husband are now living in Napa, California.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Panama: Chiriquí Highlands is **\$2395** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, flights between Panama City and David, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for Panama: Chiriquí Highlands is **\$270**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The fee for Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$2975** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a standard guestroom (Canopy Room) at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals, seven nights shared accommodations in one of the five Canopy Rooms (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below), ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The fee for Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$3245** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium room at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals, shared accommodations for seven nights in either the Blue Cotinga Suite or Harpy Eagle Suite (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The fee for Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$2545** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room at the Canopy Tower. This includes all meals, single accommodations for seven nights in a single room with a shared bath (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below), ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

Note: Participants combining the Chiriquí Highlands and Panama's Canopy Tower tours will receive a discount of \$145 per person in double occupancy and \$195 per person in single occupancy.

The fee for Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$1775** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama. This includes all meals, all lodging as described in the tour itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$480** for occupying a standard double room with a private bath for four nights at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below) and a single room for one night at the Country Inn and Suites Canal. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 12

The fee for Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$1645** per person in single occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a single room with a shared bath for four nights at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for three nights in a single room with a shared bath at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room with a private bath for one night at the Country Inn and Suites Canal, ground transportation during the tour, tipping, park entrance fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Panama City and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Tower has a total of 2 suites (Blue Cotinga and Harpy Eagle), five standard double guestrooms (Canopy Rooms) and 5 single rooms with a shared bath. Both suites and all Canopy Rooms have private bathrooms. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

Please also note that since there is no elevator, all guests will climb 3 to 4 flights of stairs to reach their rooms, the dining area and observation deck.

CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS: The Canopy Lodge has a total of 8 standard double guestrooms each with a private bath in their main building and 4 single rooms each with a private bath in a separate building on the grounds. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy a standard double guest room or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the single rooms in a separate building. The single rooms are considerably smaller and less fancy than the doubles. All rooms will be pre-reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. You will be advised of room availability and your specific room assignment at the time of your registration.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your

trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: In case your checked luggage is delayed, it's recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag. Note to participants on the Chiriquí Highlands portion of the tour: as of January 2009, Aeroperlas was charging excess baggage fees for bags in excess of 40 lbs (flights from Panama City to David and back). You may bring larger bags, but be forewarned that you will be responsible for any excess charges (which are levied by the pound)

CLIMATE: The climate in the Chiriquí highlands is decidedly temperate. Days are often sunny, with high temperatures in the 60s and 70s, but overnight lows may be in the 40s. Early mornings are almost always quite chilly, particularly on west-facing slopes in the mountains, where warming sunshine may not appear until hours after first light. Additionally, fog and rainy conditions, although not likely, are a possibility at any time.

The climate in the Canal Zone of Central Panama is usually warm, with mornings in the 70s and afternoons in the 80s. Conditions at midday can be humid and very warm, with temperatures reaching into the lower 90s. Rainstorms may occur at any time of year, but are more likely during the rainy season, which runs from May into early December, when a shower of some sort is expected almost daily. Generally, the weather in Central Panama is mild and pleasant, with our activities corresponding to the cooler parts of the day and heightened bird activity.

The climate in the El Valle region is considerably cooler than that of the Canal Zone. Mornings and evenings are cooler while midday temperatures usually do not exceed the low 80s. Clouds and overcast skies frequently prevail in higher areas, leading to damp conditions.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Panama. This includes several pair of lightweight field pants, along with cool and comfortable long-sleeved shirts. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun.

Dark-colored or neutral clothing is suggested, as white or bright colors may frighten secretive birds. Lightweight and comfortable walking shoes are recommended, since some days we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots are essential as the trails can be muddy. A small umbrella and/or rain gear are essential as well.

On Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, where morning and evenings can be quite chilly, be sure to bring at least one warm sweater or jacket and thermal underwear to sleep in. Some participants have found a wool hat and warm gloves to be helpful in dealing with the early morning chill. Note that the terrain in Chiriquí is rougher than on the Canopy Tower tour, and some may wish to bring hiking boots.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at the Canopy Tower. Because the clothes are sent out to Panama City to be cleaned, expect items to be returned within 48 hours. Laundry service at the Canopy Lodge is handled in-house. Expect items to be returned within 24 to 36 hours.

CURRENCY: The U.S. Dollar is the official currency of Panama. VISA and American Express are most commonly used, but MasterCard and Diners Club are also accepted.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Panama is required. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. citizens. A tourist entry card is required and can be purchased at the check-in counter of the airline on which you travel into Panama or at customs & immigration in Tocumen International Airport (\$5.00 U.S.). Non-U.S. citizens should check with their local Panamanian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media or film, etc.). As a precaution, it's a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

HEALTH: No vaccinations are required for entry into Panama. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In general, it is always a good idea to consult your doctor before taking any immunizations. Health requirements change frequently and often vary from district to district within a country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta advises that there is some risk of malaria in parts of the country. The areas visited on this tour are not at risk. The CDC is recommending precautions for travelers going out of these main areas. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

Your tetanus, Polio, and yellow fever vaccinations should be current. The water is drinkable in Panama and the food is safe. Please do check with your doctor for your own personal needs and prescription drugs (which may or may not be available on tour).

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

INSECT PROTECTION: As chiggers can be a problem in some areas, we recommend you come prepared with a good repellent. Some of the name brand manufacturers (Cutter's and Off) produce a variety of products you will find useful. Pump-action dispensers are generally preferable to sprays, while lotions and sticks are especially good for quick and easy application to sensitive areas on the face, or when out in the field. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger bites or nettle stings (cortisone creams are now available without a prescription) Some people recommend sprinkling sulphur, which is available at both lodges, on your socks as a chigger deterrent.

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products. Sulphur is available for use at the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge.

MISC: Departure Tax - US \$20 (included in the price of your air ticket)
 Electricity - 120 volts; plugs are the flat 2-pin American type.
 Language - The official language is Spanish, but English is spoken.
 Time - Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. This excellent field guide is highly recommended as your primary reference book on the birds. No other field guides are really necessary.

Emmons, Louise H. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Background Reading:

Chapman, Frank. *My Tropical Air Castle*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1929. Fun reading by an early ornithologist in Panama. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Chapman, Frank. *Life in an Air Castle*. New York: Appleton-Century Co, 1938. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1987. Excellent introduction to many fascinating aspects of the tropical rainforest.

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 16

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing, 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. An excellent introduction to the rainforest.

McCullough, David. *A Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. An excellent history of the construction of the Panama Canal.

Richards, Paul W. *The Tropical Rain Forest: An Ecological Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Second Edition.) A more scientific review of the botanical structure of rainforests.

Gradwohl, Judy and Russell Greenberg. "The Formation of Antwren Flocks on Barro Colorado Island, Panama." *Auk* 97 (April 1980).

Munn, Charles A. and John W. Terborgh. "Multi-species Territoriality in Neotropical Foraging Flocks." *Condor* 81 (1979): 338-347.

Reference:

Croat, Thomas B. *Flora of Barro Colorado Island*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978. A massive technical manual, but the best plant book available for the region.

Hilty, Steven L. and William L. Brown. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. An excellent field guide that has most of the birds of Panama in it; perhaps useful as an additional reference book.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume I, The Oscine Passerines: Jays, Swallows, Wrens, Thrushes and Allies, Vireos, Wood-warblers, Tanagers, Icterids and Finches*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1989. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

Ridgely, Robert S., and Guy Tudor. *Birds of South America Volume II, The Suboscine Passerines: Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers, Antbirds, Gnateaters, and Tapaculos, Tyrant Flycatchers, Manakins and Cotingas*. Austin: The University of Texas, 1994. Very useful reference, with range maps and illustrations of many species not previously illustrated.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 17

exchange rates in effect on May 6, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.