

# Guyana Trip Log

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## Calgary Zoo Tour

Guyana Trip Log  
October 31 ~ November 12, 1998  
Written by Brian Keating, Tour Leader  
Brian Keating (keatingb@calgaryzoo.ab.ca)  
Tour participants: Michel Gosselin, Travis Steffens, David and  
Pam Pickersgill, Gordon and Nan Plaxton, Marianne Muir

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**Wilderness Explorers**  
Cara Suites  
176 Middle Street  
Georgetown  
Guyana  
Tel : 592-2-77698  
Tel/Fax/AH : 592-2-62085  
E Mail : info@wilderness-explorers.com  
Home Page : www.wilderness-explorers.com

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Oct 31: I saw Dee off on her flight north this morning, being very relieved all our connections actually worked. I met the group, or should I say they found me, on the 7th floor of the Miami Airport Hotel, as I sat editing my Argentina trip log. We had a 5 hour wait, so some good discussion was had as we all got to know each other. The flight took off on time around 4 p.m., and all went well including our pickup in Georgetown by Louis. Though we arrived at the Pegasus Hotel at 1 a.m., we were in good spirits.

Nov 1: We began the city tour at 9:30 a.m., first stopping at the Cathedral, the tallest wooden building in the world. The enthusiastic minister got a bit carried away, nearly breaking into a full-fledged sermon on who makes a Saint, but I managed to head him off by getting him back on a discussion of the structure of the church. Very entertaining. The Amerindian craft centre

in their hostel complex was very worthwhile, with a number of spend-thrift Canadians dropping thousands of Guyanese dollars (CND \$1.00 = GU \$95.00). The real benefit of doing some purchasing here is that the money doesn't go through any middleman, but goes directly into the craftmaker's village. In the old seaport market, we watched some bartering between the sellers and buyers of a newly-arrived boatload of coconuts.

There were the racing birds in cages, a tired-looking parrot, and people coming and going on the water taxis. Built in the mid 1800's, the market makes me feel like I'm in an old black-and-white movie. I'm quite certain that the place hasn't changed from the time it was built. As with any port market, there were some pretty tough-looking people walking around and hanging out. On our way out, one such individual gave Louis a rough time that we weren't dropping any cash into the market, escorting us back to our vehicle complaining all the way. We returned later in the day to photograph the Stabroek Market clock tower, and the activity level had grown significantly with various market stalls open with fruits, other foods and some dry goods, giving us a different perspective of the activity level here.

After lunch, we went to the Zoo, meeting first with the manatees and watching their bizarre methods of feeding. The keepers had just thrown in some pond lilies, so they were really active munching on their floating salad. As we watched, we talked about manatees, their population problems within their world-wide tropical distribution. In the Zoo itself, we started our tour playing initially with a black-capped parrot that really enjoys some hands-on attention. The highlight, though, was our grooming session with the white-faced saki monkey and some wonderful interaction with the capuchin monkeys. The importance of this Zoo was commented on by several in the group, as it is obvious that many local families enjoy their Sunday visit. The metal photo Zoo signs that I brought from Calgary were all up, and looked really nice, augmenting the Zoo's own signage. I was disappointed that the education manager, Donald, wasn't there, as I would have enjoyed some feedback on the posters the docents organized. The keeper that toured us, however, said they were already being put to good use.

Dr. David Cassells, the Director General of Iwokrama, gave a most informative slide talk after supper. He spoke about Iwokrama, the Guyana rainforest and rainforest ecology, and gave us some significant detail of the entire Iwokrama project and how it fits into a global forest perspective. David is a very optimistic individual, and his data, neatly arranged in

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tables and graphs, supported his optimism for the hopeful future of several tropical countries, including all the Guianas. I need to write him to gain access to one chart in particular: one that shows the percentage of forest cover still in existence in countries all over the world. There were some very interesting statistics relevant to Canada. It was quite an honour for us to hear him, and his high energy style was a pleasure to listen to.

