

It's Not Just Straw Hats And A Canal

Birding in Panama March 2026

Tour guide :- Euclides Campos AKA "Kilo"

Tour participants :- Susan and Darren Sefton

This year it was my 60th birthday and we decided to spend it overseas birdwatching. We eventually settled on Panama as we had travelled in neighbouring countries, but still had a number of species left unseen – especially the Resplendent Quetzal.

I found a website birdingpanama.com, which had a "Birds of the Isthmus of Panama" tour that seemed to fit the bill very well with fixed departure dates that encompassed the date my birthday. This tour comes in two parts :- a 10 day main tour with an optional 4 day extension to the Darien Gap.

After discussing this at length between us, we decided for various reasons, that the extension was not for us, so I contacted Jose Carlos Garcia (the owner) and reserved two places. The tour starts once you have arrived in Panama, so I had to arrange the flights myself. This was not a problem although there are not direct flights from the UK, and the best pricing was from Manchester to Panama City via a stopover in Amsterdam using KLM. The return journey was using Air France via Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris - (£892.97 each). Due to the length of journey, and the ever present chance of bags being lost, we decided to go two days earlier and have a couple of relaxing days first. Jose Carlos was able to arrange these extra days at preferential rates (\$90) at the first hotel on the itinerary – the Summit Rainforest and Golf Resort.

Despite offering to pay a deposit and settle the payment upfront, Jose Carlos stated that all he needed was our full names, passport numbers and flights details to reserve the spots and book internal flights. We could pay for the tour on arrival – part in cash and part on a credit/debit card. The usual everyday currency in Panama is US Dollars, so getting the cash was very easy indeed. I have a multi-currency debit card, so this was not a problem either.

Day 1 – Saturday February 28th

We left home at 1.30am and drove to a car park near Manchester airport for the KLM flight to Amsterdam. Our bags were checked all the way through to Panama City, so all we had to do was negotiate our way through security and get to our gate on time for the 5.50 am departure. This flight was less than an hour and arrived on time. The stopover in Amsterdam was about 3 hours, so we had a chance to have a cuppa and try the Stroopwafel (two very thin waffles sandwiched together with a very sweet jam-like filling).

The time difference between the UK and Panama is 5 hours behind, so we arrived in Panama City at about 4.30pm although the flight was about 10 hours (4 films and an acceptable meal). Bag collection, security and immigration was easy although it was about 6pm before we got through. Jose Carlos had arranged for a driver, Francisco, to pick us up and transfer us to the hotel – a journey of about an hour. The hotel room was spacious, clean and modern with two double beds and a seating area and balcony. The bathroom was also large with a nice shower. A meal was available, but all we wanted to do was have a shower and go to sleep, so we passed.

Day 2 – Sunday 1st March

We awoke to the sound of early morning golfers practicing on the driving range. They take advantage of the cooler hours to feed their obsession. To be fair I cannot blame them as the heat and humidity at lunchtime was strength-sapping.

I had been expecting that due to the climate and its tropical location Panama would have lots of mosquitos and we had been warned to bring spray. However, I did not find any at the Summit Resort. We did experience them in other locations and where this was evident I have mentioned it in the notes below.

Our UK pharmacist determined that at this time of the year it was not necessary to take any tablets to protect us against Malaria, unless we would be travelling to the Darien. However, after many years of travelling in the tropics we have realised that starting to take an off the shelf anti-histamine tablet each day, starting two weeks before travel, does help reduce the itching associated with sunburn and insect bites. We continue this all the time we are away and for a few days after we return, especially if we still have visible bites. This works for us, however I would always check with a pharmacist before you travel.

A buffet-style breakfast was included. This was unlimited coffee/tea, various fruit juices, an assortment of cooked items (which varied slightly each day, but included scrambled egg, chorizo sausage, bacon, fried bread, potatoes etc). There was also a selection of cheeses, cold cuts of meat, various breads and cakes and muffins. You could also have porridge or have an omelette freshly made.

The hotel has a complimentary minibus that takes you to the visitor centre at the Miraflores locks on the Panama Canal. This bus leaves the hotel lobby at noon, returning at 3pm, and takes about 30 minutes due to traffic, although it is not actually that far away. Entrance to the visitor centre costs about 17 Dollars and this includes a 45 minute IMAX presentation. Sadly this had started at 12.15, so we missed a good part of this. The next showing was at 2.45pm, so this was not an option either. This was a shame and I would hope that the hotel change the timings to accommodate this. Should you wish to see the whole show then I would recommend booking a taxi.

On arrival we were informed that ships would be going through the locks at 2pm and we could view this from a covered seating area, in the meantime we could visit the giftshop or have a meal in the café. As expected we missed much of the IMAX presentation and made our way to the viewing area. A small cruise ship, 2 quite large catamarans and a huge container vessel entered the locks and in a surprisingly short length of time they had dropped to the required level, the gates were opened and they were on their way.

Back at the hotel we booked a short nature drive with Carlos the Concierge from the Lobby. This was to be in an electric golf buggy. The first stop was to see the Douroucouli (Night Monkeys) in a hollow tree by the security building at the entrance to the hotel drive.



The Douroucouli

The rest of the drive was around the golf course and we found a rather mangy-looking Coati, several Spectacled Caiman (including a fairly confident one named “Esteban”, who bizarrely was fed with some bread) and a number of common birds including Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Tropical Mockingbird and the only time we saw Saffron Finch.

The evening meal was a buffet-style and, although it was pleasant enough, was not very inspiring. This was to be the same each night we were in the Summit Resort, although the dishes did vary a little. The best local beer was named “Balboa” and was priced at about 3 USD a bottle.

