

GUYANA

Saturday 15th September – Sunday 30th September 2012
(16 days)

Leader: Eustace Barnes

Group Size Limit: 8

Tour Category: Easy to Moderate

This tour has been organised to see the best of what Guyana has to offer, from the rainforests to the coastal mangroves and vast southern savannas. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to see much of the region's endemic avifauna in the full splendour of pristine habitats that are so degraded in neighbouring countries. This trip therefore is of interest, not only to the neotropical enthusiast but also those visiting the South America for the first time.

The regional specialities we target include Blood-coloured Woodpecker, White-bellied Piculet, Rufous Crab-Hawk, Sun Parakeet, Blue-cheeked Amazon, White-winged Potoo, Red-billed Woodcreeper, Hoary-throated Spinetail, Black-throated Antshrike, Rio Branco Antbird, Guianan Red-Cotinga, Crimson Fruitcrow, Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, Dusky Purpletuft, Black Manakin, Finsch's Euphonia, Red-and-Black Grosbeak and Red Siskin. This is indeed an impressive list of specialities, many of which are infrequently seen making this a must for the neotropical enthusiast.

In addition we shall see a stunning variety of more widespread species including both wetland species found across the much of the continent and many species restricted to the Guianan shield from Manaus to Venezuela. Amongst many species we should see are Scarlet Ibis, Black-faced Hawk, the huge Harpy Eagle, Black Curassow, Crestless Curassow, Marail Guan, Grey-winged Trumpeter, Painted Parakeet, Caica Parrot, Dusky Parrot and Red-fan Parrot. We also hope to

find the rare Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo which seems more numerous here than in Venezuela. Our night birding may produce White-winged Potoo as well as a few owls and nightjars.

Of the more widespread species Crimson Topaz, Guianan Puffbird, Black Nunbird, Black-spotted Barbet, Guianan Toucanet, Green Aracari, Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper and Yellow-green Grosbeak should be found during our exploration of the numerous rainforests sites visited. Of the Antbirds, Black-throated Antshrike, Rufous-bellied Antwren, Spot-tailed Antwren, Todd's Antwren, Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Rufous-throated Antbird and White-plumed Antbird are fairly common and readily seen.

We shall explore riparian habitats along the Ireng river in search of the very localised Rio Branco Antbird and Hoary-throated Spinetail. A visit to the Mori scrub, a white sand forest, should produce Rufous-crowned Elaenia, Yellow-throated Flycatcher, Black Manakin and Guianan Red-Cotinga. The Cotingas are well represented and we have a very good chance of seeing the magnificent Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock at its lek, Guianan Red-Cotinga, Pompadour Cotinga and the bizarre Capuchinbird, also at a lek. These birds at their display sites are wonders of the natural world quite beyond compare.

This trip therefore offers the opportunity to see some spectacular species not easily found in nearby Brazil or Venezuela. The savannas of the south also give us the opportunity to search for the

critically endangered Red Siskin to which we devote the best part of a day in pristine habitat where we will also see a good variety of other species including Blue and Yellow Macaw, Toco Toucan, White-throated Kingbird and others.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins this evening in Georgetown, where we overnight at a lovely colonial-era hotel.

Day 2 Early this morning we will visit the famous Botanical Gardens in central Georgetown where a good range of species can be found. We shall look in particular for the near-endemic Blood-coloured Woodpecker, as well as White-bellied Piculet, Festive Amazon and Red-shouldered Macaw. We would be very lucky to see the woodpecker here, but we should see Great Black-Hawk, Snail Kite, Gray Hawk, Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons, Brown-throated Parakeet, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Black-crested Antshrike, Grayish Saltator, Buff-breasted Wren, Ashy-headed Greenlet, Spotted Tody-Flycatcher, Wing-barred Seedeater, Yellow Oriole and Carib Grackle, and possible Great Horned Owl. (If our flight to Lethem is early, we will fit in a visit to the gardens later in the tour.)

Subsequently we will drive to the domestic Ogle airport and fly over the Demerara and Essequibo Rivers southwards over unbroken rainforest and savannas to Lethem. We shall then drive across open savannas and through gallery woodlands to our base for the night on the open savannas at Saddle Mountain Ranch. Experiencing the tranquillity of one of the most remote places on the continent will be a significant part of our first mission; the search for the critically endangered Red

Siskin. Driving across the savannas we may see Pearl Kite, Toco Toucan, Blue-and-yellow Macaw, White-throated Kingbird, Southern White-fringed Antwren and Yellowish Pipit. We may also be lucky and see the odd looking Giant Anteater or a Crab-eating Fox.