Birds seen:

Great kiskadee

Common ground-dove

Cattle egret

Blue-grey tanager

Black-crowned night heron

Rock dove

Nov 2: We got up at the ridiculous hour of 3:30 a.m. to be on the road by 4. It's an hours drive to the main airport, and we needed to be there an hour before takeoff, hence the lousy timing. The good news is that we did take off on time at 6 a.m., after doing our mandatory malaria blood smear, the weighing in of our baggage and ourselves, and payment for overweight baggage (this time GU \$2100.00 at 38 pounds overweight). The nurse doing the bloodwork said that by the time we land in Annai about one and a half hours later, she'll have the results of the sample. If we read positive, we'll hear from her, if not, we won't hear anything. The program is designed to limit the spread of the disease, and apparently it's paying off.

The flight was excellent, with good views of the dramatically extensive rainforest showing between some very thick cloud cover. Most of the forest was virtually unbroken, but we did fly almost directly over the Canadian mine that overflowed and burst its settling pond, dumping an unbelievable amount of heavy metal laden water into the Essequibo River. The extent of the forest, though, was amazing, stretching as far as we could see to the horizon. It appeared limitless, with huge blackwater rivers, stained with tannins, meandering through the broccoli-like green canopy.

Colin Edwards of Rock View Resort was at the airstrip to meet us, smiling as usual and in great form. After a wonderful introduction to Annie the anteater, Sheena the peccary, his monkeys, labba, agouties, parrots and deer, we settled in his kitchen for a filling, home-cooked breakfast, compliments of Velda and her team. Soon after we were rocking and rolling in the Bedford truck to Surama Village for lunch and our overnight in the rainforest. Rupununi birding highlights that forced the "Bedford Birder" (named by Travis) to frequently stop included vermilion and fork-tailed flycatchers, southern lapwings and several birds of prey.

After an excellent lunch in the new Surama Guesthouse (Thanks Veronica!), Lionel James, our expert Amerindian guide, first took us for a tour of the cassava workshop. We went into the field to first look at the plant, then into the workshop for a discussion on the method of processing it. This economically effective community-based production company is a women-run program, designed to bring in some much-needed revenue into the community. The small horsepower engine arrived as part of an aid package, and greatly increases the production of cassava that a small group of 7 or 8 women can do. Aside from the money it makes, some independence is gained for the workers, helping everyone involved.

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From there, we were driven to the rainforest edge, and we began our walk to our riverside hammock camp. The forest was hot, even in the shade, but we did manage some good views of a nunbird, roadside hawk and our first macaws in low late afternoon light. The Burro Burro River, though, was a refreshing endpoint, and several of us enjoyed a cool Banks beer as we floated in the river, up to our chins, at sunset. Bliss. Within the hour, frogs began to croak with intensity, lighting up the forest with their song. I caught one of the main songsters: a big tree frog with huge soft brown eyes, long legs, and huge very sticky finger pads. He was sounding off in the boat, next to a 50 gallon drum that served to intensify his call in a profound way.

Imagine what it sounded like to him! I mean, he's a rock star in the frog world: Mick Jagger eat your heart out!

Marianne soon appeared with another cutie, a tiny two-toned frog with small poison sacs on either side of his head. Soon there came a report that Bufo marianus, the largest South American toad, was at the forest edge. I held it for some time showing it off, and eventually it began to clasp my hand as if in the process of amphiplexus (ie: frog mating!). I felt very honoured, but seeing that the relationship wasn't going anywhere, I soon encouraged his departure. His clasp was very powerful, holding the back of my hand with a real death grip! It's call is very different than the tree frogs, sounding like a continuously running diesel generator, doing short, loud bursts.

Then Daniel Allicock, our cook, found a beautiful small boa with some incredible patterning on his diamond-shaped head. Because I wasn't sure if in fact it was a boa, I decided not to handle it. Its aggressive nature further convinced me of this, as it attempted several lunges, mouth agape like a viper, at my hand when I came near it! It soon slipped into the bush before we managed any photos.