Day 3 – Monday 2nd March

Today was again free time. We took a walk with the in-house naturalist within the grounds near the hotel. These were along a short path through the forest to a large enclosed Butterfly House and then on to the Sloth Rehabilitation Centre, which only had 3 birds, but no Sloths during our visit) and then finally the Frog House. As we walked around the hotel we came across several colourful murals that had been painted on the walls. These were very colourful and extremely well done and brightened up the areas very well.



Like many Panamanians, the guide was not an English speaker and communication was done through a mixture of hand gestures, mime and online phone-based translator tool, but we coped adequately. Ideally, visitors to Panama should have a little Spanish, although this is not necessary for the main tour as “Kilo” was perfectly fluent and had little accent, so we understood each other very well. We seemed to get by quite well with “dos cerveza por favor” !

There are a couple of bird tables near the Frog House, but we never saw them being replenished or any birds visiting them. This is such a shame as there were clearly plenty of birds nearby and would have given good views. Birds seen were Blue-grey Tanager, Whooping Motmot, Crimson-backed Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia (pictured below) and Red-lored Amazon Parrot.



Later in the day we were sat by the pool when a Yellow-headed Caracara swooped in and took out a Blue-grey Tanager, which it then proceeded to pluck and eat in full view of everyone in the pool or on the terrace.

Jose Carlos met us at 6.30pm in the bar. This was when we were due to pay for the tour. Half was to be in cash, which we had brought with us, and the rest was to be taken by card. The card reader was new and Jose Carlos was not fully au-fait with its usage. Despite several attempts the device would not even attempt to take payment. The conclusion was that the device was not set up to read our Mastercard, but only for Visa. In the next couple of days Jose Carlos contacted the bank and determined that this was not the case and it was because there was a limit of \$2000 per transaction. The cost of the tour was \$2195, so above this threshold. We would have to take it in two or more payments.

Day 4 – Tuesday 3rd March

Today was the first “proper” day of the tour and our first meeting with “Kilo”. He arrived at 7.30am in a somewhat elderly, but comfortable, Toyota Landcruiser. This is not the normal transport for this tour, but as there were only us two booked, it was deemed overkill to have a minibus.

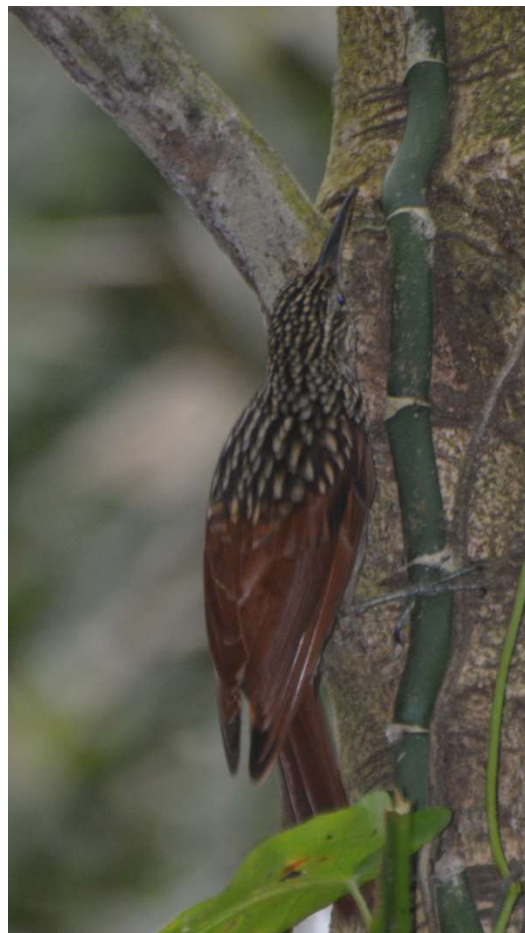
The famous Pipeline Road was to be our destination. This was built during WWII to service the oil pipeline running from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This was a back-up in case the Panama Canal was damaged. Now there is no pipe, but is a protected area that is researched intensively by the Smithsonian Institute. On the way we stopped outside the Summit Botanic Gardens as this was a perfect place to observe Toucans flying across from their overnight roosting site. In a few short minutes we saw about ten Keel-billed flying over.

The Pipeline Road is relatively flat and with the surface is made of compacted stones, although somewhat bumpy, so the Landcruiser was the perfect vehicle. Cruise ships arrange visits to the Pipeline Road and there is a privately run Rainforest Discovery Centre too. As a consequence there were lots of visitors. At certain points along the road mosquitos bothered us, but most of the road had none.

We intended to drive about 2km and park up. However, a Collared Forest Falcon perched in a tree was noticed by Kilo as he was driving. Of course we stopped and took photos. Everywhere around us were tantalising bird calls. Kilo would point in the direction of a call and quote a name, then another from deeper in and yet another from a different direction. This demonstrated his skills to us in a very short time and we knew that we were going to see lots of species.



Collared Forest Falcon



Black-striped Woodcreeper

The day consisted of short, easy walks back along the road picking out species, then a short drive and another stop. The temperature and humidity were high and we were soon sweating profusely, despite the ease of the walking. Regular re-hydration is therefore very important. With the regularity of new species and the excitement of seeing them it is very easy to forget this and I fell foul of this on one day later in the tour.

