

iAves de Panamá!

ABA's Panama International Conference

Mark your calendars now! Panama is a premier place to see birds, arguably the best country in Central America for viewing wildlife up close. The Canal Zone, with its forested habitats set aside as a safeguard against siltation during the Canal construction in 1908, is still a lush tropical lowland forest with both Atlantic and moister Pacific slope biomes represented. In addition, there are easily accessible dry forests, marshes and ponds, and foothill forests. Combined with our exploration of the extensive lowland tropical rainforest on both the Atlantic and Pacific slopes, this will make for a great week of birding.

Here's the skinny on the birding trips.

Gamboa Rainforest Lodge

After a long travel day we will designate our first birding day as an introduction to the more-common "garden" birds on the trails of the 340-acre Gamboa Rainforest Resort, our home for six days. For our introduction to neotropical birding, we will divide into small groups and explore the resort grounds and trails. We will have a chance to learn a core group of species the first day, as we bird in edge, aquatic, and forest habitats. In addition to listening to mostly unfamiliar sounds, we will study the locally common species, including our first hummingbird (Rufous-tailed), our first tanagers

(Palm, Blue-gray, and the impressive Crimson-backed), our first woodpeckers (Red-crowned and Cinnamon), shorebirds (Southern Lapwing), and our first antbird (Slaty Antshrike). We

will search for the more-secretive ground antbirds, such as Black-headed Antthrush, too. The largest bird family in the world, the tyrant flycatchers, will be well represented, with species such as Social Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbird. And we can expect good views of the common thrush (Clay-colored Robin), our first parrots (Orange-chinned Parakeet and Red-lore Parrot), and a variety of other common birds, including Blue Dacnis, Bananaquit, and both Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers.



Blue-crowned Motmot (*Momotus momota*). Metro Park, Panama City, Panama; 19 November 2004. © Rachel Hopper.

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Pipeline Road / Ammo Ponds / Metropolitan Park Dry Forest

The fifteen-mile-long Pipeline Road is a birder's dream. Gated at the entrance, the road has only birds and mammals for obstructions. More than 400 species of birds have been identified here. Virtually all of cen-

tral Panama's humid-forest bird species reside here, and we should experience the excitement of one or more mixed-species flocks moving through the forest. We will be birding only a portion of the road, a section with scrub, mature second-growth, and patches of old-growth forest. Even with the small allotment of time here, we hope to locate an army ant swarm or two with their professional army ant followers: Bicolored, Spotted, and Ocellated Antbirds, plus Cocoa Woodcreeper, to name only a few.

A quick visit to the Ammo Ponds will give us a chance for the secretive White-throated Crake, the common Wattled Jacana, and possibly Rufescent Tiger-Heron and other wading birds.

On the Pacific Slope, adjacent to Panama City, Metropolitan Nature Park is the only urban park in Latin America that has accessible tropical semi-deciduous forest. The park harbors such stunning birds as the incredibly pink Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Lance-tailed Manakin, Slaty Antwren, Pheasant Cuckoo, and a Panama endemic, the Yellow-green Tyrannulet. Birding here is easy, and over 200 species have been recorded along the forest trails. Hernan Araúz, arguably the top bird guide in Panama, and other guides from Ancon Expeditions in Panama will be our



Golden-hooded Tanager (*Tangara larvata*). Canopy Tower, Gamboa, Panama; 14 November 2004.
© Rachel Hopper.

guides here in the Metropolitan Nature Park, as well as at Pipeline Road and the Ammo Ponds.

Achiote Road Area

The annual Christmas Bird Count along Achiote Road on the Caribbean side (Atlantic Slope) of the Canal consistently produces more than 300 bird species. After passing under the Gatún locks on the Canal, we will travel on one of the most-scenic roads in central Panama. Our best opportunities for Montezuma Oropendola, the rare Gray-breasted Nunlet, and two large wrens (White-headed and Stripe-breasted) will be here. We hope to see a beautiful male Blue Cotinga, the unusual White-whiskered Puffbird, and White-flanked Antwren. Spot-crowned Barbet prefers the common cecropia trees, and Hoffman's two-toed sloth also resides here. Numerous species of striking heliconia plants are common,



The Gamboa Rainforest Resort will be our home base during our week in Panama. On its 340 acres we should get a solid grounding in the basics of neotropical birding, with good opportunities for viewing of such species as Southern Lapwing, Slaty Antshrike, Blue Dacnis, and Green Honeycreeper. © Bill Maynard.