Right now, I'm sitting under the tarp just out of the rain that the guides expertly set up over a long pole frame. Most folks are in their hammocks sleeping (Michel and Travis are doing journals beside me), and the frogs and toads are booming still, in a competition with the sound of the rain. The sky was clear during supper, and the near-full moon was brilliant, lighting up the forest. A short time ago, misty clouds blew in, making for some dramatic moon and cloud-watching with the scope. Presently, the frogs dominate the soundscape. Heaven.

Additional birds seen:  
Red-billed toucan  
Red and green macaw  
White-rumped hawk  
Roadside hawk  
White-tailed hawk  
Vermilion flycatcher  
Fork-tailed flycatcher  
Common ground dove  
Southern lapwing

Striated heron  
Great egret  
Ringed kingfisher  
Crested caracara  
Savanna hawk  
Black nunbird  
Eastern meadowlark  
Anhinga  
Pearl kite

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Nov 3: The night was amazing, beginning with part of a tree falling just as I was getting to sleep last night. The crash was thunderous, finally putting to bed the classic question..... "if a tree falls in the forest.....". Seriously, the frog serenade was the best I have ever heard in all our tropical forest experiences. The large species we caught last night pounded forth their classic deep frog "ribbits" most of the night, slowing their serenade sometime very early in the morning. I'm sure the rain was partly responsible for such frog intensity. Other unidentified calls permeated the night air, and for a time after I climbed into my hammock, we had a light rain tapping on the tarp. Everyone more or less worked out how to sleep in the hammocks, and personally, I found it to be a very comfortable way to enjoy a night. Travis suggested it was like returning to mother's womb, and he's committed to finding one to bring back for his room in Calgary! Once the rain quit and the clouds moved off, the moon shone bright, being only three nights away from full.

We were up within minutes soon after 5 a.m., after the first bird, (an antshrike), began its boisterous calling. As our boat was prepared, we sipped a coffee on the sandbar in front of the camp, wheeling the scope into position up, then downriver looking at kingfishers, anhinga and others. With Lionel at the bow, and Melnor Captain at the stern, we set off for a beautiful quiet float down the river.

The Burro Burro River is an intimate, quiet channel, no bigger than the Elbow River through Calgary. The high tree canopy nearly closes in over the top in many areas, and the thick tropical vegetation grows down and into the water channel. During our float, we virtually went from one good sighting to the next, seeing at least two pairs of white-tailed trogons (perfect close sightings in great light!), a pygmy kingfisher (my first sighting), some long-nosed bats, and the two grand highlights: three giant river otters and a small group of white-faced saki! The monkeys were easily seen, although high in the green. The male paused, looking towards us, giving us some excellent views of his moon-like white face against his black furry body. The river otters kept their distance in front, but we saw them repeatedly at a distance. After sighting them first, they dove and swam right under our boat, re-appearing up river! The camp staff saw them too, soon after we lost sight of them.

We arrived back later than we should have, eating breakfast around 10:30 a.m., meaning we had to hustle back through the forest. The big sighting during our return forest walk, however, was a full scope look at a blue-crowned motmot! His perfect racket-tail was in full display and his turquoise crown glistened in the dim light of the forest. Brilliant. Finally during the hottest part of the day, we arrived somewhat wilted at the guest house for lunch, to find that they had organized a school celebration for us. The children sang some songs about their life in their village, and one recited a poem. I had the chance to present a gift of Bosch & Lomb binoculars to the Community Village Council Chief, Sydney Allicock, to encourage the skill development of their appointed naturalists.

