

Panama - Birding the Darién Gap

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Arrival & overnight in Panama City.
- Day 2/7** Based at Canopy Camp, with daily excursions to various sites in search of the speciality birds of the area.
- Day 8** Canopy Camp to Panama City and flight home
- Day 9** Arrive UK.

Departs

September – see website.

Focus

Birds (mainly) & other wildlife.

Grading

Mostly Grade A. Generally, easy birding walks only.

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code PAN04).

Highlights

- Look for the elusive Broad-billed Sapayoa
- Nusagandi foothills
- African safari-style walk-in tents
- Bird true Central American wilderness
- Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren & Orange-crowned Oriole
- White-eared Conebill, Green-naped Tanager & Great Curassow among target species
- Crested & Harpy Eagle possible
- Led by expert local birding guides



Spot-breasted Woodpecker



Canopy Camp



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Introduction

The Darién, as this entire easternmost region of Panama is called, is one of the most diverse and species-rich regions of Central America. Here, some of the last large, relatively untouched swathes of lowland rainforest await exploration! Long revered by avid birders as a haven for rare species, including the majestic Harpy Eagle, Panama's national bird, this region is now readily accessible by a new highway, extending through the spine of Panama right into the heart of this bird-rich land. During this exciting, highly recommended 7-night adventure, we visit, en route to the Canopy Camp, the foothills of Nusagandi in search of the elusive Broad-billed Sapayoa, and the Bayano Reservoir, to look for such specialties as the starkly beautiful Black Antshrike, Rufous-winged Antwren and stunning Orange-crowned Oriole. We also visit the swampy meadows of Yaviza and the riparian forests of Río Torti, the haunts of the magnificent Spot-breasted Woodpecker! We will enjoy great birding around El Real where we hope to get excellent views of Black-capped Donacobius, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Large-billed Seed-finch, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and others.



Canopy Camp Bathroom

We will spend all our nights (except Day 1) at the Canopy Camp, where we will enjoy comfortable, large, Safari-style tent accommodation, each with full-sized beds, private bathroom facilities with hot water and flush toilets, electricity and a fan. The protected forests of the Filo de Tallo Hydrological Reserve surround the camp. In the vicinity of the camp itself we will enjoy such regional specialties as Gray-checked Nunlet, White-headed Wren and Pale-bellied Hermit right in the gardens! This tour offers other surprises, such as Spectacled Parrotlet, Red-rumped

Woodpecker, Double-banded Graytail, King Vulture and the spectacular Great Curassow. It is known that there are currently at least two Harpy Eagle nests with young near the Camp. The young are dependent on their parents for 2-3 years during which time they will remain in the vicinity of the nest-site. If a nest is active at the time of our visit we will be sure to make an excursion to see this most sought-after and spectacular raptor.

We are sure you will have a birding adventure of a lifetime!

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrival in Panama & Orientation

We leave the UK in the morning bound for Panama City, via Amsterdam. On arrival in Panama, we will transfer to the Riande Aeropuerto Hotel, just 5 minutes from Tocumen International Airport by hotel bus. While we acclimatise to the tropical heat with a cold drink, we can watch the birds in the grounds of the hotel. Great-tailed Grackle, Clay-coloured Thrush, Variable Seedeater, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and more await our visit to the gardens.

Day 2

Morning: Nusagandi

This morning we will enjoy a delicious early breakfast at 5am in the hotel restaurant. Our guide will be there for a briefing and soon after breakfast, we'll be heading for eastern Panama. The journey to our final destination is approximately 5 hours, but we will make stops along the way in exciting birding areas. As we drive east along the Pan-American Highway, we will scan for roadside birds and open-field raptors including Savanna Hawk and Crested Caracara. Our first scheduled stop will be in the Nusagandi area, off the highway in the foothills of the Caribbean Slope. As we follow the El Llano-Carti Road north, we will cross the Continental Divide and reach the Comarca (reserve) of Guna Yala. Here we will explore the trails through the pristine forest of the Nusagandi Forest Reserve in search of rarities, including Broad-billed Sapayoa, Speckled Antshrike, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Sulphur-rumped, Rufous-winged and Black-and-yellow Tanagers, Yellow-eared Toucanet, the endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker, Swallow-tailed Kite, Black Hawk-eagle, Blue-fronted Parrotlet, Streak-chested Antpitta, Tawny-capped Euphonia and more. While enjoying a lovely Panamanian lunch, the hummingbirds at the feeders will no doubt capture our attention, as Long-billed Starthroat, Sapphire-throated and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds, Black-throated Mango and more take their lunch as well; great hummingbird photo opportunities here! Lunch in Torti.