A mixed flock was following a trail of ants. We soon notched up an impressive list including Ocellated, Bi-coloured and Spotted Antbirds, Dot-winged Antwren, Black-bellied Wren and Fasciated Antshrike. Trogons were also abundant and Gartered, Slaty-tailed and White-tailed were seen well. Other notable species seen were Southern Bentbill, Yellow-backed Oriole, Red-capped Manakin and various Warblers, Gnatcatchers and Flycatchers.

We returned to the Hotel for a siesta, but returned to the Pipeline Road in the afternoon. A Great Tinamou was resting on the banking alongside the road, this was unexpected as they are quite timid, although for me the highlight of the afternoon was the Purple-throated Fruitcrow. Woodcreepers were numerous and included Northern Barred, Black-striped, Cocoa and Plain Brown. A Great Black Hawk showed well just after the gate at 2km, although it then went quiet and we saw little else.



We stopped at “Ammo Ponds” on the way back to the hotel and this was full of birds and hardly any mosquitos. It consists of a relatively small area of pond, with grassy banks, open woodland and short bushes. Here we saw several Hummingbird species, Gallinule, Mealy Amazon, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Barred Antshrike and many more. By the end of the day, after a count-up in the hotel bar, our species list had risen to 96.

Day 5 – Wednesday 4th March

Today we would be visiting the Camino de Cruces Forest. This is not too far from the hotel, so we had a good buffet breakfast as usual and Kilo picked us up and we drove to Camino.

This reserve (4950 hectares) is quite near Panama City, so I was expecting to see more visitors, however we were the only ones there. From the car park it is only a short stroll to the picnic area, which marks the start of the trails. We had only gone a few hundred metres when Kilo heard a Rosy Thrush-tanager. This primarily black bird, has a rich rosy red throat, chest and belly and a distinctive white eyestripe in the male. This was a main target for this forest. Despite playing its call it was obvious that this was going to be a challenge. The bird was skulking around in the heavy undergrowth at the base of a tree some 5-10 metres from the trail. To add to the difficulty this was a dark shaded area – not ideal for finding a black bird. After over half an hour the bird was located and we had quite good views through the scope, but no chance of any decent photos.

Other birds seen here included the Dusky and White-bellied Antbird, Orange-billed Sparrow, Stripe-throated Hermit Hummingbird, Golden-collared Manakin and Red-throated Ant-tanager.

Kilo drove us into the city for lunch at Niko’s Café. This has a choice of simply grilled meats, pastas and sandwiches. Not fancy, but tasty.

The next stop was at the pond next to St. Mary’s School in Albrook. This is also quite near the Russian Embassy, so I felt a bit nervous carrying a long-lensed camera, binoculars and notepad !

These wetlands were home to Green, American Pygmy and Amazon Kingfishers, but I missed the Ringed despite its large size even though it flew straight passed me. There were also a variety of Warblers, Vireos, Greenlets and Tanagers.



Green Kingfisher

After a siesta back at the hotel, where we also resolved the payment issue, we returned to the Pipeline Road. The routine was similar to our last visit with short walks from the car. Heavy rain showers also forced us to do our birding very close to the vehicle. Again we saw the Tinamou and added the Northern Black-throated Trogon, more Tanagers, Blue Dacnis, Black-crowned Antshrike and Blue-crowned Manakin amongst others. To avoid some of the heaviest rain we made a return visit to Ammo Ponds where we had fly-bys of both Grey-headed Kite and Swainson's Hawk.

The daily count up revealed that we were now up to 129 species seen.

Day 6 – Thursday 5th March – My Birthday

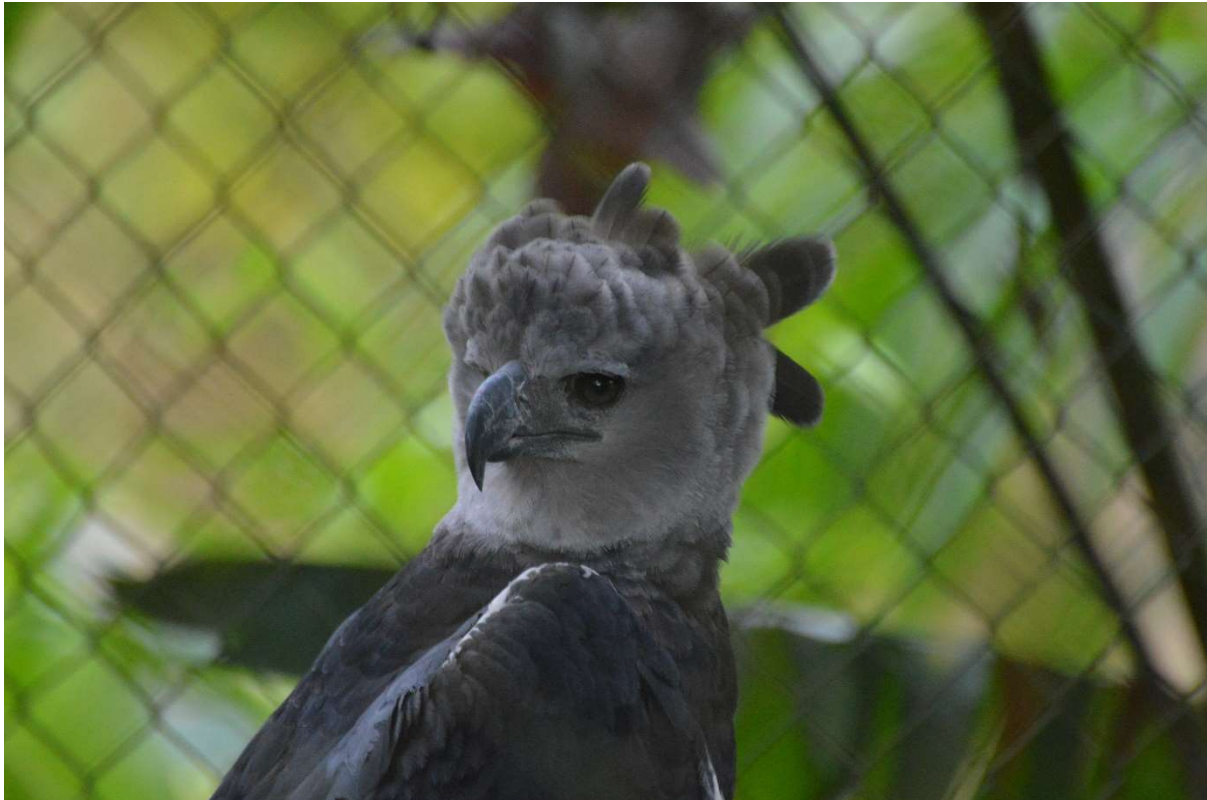
Today we would be leaving Summit and travelling to El Valle De Anton. We packed and checked-out of the hotel, before travelling to the road outside the Senafront State Border Service, which was only a short drive away. I think this might be known as “The Summit Ponds”. There were a few biting mosquitos here.