The idea was Lionel's: he asked if it would be possible to bring such a gift during our last trip a month ago. Quickly all the group members of that trip got on the bandwagon and pledged to kicke in a donation. I notified Denell via e-mail from the Pegasus, and via Robinson's Camera Centre (and carried here compliments of Gordon and Nan), came the binoculars in their original packing! And to top it all off, the posters the Docents produced (and Xerox laminated) are now mounted in a safe place in a prominent location in the one-room school! They created a lovely, colourful and inspirational display on Guyana's wildlife

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using the relevant posters as the central display. I took some pictures of Camacho Scipio, the Head Master of the primary school, in front of the display to show the Docents back in Calgary. As a final and very touching "thanks" from the village, we each received a gift given to us by a procession of children. The assortment of gifts consisted of miniature bow and arrows, a cassava strainer and tiny traditional backpacks, all made by Lionel.

We left elated with Surama, Surama's "wilds", and Surama's people and their genuine kindness and desire to please. The drive with Hamilton and Jamir to Iwokrama was punctuated with stops to see a bat falcon, crested currasows, and a nesting pair of macaws. Two agouties were spotted running across the road by most of the group.

We arrived in camp just at dark, having been picked up and delivered by the Iwokrama speed boat from the ferry landing, avoiding the bumpy corrugated driveway. Vibert Welch, the Field Support Manager of the camp met us, showed us to our rooms and made us feel welcome. There were rum punches (via the bottle Dee and I stashed at Colin's place) before supper, followed by a short intro to the camp, and then the long awaited bed. It's great to be back here.

Additional birds seen:

Screaming piha

Crested oropendola

Yellow-rumped caciques

White-banded swallow

Black-necked aracari

White-necked heron

Green kingfisher

White-tailed trogon

Blue-and-yellow macaw

Bat falcon

Grey-chinned hermit hummingbird

Yellow-headed parrot

Greater yellow-headed vulture

Pygmy kingfisher

Silver-beaked tanager

Green aracari

Rufous-vented chachalaca

Scarlet macaw

Crested curassow

Common black hawk

Nov 4: We were up and drifting down the Essequibo River by 5:45 a.m. The river was quiet, but a "pipeline" of parrots, mostly mealy parrots and a few parakeets, continuously passed high overhead. We got out to stretch our legs at a large, very picturesque sand bar, finding capybara and iguana tracks.

An ocelot track was barely visible, having mostly been erased by recent rains. Swallow-wings, some black-and-white swallows and a group of skimmers and terns were identified, as well as three species of heron.

After breakfast we boated downriver to the Turtle Mountain trail, and began our hike "pole-pole" (slow-slow) through the forest. A good look at an antbird soon followed by the raucous call and flight of a grey-winged trumpeter were the first sightings of significance. The trumpeter is a strange basketball-shaped forest bird with a head too small for its round body. Its head is covered in metallic-coloured feathers and the body is all dark. According to the book, they are reputed to carry their young down out of their nest high up in the trees in their mouths. Their nest consists of an old arboreal termite nest. We stopped several times to look at aspects of the forest: the huge buttress roots; the vines

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(specifically nibbi, the rattan equivalent of South America); medicinally utilized forest plants; balata trees and their rubber-tapping scars; and many other things. The view from the summit was superb, and everyone settled into a tranquil level of inactivity, enjoying the view and the cool breeze. Off in the distance there were several rainshowers moving about, leaving their tell-tail "scud" cloud (looking like smoke plumes) as they moved on. Surprisingly we never got hit with the rain. Three groups of howler monkeys took turns calling, announcing their presence to each other. One group was fairly close, and their calls were clear and long, giving all of us a chance to reflect on the absolutely unearthly tone of these remarkable animals.

We were on the top for about two hours, time that really flew by. The view was inspirational, with forest stretching as far as the horizon, patterned in a mozaic of multi-tone green, bisected by the big river. To have this quiet time just looking over the canopy was very important for everyone, including me, as we had been going non-stop since our arrival. And this was the place to reflect. The multitude of small canopy birds that were here three weeks ago were gone, as the fruiting tree they were feeding on had finished. On the return walk, I must have turned over twenty logs or pieces of bark (always returning them in their original position), looking for a scorpion. Gordon saw me doing this, and on his first piece, turned up a beautiful black scorpion! Beginner's luck! We coaxed it into a film container for a later photo session. A small snake was found too, one that I was quite sure wasn't poisonous, so I handled it to give everyone a closer look.

