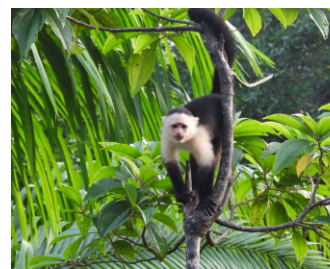
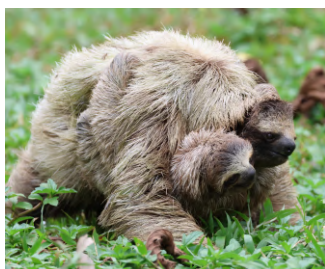


Western Panama: Tranquilo Bay | April 7–14, 2024 | Trip Report | by Rick Weiman



With host Rick Weiman, local guides Roger Morales and Reinaldo Rodriguez and participants Jay, Natalie, Kay, George, Dave, Elena, Nancy and Sandy.



Sun., Apr. 7

Welcome to Tranquilo Bay

After meeting everyone at breakfast at the Radisson Panama Canal Hotel, our short, 15-minute shuttle bus ride to the airport was uneventful. The 45-minute flight from Panama City to Boca del Toro on Air Panama was on time and provided us beautiful views of the Caribbean Sea and the many islands off the Panamanian shore. Once at the docks, we boarded two small boats for our half-hour ride to Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge on the island of Bastimentos, our home for the remainder of the tour. Along the way, we saw spotted several soaring magnificent Frigatebirds and a few Laughing Gulls.



Upon our arrival at Tranquilo Bay, we were met by Jay, one of the owners, who led us along the boardwalk trail to the main lodge. We had a brief orientation by husband-and-wife co-owners Jim and Renee and then enjoyed a wonderful Panamanian chicken stew with rice and salad in the lodge's dining room. After lunch we birded on the veranda with our local guide for the week, Roger Morales. The lodge has banana feeders and hummingbird feeders that attract the birds from the surrounding forest.

Tennessee Warblers and Bananaquits were the most common birds feeding on the bananas, and a male Shining Honeycreeper flew in as a large flock of Purple Martins circled above us. We then were led to our spacious cabins and had time to relax before a brief, late-afternoon walk around the garden trails.

Around 3:30 we met up with Roger to tour the property. At Rick's cabin, he pointed out several small lesser sac-winged bats roosting under the wooden eaves. We then approached a large miconia bush full of purple berries and apparently manakins too, as we saw both male and female Red-capped and Golden-collared Manakins displaying and feeding in the bush. Roger got excited when several White-crowned Pigeons flew into a cecropia tree as they are apparently only on the island a short period of time every year. We had beautiful views of several male Scarlet Tanagers in their bright red breeding plumage, getting ready to migrate north in a few weeks. Dave spotted our first of several brown-throated three-toed sloths of the trip high in a cecropia tree. A bit later we found a mother sloth on the ground with her baby. We watched as she slowly walked to a nearby cecropia tree and climbed to the top for some fresh leaves. Soon junior separated from his mom and started feeding on leaves on his own. We then climbed the 60-foot tower that overlooks the bay and the garden and witnessed Blue-headed and Red-lored Parrots flying by us to roost for the night. Other birds spotted were several Montezuma Oropendolas, Tawny-crested Tanagers and a Black-crowned Tityras.

Around 6:15 we met at the lodge dining area and bar for welcome drinks, appetizers and our first species checklist of the trip, a pattern we would follow throughout the tour. We also met Reinaldo Ramirez, a guide at Mt. Totumas, who was visiting Tranquillo Bay for some cross-training and would be spending the week with us. Dinner was a delicious feast of skewered shrimp in a coconut-based sauce with lemon pasta. Prior to heading off to the cabins, we were visited on the veranda by a Derby's woolly opossum who was also a fan of the free bananas.

