

Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness | March 9-20, 2024 | Trip Report | by Bryan Shirley



With guide Bryan Shirley & local guide Gary with 6 participants: Beth, Diane, Darren, Dennis, Brian, and Gary.



Sat., Mar. 9

Maihaca River Boat Trip | Rufous-Crab Hawks

Some of our group unfortunately had a flight cancellation Miami and were not present for today's activities, but those that were present started early and drove out of the city to the east. We reached the Maihaca River and started our boat trip a bit after sunrise. Birding by boat is always fun, and this time even more so since it was our first day of the trip! Every bird we saw was new and exciting! We had 4 species of Kingfisher, Variable Chachalaca, Green-tailed Jacamar, and lots of others. Perhaps the highlight of the trip was seeing the bizarre looking Hoatzins – we saw 18 of them throughout the morning. After a few hours on the river, we were ready for breakfast. Our boat guide had a wonderful breakfast ready for us at his house. We had a Little Cuckoo show up during breakfast as well!

As we made our way back toward Georgetown we made a couple of stops to see Rufous Crab Hawks - mangrove specialist endemic to the coast of northern South America. A stop along the Georgetown Sea wall produced a good variety of shorebirds and herons. A flock of 30 Scarlet Ibis was there as well – a lifer for some of the group. The remaining part of the group arrived this evening in time for dinner. Of course, disappointed to have missed a the day here, but happy to finally be in Guyana and excited for our trip to the interior of the country tomorrow.



Sun., Mar. 10

Kaieteur Falls & Orange-breasted Falcons | Night birding: Potoos & Spectacled Owl

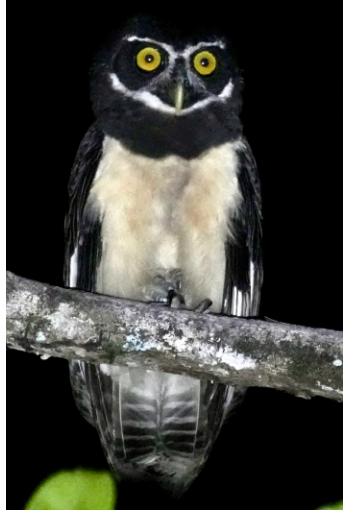
We had an early morning flight, but we had a bit of time to bird around the lodge before we left. A Plain-bellied Emerald had a favorite perch in the garden and a pair of Red-shouldered Macaws landed in one of the palm trees. Our flight to Kaieteur Falls took us about an hour. When we landed, we met our guide and headed into the forest. Before long we were at the Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock lek. This gorgeous member of the cotinga family has a scattered distribution across northern South America, but the stronghold is Guyana and Suriname. When we arrived at the lek a female was present, which got the males excited. They put on quite a show chasing each other around the area. We watched them for a while and took a lot of photos, then continued onto the waterfall. Kaieteur Falls is one of the largest waterfalls in the world. It has a single drop of 741 feet, more than 4 times that of Niagra. The falls were spectacular and while we were taking photos of the scenery, we had a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons fly past! This is a very rare and local species and was new for almost the entire group. We were also all very keen to see the Golden Rocket Frog and after a bit of searching found a couple. This tiny frog lives in puddles in the leaves of a large bromeliad found around Kaieteur. The bromeliad is only found in a small distribution on the plateau around the falls so we were excited to find them.

After another short flight we arrived in the village of Surama. Since our guide Gary wasn't able to fit in plane with us and was going by van, we had a new guide for this afternoon. He was a high school student, and it was fun to learn about the programs that they have in place here to help students prepare for good jobs as guides. After lunch it was extremely hot, but we were all excited to be birding so some of us did an optional walk into the forest. We were rewarded with our first Painted Parakeets, Cayenne Jays, and Marail Guan. In the late afternoon we birded a few areas around the town. Our guide, Craig, knew where a Great Potoo and Common Potoo were roosting, and they made for great photos. After dark we were treated to a wonderful Spectacled Owl.

Mon., Mar. 11

Capuchinbird | Night birding: White-winged Potoo

This morning, we started back in the forest on the Borro Borro Trail. Screaming Pihans were living up to their names and calling all around the forest. We heard the strange call of a Capuchinbird and before long had several of them surrounding us. What an awesome bird! The call is one of the weirdest of any bird and sounds something like a sick cow. They are nearly endemic to the the Guyanas and Suriname and such a strange looking bird – it was a highlight for sure! We also had a Rufus-winged Ground-Cuckoo calling fairly close to us, but they are usually tricky to see and this one gave us the slip without ever showing itself. Gary arrived at the lodge with our luggage in the mid-morning and Craig headed off to school. We spent a bit more time on the Borro Borro



trail until the heat sent us back to the lodge for a siesta. A few of the other goodies from this morning included several Chestnut Woodpeckers, Great Jacamar, Black Nunbird, and Blue-throated Piping-Guans.