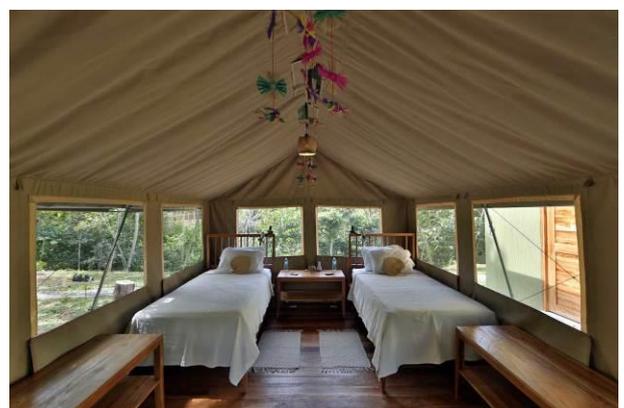
Afternoon: Bayano Region & Arrival at Canopy Camp Darién

After lunch, we will head back to the Pan-American Highway and continue east to the Canopy Camp Darien, and arrive before daylight fades so we can settle into our tents and get acquainted with the setting. After a delicious dinner of fresh American and Panamanian fare, we will gather to have a briefing about the days to come, and settle into our tents for the night.

Day 3

Morning: Canopy Camp Trails

We will meet before sunrise for a hot drink and to enjoy the sounds of the birds. Black-mandibled and Keel-billed Toucans call from the towering Cuipo trees; Red-lore and Mealy Parrots fly overhead; White-bellied Antbird, Bright-rumped Attila, White-headed Wren and Golden-headed Manakin sing from the surrounding forests; while Pale-bellied Hermit and Sapphire-throated Hummingbird visit the flowers around camp.



Canopy Camp twin bedroom



Barred Puffbird by Cindy Beckman

Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Barred Puffbird are also seen frequently around the campsite. We will be served a hearty breakfast at 7:30 am. After breakfast we will work our way into the forest on “Nando’s Trail,” in the hope of finding Tiny Hawk, Black and Great Antshrikes, Olive-backed Quail-dove, Cinnamon Becard, Black-tailed Trogon, Double-banded Graytail, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Yellow-breasted and Royal Flycatchers and Russet-winged Schiffornis. We will also be looking for groups of Red-throated Caracara, King Vulture and Short-tailed Hawk overhead in the clearings. Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Plumbeous and Zone-tailed Hawks are also possible. Lunch at Canopy Camp.

Afternoon: Quebrada Felix Abajo

Just a short drive from the Canopy Camp, we reach the open areas and rice fields of Quebrada Felix Abajo. We’ll drive slowly along the winding road through fields and pastures mixed with tall Cuipo and Panama trees. Crossing the Quebrada (stream) Felix, we will watch for kingfishers and Rufescent Tiger-Heron, hunting quietly for fish

and frogs. Scanning the fields beside us, we hope to find Red-breasted Blackbird, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground-doves, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Red-billed Scythebill, Muscovy Duck, Orange-crowned Oriole, Chestnut-fronted Macaw and raptors, including Laughing Falcon and Red-throated Caracara may be seen. In small thickets along the way, Black Antshrike and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher may be lurking around. At the rice fields, water birds—Southern Lapwing, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Limpkin, Cocoi Heron and if lucky, a Gray-breasted Crake—are around and more raptors including Aplomado Falcon, Savanna Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture can be seen foraging in the flooded field. On the way back, mixed flocks of White-eared Conebill, tanagers and other birds may be encountered. Geoffroy’s Tamarins and Gray Fox are mammals that can be found here. We will return to camp in time to freshen up for dinner. After dinner we will gather to look for owls, including Striped, Crested, Barn, Black-and-white and Mottled Owls, as well as Common and Great Potoos and hopefully some nocturnal mammals. We will end the day with our checklist, tallying our sightings for our first full day at the Canopy Camp! Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 4

All day: Aruza Lagoons

Today we visit the area of Aruza Lagoons and Aruza Road. This road extends 12 km south off the Pan-American Highway through open farmland, dry scrub and roadside habitat. The road eventually crosses a small stream and ends at small ponds. Along the roadsides, we hope to find Red-breasted Blackbird, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, White-headed Wren, Smooth-billed and Greater Ani, Muscovy Duck, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Southern Lapwing, Blue-headed Parrot, Striped Cuckoo, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Buff-breasted Wren,