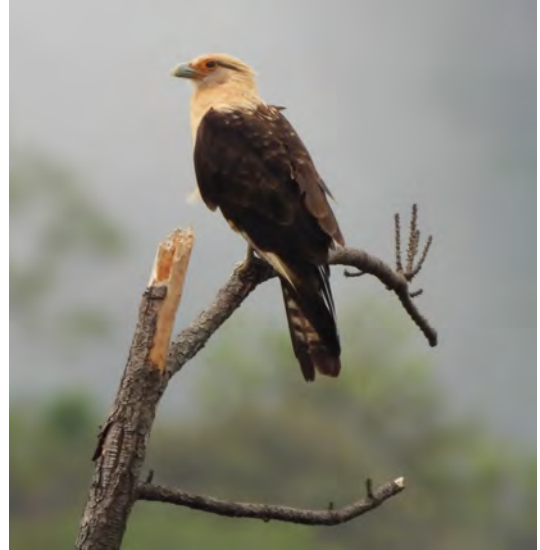
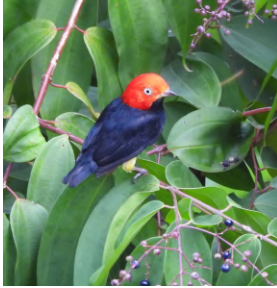


Mon., Apr. 8 Punta Róbal Road | Palo Seco Protection Forest | Continental Divide

Another early breakfast today as our plan was to depart by boat for the mainland at Punta Róbal. Before boarding the boats, we spotted three Green Ibises perched in a tree. As we motored across the bay, Royal Terns and Mangrove Swallows circled and soared nearby. Our boat captain, Alvaro, spotted some Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, so we slowed to watch them swim close to the boats, seemingly to get a better look at us. Arriving at the dock, we observed more Royal and a few Sandwich Terns perched on the pylons and buoys, and a Brown Pelican flew by. We climbed into our spacious coaster bus to explore the road from Punta Róbal inland, which winds through coastal wetland and low elevation forest habitats. We made frequent stops to walk the road, an impressive 68 species along the way. Some highlights were Gray-headed Chachalaca, Buff-throated Saltator, Yellow-headed and Crested Caracaras and an Olive-crowned Yellowthroat. Another stop further inland yielded White-lined, Scarlet-rumped and Palm Tanagers as well as a Pied Puffbird.

Later in the morning we observed a large kettle of Mississippi Kites followed by another kettle of Turkey and Black Vultures. Picking through the hundreds of birds, we also noted a few Broad-winged Hawks.

We then headed to higher elevations, going from sea level to 3,500 feet into the Palo Seco Protection Forest. We spotted a perched White Hawk on the way up and stopped for photos. Climbing higher we entered a section of forest shrouded in mist and a light rain started to fall. We had lunch in the van and then added Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Blue-chested Hummingbird and a Mistletoe Tyrannulet. On the way back, we stopped at a bridge named after a local naturalist, Willy Mazu, and had excellent looks at Torrent Tyrannulets feeding in the stream below alongside a Black Phoebe. Perched in the trees we found a pair of Crested Guans and Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans. Another highlight was a tree full of Chestnut-headed Oropendolas and their hanging basket-style nests. Then it was back to the boats for our return to the lodge followed by a rest and then a delicious dinner of local chicken and a passion fruit pie for dessert.



Tues., Apr. 9 Tranquilo Bay Eco Adventure Lodge | Snorkel Trip

On this morning, we met at the tower at 6:30 for some early morning birding, then after breakfast we walked the jungle trails around the lodge. Unfortunately, mother nature had other ideas as a steady rain that started overnight continued throughout the morning. Several of us sheltered on Sandy and Nancy's porch to watch the activity at the "magic tree," the miconia bush planted by the owners over 20 years ago. In addition to the two manakins seen previously, we found Short-billed Pigeons, a male White-winged Becard and a Swainson's Thrush. After breakfast we birded from the veranda, spotting over 30 species including Shining Honeycreepers, both manakins, a White-necked Jacobin and a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher.

