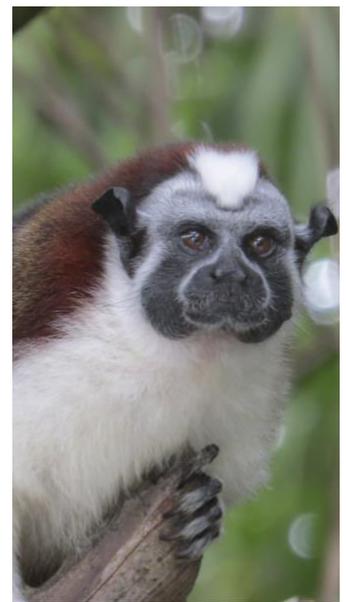


Panama Trip: Birding in a Tropical Paradise!

December 1 – 8, 2018 | With Morris Arboretum



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Join Ruth Pfeffer for an incredible birding trip in a tropical paradise! This year she is leading a trip to Panama, a vibrant crossroads of the Americas. Discover its abundant birding and rich variety of mammals as we explore lush rainforest alongside the Panama Canal. Panama ranks as one of the world's top bird-watching sites, with more than 900 species of resident and migrant birds ... more than the U.S. and Canada combined.

This well-paced tour stays mainly at one hotel, the delightful Gamboa Rainforest Lodge, adjacent to Soberanía National Park and the scenic Chagras River. Many of our outings are close to the lodge; on one day we drive to a mountain area for a different view. We plan afternoons for some free time to enjoy the pool and grounds, pursue photography, enjoy the amenities of the lodge, or to visit the lodge's orchid facility, the reptile house, or the new sloth rescue facility. There are also kayaks for rent and trails to explore.

Ruth Pfeffer: Expert Birder & Trip Leader

Ruth Pfeffer, owner of Birding with Ruth, is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable birder whose accomplishments are varied and interesting. From her roots as a Girl Scout leader, Ruth pursued her passion for the environment by visiting many countries to broaden her knowledge. She has led trips to locations near and far, from Bombay Hook, Hawk Mountain, and Cape May to Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, and the Galapagos Islands. Ruth has been a member of many environmental and birding organizations including the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, the Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and Schuylkill Environmental Education Center, as well as serving on Wyncote Audubon Society's board for membership. Photographing the natural world is also a passion of Ruth's. She looks forward to sharing her expertise with you.

For more information please contact Jan McFarlan at jlm@upenn.edu.

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Birding & Nature Tour with Morris Arboretum
\$2995 DBL / \$3490 SGL from Panama City
Airport is Tocumen International (PTY)



Itinerary

Sat., Dec. 1 Arrivals in Panama City

Welcome to Panama! Upon arrival in Panama, you are transferred by the hotel courtesy shuttle van to the Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel, just a few minutes from Tocumen International Airport. What a change from winter! While you acclimatize to the tropical heat and have a cold drink, you can bird around the lovely pool or enjoy a swim. Tonight, enjoy a welcome dinner with your travel companions. There is a lot to see between here and Gamboa, so this first night lets us rest up and be ready to explore.

Accommodations at Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel (D)

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Sun., Dec. 2 Panama City to the Gamboa Rainforest Lodge

After breakfast today we set out for Gamboa Rainforest Lodge. Our route passes through modern Panama City and then parallels the Canal; we watch ships pass by as we drive. Nature starts to prevail in lush forests that line our route as we turn up the road to our lodgings just across the Chagras River at Gamboa.

En route we make stops at an important hemispheric shorebird site, a tidal wetland not far from the airport. We scan with scopes and should find myriad shorebirds and waders, including perhaps colorful Roseate Spoonbill. Across from the viewpoint we walk through Panama Viejo, ruins of the first city, long ago sacked by pirates. The viewing site is also next to one of the best handicraft markets of the city. We then enjoy lunch at a local restaurant with a view of the ocean.

Our next stop is at one of the three main lock systems of the Panama Canal, Miraflores Locks. We visit a state-of-the-art museum here to give you background on the locks, their history, and operations. You can also enjoy fresh air on the viewing deck, watch a big ship go through, and delight in species such as Fork-tailed Flycatcher and Great Kiskadee active in the area. Over the next few days, the Canal is ever present, providing a great opportunity to understand its operations (past and present), recent expansion, and role in Panama's economy.

