

## SURINAME

**Saturday 28th January – Saturday 11th February 2012 (15 days)**

**Leader: Mark Van Beirs**

**Group Size Limit: 8**

**Tour Category: Easy to Moderate**

The delightful country of Suriname (sometimes spelt Surinam) is the smallest sovereign state in terms of area and population in South America. It had a turbulent history of colonization and immigration and is ethnically, linguistically, culturally and religiously extremely diverse. Hindus (shipped in from India as workers), Creoles, Javanese, Maroons (descendants of escaped West African slaves) and Chinese form the bulk of the population and there is a distinctive Dutch heritage, which results in a very characteristic and unique flavour.

Suriname does not form part of South America's Latin cultural and language heritage and exudes a more Caribbean essence. The official language is Dutch, but the inimitable Sranantongo is the lingua franca. Most of the inhabitants live along the Atlantic coast and in the easy-going capital Paramaribo, where old Dutch-style wooden buildings beg for paint.

Suriname lies on the Guyanese shield, just north of the equator, between the Amazon and the Orinoco rivers and is wedged in between the small countries of Guyana and French Guiana. More than three quarters of the country is occupied by forests, which are still mainly untouched by humans, so the evocative calls of Howlers and Spider Monkeys still reverberate through the jungle. The country has several splendid nature reserves and national parks including the fabulous Central Suriname Nature Reserve (where the Raleigh Falls and the Voltzberg are situated) and the Brownsberg Nature Park.

This small country incorporates a variety of habitats including grassy

savannas, freshwater marshes, coastal mangrove swamps, tropical lowland jungle and scrub-covered granite outcrops, resulting in a rich flora and fauna. The birdlist tallies just over 700 species, but the main attraction for the international birder is the occurrence of a handful of birds that are rarely recorded elsewhere like Rufous Crab-Hawk, Green-throated Mango, Fiery-tailed Aowlbill, Blood-coloured Woodpecker, Guianan Piculet, Black-throated and Band-tailed Antshrikes, the diminutive Dusky Purpletuft, the rare Crimson Fruitcrow, the glorious Guianan Red-Cotinga, White-fronted Manakin, White-throated Pewee, Boat-billed Tody-Tyrant, the ultra smart Blue-backed Tanager, Finsch's Euphonia and Red-and-black Grosbeak.

Tiny Suriname is also a great place for magic encounters with the highly prized Grey-winged Trumpeter, flocks of which can still regularly be encountered in its pristine forests. Accessible leks of bizarre, growling Capuchinbirds and of exhilarating Guianan Cocks-of-the-Rock will help to produce a totally out of this world birding experience.

We will start our travels in sleepy Paramaribo, from where a day trip will take us to an extensive area of mangrove, which is home to the striking Rufous Crab-Hawk. We will also search for the restricted range Blood-colored Woodpecker, Guianan Piculet and Crimson-hooded Manakin in coastal swamp forest, while nearby marshes hold beauties like Scarlet Ibis and Black-collared Hawk. A visit to a couple of different savanna biomes should give us Green-

tailed Goldenthrout, Black Manakin, Rufous-crowned Elaenia, the unobtrusive Palebellied Mourner and Finsch's Euphonia.

Further inland lies the large Central Suriname Nature Reserve, which is mainly inaccessible, but luckily the Raleigh Falls-Voltzberg core area provides easy entry into fabulous lowland rainforest. Jungle edges along the Coppename River should produce wing-rattling Marail Guans, mind-boggling Red-fan Parrots and gorgeous Spangled Cotingas. The Voltzberg is a barren granite outcrop with a height of about 460ft (140m) that offers spectacular vistas over the surrounding endless jungle.

The amazing spectacle of lekking Guianan Cocks-of-the-Rock will be one of the climaxes of the tour, as seeing these improbably-adorned birds dance and display is a truly riveting experience. Patient stalking along the forest trails may yield goodies like Rusty-breasted Nunlet, Band-tailed Antshrike, Spotted Antpitta, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin and the obscure Boat-billed Tody-Tyrant. The evocative roars of Black Spider Monkeys and Red Howlers will greet the dawn, while at night we will listen for the quiet trills of the Roraima Screech-Owl.

Further south we will spend several days working the narrow paths of the magnificent forests surrounding the remote Palumeu Lodge, situated near the convergence of the Tapanahony and Palumeu rivers. We will visit a lek of bizarre Capuchinbirds and hope for a fabulous encounter with a group of much-wanted Grey-winged Trumpeters. The extraordinary Crimson Topaz is not uncommon and shy Guianan Red-Cotingas can sometimes be found in the canopy. By diligent scanning from a rocky outcrop, we stand a fair chance of finding the rarely-seen Crimson Fruitcrow.

