

**Amazing Raptor Migration & number one Jungle Birding
TRIP REPORT - Panama, 10 days
23. October - 1. November 2015
with a small private group of 6**



We were asked by a private group to put together a tour concentrating on Raptor Migration. They were thinking about to come to Mexico, which is our base during winters and we know, that Veracruz also offers a spectacular Raptor Migration, locally called the Rio de Rapaces, which means River of Raptors. But we suggested instead Panama, partly because number of raptors can be even higher here, also because it is easier to combine with World famous jungle birding as well.

So, we put together a **superb combination of a spectacular massive raptor migration**, number one in the World **with some easy, lowland tropical rainforest birding** with many sought after species. The group liked the idea, so we worked on the details and suggested end of October since usually that is the peak time for the Raptor Migration.

Actually during the tour the constant flow of **Hawks, Vultures, Kites** blackened the sky and every day we saw over a hundred-thousand raptors.

Our record was an unbelievable **1.2 million birds** within a few hours! Later on we added a **huge variety of rare and colourful tropical denizens** such as **Blue Cotinga**, dozens of **Hummingbirds**, 5 **Trogon** species, **Motmots**, **Toucans**, **Woodpeckers**, **Puffbirds**, **Manakins**, **Purple-throated Fruitcrow**, **Chuck-will's-widow**, about 30 species of **Flycatchers**, various **Anthshrikes**, **Antwrens**, **Antbirds**, **Ant-thrushes & Antpittas**, **Green Shrike-Vireo**, **Wrens**, **tropical Warblers**, **Caciques & Orioles**, dazzling variety of **Tanagers**. **Beautiful butterflies** & some **interesting mammals** such as **Sloths** and **Geoffrey's Tamarind Monkey** coloured the scene during the easy birding days.



Black-throated Mango male



Yellow-headed Caracara

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One of the many nice moments



Mississippi Kite silhouettes in clouds

Fact File

- 10 birding days in Panama, watching the world-famous Raptor migration & visiting National Parks and nature reserves for tropical lowland rainforest birding
- start and finish in Panama City
- using 2 accommodations with great on site birding
- very short daily transfers

The Group and guides

- the group consisted of 6 people, 2 couples and 2 individuals and they enjoyed a great guide-guest ratio having most of the time 3 guides with them, Gabor & Andrea and Alex.



Highlights

- daily Raptor Watching from top of a hill
- birding at world famous sites such as **Metropolitan Nature Park, Panama City Wetlands,** rainforests of **Pipeline Road & Ammo Ponds at Soberanía National Park** and other areas
- wide variety of birds, plus some mammals, reptiles, butterflies and interesting habitats

Accommodation

- 5 nights at the foot of the most famous Raptor watching point in Panama City
- 3 nights at Gamboa Reserve
- 1 night back again in the same hotel in Panama city

Activity level

We had easy to moderate walks; some areas are hot and humid; a few times had short, but sometimes strong tropical rain falls.



Zone-tailed Hawk



Swainson's Hawk



Yellow-crowned Euphonia



Eastern Kingbird

Itinerary

Day 1 - 23rd October, 2015

Gabor and Andrea who organized the trip arrived with an internal flight from **Bocas de Toro**, where they revisited some great locations for birding. They actually offer pre or post tour possibilities to a beautiful area called **Tranquillo Bay in Bocas**. So, Gabor and Andrea arrived to **Panama City** late afternoon and the private group as well, but since our internal flight was a bit later, we asked a local guide to take the group from the airport to the hotel and finally about 1 hour later we arrived as well. We discussed next day's program during our dinner at a nearby restaurant. Then we returned to the hotel and went for a goodnight sleep!

Days 2-5 - 24rd-27th October, 2015 - Panama city area

Each morning we started birding in our hotel garden and in the tranquil, green area nearby which produced for us a long list of various species such as: **White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango, Garden Emerald, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Lineated Woodpecker, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Streaked & Boat-billed Flycatcher, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, Clay-colored Robin, Yellow Warbler, Variable Seed-eater, Crimson-backed-, Blue-gray, Summer and Palm Tanager, Yellow-crowned Tanager.**

Each morning after breakfast if the weather was suitable we drove up to the top of a nearby hill which offered a perfect panoramic view of the large kettles of migrating raptors. Our timing was perfect since at the end of October we got the peak time for mainly hundreds of thousands of **Swainson's, Short-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks.** We were also lucky to see some late **Swallow-tailed Kites and Mississippi Kites** as well.



Raptor Watching + city background



Yellow-headed Caracara



Geoffrey's Tamarind Monkey



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

From time to time we pointed out some **Zone-tailed Hawks**, **Yellow-headed Caracaras** and fast **Peregrine Falcons**. We also saw some fishing **Ospreys** and hunting **Crane Hawks**. We picked up some rarer species as well, such as **Gray-lined Hawk** or **King Vulture**. On our last visit of the hill we also found both **Chuck-will's Widow** and **Lesser Nighthawk**.