On arrival, enjoy the expansive view from your rooms of the Chagras River and surroundings. And enjoy those first bird sightings as the grounds are bird-friendly — we never know what we may find! Black-breasted Puffbird, Double-toothed Kite, Black-tailed or other trogons, even Magnificent Frigatebird high overhead are possible.

If we arrive in time, enjoy a walk before we settle in for a delicious dinner.

Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)



Mon., Dec. 3 Hotel Grounds | Chunga Trail

One of the best birding spots of the Canal Area is right on the Gamboa Resort's grounds. These grounds are frequently visited by many birders and birding tour companies. More than 200 bird species have been recorded in an area of only about 90 acres. Feeders help the birds come in to you, and the more open conditions make for good viewing. There are a number of trails on the property, the main one we explore is the Chunga trail.

After meeting in the lobby area at 6:30 AM, we take a short ride through the forest to our Rainforest Aerial Tram to be quietly transported into the forest canopy to The Panama Canal Birding Tower which allows different viewing levels as it rises to the top of the canopy. Atop enjoy spectacular views of the Panama Canal and surrounding area. We look for Green Shrike Vireo, Lesser Greenlet, toucans, and the Blue Cotinga with its sparkling electric blue colors. Breakfast is waiting for you at the top of the lookout this morning! Coming down from the canopy La Chunga trail is the next spot for our morning of birding. This is an easy trail with a combination of scrub and swampy forest. Some of the most relevant birds are Jet Antbird, Great Antshrike, Blue Cotinga, and Yellow-tailed Oriole.

After lunch enjoy some free time to relax or explore on your own. This evening, after dinner, we enjoy a night drive in a safari-style vehicle from the lodge. We hope to find Capybara, other mammals, and

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possibly night birds like owls and nightjars. It's magical to be out in the cool of evening, taking in all the sounds.

Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., Dec. 4

Soberanía National Park | Pipeline Road

Pipeline Road is perhaps Panama's most famous birding destination. It is 10 miles of secondary and primary rainforest, with a dirt road that snakes through, passing a series of small creeks. We start early to be there for prime bird activity. This road is also used by the Smithsonian Institute as a research area. It is well known for its quality birding that includes elusive species such as Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo, Speckled Mourner, Red-capped Manakin, Streak-chested Antpitta, and Ocellated Antbird. We may also find secretive antbirds such as White-flanked and Pygmy Antwrens, and other rainforest birds such as Great Jacamar, Broad-billed Motmot, Blue-crowned and Golden-collared Manakins, Brown Twistwing, and some of the rarer forest raptors. We likely encounter the tropical phenomena of the mixed flock — a veritable explosion of birds that work and feed together, exhibiting complex social structure that scientists are only beginning to understand.



Pipeline Road is also an excellent place to search for mammals, and to better understand the lush lowland rainforest ecology with your guide. Mammals may include Tamandua (a type of anteater), Two and Three-toed Sloths, four species of monkey, Agouti, and others.

During World War II, a pipeline was built along the Panama Canal to transport fuel from one ocean to the other in the event the waterway was attacked. Fortunately, it was never used. The road, not open to traffic, provides a lush, easy pathway for us to explore. This is the site where the Audubon Society held its world Christmas bird count record for 19 years straight, with 357 species of birds identified in a period of 24 hours.

This road is only about a ten-minute drive from Gamboa Resort. We return by lunch for another afternoon with time to enjoy the resort's amenities, which include a pool and spa.

Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Dec. 5 Panama Canal Rainforest Boat Adventure | Gamboa History

After breakfast, we explore the waters of the Panama Canal on small boats, quietly moving through coves and inlets in search of wildlife, including Greater Ani, Snail Kite (by the dozen!), other raptors, and possibly whistling ducks, reptiles such as Spectacled Caiman and Green Iguana, and both Mantled Howler and White-faced Capuchin Monkeys. We find this to be the most comfortable and accessible way to discover the natural attributes of the Panama Canal watershed. We have the freedom to explore Gatun Lake in detail, passing by gigantic cargo ships transiting the waterway. Along the way, we should spot Three-toed Sloth resting on tree branches, while Osprey are vocal and on the prowl for Peacock Bass. Limpkin, Anhinga, and Keel-billed Toucan are some of the birds we may encounter.



