

PANAMA: CHIRIQUÍ HIGHLANDS JANUARY 21-29, 2012

PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER JANUARY 28-FEBRUARY 4, 2012*

PANAMA: EL VALLE'S CANOPY LODGE EXTENSION FEBRUARY 4-9, 2012*

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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, Emerald (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 2,000 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 Emerald (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 on 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 21-29, 2012

January 21, 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 22, 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 23, 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 are aguacatillo trees nearby, the fruits of which are a 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 24, Day 4: Finca Hartmann. After an early breakfast (most likely at 4:30 a.m.), 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 25, 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. This could involve a visit to Bajo Grande and the Respingo area, along the ridge above Guadalupe. Here we could hike a section of the Sendero de los Quetzales (Trail of the Quetzals) where the high-elevation cloud forest affords 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. Still another possibility is nearby Finca Dracula, known primarily for its outstanding orchid collection, but which is also home to a number of interesting birds, including Buff-fronted and Chiriqui quail-doves, Spotted Wood-Quail, Dark Pewee, Black-capped and Yellowish flycatchers, and many others.

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 lusher 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 6,000' elevation. Finca Lérída is ornithologically famous as a historical collecting site, from which many significant records were obtained. With comfortable rooms, good 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 26, Day 6: All Day Birding Around Finca Lérída. We will have the entire day to enjoy the avian riches of the Boquete region. 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 cloud forest trails above the lodge or within nearby Volcan Barú National Park. 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 27, Day 7: Day Trip to Fortuna Road. An early start (breakfast at 4:00 a.m., departure at 4:45 a.m.) 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 mostly be spent birding the road, although conditions permitting, we may spend some time on one or more 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 28, Day 8: Morning Birding at Finca Lériða; 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 28-February 4, 2012) 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 29, 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 28-FEBRUARY 4, 2012

January 28, 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 Ecologde & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 29, Day 2: Canopy Tower and Entrance Road. An early start this morning (6:00 a.m.) 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.

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 6

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

January 30, 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 Cocoi 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 Darién 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 most of the day.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

January 31, 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 Darién, 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 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 1, Day 5: Achioté 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 Achioté 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, Achioté 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 2, Day 6: Rainforest Discovery Center & Gamboa Area. This morning we will return to Pipeline Road, where we will spend most of the morning at the relatively new Rainforest Discovery Center (RDC). A highlight of our visit will be our time spent atop the RDC canopy tower, which will give us an impressive view of the rainforest canopy. Blue Cotingas are regularly seen from here, as are Scaled Pigeon, various swifts, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-necked Puffbird, several species of trogons, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Yellow-margined Flycatcher, and mixed-species flocks with a variety of warblers, honeycreepers and tanagers. The tower can be particularly good for seeing forest raptors as they perch above the canopy in the early morning, or, as they catch the first thermals later in the morning. Possibilities include Gray-headed Kite, Hook-billed Kite, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Ornate and Black hawk-eagles, and others. When activity in the canopy dies down, we will descend from the tower to bird the trail system below, where many of the typical Pipeline Road birds are possible. Eventually, we will make our way back to the visitor center, where a number of feeders along the deck attract large numbers of hummingbirds of several species, among them White-necked Jacobin, Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Black-throated Mango, White-vented Plumeleteer, Long-billed Hermit and Stripe-throated Hermit.

We will return to the Canopy Tower for lunch and siesta, after which we will spend the afternoon somewhere in the Gamboa area. Our exact plans will remain flexible to take advantage of current conditions. We might choose to bird along the Chagres River near the Gamboa Rainforest Resort. The forest edge here can make for interesting birding, with such possibilities as Jet Antbird, Great Antshrike, White-bellied Antbird, Golden-fronted and Scrub Greenlets, Yellow-tailed Oriole and others. Conversely, we might head to Old Gamboa Road where the trail 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.

NIGHT: Canopy Tower Ecolodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 3, Day 7: Metropolitan Natural Park, Panama Canal Museum and Miraflores Locks. 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 ("Whooping") Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Lined 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 Ec lodge & Nature Observatory, Gamboa

February 4, 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 4-9, 2012

February 4, 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.

Soon after diverging from the Pan-American Highway, we'll come to charming El Valle de Antón. At nearly 2,000 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, 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).

It is quickly apparent that the El Valle region contains an impressive diversity of habitats, from semi-deciduous forest typical of the Pacific lowlands and foothills, to wet, higher elevation cloud forest, to lush Caribbean slope foothill forest. Each of these habitats has its own special birds, and during our stay we will attempt to cover as many of these habitats as possible. Our exact itinerary, particularly the sequence in which we cover the various

spots will remain flexible, and, in part, be determined by conditions on the ground, including weather and current birding conditions.