Day 3 Today, at dawn, we will be on-site to see Red Siskin and we will walk through an area of savanna that lies along the base of low-lying forested hills. As well as Red Siskin, this area is very good for a super selection of open country species including White-tailed Hawk, Toco Toucan, Red-shouldered Macaw, Finsch's Euphonia, Little Chachalaca and a surprising variety of tyrannids. After a rest and lunch we will retrace our steps to Lethem for the night. On the way we will again spend a good deal of time birding on the savannas looking in particular at a number of wetlands for waders and wildfowl.

Day 4 Today we will turn our attention to two rare birds with very restricted ranges; Hoary-throated Spinetail and Rio Branco Antbird. Both are only found in gallery forest along the Takatu and Ireng rivers, where recent agricultural changes have seriously reduced the amount of available habitat for both birds. As a result, the spinetail is now classified as endangered, while the antbird is treated as near-threatened. To reach suitable habitat, we will either drive or travel by boat to the junction of the Takatu and Ireng rivers. This is likely to take us at least a couple of hours in each direction and we should encounter species such as Capped Heron, Muscovy Duck and Pale-legged Hornero en route. Although the habitat needs of the antbird and spinetail are seemingly

slightly different (the antbird prefers taller trees with vine tangles and the Spinetail acacia dominated riparian woodlands), they can both be found along a comparatively short stretch of the Ireng river. We plan to end our mission late morning and then head north to Karasabai for an overnight stay. Crossing open savannas, we shall pass marshlands and dry woodlands before reaching our site. Depending on available time we shall search for Azure Gallinule, Orange-backed Troupial, Hooded Tanager and Chestnut-vented Conebill amongst a long list of others.

Day 5 We will make an early start to search for the endangered Sun Parakeet. Thirty years ago, this species was not uncommon across the Guianas. However, huge numbers were caught for the cage bird trade and the area around Karasabai is now believed to be the only place in Guyana where this species can still be found. Consequently, it is now regarded as highly endangered, although small flocks can often be seen here flying overhead. Staying close to our site should allow us plenty of time to find this spectacular psittacid and many others while engaged in our search. These may include Red-and-green Macaw, Maguari Stork, Muscovy Duck, Crested Bobwhite, Painted Parakeet and Orange-backed Troupial. However, this area is isolated and has not been thoroughly explored by birders, so there is a chance that we could make some noteworthy discoveries. In the late morning we will head east to the Karanambu Ranch along the Rupununi river, where we will stay for two nights.

Day 6 Around dawn we will make a special effort to locate one of the oddest-looking members of the cotingids, the Capuchinbird. There is a lek close to our

lodge and we plan to visit the display area to watch these odd-looking creatures. Another of our targets whilst staying at Karanambu is the near-threatened Bearded Tachuri, a member of the flycatcher family which has declined markedly in recent years as it requires fairly undisturbed savannah grasslands. Another grassland species we will search for is the Crested Doradito, which also has a spotty distribution much reduced by habitat degradation. We have a good chance of finding both these species. We will be also be looking for Boat-billed Heron, Pinnated Bittern, Sunbittern, Sharp-tailed Ibis, Green-tailed Jacamar, Spotted Puffbird, Black Nunbird, White-fringed Antwren, Black-chinned and White-bellied Antbirds and Finsch's Euphonia. We also intend to make a boat trip either very early in the morning or late in the afternoon on the nearby Rupununi River to look for the Crestless Curassow. Although this species has not been hunted on the ranch for many years, it remains difficult to find. On one evening, we also plan to head out onto the savannas after dark to look for nightbirds and on a good evening it is possible to see at least six species of nightjar and nighthawk including Nacunda, Least and Lesser Nighthawks, and White-tailed and possibly Rufous Nightjar. We may also see a Giant Anteater during our stay, as this species is not uncommon around the lodge.