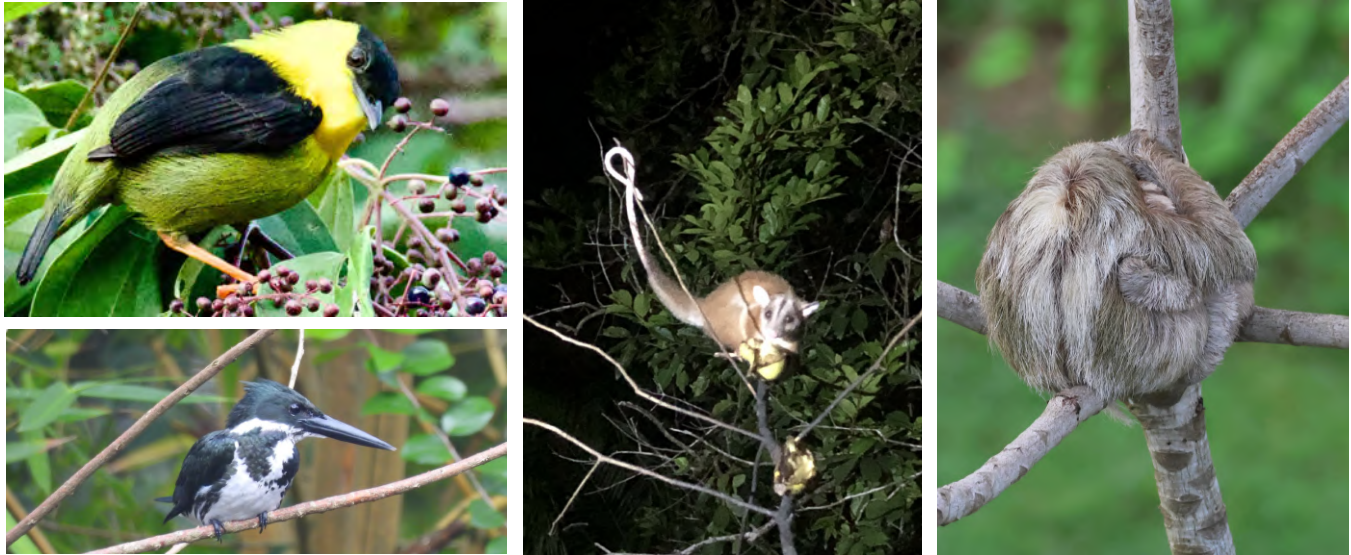
After lunch most of the group went snorkeling on a reef about a 10-minute boat ride from the lodge. Colorful fish were everywhere including wrasses, small snappers and butterfly and angel fish. Equally impressive were the many healthy brain corals, sea fans, anemones, sponges and different species of small jellyfish.

Then it was back at the magic tree before dinner where we added 18 species including very close looks at Tawny-crested and Plain-colored Tanagers, White-vented Euphonias, a female Blue Dacnis who was just as stunning as the male, and both tityras. We reviewed our checklist over cocktails and appetizers and headed to bed soon after dinner as we had another early day tomorrow.

Wed., Apr. 10 Punta Róbal Road | Fortuna Forest Reserve | Palo Seco Protection Forest

After a nice buffet breakfast with fresh fruit and juice, we cruised to the mainland at Punta Róbal and drove to the Fortuna Forest Reserve on the Pacific side of the Continental Divide. Of course, we had to stop on Punta Róbal Road to scan the fields and wetlands along the way. A highlight was watching a pair of Crimson-fronted Parakeets excavating a nest cavity in a palm tree with a pair of Black-cheeked Woodpeckers above them working on their own nest hole. We also added Purple Gallinule, Gray-capped Flycatcher and Golden-hooded Tanagers.

Driving further upslope, we stopped at the Fortuna Reservoir where Flame-colored Tanagers, Blue-and-white Swallows, two soaring Swallow-tailed Kites and a cooperative Rufous-collared Sparrow were found. At 3,800 feet



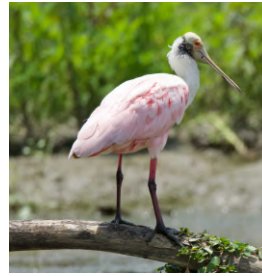
elevation we'd reached the Fortuna Forest Reserve where we did some roadside birding and had lunch. The new birds we added here are too numerous to list, but highlights included multiple Magenta-throated Woodstars and White-tailed Emerald Hummingbirds feeding on flowers on a ridge above us, male and female Collared Trogons of the orange-bellied race that perched for photos and a Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant that teased us with its evasive, peek-a-boo behavior as we tried to get binoculars on it.