Pacific Antwren (*Myrmotherula pacifica*). Achiote Road, Colón, Panama; 16 November 2004. © Rachel Hopper.

as are their attendant hummingbirds, the hermits, named for their retiring nature.

Canopy Tower, Semaphore Hill, and Plantation Trail

Built by the U.S. Air Force as a radar site in 1965, the Canopy Tower is today a popular eco-lodge situated atop 900-foot Semaphore Hill. Besides a panoramic view of Gamboa, the Panama Canal, and the Chagres River, there are birds we hope to see from the Tower. Possibilities include migrant northern warblers, vibrant Chestnut-mandibled and Keel-billed Toucans, the rufous-colored Squirrel Cuckoo, the dazzling Blue Cotinga, and the gaudy Green Shrike-Vireo. At the hummingbird feeders below, we should have point-blank views of Blue-chested Hummingbird, Garden Emerald, and the wonderful White-necked Jacobin.

A walk down Semaphore Hill will offer chances to see tropical forest birds and forest mammals, including four species of monkeys. A Red-capped Manakin can often be



Spot-crowned Barbet (*Capito maculicoronatus*). Achiote Road, Colón, Panama; 16 November 2004. © Rachel Hopper.

heard popping from inside the forest, while Violaceous and Slaty-tailed Trogons perch overhead. A Great Jacamar or a Collared Forest-Falcon can sometimes be seen perched inside the forest. At the bottom of Semaphore Hill, the narrow Plantation Trail runs parallel to a stream, passing through bird-filled forest. This trail also has antbirds and Black-chested Jay.

Bilingual guides Carlos Bethancourt and José Soto from Canopy Tower will be our leaders for this portion of the conference.

El Valle de Anton

Birding the forested crater of an extinct volcano, near the town of El Valle de Anton, we will have our only chance to see foothill bird species in a beautiful setting with temperatures noticeably cooler than those of the steamy lowlands of the



Western Long-tailed Hermit (*Phaethornis longirostris*). Canopy Tower, Gamboa, Panama; 14 November 2004. © Rachel Hopper.

Canal Zone. Specialty birds we hope to see along the roads and trails include Orange-bellied Trogon, Common Bush-Tanager, and Silver-throated and Tawny-crested Tanagers. Hummingbirds are common, and feeders may attract Violet-headed Hummingbird, White-tailed Emerald, and White-vented Plumeleteer. With luck we may see species such as the spectacular Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, Keel-billed Motmot, and Black-faced Grosbeak. Beautiful mountain scenery and cool temperatures will add to this pleasant day of birding.

Birders' Exchange is Going to the ABA Conference in Panama with You

Would you like to give something back to the Panamanian birding and conservation community? Panamanians are extremely proud of their country, and they love to show visiting birders the richness of their natural and human history. While planning for your trip to the ABA Panama International Conference in September, please consider supporting the ABA's Birders' Exchange by bringing with you any of the following donations to the conference: field guides to the birds of Panama, new or used binoculars or spotting scopes, camera equipment, or sound-recording equipment. All equipment donations must be in perfect working order. Also valuable to Panamanian educational programs are children's books about natural history, especially those written in Spanish.

This is a special opportunity to be personally involved in the work of Birders' Exchange and to give a huge helping hand to bird conservation and education and to our Panamanian friends. Your Birders' Exchange gifts to Panamanian biologists and educators will help to ensure the success of ecotourism in Panama.

Your donations will be distributed throughout Panama by the Panama Audubon Society, by Raul Arias de Para (owner of The Canopy Tower), and by our conference field trip coordinators. All donations to Birders' Exchange are tax deductible.