Black Oropendola

Bananaquit, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds, Crested Oropendola and Laughing and Aplomado Falcon. If we're lucky, we may get a glimpse of a Chestnut-fronted Macaw or a shy Little Cuckoo, both having been seen along this road. We will break for lunch in a shady spot along the road. This afternoon at the lagoons, Pied Water-Tyrant, Capped Heron, the beautiful Yellow-hooded Blackbird and the extraordinary Black-capped Donacobius are found here, a great habitat for all these wonderful species! Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 5

Morning: El Salto Road

We will meet for an early breakfast, then head to El Salto Road for the morning. El Salto Road extends 6 km north from the Pan-American Highway and ends at the mighty Río Chucunaque. This open road and surrounding dry forest is a great place to search for regional specialties including Golden-green Woodpecker, Double-banded Graytail, Blue-and-gold and Chestnut-fronted Macaws, Black and Crested Oropendolas, Blue Cotinga, White-eared Conebill, Black-breasted Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole and the majestic King Vulture. A trail at the end of the road will take us into low-canopy forest, where we hope to find Bare-crowned Antbird, Pale-bellied Hermit, Olivaceous Piculet, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Forest Elaenia. Lunch at Canopy Camp.

Afternoon: Tierra Nueva Foundation

After some relaxation time during the hottest part of the day, we will visit the property of the Tierra Nueva



Canopy Camp Social Area

Foundation. Fundación Tierra Nueva is a non-profit organization whose main mission is “working towards the sustainable development of people of the Darién Rainforest”. The property is the home of a technical school focusing on applications in agriculture. We will explore the trails of this large property, in the hope of finding Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Yellow-breasted and Black-billed Flycatchers, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Slaty-backed Forest-falcon, Cinnamon, Cinereous and One-coloured Becards, White-eared Conebill, White-headed Wren and the magnificent Great Curassow. We will also search for the eastern

race of the Chestnut-backed Antbird, which shows white spots on the wings. Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 6

All day: Nuevo Vigia

We will awake once again to the energetic dawn chorus of oropendolas, wrens, antbirds, manakins, parrots and toucans, as the sun rises over eastern Panama. After a satisfying breakfast, we will once again leave the Canopy Camp for a morning filled with great birds! This morning we are off to Nuevo Vigia, an Embera village nestled north of the Panamerican Highway, surrounded by great secondary growth dry forest and two small lakes, all of which attract an enticing variety of birds. The village is accessible by "piragua", locally-made dugout canoes. As we coast along the Chucunaque and Tuquesa Rivers, we will keep our eyes and ears open for Chestnut-backed, Crested and Black Oropendolas, Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Common Black Hawk, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Red-

billed Scythebill, Capped and Cocoi Herons, White Ibis, Greater Ani, Great Potoo, Green Ibis and the rare Dusky-backed Jacamar.

We will spend the majority of the morning birding around the trails maintained by the community, great places to see Double-banded Graytail, Golden-headed Manakin, Bare-crowned and White-bellied Antbirds, Royal Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Spectacled Parrotlet, Black-tailed Trogon, Striped Cuckoo, Black-bellied Wren, Little Tinamou, Golden-green Woodpecker and Green-and-rufous Kingfisher! At a forest lagoon, we will scan for the shy Agami Heron. In the village of Nuevo Vigia, local artisans weave colourful decorative masks and plates out of palm fronds and carve cocobolo wood and tagua nuts into animals and plants, and we will have the opportunity to meet some of the community members and admire (and purchase) some of the beautiful products they make by hand. We will enjoy a satisfying picnic lunch in the village, followed by more great birding around the riversides and scrubby habitat surrounding Nuevo Vigia before heading back to the Canopy Camp. Picnic lunch in Nuevo Vigia, dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 7

Morning: Santa Rosa

A beautifully wooded area of the Filo del Tallo Hydrological Reserve, Santa Rosa (named for the nearby town) boasts mature secondary forest home to Black-and-white Hawk-eagle, Great Curassow, Great Tinamou, Royal Flycatcher, Speckled Mourner, Gray-cheeked Nunlet, Moustached Antwren, Spotted Antbird, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Purple-throated Fruitcrow and White-eared Conebill and it is the only place in the area where Dull-mantled Antbird can be seen regularly, as it prefers the tranquil forest streams that wind through the area. It is also a very popular place for migrating songbirds to stop by. Here we walk a trail along a ridge with a large stream below. Giant Strangler Figs and Panama trees close in the canopy of the forest, creating a pleasing atmosphere for a great morning of birding!