En-route Kilo pulled over at short notice and leapt out of the car. Somehow he had noticed a Blue Cotinga perched at the very top of a roadside tree. The Senafront road is lightly forested, with some open pastures and a couple of ponds at one end. Howler Monkeys played in the treetops above us, whilst a surprising number of species showed. These were mostly flycatchers and warblers, but we had flyovers from several parrot species too. At the ponds we saw Boat-billed Heron. On the walk back a beautiful Rose-breasted Grosbeak showed as did a Crimson-crested Woodpecker.



Blue Cotinga

Due to us not taking the Darien Gap extension we had no chance of seeing the Harpy Eagle, however I had found out that there is a captive eagle housed at the Summit Botanic Gardens. There was a \$5 entrance fee, but this was a big saving on the \$895 cost to the tour extension. The eagle exhibit is at the highest point of the well-kept gardens and even though it was only 9am, it was getting quite hot. The exhibit has an indoor section, which was thankfully air-conditioned, where one of the keepers was giving a talk. Afterwards we were taken out to see "Panama" a female Harpy that had been bred at Miami Zoo and had been presented to the country about 12 years previously. As there was some maintenance going on in her enclosure, she had been shut into a side aviary and this gave us good close views of her as she was perched only 3-4ft above the ground.



“Panama” the Harpy Eagle

After visiting “Panama” we decided to visit the only other captive animal in the gardens, a Jaguar. The walk to this enclosure allowed us to add Black-crowned Tityra and Black-tailed Trogon. These were the only time we saw these species, so it was well worth the visit. However, the Jaguar exhibit was disappointing. It was quite small and the animal itself was displaying some stereo-typic zoochosis behaviour by continually pacing back and forth along the same section of fence. This is a sign of stress and was not pleasant to witness.

After leaving the Botanic Gardens we continued on to El Valle de Anton. This was quite a long drive, so we stopped along the way for lunch. This was at a roadside café and consisted of chicken soup with Taro and a plate of roast chicken with rice. All well-cooked and quite tasty. A savannah Hawk sat on a power line was the only species of note we saw during this journey.

Anton is a small town inside the caldera of an extinct volcano. The sides of the caldera were very steep and well-forested. Anton is a holiday town, which is well stocked with nice eateries and at weekends, when people from Panama City visit, it is quite lively.

Our accommodation for the next two nights was at a neat little guest house. It seemed more like a home stay though. It was clean, had 2 double beds and nicely decorated, with its own bathroom and shower, but somewhat lacking in facilities (no pool or bar etc). Strangely, it had an additional bed on a mezzanine accessed via a ladder attached to the wall.

The advertised hotel had recently changed ownership and had it had not been able to contact the new owners to make a booking. We checked in and I opened my birthday cards and made a couple of Whatsapp videocalls back to family in the UK. Afterwards we went to visit the hillside garden of Jose and his wife for a couple of hours. They have a number of bird feeders set up in their small garden and you can sit on patio chairs on their covered veranda and watch the visiting birds at close

range. The journey was up some very steep roads and at one point Kilo was struggling to get the Landcruiser into 4x4 mode and switch on the diff-lock. We very nearly did not get there.

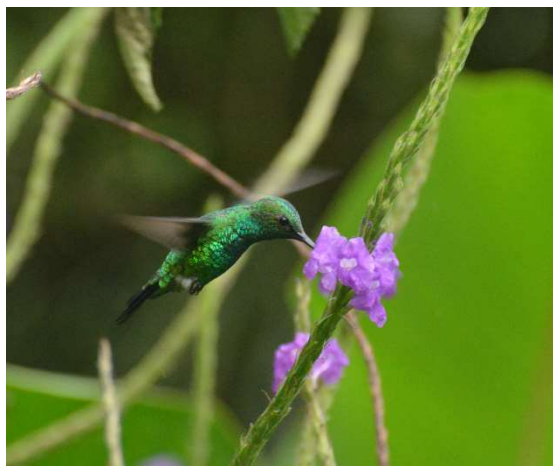
Initially, the Clay-coloured Thrush was the species taking advantage to the bananas, but Tanagers, Euphonias, Black-striped Sparrow, Buff-throated and Streaked Saltator were soon drawn in. Every so often a large flock of Grey-headed Chachalaca would take over and all other species would scatter. Jose would chase them off and the smaller birds would return. A pair of Grey-cowled Wood-rail were a surprise visitor as were some very confiding Lesson's Motmot. At quiet times I would sneak off to see the Garden Emerald and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds feeding on a large Vervain bush nearby.