Our last venue of the tour will be the large Brownsberg

Nature Park, which is a forested laterite plateau situated about 70 miles (115 kilometres) south of the capital. Gold mining activities in the beginning of the 20th century have created some high waterfalls, which form a great attraction for visitors. The diverse forest types hold a different selection of species, and include marvels like Black Curassow, the restricted range White-fronted Manakin, Glossy-backed Becard, the rarely-encountered White-throated Pewee, the tremendous Blue-backed Tanager and Red-and-black Grosbeak. Monkeys are well represented here and we may well encounter the delightful White-faced (or Guianan) Saki.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** The tour begins this evening at Paramaribo, where we will spend two nights.

**Day 2** The surroundings of Suriname's lethargic, seaside capital offer an interesting variety of habitats. Mangrove forest, coastal swamp jungle and oceanic creeks hold the striking Rufous Crab-Hawk, a close relative of Common and Great Black Hawk, that is only found near the seashore. Although it ranges from Eastern Venezuela south till Eastern Brazil, it is most easily found here. We will also search for the restricted range and dramatically-named Blood-coloured Woodpecker and the near endemic, tiny and unobtrusive Guianan Piculet. Gaudy Crimson-hooded Manakins display at their leks inside thickets. Nearby marshes hold the incredible Scarlet Ibis, the attractive Black-collared Hawk, skulkers like Ash-throated and Gray-breasted Crakes and the uncommon Wing-barred Seedeater. A visit to a couple of different savanna biomes characterized by grassy expanses dotted with Curatella (Andpaper) trees and Clusia (Pitch Apple) bushes should give

us Russet-crowned Crane, the localized Green-throated Mango, Bronzy Jacamar, Rufous-crowned Elaenia and the localized Finsch's Euphonia. Other species we should encounter include Least Grebe, Brown Pelican, Tricoloured, Little Blue, Striated and Cocoi Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Green Ibis, Snail and Slender-billed Kites, Black, Turkey and Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, Osprey, Long-winged Harrier, Roadside and Grey Hawks, Yellow-headed Caracara, Limpkin, Wattled Jacana, Laughing Gull, Large-billed and Sandwich Terns, Black Skimmer, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Brown-throated Parakeet, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Orange-winged Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Greater and Smooth-billed Anis, Pauraque, Lesser Nighthawk, Short-tailed Swift, Plain-bellied Hummingbird, Glittering-throated Emerald, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Spotted Puffbird, the magnificent Toco Toucan, Spot-breasted and Lineated Woodpeckers, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Pale-breasted and Yellow-chinned Spinetails, Black-crested and Barred Antshrikes, Blackish Antbird, Common and Spotted Tody-Flycatchers, Plain-crested and Yellow-crowned Elaenias, Southern Beardless and Pale-tipped Tyrannulets, Yellow-breasted and Fuscous Flycatchers, Pied Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Tropical and Grey Kingbirds, Fork-tailed and Boat-billed Flycatchers, Great and Lesser Kiskadees, the vociferous Cinnamon Attila, White-winged and Barn Swallows, Grey-breasted Martin, Tropical Mockingbird, Pale-breasted and Bare-eyed Thrushes, Black-capped Donacobius, Buff-breasted and House Wrens, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Ashy-headed Greenlet, Masked Yellowthroat, Bicolored

Conebill, Bananaquit, White-lined, Silver-beaked, Blue-grey, Palm, Burnished-buff and Turquoise Tanagers, Violaceous Euphonia, Greyish Saltator, Variable Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Wedge-billed Grass-Finch, Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Yellow Oriole, Carib Grackle and Yellow-hooded and Red-breasted Blackbirds. A good selection of migratory North American waders like Hudsonian Whimbrel, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers and Grey and Semipalmated Plovers inhabit the extended mudflats.

**Day 3** This morning a small plane will take us southwest over vast stretches of untouched rainforest to Foengoe (Fungu) Island for a four nights stay. Upon arrival we will start exploring our new surroundings.