We celebrated the Iwokrama Forest with sundowners on the river, doing a quiet, motor-off float. As we observed the chromatophors migrating in the evening light, the grunt fish began their grunting, much to the amazement of the group.

During supper, Lorna, a researcher working here, gave us an excellent presentation on the balata tree and nibbi vine, two "non-forest products" she hopes will become a part of the economic future without logging off the forest. She is trying to add to the argument that an intact forest has many hidden values, far beyond the basic dollar for timber. The trick here is to create a sustainable forest economic program so that the locals can continue their way of life, using the intact forest, but still have economic opportunities. This will be the key to saving the forests, "bio-prospecting", and harvesting, but not destroying.

Zachariah Norman, the Amerindian guide we so enjoyed on the previous trip, came in to the kitchen near the end to inform me he had caught a fishing bat in the mist net, so the focus immediately changed from balata to bats. Seeing this highly specialized bat up close, examining his needle sharp claws on his huge feet and inter-femoral membrane designed to help hold his minnow-sized catch, was fascinating. Then we ventured out into the night with Zachariah as the guide to do some river nightlighting. A dead (headless!) anaconda was one of the first things we encountered (it looked like a floating, coloured styrofoam log!), soon followed by a very brief kinkajou sighting (I only saw the leaves shake), two capped herons, and three very close encounters with a caiman. We had the boat perhaps a meter and a half from one caiman at one point, his eyes glowing like rubies lit from within, (an extreme example of eyeshine). When it quickly submerged, it startled Marianne and Pam, giving the guides a good laugh.

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I finished off the evening with a spotting scope session with some of the camp staff, enjoying the full moon and its texture, and Jupiter and its moons.

Additional birds seen:  
Blue-crowned motmot  
Large-billed tern  
Spotted sandpiper  
Yellow-billed tern  
Green ibis  
Capped heron  
Black skimmer

Osprey  
Swallow-wing  
Gray-winged trumpeter  
Little blue heron  
Hook-billed kite  
Pied-water tyrant

Nov 5: The alarm went off too early (4:30 a.m.), but we all elected to try for the jaguar drive, even with the odds against us. We did see three agouties and a close-up pair of currasows. But the prize was the crimson topaz hummingbird. Zachariah went with us, and having his eyes and skill was a pleasure. He also took the time to make a traditional flute from a congo palm, demonstrating two notes that are played in traditional ceremonies.

After breakfast, we relaxed for a few hours: we went for a swim, did some writing and birding, had a shower, let the scorpion go, and gave the package of art supplies to Zeta, the cook's assistant (a gift from Ray and Lois Garety via the Plaxtons). On the way out, we paid a quick visit to Martin's Island and then Fairview village. Here we watched some women making cassava bread, a very interesting process, and visited the new school that 18 months ago was in its construction stage with the assistance of a Youth International group from Canada. The head mistress gave us a nice tour, explaining that she covers all ages in the one room building, with just under 40 children in her one class! She has been there for three weeks, and said she is really enjoying it.

We stopped a few times, once to look at a black hawk and the other to attempt to see a screaming piha. The latter goal was unsuccessful with an actual sighting, but the four pihas screaming in four different roadside areas was a sound we'll never forget.

Colin's resort was a pleasure to come "home" to, and with sundowners in hand, we floated blissfully in his pool until the sun set. Supper was the usual informal family affair in the kitchen. When I went to settle in at my "camp" beside the pool, I decided on a nocturnal cool down in the pool. The little pond beside the pool was alive with frog croaking, and upon investigation, I found numerous individuals including two pairs mating (in amphiplexus!). Needless to say, I spent some time videoing this amphibious sex scene.