Grey-cowled Wood-rail



Grey-headed Chachalaca



Garden Emerald Hummingbird



Tawny-capped Euphonia

Our evening meal was at Bruschetta in Anton. A nicely cooked medium-rare Ribeye steak and frites was my birthday treat, but sadly no jelly and icecream for afters !

Day 7 – Friday 6th March

We had an early start this morning, but it was only a short drive to the local café where we would get breakfast. Sue got some cinnamon-laced oatmeal, which she said was delicious, and I had sausage and fried tortilla bread and copious amounts of coffee.

The steep hills were climbed again, this time the Landcruiser coping better. As we were passing the Canopy Zipline entrance Kilo saw a Coquette Hummingbird feeding on the Vervain lining the road. We stopped for about 30 mins, but he did not return. He was a special, so we would be back.

However, we did see White-vented Plumeleteer, Blue-chested Hummingbird and a group of Tawny-crested Tanager feeding nearby.



Blue-chested Hummingbird

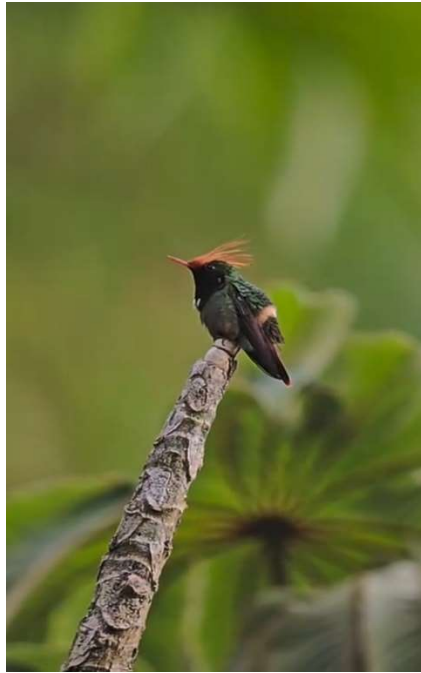


Tawny-crested Tanager

Carrying on we parked at the top of a trail and we set off on foot down the gravel track following the stream down a very steep gorge. This was heavily forested and we were told that this was the haunt of several Motmot species. The humidity was very high and although playback was used extensively and the birds replied, Kilo just could not get eyes on them. We were up and down the trail as the birds seemed to be moving, or was it different individuals just playing with us? Eventually, the scope was skilfully focussed in on a Tody Motmot. Once we had broken our duck, the other species all showed with Broad-billed, Rufous and Lesson's all showing well through the scope. Light levels were low though and I just could not get good enough shots with the camera.

Next, Kilo suggested we go high up and see if we could search out Sicklebill – this is a species of Hermit Hummingbird with a very pronounced downwardly curved beak. These feed on Heliconia flowers, which are only found in a few spots. The best place was high up near some chicken farms. We drove to the spot, but the heliconias had been cut down. The only species we saw here was a Broad-winged Hawk. At another nearby spot the heliconias were not in flower, but the woodland was alive with birdsong. Playback encouraged a myriad of species to show themselves including White-ruffed Manakin. Golden-winged, Canada, Rufous-capped and Bay-breasted Warblers, Silver-throated and Bay-headed Tanager and a Green Honeycreeper.

The Coquette was still outstanding though, so we returned to the Zipline centre and staked out the Vervain. Whilst waiting Snowy-bellied, Rufous-tailed and Violet-headed Hummingbird were seen, but eventually the star of the show, the Rufous-crested Coquette, put in an appearance. We followed it around firing off many shots with the camera, however due to his fast and unpredictable movements, many of these were either out of focus, missing part of the bird or simply a flower where the Coquette had been a split-second previously. Kilo did manage the photo below.



The Sickletail had still not been seen, so Kilo took us to another spot which did have some flowers. However, they were not in prime condition and despite waiting for over an hour no Sickletail showed. Kilo prepared the ground around some more flowers nearby, by removing some branches and we resolved to return later.

After a siesta back at the guest house, where Sue promptly fell fast asleep in a hammock, we returned to the prepared site. Needless to say that although we waited for a very long time the Sickletail did not show up. On the way back to the car I did manage views of a Northern Emerald Toucanet and Kilo video'ed a Northern Schiffornis, previously known as Thrush-like Manakin, but recently re-classified. This bird is not often seen as it skulks through the undergrowth and does not join feeding parties with other species.



Northern Schiffornis – from the video by Kilo

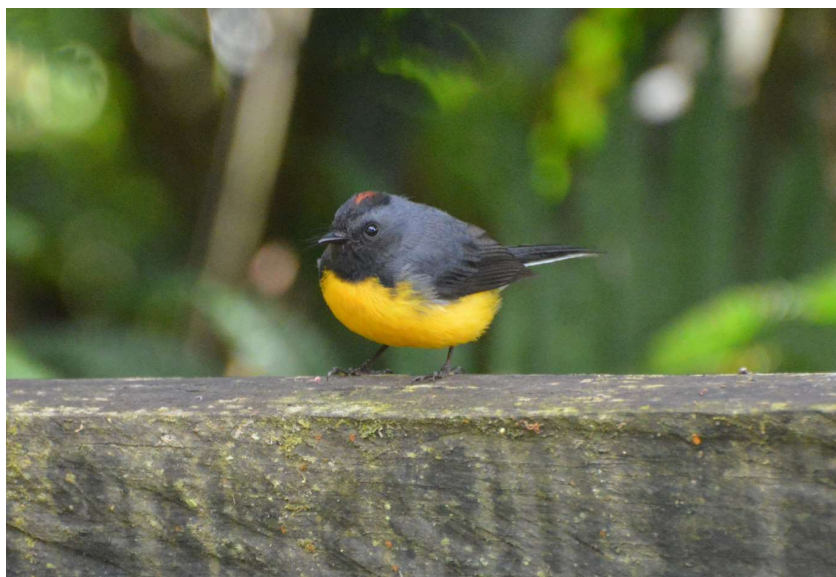
The evening meal was back at the Brusquetta and, although we looked, we could not raise any owls around the town after dark. The count was now up to 189 species.