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

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 5, 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 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 2,800 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. A good representation of the birds of this elevation includes Bat Falcon, Lineated Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, Emerald (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 might 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 Tyrannulet, White-bellied Antbird, Rufous-and-white Wren, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 6, Day 3: Altos del Maria or the Rio Indio Road. This morning we'll load up in four-wheel drive vehicles for an all-day trip to one of two areas. We might cross the mountains to Altos del Maria, a remnant cloud-forest habitat at 3,000 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 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 Tanager, 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.

Conversely, we might ascend once more to La Mesa, and then descend on a newly opened road to the Jordinal-Rio Indio area of the Caribbean slope. Many of the same species found at Los Altos del Maria can also be found here, as can such prizes as Barred Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Rufous-crested Coquette, Spot-crowned Barbet, Barred Puffbird, Emerald Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Tanager and many more. Which spot we visit will be based on weather, road conditions, and the current birding conditions at each spot.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 7, Day 4: El Chiru & La Zamia Trail. We will depart around 6:00 a.m. 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 Tanager, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant and Rufous-browed Peppershrike will all be targeted.

We might 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 from the lodge, time here may give us our best opportunity to find Blue-crowned Motmot and Black-faced Antshrike, 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-billed Parakeet, Social Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Barred Antshrike, and Palm Tanager are all expected.

NIGHT: Canopy Lodge, El Valle de Antón

February 8, 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.

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 11

NIGHT: Country Inn and Suites Canal, Panama City

February 9, 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, a Research Associate of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, an elective member of the American Ornithologists' Union, and a member of both the A.O.U. South American Check-list Committee (SACC) and the American Birding Association (ABA) Check-list Committee. 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 Ryan are now living in Napa, California.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: 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: Chiriquí Highlands is **\$2845** 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 **\$415**. 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.

Those registering for Panama's Canopy Tower prior to December 1, 2011 will receive a discount of \$500 off of the prices below.

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

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

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 single supplement for Panama's Canopy Tower is **\$735** for occupying a standard guestroom (Canopy Room) with a private bath for seven nights at the Canopy Tower (see CANOPY TOWER ACCOMMODATIONS section below). 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.

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.

Those registering for Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension prior to December 1, 2011 will receive a discount of \$250 off of the prices below.

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, four nights occupying a standard double room at the Canopy Lodge, one night occupying a double room at the Country Inn & Suites, 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: El Valle's Canopy Lodge Extension is **\$1945** per person in double occupancy from Panama City, Panama for occupying a premium room at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 6, four nights in one of the Canopy Lodge's two premium rooms (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS sections below), one night occupying a double room at the Country Inn & Suites, 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 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 13

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 private bath for four nights at the Canopy Lodge. This includes all meals, single accommodations for four nights in a single room with a private bath at the Canopy Lodge (see CANOPY LODGE ACCOMMODATIONS section below), a single room 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: In their main building, the Canopy Lodge has a total of 6 standard double guestrooms and 2 premium rooms. Each premium room has more space than a standard room, windows on two walls and a king bed. In a separate building on the grounds, there are 4 single rooms each with a private bath which are considerably smaller and less fancy than the rooms in the main building. Based on room availability, singles have a choice of paying a supplement to occupy one of the standard double guest rooms or a paying a discounted tour fee to occupy one of the single rooms in a separate building. 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 any or all of these tours, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for each 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, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. 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. *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 \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

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 & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form 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 as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** 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.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.* This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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 2011, 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.

Panama: Chiriquí Highlands, Panama's Canopy Tower & Panama: El Valle's Canopy Lodge, Page 15

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 may prove useful (May to December), 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 sturdy hiking shoes are recommended.

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. Prior to 2010, a tourist entry card was required and could be purchased at customs & immigration in Tocumen International Airport (\$5.00 U.S.). As of January 2011, this was no longer required, but it is conceivable that this could change yet again. 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 condition, 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 (800) CDC-INFO. 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 \$40 (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:

Angehr, George R. and Robert Dean. *The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide*. A Zona Tropical Publication from Comstock Publishing Associates, a division of Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 2010. This excellent new field guide provides an up-to-date, portable and complete field guide to the birds of Panama. The level of detail is not comparable to the Ridgely-Gwynne classic, but maps and text are on the page facing the plates, making it user-friendly, and taxonomy and range information is very current.

Ridgely, Robert S. and John Gwynne. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. (Second Edition). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. This classic field guide and reference is still highly recommended, and provides more detailed information on natural history and distribution of Panama's birds than any other source. It remains an excellent field guide to the country's birds.

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.

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.

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