Additional birds seen:  
Crimson topaz  
Blue-headed parrot

Moriche oriole  
Great black hawk

Yellow-headed parrot  
Mealy parrot  
Spix guan  
Bearded bellbird (heard only)

Common tody-flycatcher  
Tropical mockingbird  
Palm tanager

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Nov 6: Today was a day to relax with no planned events. After a very restful night in my bed beside the pool, I watched the early morning light colour the Rupununi from the "rock view" lookout with Travis and Marianne. Flocks of brown-headed parakeets zoomed in and landed, presenting us with some perfect views of these colourful birds. One pair sat and necked (!) for an extended period on one exposed branch. The highlight, though, was when Annie the anteater came out of her nighttime roost. I followed her for about half an hour watching her forage for food. At one point she became too inquisitive and reached for my arm, pinching it between her claw and palm. The force was significant, like a huge set of vice grips grabbing my arm. I was lucky that I reacted quickly enough to retreat back to a higher point out of reach. She soon went back to her feeding, and I just kept my distance. I managed some excellent video, though.

After breakfast I invited myself along to a meeting of the Rupununi Development Council (some 30 village leaders and interested members such as most of the guides we have been meeting), and the three chief staff members of Iwokrama: Dr. Graham Watkins (gwatkins@guyana.net.gy) (67 Bell Air, Georgetown), the Director General, Dr. David Cassells, and Dr. Gary Hunnisett, a Canadian who used to work for the Canadian Wildlife Service some 15 years ago.

The meeting was a discussion of the concept of tourism, its potential positive impact and its negatives. The room full of Amerindian faces, many that I now recognize, left me with a feeling of warmth and sadness at the same time. Here are a wonderful, gentle people, who like so many other remote cultures, will be soon fully exposed to the changes brought about by the road (built in 1992) and now, tourism. The road will likely have a powerful impact, both good and not so good, when it becomes fully driveable. Apparently the government has committed funds to rebuild the more damaged portions, so it's a matter of time. Tourism will no doubt grow, but the realities of competition and the lack of services coupled with absolutely no experience should enable its progression in a reasonable manner. The people themselves are keen, however, fully recognizing the economic possibilities. I was in a room full of the "converted", though. The discussions touched on the past, bringing up the indiscriminant killing of anteaters, turtles and otters that have, over the years, greatly reduced their numbers. The fishing stories tell an all too familiar tale too, as just a decade ago, the local water holes produced foot-long fish, and now all they can catch are minnows of just a few inches. A few days ago on the road to Iwokrama we encountered a few boys fishing in a pond, and their catch consisted of only a dozen or so tiny fish, catfish mostly, all caught with a fine net. All this impact with a relatively scant human population.

David and Graham gave excellent overviews of a tourism report and talked of some possibilities of Iwokrama assistants. Gary did an interesting presentation style: he asked questions of the group that stimulated some good discussion, especially when he asked what would a five day tourist plan be. I gave a presentation on the expectations of tourists, using some examples from this trip, and what makes a quality experience. I wanted to contribute in a way that would make them see the benefits of a good tourism plan, but to fully understand the difficulties and competition we, as sellers of this travel product, are faced with. I especially wanted to drive home the fact that their best marketing will be through word of mouth, and to therefore look at each tourist as the

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means of "gaining" the next group. I also wanted them to realize that each tourist is a "goose full of golden eggs" only because that tourist has saved hard to make this once-in-a-lifetime trip come true. How each tourist enjoys his experience will be the key, because he is connected to a network of similar travellers back home, and what he says may or may not encourage his friends to travel here. In other words, "don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs"; rather give a quality experience to the tourist, and the economic benefits to the community should be realized.

I left the meeting at 12:30 p.m. to join my group for lunch where we ended up talking tourism and travel philosophy. The Rupununi Council/Iwokrama meeting continued throughout the

afternoon, but I spent some good time with my group going over maps and the birds and mammals that we have seen. Late in the afternoon, Colin took us for a wonderful tour of his farm, showing us a multitude of trees, shrubs, and his orchard. We concluded the tour at his "community" bar (in the old ranch abattoir), talking amongst ourselves and with some of the locals over rum punch and beer.