Day 8 – Saturday 7th March

Today was going to be a long day as we would be re-locating to Bambito near the Costa Rica border. It was still dark when we left the guesthouse. After about an hour of travelling we stopped for a quick cuppa. Soon we stopped to an area just off the Pan-American highway where there are some open woodlands and ricefields. The crops had been harvested and some had depressions where water had collected. There were a number of Egrets and other waterbirds. This was the one occasion we saw White Ibis. The woodlands gave us Isthmian Wren, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Black & White Warbler, Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet and Summer Tanager, whilst Yellow-crowned Amazon Parrot was a flyover. We stopped in several other similar locations and here we saw Black-necked Stilt, Wood Stork, Black-crowned Night Heron and Groove-billed Ani. We also had a fleeting view of a female Lance-tailed Manakin, an Eastern Meadowlark on a wire fence and Pale-eyed Pygmy Tyrant.

Soon we were back on the road. We stopped a couple of times for lunch and fuel, but other than a Brown-throated Parakeet, the journey was a bit barren.

We arrived at the Faranda Bambito hotel in mid-afternoon. This was a late change to the hotel, but it was perfectly good. The room was well appointed, clean and comfortable with a nice view over the gardens. The bathroom was a little small though. We checked-in and had a comfort break, but Kilo suggested that we get a start on the following day by scouting out the Los Quetzales Trail. This is in the Baru Volcano National Park near Cerra Punta and is only a 15-20 minute drive from the hotel. We parked up by the small cabin and walked up the fairly steep rocky trail through the cloud forest. Kilo was checking the trees, not just for birds, but also to see if they were fruiting. Quetzals feed on wild Avocados and these were our most likely places to spot the birds. To our disappointment the Quetzals were not home and Kilo only heard distant calls. However, the best trees were actually near where we had parked the Landcruiser. Despite the lack of Quetzal there were plenty of birds around, many of which were new for the trip. Hairy and Acorn Woodpecker, Black-faced Solitaire, Slate-throated Redstart, Lesser Violetear and White Throated Mountain-gem Hummingbirds were the stand outs. We also added a couple of new Woodcreepers and Flycatchers and Tanagers.



Slate-throated Redstart

The evening meal was back at the hotel as Kilo was tired and just wanted to rest, so after a quick run through of the list (now up to 229 species) he left for his accommodation and we were left to choose from the menu up to a fixed amount. As with the rest of the trip beers were to be paid for by us.

Day 9 – Sunday 8th March

It was another early start, so we had arranged for a breakfast box to be collected from reception. It was still quite dark when we arrived at the bottom of the trail and parked up. We would end up monitoring the trees, that had been picked out by Kilo the previous evening, for several hours. Every so often Kilo would chase off trying to locate birds from their calls. But no Quetzal!

The lack of Quetzal did not mean that there wasn't birds to spot and slowly but surely the list climbed. Rufous-collared Sparrow were scratching around our feet and several Warblers, Euphonia and Chlorophonia were also seen in the garden below the avocados. Opposite were some flowering bushes and these were attracting Volcano, Lesser Violetear, White-throated Mountain-gem and Stripe-tailed Hummingbirds. A Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush also put in an appearance.

All the time whilst we were sat at the bottom of the trail, we were being greeted by locals who were driving up the trail in their 4x4's. There are vegetable gardens in the clearing at the top of the trail and these were being harvested. Eventually Kilo decided that the Quetzals were not going to show, so we also drove up the trail. This was very bumpy and we were thrown in all directions. Several years ago I had surgery on my neck and still have several screws, plates and bits of plastic installed. This means that jolts like this and staring into high trees is both tiring and quite painful. However, this was all forgotten as we pulled into the clearing and Kilo exclaimed "Quetzal" and pointed at a tall tree in front of us. I had not even had a chance to pull out my camera before we had the beautiful sight of a fully-plumaged breeding male fly across to the forest, closely followed by another.

Kilo stated that he thought these males were courting a nearby female and started to play their calls in the hope that they would reply and he could locate them. After about 15 mins he had a male in the scope. The view was somewhat dark and high up, but it was a Quetzal – the main target for the trip. Photography was challenging, but sometimes you just have to give up on this and simply enjoy seeing the birds without staring through a viewfinder. Eventually all three birds, including the female, were seen. As a bonus we also had a good but distant view of the Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, another highly desirable species.



Resplendent Quetzal – photo by Kilo

We picked off a few more species on the trail, such as Dark Pewee, Mountain Thrush and Yellow-bellied Siskin before going for lunch and a siesta in the hotel. However, the gardens at the hotel also produced Black Phoebe and Blue & White Swallow. Before leaving on our afternoon drive we had a few minutes walking around the car park and checking out the surrounding bushes and flowering plants. Scintillant Hummingbird showed itself.