Roger and Reinaldo got very excited when a Black-thighed Grosbeak flew in and perched above us, and Rick and Sandy had great looks at a beautiful Bay-headed Tanager. Re-crossing the Continental Divide on our return, we had the opportunity to bird the Palo Seco Protection Forest on the Caribbean side of the divide that had been misted out earlier. Here we added Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Common Chlorospingus and a Slate-throated Redstart. We stopped at a gas station that is an eBird hotspot called "Supermarket Lagoon" and found a nesting colony of Western Cattle Egrets. A huge kettle of raptors included 500+ Broad-winged Hawks and several thousand Swainson's Hawks, both light and dark morphs. Once they'd gained enough elevation, the birds would stream northward in a true river of raptors – such a stunning sight!

Then it was back to the lodge by boat where we enjoyed fresh snapper in garlic sauce with coconut rice for dinner and a slice of pecan chocolate coconut pie for dessert.

Thurs., Apr. 11 Isla Popa | Tranquilo Bay Trails

After our buffet breakfast we marched down to the dock and boarded the boats for a 10-minute boat trip to nearby Isla Popa. This island is closer to the mainland than Bastimentos and some birds not found on Tranquilo Bay can be seen here such as toucans, woodcreepers and trogons. Most of the morning was spent leisurely birding by boat on the calm waters of the Popa Canal and the surrounding red mangrove forest. We had distant looks at two all-white, male Snowy Cotingas, and also spotted a Belted Kingfisher, a "Mangrove" Yellow Warbler and got a quick look at a Mangrove Cuckoo. On the island, Roger found several strawberry poison dart frogs with their bright and varied colorations. We walked up to an overlook owned by a local named Diego and birded for a bit, finding Pale-billed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Toucan, several Golden-hooded Tanagers and two very cooperative Collared Aracaris. Back at the boat, we spotted a Merlin perched in a tree as its larger cousin, a Peregrine Falcon, streaked over the boat.



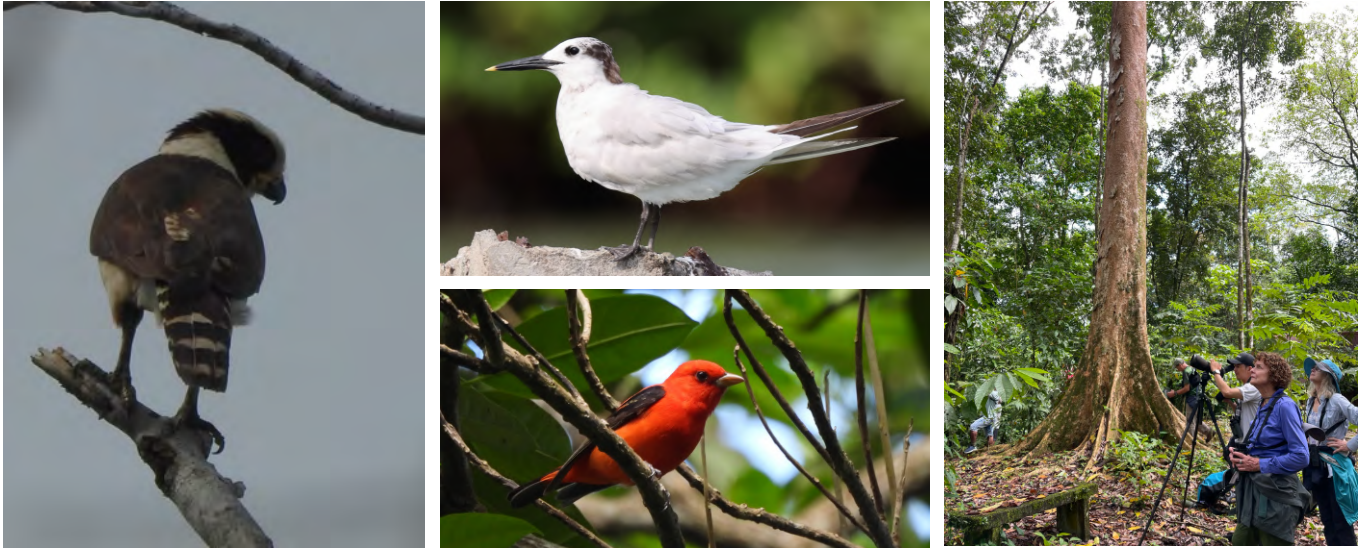
We returned to the lodge for lunch and then had a few hours to relax. Around 3:30 most of the group took a walk on the lodge trails with Roger and Reinaldo. We headed down to an area by a creek that formed a bathing pool and had amazing looks (and videos) of a male Crowned Woodnymph and a Purple-crowned Fairy bathing. The hummingbirds would hover over the water and then effortlessly dip their bodies into the pool. A female Golden-collared Manakin and a handsome Chestnut-sided Warbler also stopped by for a bath. On the way up the trail towards the lodge, we added White-flanked Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird and Long-billed Gnatwren, and we heard an Acadian Flycatcher call. Another wonderful dinner followed and then we all retired to our rooms to rest up for an early adventure tomorrow.