Supper was under the mango trees where a cool breeze kept us comfortable. Our three Iwokrama guests joined us, and discussions on the World Bank and international policy as it affects forestry and development dominated our side of the table. Dr. Cassells has worked for the Bank for many years, giving him some detailed insight. The evening concluded with a session photographing frogs around the pool, followed by a quick swim.

Colin has a fascinating book entitled "Waterton's Wanderings in South America", Macmillian & Co, 1879, that may be available on the Amazon.com Internet book seller. David did some reading from it by the pool about caiman catching and better, how the motmot got his cropped tail. This is a "must read", hence some research on how to get a hold of it will need to be done.

Additional birds seen:

Brown-throated parakeet  
Greater ani

Smooth-billed ani  
Fork-tailed palm swift

Nov 7: In the middle of the night, a rainstorm kicked in with some intensity, but soon fizzled. We took the Bedford (when in transport, now called the "Rupununi Rover", by Travis) to the forest edge (a 50 minute trip) and had a beautiful sunrise walk. Several flocks of parrots were seen, including a new species for us: the golden-winged parakeet! Gordon spotted a channel-billed toucan in absolutely perfect light, making that the morning sighting. Its yellow bib, vivid red breast belt and contrasting black belly all made brilliant by a crack of dawn sun was most memorable. A new finch and a Muscovy duck with huge red caruncles on his face were also highlights.

After breakfast we had some time to relax, and I chose to do so by following Annie the anteater around, shooting stills and doing some video. She would sniff here and there, snuffling out ants and using her can-opener like claws to pry back the grass or roots to get at her protein prize. Many ants were easily seen on her fur, and then only for a short period of time: they couldn't get a grip on her bristle-like facial hair and would fall off!

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Travis figured there is some serious hair adaptation here to keep the biting and stinging ants off, and no doubt that's true. Hence, the strange fur of these beasts.

We left a little late from Colin's place (I'm not sure why... but I didn't want to get to the landing before the boat arrived). Whatever, we rolled into Diane's place, Karanambu Ranch, somewhere around 8 p.m., after about four hours on the river! No problem, though, as we identified 23 species of birds along the way, many with Kenneth's help, including a sighting of two buff-necked ibis and numerous jabiru storks! Several caiman were also sighted, with one sitting well for us on a sand beach. We indulged ourselves with rum punches at sunset, and the story-telling intensified as we drove under the star-filled sky. Kenneth's boat engine was small and therefore surprisingly quiet, giving us some valuable discussion time and outstanding star-watching. The trip in the night was magical.

Diane McTurk was waiting for us, and in her usual outstanding way, greeted us with distinction and proceeded to get us settled in. Supper was served on the long table in the usual style, Diane served three courses, and more great stories were told. What a charmer, and what a special place.

Additional birds seen:

Channel-billed toucan  
Golden-winged parakeet  
Red-bellied macaw  
Muscovy duck  
Keel-billed toucan  
Lesser seed-finch  
American kestrel

Yellow-headed caracara  
Ruddy dove  
Ruddy ground-dove  
Jabiru stork  
Rufescent tiger-heron  
Red-capped cardinal  
Pied lapwing

Lesser yellow-headed vulture  
Snowy egret  
Wood stork  
Buff-necked ibis

Little green heron  
Great blue heron  
Lesser kiskadee flycatcher

Nov 8: Chachalacas woke me somewhere around 5 a.m. with their loud CHA-LAKA calls. Wonderful! By 6:30 a.m. we were putting along up river to the trail to Crane Pond, birding as we went. Almost immediately we came across a tree with what looked like a big red fuzzy termite mound: our first howler monkey! He eventually became shy of our presence, got up, and walked off the branch he was sitting on (and likely overnighted on), and disappeared into the thick bush.