One of the street signs seemed to be suggesting that we should blow a trumpet at any falcons we saw.



We drove up to about 1800m and parked up on a road with a very steep drop off on one side. This meant that we were on a level with the tree tops and this was good for my neck. Chestnut-capped Brush-finch, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and White-throated Thrush were called and responded, whilst we had great views of several very curious Red-headed Barbets. Further around the road a group of Band-tailed Pigeon and a Maroon-chested Ground-dove were picked out.

Returning to the hotel a Green Hermit and a Large-footed Finch were the last two to be added to the list. Again we ate at the hotel as it was Sunday and restaurants in the nearby town would be shut. The list had now reached 256.

Day 10 – Monday 9th March

Today we would be visiting La Amistad Park. This straddles the border between Panama and Costa Rica. It was only a 15 minute drive, which would leave us enough time to have breakfast in the hotel and still arrive before the gates opened at 8am. By the gates is a small footbridge crossing a fast flowing stream. As we still had 10 minutes before we could enter we checked out the surrounding area and soon spotted an American Dipper on the rocks (pictured below) and several Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers.

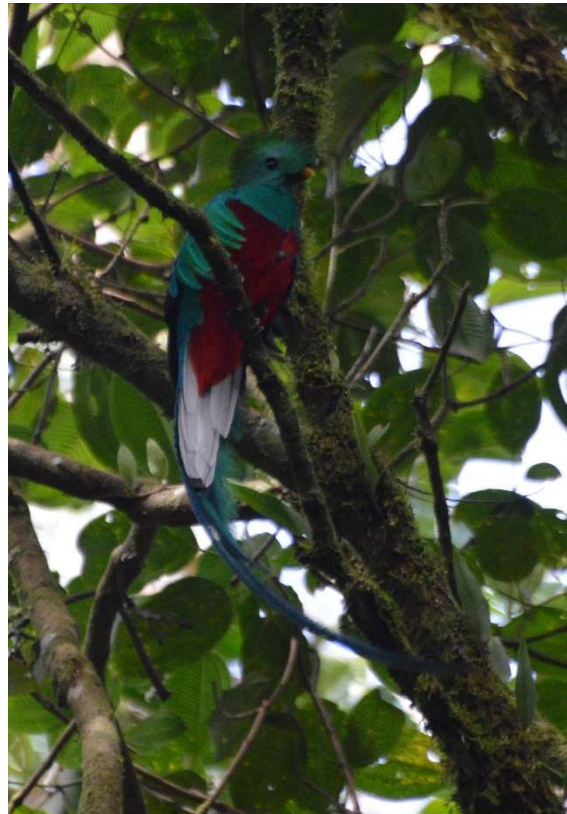


Presently a ranger arrived and opened up. The trail had two strips of concrete at wheel-width, so this was a nice comfortable drive with up no strain on my neck. At the top of the trail is a ranger station, toilet block and picnic area with several footpaths radiating out like the spokes of a wheel. Kilo chose one at the back, which gently sloped upwards through some of the thickest areas. A call attracted his attention and he told us to stay put and placed his speaker on a log laid over a shallow ditch. Soon we could detect movement from a tiny, somewhat black shadow. This was quite fast moving and never in full view, but eventually we could pick out that it was a Silvery-fronted Tapaculo. The silver front is a narrow stripe running from the top of the beak and over the top of the eye and is very reminiscent of a wren. This trail did have a few mosquitos and we did get bitten.

Further along the path a mixed flock came through and this was quite productive. Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike, Tufted Flycatcher, Collared Redstart and various other warblers and flycatchers were all around us. Eventually they moved on and we returned to the ranger station to try another trail in the hope of catching sight of the Prong-billed Barbet. I was just starting to say “stay on the concrete” when Sue stepped on some very soggy ground and promptly sank up to her knee. She could not get out on her own and as we pulled one of her shoes came off.

This was retrieved and washed off at the toilet block. Other species seen on this trail included Buffy Tufted-cheek, Ruddy Treerunner, Golden-crowned Warbler and Black-capped Flycatcher.

The Prong-billed Barbet did show, but was completely overshadowed by the number of Resplendent Quetzals that we came across. At least 4 males and 3 females. One of the rangers showed us a nest site that was being excavated. There was small wood chippings all over the floor. This tree was right by the side of the footpath and they were considering closing this path to avoid disturbance, but we managed to have really good views of the occupants. Talamanca Hummingbird was also seen feeding on some bright yellow tube-like flowers.



Another tree being used for nesting is about halfway down the trail and stands about 5metres from the side. This has several holes in it, some of which may have been made by Woodpeckers, but 2 males and a female were in attendance and quite close, although mostly in quite shaded spots. At one time all three were on the same perch.

Our Quetzal-itch had definitely been scratched, so after picking up Golden-bellied Flycatcher and Grey-breasted Wood-wren we returned to the town for lunch and afterwards a siesta at the hotel.

In mid-afternoon we drove to the Volcan Ponds. The idea was that we would walk the footpaths in the shade until it became a little cooler and we would then check out the ponds and the more open areas around the lavish houses built nearby.

The woods were quite quiet, although we had good views of a Collared Trogon through the scope and Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Rufous-breasted Wren showed well. An open pool was inhabited by American Coot, Common Gallinule, Northern and Wattled Jacana, with a few Blue-winged Teal. However, the hardest to spot was a Masked Duck. This was half-submerged right by the edge of the reeds. Its plumage camouflaged it very well and even through the scope it was very difficult to pick out its shape.