Fri., Apr. 12 Snyder Canal | Changuinola River

After breakfast we boarded the boats to explore Snyder Canal. We headed towards Isla Colón during a beautiful sunrise and 40 minutes later entered the Snyder Canal, but not before two Brown Pelicans glided next to the boats. The canal was constructed in the late 1800s for local banana and fruit exporters, providing a shortcut for boats between the Changuinola River and the old port of Almirante. The canal is narrow, bordered by jungle and fields on both sides, and now remains open due to natural tidal flow. We tied both boats together and slowly started our birding adventure down the seven-mile canal.

Northern Jacanas, a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and three kingfishers: Green, Amazon and Ringed were viewed from the boats. We grounded the boats and scanned a field for regionally endemic Nicaraguan Seed-Finches, and we all got good scope views of the thick bill of a perched male. Several of the group got looks at a Mourning Warbler, and a Common Tody-Flycatcher flitted about in a large ficus tree before we got back in the boats. Other highlights of the 62 species seen or heard in the canal included Scarlet-rumped and Blue-Gray Tanagers, Red-throated Ant-Tanager and Northern-barred and Streak-headed Woodcreepers. We also saw emerald-colored green basilisk lizards, both a male and a female, and a family of sloths literally hanging out together in a cecropia tree.

We soon entered the main channel of the Changuinola River and began our slow journey upriver, scanning the mudflats. Our first ducks of the tour were spotted including Blue-winged Teal, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and Lesser Scaup. Common and Purple Gallinules were patrolling the mudflats and a Least Bittern flushed but was only seen by our boat captain, Alvaro, who also spotted a secretive Pinnated Bittern and we all at got good looks



of his neck and head as he hid in the tall reeds. Other birds observed were several Limpkins, including one eating a large snail, two Snail Kites and a pair of Roseate Spoonbills. Around noon we tied up the boats and enjoyed a wonderful picnic lunch under the shade of an enormous ficus tree along the river. After lunch, we explored the area finding three species of oriole: Baltimore, Black-Cowled and Yellow-tailed. On the beach by the river mouth we spotted several shorebirds including Sanderling, Spotted Sandpiper, and Semipalmated, Black-bellied and Collared Plovers.

We had planned to take a trip out from the river mouth to Bird Island where Magnificent Frigate Birds, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Brown Boobies nest. Unfortunately, the winds were blowing and the sea was too rough to chance the trip. We were rewarded on the way back to Tranquillo Bay with a Brown Booby sighting, and more Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns and Laughing Gulls resting on pilings. One of the boats also had a Parasitic Jaeger fly right in front of them. After our long day on the water, we returned to the lodge to relax with a few cocktails and a delicious snapper ceviche appetizer as we reviewed our checklist and enjoyed another wonderful dinner.

Sat., Apr. 13 Green Acres Chocolate Farm | Tranquillo Bay Trails | Night Walk

After breakfast, the group met at the boat dock for a 15-minute ride to the Green Acres Chocolate Farm on the mainland. The owner, Gary, greeted us at the dock and served a refreshing, chocolate-infused iced tea and some dark chocolate flavored with coconut and peanut butter. After we listened to his short presentation about his chocolate production and reforestation work in the area, we had the opportunity to buy some chocolate products, then spent over two hours birding the trails around the farm.