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This is also a great place to focus on some history. At the time of its creation, Gatun Lake was the largest man-made lake in the world. The flow of all the rivers within the Panama Canal Watershed is contained in Gatun Lake to provide water for the operation of the lock system. More than 52-million gallons of fresh water are used for every ship that transits through the Panama Canal from one ocean to another.

The year 2000 marked the end of the U.S. Panama Canal treaty (which had actually been revised several times) and Panama now assumes responsibility for operations of the Canal. In 2016, a third lock opened to accommodate increased traffic and larger ships. From our boats on Gatun Lake we can see the Titan Crane and learn more about history of Gamboa, which is still the Canal's dredging operations center.

This afternoon you may want to visit some of the nature facilities at the resort, including the new sloth rescue center. Or, practice some photo skills with Ruth.

Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Dec. 6

Cerro Azul: A Mountain Retreat with Hummingbirds Galore | Summit Ponds

The foothills of Cerro Azul are located 1 hour and 30 minutes from Gamboa, at nearly 3,000 feet elevation. We spend the day birding the gardens, yard, and surrounding forest of a private residence where, most of the time depending on the weather, the birding activity seems non-stop. Here we can find an entirely different group of foothill birds that are not likely to be encountered elsewhere. Some of the regional specialties include: White-tipped Sicklebill (a rarely seen hummingbird), Yellow-eared Toucanet, Long-billed Starthroat, Green Hermit, Violet-capped Hummingbird, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, White-vented Plumeleteer, Speckled Tanager, Emerald Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Rufous-winged Tanager, Spot-crowned Barbet, Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, and the Panamanian endemic Stripe-cheeked Woodpecker.



Mid-afternoon we visit Summit Ponds, a wonderful, leisurely birding area where even in the quiet time of afternoon we find roosting Boat-billed Heron and a host of interesting species. Here we are at the edge of open and forested areas, and good numbers of migrant warblers join resident tropical species, making it a very rewarding stop. Colorful toucans frequent the pond and we may find Green Kingfisher or even the elusive American Pygmy Kingfisher. This is a full but wonderful day!

Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Dec. 7 Pipeline Road's Discovery Tower | Ammo Pond

We return again this morning to Pipeline Road for a remarkable experience atop the canopy. Enjoy the Discovery Centre and climb the tower for a view you can never forget. Near dawn, the sounds and sights are memorable! With luck we have close fly-bys of several species of parrots. We may have a mixed flock come through with beautiful gems like Blue Dacnis, or even a tame puffbird perched nearby.

We also stop at a very productive pond called Ammo Pond, where we hope to find Northern Jacana, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Lesser Kiskadee, possibly Pygmy Kingfisher, and other interesting species.

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After one last relaxing afternoon, we enjoy a farewell dinner together and share highlights of a week in paradise!
Accommodations at Gamboa Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Dec. 8 Departures from Panama City

This morning we bid the beautiful surroundings of Gamboa good bye and head to the airport for our return flights.
(B)

Tour Information

Registration

Our ground operator for this tour is [Naturalist Journeys, LLC](#), of Portal, Arizona. To register for the trip, please complete their registration form, found online at www.naturalistjourneys.com or request a copy by email at info@naturalistjourneys.com. Completion of the form and a deposit of \$500 per person secures your space. The balance of payment is due 90 days prior to our departure; Naturalist Journeys will remind you. The terms and conditions and cancellation policy are all outlined on the registration form.

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$2995 DBL / \$3490 SGL, per person, from Panama City. This cost is based on double occupancy and includes all accommodations; meals as specified in the itinerary, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. The cost is based on a minimum number of 6 participants, and the group size will be not more than 12 participants, with Ruth Pfeffer as guide joined by a local expert guide, José Soto.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home to Panama, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, portage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

We recommend a group flight with the plan to arrive on December 1 to check into the hotel, get settled, and enjoy dinner. Naturalist Journeys' travel agent, Pam Davis, is happy to coordinate the flight and issue tickets, which are billed as a separate expense on your tour invoice. If you prefer to book your own air, please let Naturalist Journeys know. They can also make suggestions if you would like to spend additional time in Panama. Our first night is at an airport hotel with a courtesy shuttle, so if you are on a different flight or wish to arrive early or extend your stay, you can meet us at the Crown Point Panama Airport Hotel. We gather here to rest up from the flight and be ready the next morning to travel to Gamboa with time to sightsee and bird en route.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

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