As the sun started to drop a Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Orange-billed Nightingale Thrush, Bright-rumped Attila and Scaled Pigeon appeared in the woods and we disturbed a Roadside Hawk from its roost.

At the hotel we had a few beers prior to our meal and updated the list - 288 species.

Day 11 – Tuesday 10th March

Kilo joined us at the Bambito for breakfast. This would be the last day with our new found friend. After driving us to “Birding Paradise” near Cuestra Piedra, Kilo would be driving back to Panama City with our large bags. This would take several hours, whilst we sat in comfort being looked after by Misael and Charlie at Misael’s home. This is situated in a small protected area of forest and has several suspended nectar feeders and bird tables with fruit and seeds. This attracts a large number of Hummingbirds and other fantastic birds. After the past few days of being on foot birding it was just nice and relaxing to sit and have all these Hummingbirds zoom around your head. I think Charlie was a bit put-out by our desire to just sit and did manage to coerce us into having a little walk around the grounds. To be fair we did get a good close look at a male Blue-capped Manakin, but we were soon back at the feeders.

Over a simple, but delicious meal, we chatted to the other guests, but still kept an eye on the feeders. A Painted Bunting broke me off mid-mouthful as did a Purple-crowned Fairy.



We were due to be picked up in a taxi and driven to David airport for the flight back to Panama City, but we still managed to pick up one or two more species whilst waiting. Yellow-crowned & Spot-crowned Euphonia, Bronzey Cowbird, White-browed Gnatcatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher were added as were two final Hummingbirds :- Blue-throated Goldentail and Charming Hummingbird. Below are a few images of the species to be seen at Birding Paradise.





Golden-hooded Tanager



Lesson's Motmot



Male White-necked Jacobin



Female Flame-rumped Tanager



Buff-streaked Saltator



Rufous-tailed Hummingbird



Snowy-bellied Hummingbird

The drive to David airport was uneventful and we were quite comfortable in the air-conditioned departure lounge. Being unaccompanied we struggled with the announcements as they were only in Spanish, but a helpful American lady stepped in and we were soon on-board. Even though it was only a 40 minute flight, the crew still managed to serve drinks and snacks before we started our descent.

Jose Carlos had picked up our bags from Kilo and was waiting in the arrivals area as we disembarked the aircraft. We were soon back at the Summit Rainforest Resort and we took advantage of the buffet before climbing exhausted into our bed – it had been a long day even though we had spent much of it on our backsides !

Day 12 Wednesday 11th March

Today was our last day in Panama and as we were not on tour we had intended on having a lie-in, however the Howler Monkeys had other ideas. At 6am they started to call and once these guys have woken you from your slumber you are not going to drop off again.

We had a 1 hour extension to normal check out time, so we had the room until 1pm. First we had breakfast on the terrace next to the swimming pool. The sun was already strong and anything in the trees behind the pool were in silhouette, so I decided to go for a short walk through the forest to the Butterfly House. I knew this would be locked, so would be returning the same way. Little was showing itself other than a pair of Rufous-breasted Wrens. On my way back I paused at the highest point and sat on one of the benches. It was there that I noticed a Sloth about 20ft up in a tree. On closer inspection it was clear that she had a small baby.

As I sat there she slowly started to descend down a liana and was soon only about 8ft from the ground and was in clear view. What a shame I had not brought my camera !

We checked out and went back to the pool terrace with our luggage. This was to be our position for the next 5 hours, although I did no back and take a few photos of the Sloths. A late lunch with a couple of Balboas was our last before Jose Carlos arrived at 6pm to take us to the airport. As we left

the hotel we noticed a Snail Kite by the entrance pond – this brought the holiday final total to 298 species seen. Other species were seen just by Kilo and several more that were just heard. These were not counted.

The traffic was reasonably light, so the journey to the PTY airport only took about an hour. We were still over 3 hours before flight time, so leisurely made our way through bag drop, security and other checks. The time went surprisingly quickly and we boarded about 9.30pm. We returned home via Paris on Air France. Due to the late departure this meant that we effectively got a “free” day at the end of our holiday to relax.

The flight was somewhat bumpy due to bad weather over the Atlantic. This turbulence meant that for much of the flight we were in our seats with the seat belt lights on. However 4 films and an “OK” meal kept me busy and we arrived a little earlier than our expected time.

Our transfer time before the next flight was scheduled to be just a little over an hour, so the extra time was helpful and we made our way through CDG easily and arrived at our gate with plenty of time. Boarding commenced as normal, but just as the priority passengers were strapping themselves in, the flight crew discovered a problem and we had to disembark. The problem must have been relatively easy to fix as we were boarding again within the hour and after a short uneventful flight we were soon in Manchester and on our way home.

Birdingpanama.com recommends using “The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide” by George R. Angehr. This aligns with the checklist issued to all participants of the tour. This checklist contains all 1026 species recorded within Panama (including those with just a single record). Each day Kilo would sit down with us and we would tick off each species we had seen that day.

Despite the recommendation, I chose not to get this guide. In 2024 my good friend David Alker, a talented bird illustrator who specialised in Hummingbirds, passed away and his widow Norma gave me his 1989 copy of “A Guide to the Birds of Panama” by Robert S. Ridgely and John A. Gwynne, Jr. It was because I had this guide that I started looking into visiting Panama in the first place. It is quite out-of-date taxonomically, doesn’t show all species on the plates and the plates are split into two sections with similar species on different pages. This made using the guide quite difficult, but in some ways it made me look more closely into each species/sub-species. It was to honour Dave’s memory that I took his guide with me.



In memory of David Alker 18/06/1944 – 02/05/2024