**Days 4-6** Foengoe Island is a small piece of land lying within the rapids of the blackwater Coppename River and will be our base for visiting the famous Central Suriname Nature Reserve. This UNESCO World Natural Heritage site covers approximately 6200 square miles (16,000 square km) and is probably the largest, unpopulated tropical rainforest reserve in the world. It encompasses the well-known Raleigh Falls/Voltzberg Nature Reserve which is named after the 17th century British explorer Walter Raleigh and the 19th century German geologist Franz Voltz. The Raleigh Falls are a spectacular series of rapids and the Voltzberg is a bulky, barren, granite inselberg that rises nearly 790ft (240m) above the surrounding forest. A large variety of habitats can be found and almost 400 different species of birds have been noted.

The highlight of our stay will undoubtedly be our visit to

the largest known communal lek of the exquisite Guianan Cock-of-the-rock. From a well chosen viewpoint we will be able to observe the often bizarre antics of up to twenty males of this brilliant orange cotinga. They gather at their display arena to call, posture, dance and squabble to get the attention of the more soberly hued females. This spectacle is one of the most riveting and spellbinding experiences a birder can ever hope to witness. Late in the afternoon we will position ourselves at the airstrip and look for the little-known Marail Guan, which can sometimes be located in a fruiting Cecropia tree together with more common frugivores like Blue-throated Piping Guan, Little Chachalaca, Red-billed and Channel-billed Toucans, Green and Black-necked Aracaris and Guianan Toucanet. Good numbers of parrots and macaws are also a feature of this area and with a bit of luck we will observe the astonishing Red-fan Parrot. Along the forest trails we will concentrate on trying to find specialities like the smart Band-tailed Antshrike, Rufous-bellied Antwren, the glorious Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Spotted Antpitta, the rare and unobtrusive Boat-billed Tody-tyrant (known only from the Guyanas and adjoining northern Amazonian Brazil), the amazing Capuchinbird, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin and the distinctive Collared Gnatwren.

The rocky outcrops and viewpoints at the Voltzberg, reached after a three and a half mile (six km) walk from Foengoe island, gives us excellent opportunities to admire the magnificent panorama of unbroken forest and allows us easy viewing into the canopy of the surrounding jungle, where troops of Red Howlers or Black Spider Monkeys regularly pass through. A variety of widespread birds of prey and Chapman's, White-collared and even White-chinned Swifts can regularly

be seen. An extensive granite shield is covered in cacti, euphorbias and orchids, where that unique hummingbird, the Fiery-tailed Awlbill and the tiny Dusky Purple-tuft have been noted.

Other birds we hope to encounter include Great Tinamou, Anhinga, Capped Heron, Green Ibis, Greater Yellow-headed and King Vultures, Swallow-tailed and Plumbeous Kites, Great Black Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Black and vociferous Red-throated Caracaras, Barred and Lined Forest-Falcons, Scaled and Plumbeous Pigeons, Grey-fronted Dove, enthralling Blue-and-yellow and Red-and-green Macaws, Painted and Golden-winged Parakeets, Blue-headed and Mealy Parrots, Black-bellied Cuckoo, Roraima Screech-Owl, Spectacled Owl, Blackish and Ladder-tailed Nightjars, Band-rumped Swift, Eastern Long-tailed and Reddish Hermits, Blue-tailed Emerald, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Black-eared Fairy, Amazonian White-tailed, Violaceous and Black-tailed Trogons, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers, Paradise and Great Jacamars, Guianan and Pied Puffbirds, Black Nunbird, Rusty-breasted Nunlet, Swallow-wing, Waved, Chestnut, Red-necked and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, the localized McConnell's Spinetail, Plain Xenops, Short-billed Leafosser, Plain-brown, Wedge-billed, Amazonian Barred, Striped, Buff-throated and Chestnut-rumped Woodcreepers, Fasciated, Guianan Slaty, Amazonian, Spot-winged, Dusky-throated and Cinereous Antshrikes, Guianan, White-flanked, Brown-bellied, Grey, Long-winged and Dot-winged Antwrens, Grey, Dusky, White-browed, Guianan Warbling, Black-headed, attractive White-plumed and Rufous-throated Antbirds, Rufous-capped Antthrush, Screaming Piha, marvelous Purple-breasted

and Spangled Cotingas, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, White-bearded, Golden-headed and White-crowned Manakins, White-lored and Guianan Tyrannulets, Painted Tody-Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Cliff, Piratic and Short-crested Flycatchers, Bright-rumped Attila, Cinereous Mourner, Black-collared Swallow, Coraya and Wing-banded Wrens, White-necked Thrush, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Neotropical River Warbler, the smart Rose-breasted Chat, Red-billed Pied Tanager, Fulvous-crested and White-shouldered Tanagers, Purple Honeycreeper, Pectoral Sparrow, Slate-coloured and Blue-black Grosbeaks, Giant Cowbird and Red-rumped Cacique. Mammals are not very obvious here, but we may encounter Brown Capuchin, Collared Peccary and Red Brocket Deer. We will spend the first two and the last night in the lodge on Foengoe island. The third night will see us sleeping in hammocks in the basic camp at the base of the Voltzberg.