After our afternoon siesta we drove and birded along the road. There is really only one road from Gerogetown into the interior but there was not a lot of traffic so it is good birding. We had a cooperative pair of Green-tailed Jacamar, a Guianan Puffbird, and good views of a long-time nemesis bird of Bryan's – Cream-colored Woodpecker. After dark we found a White-winged Potoo and a Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl.

Tues., Mar. 12 **Suruma to Atta Lodge**

Today we birded up the main road from Suruma. We had a nice mixed flock that included Fulvous-crested, Blue-Gray, Palm, Spotted, Yellow-backed, and Paradise Tanagers! In the small amount of water still near the road we had a Rufescent Tiger-Heron and Green Ibis. A couple of Red-fanned Parrots were a treat. We did a walk into the forest on the Harpy Eagle Trail. Overall, it was very quiet, but we had a very close view of a Guianan Toucanet on the ground!

We had planned on one more night at Suruma, but due to an issue with rooms we ended up going to Atta one day early. After our siesta, we said goodbye to Suruma and birded our way up the road towards Atta. At a nearly dry river crossing we picked up a few new birds – a pair of Guianan Streaked-Antwren and a Black-chinned Antbird were in the low trees near the river. We also had a Coraya Wren make a brief appearance right next to us. We arrived at the lodge just at dark and got settled into the rooms before dinner.

Wed., Mar. 13 **Atta Rainforest Lodge | Canopy Walkway**

We woke up excited to be birding the forest around Atta Lodge. We birded just around the lodge a bit as it was getting light. A Spix's Guan was perched near the lodge and several species of parrots were flying around in the early morning light. The resident Black Curassow made an appearance – it must be used to the celebrity treatment here since it is always followed by a group of paparazzi taking photos. What a great bird! Eventually we were ready to move and headed into the forest. It was only a short walk to the canopy walkway. We spent a couple of hours there enjoying the birds in the treetops. Guianan Red-Cotinga was a highlight, and we had several Purple-throated Fruit-Crows at eye level. It is funny how normally we are on the ground straining to see into the treetops, and then this morning while on the canopy tower we had a flock of antbirds on the ground far below us that we were all trying to get a look at! Looking straight down from the tower we were able to get decent looks at Rufous-throated and White-plumed Antbirds! Once things quieted down on the tower we got



better looks at both of them on ground level. We did a walk through the forest adding Brown-bellied Stipplethroat to the list.

In the afternoon after our break, we birded along the road. We had a few Red-throated Caracaras taking a dust bath in the road. We had a great time after dark and had Short-tailed Nighthawk, Common Potoo, Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, and a fantastic Black-banded Owl before headed back to the lodge for dinner.

Thurs., Mar. 14

White-sand Forest | Rockview Lodge

This morning, we started out birding along the road from Atta Lodge. With it being so hot and dry lately, the little bit of water remaining in ponds and creeks along the road held lots of interesting birds. We got a Capped Heron, Limpkin, and Rufescent Tiger Heron at one pond. From a bridge over a small river, we had a Agami Heron – always an extremely hard bird to get a good look at. As if that wasn't enough, on the other side of the bridge we had a group of Giant Otters catching fish and eating right in front of us! It was quite a sight!

We slowly worked our way up the road, stopping and walking some of the more promising sections. A Fiery-tailed Aowlbill was a great find – through the scopes and in our pics the unique upturned bill of this tiny hummingbird. A calling Spotted Puffbird was a bit tricky to find, but once we did it stayed put for a long time allowing us great scope views and photos. A pair of Paradise Jacamar put on a show catching insects above us. In this area there are White-sand Forests. Possibly due to the lack of nutrients in the sand, the trees are a lot smaller, and it creates a very different habitat. We walked along a old trail that was once used to drive cattle from the interior to Georgetown. It was quite hot, and the birding was slow, but eventually we got good looks at Bronzy Jacamar – a specialty bird of the white sands forest.

For lunch today we stopped at a small restaurant at the junction of the road to Surama village. From there we headed down to Rockview Lodge, our home for the next few days. Once we got settled into our rooms most of us headed to the pool to cool off – it felt wonderful!