Day 7 After a morning boat trip to visit some spectacular ox-bow lakes we will leave Karanambu after lunch by boat. This should give us an excellent opportunity to look for various river-edge wetland and open country species. We stand a good chance of seeing Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Jabiru, Wood Stork, Green

Ibis, Northern Crested-Caracara, Black-collared Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Brown-throated Parakeet and Swallow-wing. Depending on the river level, this trip offers a chance of seeing Giant Otters as there are several family groups in the area. Both Black and Spectacled Caiman also inhabit the river and several species of monkey including Red Howler, White-faced Saki, Brown-bearded Saki and Squirrel Monkey can be found in the riverside trees. We should arrive at Ginep Landing where we will connect with our vehicle for the journey northward to the lovely Rock View Lodge for an overnight stay. On the way we could find Red-shouldered Macaw, Sooty-capped Hermit, White-tailed Goldenthrout, Cinnamon Attila, Yellow-throated Flycatcher, Pale-tipped Inezia, Cayenne Jay, Flavescent Warbler, Finsch's Euphonia and Orange-backed Troupial.

Day 8 Today we will take an excursion to a Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock lek. This involves a walk from Woowetta village through pristine rainforests rich in both bird and mammal life. We shall hopefully arrive at the lek in good time to watch the spectacular males displaying. The forests are full of primates, cracids, parrots and cotingas and we should see a good many of these along with many antbirds, furnarids and woodcreepers. We shall hope to find an army ant swarm with its attendant followers and possibly the rare Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo. After lunch we shall make our way back to the main highway and from there travel to Surama Ecolodge on the edge of the rainforests, where we will spend the night. We plan to do some nightbirding and hope to find Northern Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, Tropical Screech-Owl, Lesser

Nighthawk, White-tailed Nightjar and Common Potoo.

Day 9 This morning we shall walk through gallery forests and savannas near Surama, hoping to see Cayenne Jay, Yellow-crowned Elaenia, Guianan Warbling Antbird, Chestnut Woodpecker, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Screaming Piha and many others. The savannas here are good for Southern White-fringed Antwren, Guianan Slaty Antshrike, Finsch's Euphonia and maybe a Spotted Puffbird. After breakfast we shall head north to a superb forest trail along which there is an active Harpy Eagle nest which is built in a huge emergent tree. We may also find the rare Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo along this trail, but there are a good many other attractions here. Red-legged Tinamou, Painted Parakeet, Dusky Parrot, Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Pale-throated Barbthroat, Rufous-throated Sapphire, Great and Paradise Jacamars, Guianan Puffbird, Black-spotted Barbet, Golden-spangled Piculet, Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper, Guianan Slaty-Antshrike, Rufous-bellied, Spot-tailed and Todd's Antwrens, Dusky, White-browed, White-bellied, Ferruginous-backed, Rufous-throated and Guianan Warbling Antbirds, Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant, Lemon-chested and Ashy-headed Greenlets, and Golden-sided Euphonia are all possible. We then continue north to the famous Atta Rainforest Lodge for a three nights stay.

Days 10-11 Although the forest around Atta Rainforest Lodge is excellent for birds, the major attraction here is a 505-feet (154-metre) long canopy walkway which is only about 800 yards (750m) from the lodge. The walkway has four platforms, the highest of which is over 100ft (30m) above the ground, and these will allow us to get great looks at a

range of canopy species, many of which we would struggle to see well from the forest floor. Amongst the likely highlights are Painted, Brown-throated and Golden-winged Parakeets, Caica Parrot, Guianan Puffbird, Waved and Golden-collared Woodpeckers, Spot-tailed and Todd's Antwrens, Grey Antbird and Fulvous Shrike-Tanager. The walkway is also an excellent place to look for various cotingas and tyrannids, including Dusky Purple-tuft and the poorly known and range-restricted Olive-green Tyrannulet. If there are any suitable fruiting trees nearby, we stand a good chance of seeing the former, as well as the more widespread Purple-breasted Cotinga. If we are very fortunate we will see the rare Blue-backed Tanager.