The birding in the dark forest was challenging, but we came away with several new sightings such as Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Slaty-tailed Trogon and a Bright-rumped Attila. We had distant looks at a flock of Black-chested Jays and heard the loud calls of mantled howler monkeys before Alvaro found a male in the scope for us. As there had been a drought, we were happy the recent rains seemed to have rejuvenated the population of green-and-black poison dart frogs and Talamanca striped rocket frogs. Our guides also found a Stripe-throated Hermit and we watched it constructing its nest until it was time to go. While boarding the boats for the return



trip, two Squirrel Cuckoos popped up for us, our first of the tour. We headed back through the mangroves and spotted several large red starfish visible in the shallow clear waters.

We had lunch at the lodge and then had the afternoon off. A few of us did a little snorkeling off the dock and spotted some snappers, parrot fish, sea fans and sea cucumber. Dave, Kay and Elena headed back to the hummingbird pool and again saw both of the bathing hummingbirds along with a pair of Tawny-crested Tanagers taking a dip. In the late afternoon several of the group joined Rick and Reinaldo and birded the gardens again and climbed up the platform that overlooked the bay. From this vantage point we were above the many miconia shrubs whose berries attracted honeycreepers, manakins and migrant warblers, with several stunning Bay-breasted Warblers mixed in with a few male Scarlet Tanagers.

Then it was back to the lodge for some cold Balboa beers, gin and tonics and our final checklist of the tour. We tallied our sightings and were quite happy with our list of 222 species either seen or heard. After the checklist, each of us shared our favorite birds and memories of the trip. It was a tie between Red-capped Manakin and Purple-crowned Fairy for favorite bird of the tour, with White Hawk, Collared Trogon, Green Honeycreeper and Snowy Cotinga also getting votes. Favorite memories and places visited included the unforgettable Snyder Canal / Changuinola River day on the water, the Red-capped and Golden-collared Manakins displaying in the gardens, the hummingbird bathing pool and just birding around the lodge gardens and seeing so many beautiful birds right next to our cabins.

But we weren't done yet as we had a scheduled night walk with Roger and Reinaldo on the lodge grounds. We had to avoid the many busy leaf cutter ants that were using the sidewalks as an ant superhighway. We came across a Hoffman's two-toed sloth hanging directly over our heads and found a Crowned Woodnymph and a Boat-billed Flycatcher sleeping. By a small pond we found a large Central American bullfrog, a small spectacled caiman, and several red-eyed tree frogs. We tried to call in an owl and heard a Mottled Owl reply, but it never got close enough to see.

Sun., Apr. 14 Departure Day

It was hard to say goodbye to this remarkable island lodge. The Tranquilo Bay staff, our wonderful local guides and the owners Jim, Renee and Jay treated us like old friends. After breakfast and some final veranda birding, we



said goodbye to Dave, Elena, Kay, George and Reinaldo who were departing for the Mt. Totumas extension part of the tour. The rest of us boarded the boats an hour later and headed to the mainland for our short flight back to Panama City. We checked into our Radisson Panama Canal Hotel near the airport where the rest of the group had dinner together.

Photos: Group (Rick Weiman - RW), Three-toed Sloth (Mary Simmons - MS), White-throated Capuchin monkey (RW), White-vented Euphonia (RW), Collared Aracari (MS), Black-bellied Whistling Duck (RW), Green (or Emerald) Basilisk (RW), Eastern Meadowlark (RW), Shining Honeycreeper (MS), Kay & George (RW), Collared Trogon (RW), Sandy & Nancy (RW), Collared Aracari (RW), Snorkel Trip (RW), Red-capped Manakin (RW), Yellow-headed Caracara (RW), Golden-collared Manakin (MS), Amazon Kingfisher (female) (RW), Derby's Woolly Opossum (RW), Sloth from tower (Kay Simmons - KS), Canal to Changuinola River (MS), Yellow-tailed Oriole (Reinaldo), Roseate Spoonbill (MS), Limpkin (MS), Laughing Falcon (RW), Sandwich Tern (RW), Birding the Chocolate Farm (MS), "Hollywood" mangroves on way to Isla Popa (MS), White-crowned Pigeons (RW), Bay-breasted Warbler (RW), Black-cheeked Woodpecker (MS), Tranquilo Bay EcoResort Boat Launch (MS), Resplendent Quetzal (MS), Scarlet-thighed Dacnis (MS), Rufous-tailed Hummingbird nest (RW)