**Day 7** After some final birding on Foengoe Island we will fly back to Paramaribo for an overnight stay. In the afternoon we will continue our investigations of the capital's surroundings.

**Day 8** A small plane will take us due south to distant Palumeu Lodge, situated in the far southern reaches of the country near the confluence of the Tapanahony and Palumeu rivers within 60 miles (100 km) of the Brazilian border. Upon arrival at this Amerindian village inhabited by Trio, Wayana and Akurio people, we will settle in and start exploring. We will spend three nights in this simple, but delightful ecolodge.

**Days 9-10** Pristine lowland rainforest crisscrossed by numerous hunting trails and a couple of marvelous granite inselbergs offering fantastic

views into nearby canopy are the main attractions for the birder at Palumeu. Slow stalking through the jungle should eventually reveal the presence of a party of much-wanted Grey-winged Trumpeters. These lovely, hunch-backed birds wander through the forest in loose groups, producing guttural hums and loud grunts as they forage. We will spend some time at an active Capuchinbird lek, where we hope to see these truly bizarre bald cotingas emit their 'distant chainsaw' calls from their hidden perch in the high canopy. High pitched whistles should divulge the brilliant plumage of the amazingly unobtrusive Guianan Red Cotinga, yet another gorgeously-plumaged cotinga. The rare Red-billed Woodcreeper can sometimes be found in a mixed species flock or at an army ant swarm and in dense undergrowth we will try to locate Black-throated Antshrike, Chestnut-belted Gnateater, the localized White-fronted Manakin and the unassuming Cinnamon Neopipo. Persistent scanning from our viewpoint on the granite kopje of Potihill may reward us with one of the ornithological prizes of northeastern Amazonia, the incomparable Crimson Fruitcrow. This rarely-encountered jay-sized cotinga can sometimes be found during the morning hours quietly sitting in the open canopy of a forest giant. We may also chance upon a stunning Pompadour Cotinga, a dazzling Crimson Topaz feeding on the flowers of a rambling vine or an attractive but rare Brown Bearded Saki monkey. If the weather gods cooperate we will see the distant Kasikasima Mountains. Other interesting species include Variegated and Cinereous Tinamous, Grey-headed and Double-toothed Kites, White and Black-faced Hawks, Bat Falcon, Marbled Wood-Quail, the fabulous Black Curassow, Collared Plover, Spotted Sandpiper,

Common Ground-Dove, Scarlet Macaw, White-eyed Parakeet, Black-headed, striking Caica and Blue-cheeked Parrots, Little Cuckoo, Amazonian Pygmy Owl, Chapman's Swift, Straight-billed Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Grey-breasted Sabrewing, White-chinned Sapphire, Plain-bellied Emerald, Blue-crowned Motmot, Yellow-billed Jacamar, Black-spotted Barbet, Golden-spangled Piculet, Yellow-throated and Chestnut Woodpeckers, Plain-crowned Spinetail, Rufous-rumped, Chestnut-crowned and the secretive Cinnamon-rumped Foliage-gleaners, Cinnamon-throated, Black-banded and Lineated Woodcreepers, Great Antshrike, Todd's Antwren, Scale-backed, Silvered and Spot-winged Antbirds, Black-faced Antthrush, Thrush-like Antpitta, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, Ringed Antpipit, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Double-banded and Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrants, White-eyed Tody-Tyrant, White-crested Spadebill, Yellow-throated and Short-crested Flycatchers, Rufous-tailed Flatbill, Greyish Mourner, Black-crowned Tityra, Wing-barred Piprites, Brown-chested Martin, White-banded Swallow, Southern Rough-wing, Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo, Lemon-chested and Buff-cheeked Greenlets, the melodious Musician Wren, the beautiful Golden-sided Euphonia, Flame-crested and Hooded Tanagers, Fulvous Shrike-Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Lined Seedeater, Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch, Yellow-green Grosbeak and Green Oropendola. Mammals here may include Golden-handed Tamarin and Guianan Squirrel.