On a good day the sheer number of birds in the sky can be stunning. On one day we witnessed a constant **River of Raptors flowing in front of us with more than 1.2 million birds within just a half day!**



On one of the days we spent a few hours at the **Metropolitan National Park** where we found **Gray-headed Chachalaca**, **Black-crowned & Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, **Barred Antshrike**, **Southern Rough-winged Swallow**, **Prothonotary Warbler**, **Saffron Finch**.

Another day we discovered the **Bayano Lowland area** which produced **Little Tinamou**, **Wood Stork**, **Green & Cocoi Heron**, **Anhinga** and we could add a few more raptors such as: **Crested Caracara**, **American Kestrel**, **White-tailed Kite**.

Further new species were **Blue Ground Dove**, **Red-lored Parrot**, **Smooth-billed Ani**, **Common Nighthawk**, **Pale-bellied Hermit**. We managed to find local specialities such as: **Black-tailed Trogon**, **Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Pied Puffbird**, **Golden Collared Manakin**, **Fasciated Antshrike**, **Black Antshrike**, **Western Slaty/Black-crowned Antshrike**, **Dusky** and **Jet Antbird**, **Bay Wren**, **Bay-breasted Warbler** and the very localized **Streaked Xenops**.



Jet Antbird



Blue-headed Parrot



Lesser Nighthawk



Chuck-will's-widow

It was very interesting, that on one of the days we met George Angehr, who is the author of the Birds of Panama and we mentioned to him, the observation of **Streaked Xenops**, and he noted, that it is the only species in the book, which he has not seen in Panama! But we did, thanks to our great local help Alex!! Hurray!!:-)

Days 6-9 - 28th-31th October, 2015 - Tropical Lowland Birding

Each day we discovered different parts of the **Gamboa Forest, Soberania National Park** and other **World-famous trails**, such as **Pipeline Road or Plantation Road**.

Travelling distances were short every day, walks were generally on flat area, but some days were really humid especially after sporadic rains. The list of birds we had seen is quite long, here we mention some of those which we saw: **Great Tinamu, Muscovy Duck, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Agami Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Tricolored Heron, King Vulture, Bat Falcon, Snail Kite, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, White-throated Crake, Gray-necked Wood Rail, Purple Gallinule, Scaled Pigeon, Mealy Parrot, Greater Ani, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift**. A dazzling variety of hummingbirds waited for us, such as **Western Long-tailed and Stripe-throated Hermit, Purple-crowned Woodnymph, Violet-bellied and Blue-chested Hummingbird, White-vented Plumeleater**.

We searched and found all 5 possible **Trogon** species: **Black-throated, White-tailed, Garthered/Violaceous, Slaty-tailed and Black-tailed**. Also we found **Blue-crowned, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmot**. Other colourful species to be mentioned were **Collared Aracari** and **Chestnut-mandibled Toucan**.

We got some unique **Woodpecker** species such as **Black-cheeked, Cinnamon and Crimson-crested**. We also found **White-necked and Black-breasted Puffbirds**. Some of the notable highlights of tropical birding were **Blue-crowned** and **Lance-tailed Manakin**, but **Blue Cotinga** and **Purple-throated Fruitcrow** stole the show. :-)
We actually witnessed the male of the latter species displaying, calling out the female and then they were flying away together happily. :-)



Keel-billed Toucan



Birding at Gamboa



2 easy Flycatchers: Boat-billed Flycatcher and Streaked Flycatcher

The biggest challenge was always to identify the many different flycatcher species especially that here more than 30 were possible.

We found more than 2 dozens, including **Southern Bentbill, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Ruddy-tailed** and of course **Panama Flycatcher**.

Antshrikes were represented by **Fasciated** and **Western Slaty/Black-crowned**, while **Antwrens** included **Checker-throated, White-flanked** and **Dot-winged**. We also had several different **Antbird** species as well, such as: **Dusky, White-bellied, Chestnut-backed, Bicolored and Spotted**. We were lucky to find **Black-faced Ant-thrush** and **Streak-chested Antpitta** as well. Most of the above mentioned species we could observe very well especially when we found some big ant-swarms.

Other interesting species we saw during the tour: **Green Shrike-Vireo, Black-bellied Wren, tropical Warblers, Caciques & Orioles, Scaly-breasted/Southern Nightingale Wren**, a dazzling variety of **Tanagers** including **Rosy-thrush Tanager** and the strangely, but aptly named **Brownish Twistwing**.

For the last night we **returned to Panama city** to the same hotel where we spent the first 5 nights of the tour.

Day 10 - 1th November, 2015

Last day there was still time to bird alongside the seaside. Our group had seen several different herons, such as **Black-crowned & Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Semipalmated Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Tricolored Heron, Royal Turn**. But the most interesting species was **Blue-footed Booby**.

Early afternoon we were transferred to the airport to catch our flight and **arrive back home** next day - **2nd November, 2015**



Yes, all those little black dots are also migrating raptors!!!