In the afternoon we birded around the lodge and the airstrip next door. It is a more open habitat than the areas we had been so far so we picked up quite a few new birds. Around the lodge we had several Burnished-Buff Tanagers and Vermillion Flycatchers. In the grassy areas at the airstrip we saw several Grassland Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks. Perhaps the highlight of the evening was the Buff-necked Ibis that were flying around the area and eventually roosting in the trees near the lodge.



Fri., Mar. 15 **Atta Lodge Road | Oxbow Lake**

We woke up to a surprise today – clouds! It was a bit cooler and was nice not having the sun beating down on us. We worked our way back up the road toward Atta Lodge. At a small pond we had a Sunbittern feeding along the water's edge. It was a loafer for several of us and always a treat to see. We had heard Variable Chachalacas several times throughout the trip, but this morning we finally got to see a couple sneaking through the trees near the pond. We had planned on birding some more White Sand Forest trails, but everytime we tried it would start to rain and send us scampering back to the van. So, we opted to bird along the road where we could have the van nearby just in case. Today we really were hoping for some cotingas. Both Spangled and Pompadour Cotingas were high on everyone's wish list for the trip, and we hadn't got either yet. As we birded along the road Plumbeous Kites were common. We had a wonderful view of a White Hawk soaring overhead. A Red-fanned Parrot sticking his head out a hole in a tree was fun. Eventually we found a fruiting tree and finally found our Cotingas! It was far but the bright colors made them easy to see, even at a distance. Both Spangled and Pompadour Cotingas were flying around and landing in fruiting tree!

After our daily siesta back at the lodge, we drove to a large oxbow lake. Along the way we picked up a White-naped Xenopsaris, which we had missed at Surama. The oxbow lake had lots of birds around. Brown-throated Parakeets were coming in to drink right near us. Pale-tipped Tyrannulet was hopping around the bushes and both White-headed Marsh Tyrant and Pied Water Tyrant were catching insects along edges of the lake. At sunset we were treated to quite a spectacle of Band-rumped and Lesser Nighthawks flying around the lake. Back at the lodge just before dinner a Tropical Screech Owl responded to our call and flew in and landed only a few feet away. It continued to call and search for the intruder all through our dinner. It was a nice ending to the day!

Sat., Mar. 16 **Rupununi Boat Trip | Bare-necked Fruit-Crow**

Today was our boat trip on the Rupununi River. With it being the end of the dry season, the river was low and required our boat drivers to navigate the sand bars. It is always fun birding by boat and today was no exception. We slowly drifted along with the current watching a variety of herons, egrets, and several species of kingfisher work along the river edges. Muscovy Ducks flew up and down the river and Pied Plovers were striking on the sand bars in the morning light. We had 3 Crestless Curassow fly across the river, but they were quite shy and disappeared the second they reached the opposite shore. On our walk into the forest, a few of us saw one more sneaking through the brush. We had great looks at Black-crested Antshrike, White-browed Antbird, and with a bit of work we all got Amazonian Black-Tyrant, a very rare bird for Guyana.



Back at the lodge a dip in the pool hit the spot during our afternoon siesta. We spent the late afternoon birding along the road toward Surama. The biggest surprise of the day was a Bare-necked Fruit-Crow Bryan found in the top of a large tree. It sat for quite a while giving us all great scope views. Gary said he hadn't seen one in this area for several years and was pretty excited, as were we all.

Sun., Mar. 17 **Giant Anteater | Sun Parakeet | Manari Ranch**

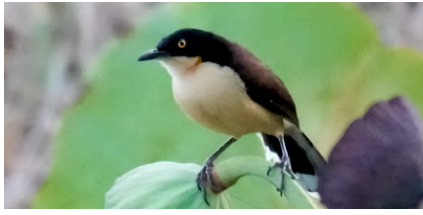
It is quite a drive from Rock View Lodge to Karasabai, so today was our earliest morning of the trip and had a 4:30 AM departure after a few cookies and coffee. That put us well out into the savannahs of southern Guyana by sunrise. At daylight we stopped to try for a key species – the Bearded Tachuri and it was easily located. Soon afterwards we had one of our best mammal sightings of the trip – the Giant Anteater. We ended up seeing 5 in total, all within a few miles of each other. We arrived at Karasabai and met with Ali, our local guide here, and started searching for the endangered Sun Parakeet. Definitely one of the most sought-after species on this tour, these striking parakeets have a very small range that includes a small piece of NE Brazil and a tiny area in Guyana. It took a couple of hours, but eventually we had 2 Sun Parakeets in the scope!