**Day 11** After some final birding at Palumeu we will fly back to Paramaribo for an overnight stay.

**Day 12** Before dawn we will already be positioned amidst savanna habitat not

too far away from the Zanderij International Airport. These grassy white sand plains, dotted with contorted dwarf trees and bushes and the adjacent forest edge harbour an exciting avifauna. Common Potoo, Rufous and White-tailed Nightjars and Lesser Nighthawk can be found and when the sun finally appears the melancholic song of the Red-legged Tinamou can be heard. Thorough exploration of this inviting habitat should produce marvels like Crested Bobwhite, the stunning Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Green-tailed Goldenthrout, Bronzy Jacamar, the inconspicuous Black Manakin, Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin, the rare Pale-bellied Mourner and Rufous-crowned Elaenia. Groves of distinctive Mauritia palms often hold squabbling parties of Red-bellied and Red-shouldered Macaws and the subdued Sulphury Flycatcher. Other species we are likely to encounter include Plain-crested Elaenia, Swainson's Flycatcher, Black-faced Tanager, Grassland Sparrow, Moriche Oriole and Eastern Meadowlark. Later we will continue our drive south to the Brownsberg Nature Park for a three nights stay.

**Days 13-14** The 14,800-acre (6000-hectare) Brownsberg Nature Park is situated in the district of Brokopondo, about 70 miles (115 km) south of Paramaribo, in the vicinity of the large Van Blommestein reservoir. The mountain is named after the unsuccessful, 19th century American gold digger John Brown. Later bauxite was mined, but earnings were thin, so in 1969 the Brownsberg Nature Reserve was created. Remains of these ill-fated mining activities are still scattered around the area. Our lodge is situated on the 1640ft (500m) high Mazaroni plateau, a remnant of an enormous laterite crust. The whole region is covered in luxuriant rain forest, low and dense in places, and lofty and rather open in others.

Well maintained dirt tracks and walking trails offer easy access to the different forest types. Several rivers have eroded their twisted course through the area, creating some impressive waterfalls. Viewpoints offer fabulous opportunities for canopy watching and here we hope to encounter the magnificent, localized and rarely-seen Blue-backed Tanager. This unique and colourful species occurs in low densities and is somewhat erratic, but the Brownsberg is an excellent place to get acquainted with this cracker. We will need some luck to find the marvelous Red-and-black Grosbeak, a shy mid storey inhabitant. The uninspiring White-throated Pewee is only known from a handful of localities in northeastern Amazonia, but can usually readily be found here. Another sporadic and localized canopy inhabitant is the outstanding Glossy-backed Becard, which is usually encountered in a

mixed flock. White Bellbirds utter their loud arresting calls from a vantage point and the wonderful Ringed Woodpecker leads a quiet life in the mid-storey. Both White-throated and the perplexing, but lovely White-fronted Manakins favour the berries of melastome bushes and we stand another excellent chance to encounter a party of enthralling Grey-winged Trumpeters. Red Howler Monkeys are quite common here and will greet dawn with their ear-splitting roars and with a bit of luck we should also find a smart, bushy-tailed Guianan Saki. Other species we hope to see include Little Tinamou, Short-tailed Hawk, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Spix's Guan, Grey-necked Wood-Rail, Ruddy Pigeon, Ruddy Quail-Dove, the elusive Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Dusky Parrot, Northern Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, the delightful Crested Owl, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Lesser Swallow-

tailed Swift, Rufous-breasted Hermit, the elusive treetop-favouring Racket-tailed Coquette, the adorable Tufted Coquette, Rufous-throated Sapphire, Collared and Black-throated Trogons, Golden-collared and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, Rufous-tailed and Olive-backed Foliage-gleaners, Amazonian Barred Woodcreeper, Mouse-coloured Antshrike, Ash-winged Antwren, the endearing Spot-backed Antbird, the devilishly hard to see Variegated Antpitta, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet, White-lored Tyrannulet, the diminutive Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant, Sulphur-rumped and Rusty-margined Flycatchers, the peculiar Sharpbill, White-bearded Manakin, Thrush-like Schiffornis, Pink-throated Becard, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Musician Wren, Tropical Parula, Bay-headed Tanager, Black-faced Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper and Golden-bellied Euphonia.

**Day 15** After enjoying some final birding at Brownsberg, we will return to Paramaribo, making one or two birding stops on the way to fill potential gaps in our list. The tour ends in the early evening at Paramaribo.

#### **Accommodation & Road**

**Transport:** The hotel in Paramaribo and the lodge at Palumeu are of normal Birdquest standard. Elsewhere accommodation is fairly simple but pleasant, with shared bathroom facilities (and there will sometimes be more than two people per room). Road transport is by small coach 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.