Another area where we will want to spend some time is the clearing around the lodge, as this is one of the best places to see another of Guyana's specialities, the Crimson Fruitcrow, a species seen here on a regular basis as it often comes to feed in nearby trees. The clearing is also a reliable site for Black Curassow, as there is a family party which has become habituated to people and regularly passes through the clearing. With reasonable luck, we should be able to add this bird to the impressive list of species we hope to see around the lodge and walkway. Other species we hope to encounter during our stay include Spix's and Marail Guans, Grey-winged Trumpeter, Red-fan Parrot, Eastern Long-tailed Hermit, Crimson Topaz, Great and Paradise Jacamars, Guianan and Pied Puffbirds, Guianan Toucanet, Green and Black-necked Aracaris, Red-billed Woodcreeper, Black-throated Antshrike, Guianan Streaked Antwren, Guianan Warbling

Antbird, Pompadour Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin, Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant, Golden-sided Euphonia and both Red-and-Black Grosbeak and Yellow-green Grosbeak. During our stay, another of our major targets will be the poorly known White-winged Potoo which, after dark, can be found both around the lodge and at the walkway. Looking for this bird will be one of our major priorities, but we will need a bright moonlit night to stand a reasonable chance of seeing it. Quite apart from the profusion of bird life there is also a good selection of mammals to be seen including Guianan Red Howler Monkey, Weeping Capuchin and Guianan Saki Monkey. If we are very fortunate we will even see Jaguar, which is seen with regularity along the main road.

Day 12 Today we will drive to the Iwokrama River Lodge for a two nights stay. We will stop at an area of white-sand forest known as the Mori Scrub. This highly specialised forest type is important for Guianan Red-Cotinga, Black Manakin, Rufous-crowned Elaenia and Yellow-throated Flycatcher, all of which we will look for. After this we continue towards the Essequibo river driving through some excellent forest where we are likely to find species such as Grey-winged Trumpeter, Green Aracari, Guianan Toucanet, Spotted Puffbird, Black-spotted Barbet and Black Nunbird, as well as a variety of parrots including Black-headed and Caica Parrots.

Day 13 After an early breakfast we take a boat up river to the Turtle Mountain Camp from where we can walk an excellent trail through tall lowland

rainforests to a low hill that gives spectacular views over the vast rainforests in the area. The area is good for the rare Red-and-black Grosbeak, Black Curassow, Grey-winged Trumpeter, a good number of parrots, and possibly Bronzy, Paradise and Great Jacamars. It is also another area where Rufous-winged Ground-Cuckoo has been seen at army ant swarms. If we find an ant swarm we may also see White-plumed and Rufous-throated Antbirds. After lunch we will return to Iwokrama River Lodge, birding along the river en route.

Day 14 Today we will take an early morning flight to the world's highest waterfall: the Kaitetur Falls. This spectacular site is one of the most impressive in South America and presents us with a chance of seeing another Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock lek and other forest species. At the falls there are White-chinned and White-tipped Swift and if we are lucky an Orange-breasted Falcon. We then continue our journey to Georgetown, arriving in the late afternoon for a two nights stay. If time permits we may visit the botanical gardens again or wander through the old colonial centre of town.

Day 15 An early morning departure takes us eastward from Georgetown to look for Blood-coloured Woodpecker and the localised Rufous Crab-Hawk, the last of the many range restricted species we will have been searching for. The woodpecker is only known from a narrow coastal strip which runs eastward for just a few hundred miles (around 500km) from Guyana and finding this species will be one of our main priorities. We will also look for the White-bellied Piculet, Boat-billed Tody-Tyrant, Mangrove and Little

Cuckoos, Black-crested Antshrike and Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet. We shall spend the morning in an excellent area for Rufous Crab-Hawk, a species which has been badly affected by the destruction of mangroves. The area is also good for the woodpecker and piculet, so we stand a very good chance of seeing all three species. Guianan Gnatcatcher has also been very found in this area and we will make an effort to find this rare and localized species, along with the uncommon Point-tailed Palmcreeper. A short boat trip should give us great views of the bizarre Hoatzin, all five kingfishers and the localised Green-throated Mango, and Plain-bellied and White-chested Emeralds. Closer to Georgetown, we may visit some mudflats where we are likely to find a range of herons and waders, as well as Scarlet Ibis, Black Skimmer, Brown Pelican and Magnificent Frigatebird. With luck we will see Clapper Rail on the rising tide.

Day 16 The tour ends this morning at Georgetown's international airport.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels and lodges are of normal Birdquest standard, although in some cases at the simple but pleasant end of the scale (and a few remote accommodations have shared bathroom facilities). Road transport is by small coach or minibus and roads are reasonably good.

Walking: The walking effort is easy to moderate.

Climate: Mostly hot, dry and sunny, but it is sometimes overcast and it may rain at times. It is often very humid.

Bird Photography: Opportunities are worthwhile.