Black Antshrike by Cindy Beckman

Afternoon: Aligandi

After lunch and some down time, we will meet again to continue birding. Aligandi is a huge area with unique scrub forest and much to be explored. We head out from the Camp towards the end of the Pan-American Highway, taking a turn prior to reaching Yaviza. Along the roadsides here, we will scan for Red-breasted Blackbird, Striped Cuckoo, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Thick-billed Seed-finch, American Kestrel and other open area birds. A Great Green Macaw nest is tucked up in the canopy of a huge Cuipo tree, visible from the road, and if lucky, an adult or a chick may be seen poking its head out of the cavity. At Finca Doncella, we continue on foot along the road through the scrub forest, seeking out Spot-breasted Woodpecker, Bat Falcon, Giant Cowbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, Red-billed Scythebill, White-eared Conebill and mixed feeding flocks. Later in the day is a great time to be here, as the macaws often fly over as the daylight dims and Black-eared Wood-quail can

be heard in the distance calling at dusk. After dark, Black-and-white, Striped and Barn Owls, along with Common Pauraque are often seen! Dinner at Canopy Camp.

Day 8

Morning: San Francisco Nature Reserve

We will wake before dawn to pack and have an early breakfast, say our goodbyes to the Canopy Camp, and start our journey back to Panama City. We will stop at San Francisco Nature Reserve, a private forest reserve owned and managed by the St. Francis Foundation, covering 1,300 acres in eastern Panama Province, and we will spend the morning birding at this fantastic site. The San Francisco Reserve was established in 2001 by Father Pablo Kasuboski, an American priest from Wisconsin who came to Panama in 1988. The reserve serves as a wildlife refuge and protects the headwaters of the main rivers of the area. The foundation created by Padre Pablo, as Father Kasuboski is called, also works on infrastructure development in the area by building and maintaining aqueducts, roads, schools and churches. In fact, the St. Francis Foundation built and maintains the largest private rural aqueduct in all of Panama and Central America. The reserve has a variety of habitats including primary, secondary and riparian forests, forest edge, fields, farmland, ponds and wetlands. During our morning here, we will explore some of the different habitats along the short road that enters the reserve. We will hope to find Great Jacamar, Broad-billed Motmot, Collared Aracari, Russet-winged Schiffornis, Royal Flycatcher, White-fronted Nunbird, Brownish Twistwing, Yellow-green Tyrannulet, Central American Pygmy-owl, Blue and Plain-breasted Ground-doves, and if we're very lucky, a Black-and-white Hawk-eagle soaring overhead or a Wing-banded Antbird along the trails! Lunch in Torti.



White-fronted Nunbird by Carlos Bethancourt

Afternoon: Bayano Lake & Return to Panama City

After our lunch, we will stop at the bridge at Lake Bayano, Panama's second largest lake. This reservoir supports a huge amount of water birds, including a large colony of Neotropic Cormorants, as well as Anhinga, Cocoi Heron and the rare Bare-throated Tiger-heron. We will scan the water's edge for Purple Gallinule, Pied Water-tyrant, Smooth-billed Ani and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. A short trail leading from the water's edge is a great place to search for Black Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Rufous-winged Antwren and Golden-collared Manakin. At another great place to stop along the way, Río Mono Bridge, the surrounding forest is home to One-coloured Becard, Black-headed Tody-flycatcher, Blue Cotinga, Pied Puffbird, Orange-crowned Oriole, Blue Ground-dove and more. We will also scan the river below for Green-and-rufous Kingfisher and the elusive Fasciated Tiger-heron. All too soon it will be time for us to head back to the airport for our flight home.

Day 9

Arrival in UK during the late afternoon.

Accommodation & group size

We will be staying in the new Canopy Camp Darién, which has spacious and comfortable walk-in safari tents, each with full-sized beds, private bathroom facilities with hot water and flush toilets, electricity and a fan.



Guide

Led by expert local birding guides.

Flights

Standard flights are with KLM from regional airports via Amsterdam.

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. It is by no means a strenuous or difficult tour though, and all outings and walks are optional.

Weather

The climate in Panama will be generally warm and humid. Short bursts of rain are likely at times, but not to the detriment of our birding aims.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

The tour price includes all lodging, taxes, meals, wine with dinner, natural fruit juices, sodas, Wi-Fi, arrival night at Riande Airport Hotel with dinner, all tours stated in the itinerary, entrance fees, bilingual professional guides, snacks and beverages during all outings.

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks not mentioned above, laundry, tips and souvenirs.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.