After an early lunch we headed back out to the main road and drove to a dried-up lake. There had been fires in this area too, so we were worried about being able to find our target bird here but after a short walk we located a pair of the very local Crested Doradito.

From there we drove the rest of the way to Manari Ranch, our home for the next two nights. After getting settled and taking a bit of a siesta, we walked around the gardens and along the nearby Manari River. We heard Bicolored Wrens and didn't see them at first, but eventually found them. After that they seemed to always be around the ranch house. Down at the river we had a pleasant surprise when Garey found a Giant Snipe feeding in the grass along the river! We were able to watch it through the scope and photograph it for several minutes in the fading light at sunset.

Mon., Mar. 18 **Birding along the Brazil Border | Rio Branco Antbird & Hoary-throated Spinetail**

Today we were targeting a couple more birds with extremely limited ranges – the Rio Branco Antbird and Hoary-throated Spinetail. They both can be found in the riparian habitat along the river that forms the border between Guyana and Brazil near Manari Ranch. We used three 4x4 vehicles to get there since there are only two track roads across the savannah. As we drove, we picked up a few interesting birds such as a pair of Burrowing Owl standing near their burrow and a small group of Maguari Storks and Jabiru in a nearly dry wetland. When we



reached the river, we walked down to the Rio Branco Antbird spot. We tried the call and it popped up almost immediately and gave us all fantastic views. The spinetail was a bit more difficult, but eventually after about an hour we got good views of it as well. On the way back to the ranch we stopped at a lake to look for waterbirds and got another bird that was on the wish list for several of our group – Pinnated Bittern.

After lunch and the afternoon siesta we went to JR Ranch and scanned the reservoir there. There were lots of fun birds to look through and possibly the most picturesque sunset of the trip. Once again, we were treated to several dozen Least Nighthawks catching insects over the water as dusk.

Tues., Mar. 19

Flight to Georgetown | Botanical Gardens

We had a morning flight back to Georgetown today but enjoyed one final with some easy birding around Manari Ranch. While we didn't see any new species, everyone enjoyed a bit of time enjoy the atmosphere and the "regulars" around Manari for one last time. Our flight to Georgetown went without a hitch and we were back into the city soon. Since some of the group missed the chance to bird around Georgetown on day one we were glad to have a chance to here. Garey told us of a spot we could try for a Rufous Crab Hawk behind the shell station. Unfortunately, it didn't make an appearance, but we picked up a few consolation birds like a Mangrove Cuckoo and Crane Hawk.

We stopped to check the shorebirds at the seawall and had a stunning Scarlet Ibis roosting in a Mangrove nearby. The mudflats were covered with a variety of shorebirds including a good number of White-rumped Sandpipers, Whimbrel, and both Yellowlegs.

After 10 days in the interior Cara Lodge felt luxurious and lunch was delicious. Air-conditioned rooms, hot water, and diet cokes were much appreciated! We had one more birding outing this afternoon to the Georgetown Botanical Gardens. There were lots of birds -and a bunch of good photo opportunities. One main target bird was the Blood-colored Woodpecker and we had great looks at 3. Besides being a striking red woodpecker, it is restricted to the coastline between Guyana and French Guyana so we all definitely were excited to see it. We birded there until sunset, and it was the perfect ending to the trip. Back at Cara Lodge we enjoyed one last dinner together and our final checklist.

Wed., Mar. 20

Flight to USA

This morning, we had a thankfully uneventful flight back to Miami where we said our goodbyes and headed home to start going through our notes and photos of all the wonderful birds and great memories.

Photos: Group (Bryan Shirley - BS), Red-throated Caracara (Brian Elliot - BE), Sun Parakeet (BS), Giant Anteater (BS), Red-necked Woodpecker (BE), Lesser Nighthawk (BE), Hoatzin (BS), Red Howler Monkey (BS), Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (BE), Racket-tipped Thornail (BE), Red-shouldered Macaw (BE), Capuchinbird (BE), Fasciated Antshrike (BE), Channel-billed Toucan (BE), Guianan Toucanet (BE), Yellow-rumped Cacique (BE), Giant River Otter (BS), Burnished-buff Tanager (BE), Canoe ride (BE), Weeper Capuchin (BE), Sun Parakeet (BS), Orange-backed Troupial (BE), Giant Anteater (BS), Scarlet Ibis (BS), Black-capped Donocobius (BE), Double-striped Thick-Knee? (BE), Orange-winged Parrot (BE), Little Cuckoo (BE)