Our big bird sighting was a rufous-bellied heron, perhaps one of the most beautiful of all herons, with its long beak that doesn't end, red neck and delicately coloured body. It allowed a close approach, slinking away as if it had committed some crime when at last we got too close. A puffbird was seen on our walk to the pond, and a jacamar sat long enough for us to set the scope on it, giving superb views. Kenneth forgot the key to unlock the boat to go out into the pond for close-up looks at the giant Amazonia lily pads, so we decided to do the other walk into Acuri Pond just downstream. Yet another very cooperative puffbird was seen on that trail, and upon arriving at the lily pad-covered Acouri

## 12.

Pond, five giant otters appeared! Kenneth was able to call in two of them, giving us an excellent look. Here were the world's largest otters popping up between the world's largest lily pads!

After breakfast, we swam with Peter the Great, Diane's pet giant river otter. All of us sat in the river water, Peter visiting each of us in turn. We had a ball watching this high energy, playful animal bounce like a ball out of control, between us all. Everyone got right into it, with at least two hours of non-stop Peter play passing in no time. We fed him three piranha that the fisherman caught earlier this morning, tossing the fish in the river for him to "catch". Lying beside him watching him eat is an experience, as he pulverizes the fish before chewing off chunks, possibly a way to reduce the bones in the flesh to nothing. The noise he makes when eating, a kind of gurgling hum, is certainly endearing, making any observer giggle with delight.

We went to Simoni Ponds in the late afternoon, enjoying a tropical rain and a double rainbow. A quiet drift back down the narrow intimate channel was a pleasure, but the best was yet to come. In the same location as three weeks ago, there were 5 howler monkeys, 3 of which quickly got up off their branch and walked in full view of us. Their red coats appeared rich in colour, the low sun doing its magic. Having seen the best of the show here, we pushed off to the opposite side of the boat landing, hoping the squirrel monkeys would come in. Right away, we had a troupe, Travis counting 8 within minutes, and Kenneth confirming there were over 30 in this group. More and more monkeys appeared, filling the palm with their chattering, fuzzy brown bodies. The palm itself is one of the species that has its entire stalk made out of thorns, making any predator attack via the ground impossible. A perfect nighttime roost. The final view before it was too dark to see, was of about a half dozen lined up on one frond, all in a row. Too dark to video, but a pleasure to watch. I did manage some excellent silhouettes of several on the uppermost fronds, jumping, scratching, and generally being squirrel monkeys.

Sundowner drinks were served in the main lodge amongst much excited human chatter, and supper consisted of fresh fish. As we sat having our drinks, two tiny bats fell from the roof and landed between me and Pam! They were embraced in combat (mating?...or should I say combat?), so I took the opportunity to try to pick them up. They were so tiny I had to be really careful not to hurt them, and in my gentleness, one flew away instantly, and the other bit me over and over trying to get away. His little mouth didn't come anywhere near breaking the skin on my hand, as these were the smallest bats I have ever seen. I have never seen bats tumble from the air in such a violent way, and all the way to the ground yet!

Additional birds seen:  
Black vulture  
Chestnut-bellied heron  
Tropical gnatcatcher  
Troupial oriole  
Green-tailed jacamar

Purple gallinule  
Boat-billed heron  
Black-crested antshrike  
House wren  
Yellow-throated spinetail

Spotted puffbird  
King vulture

White-vented euphonia  
Wattled jacana

13.

Nov 9: A very good morning birding expedition was experienced by a few of us, where we saw five toucans in one tree, a lineated woodpecker and two river otters that Kenneth once again called in. Breakfast was a rushed affair. It seemed that the kitchen supervisor, Georgina, was sick, and the remaining staff had a late start in getting our breakfast cooked. As a consequence, the flying "shoebox" (our Caravan aircraft) surprisingly arrived on time, and because the thing can't be switched off easily (it's a turbine engine, apparently), well, things got a bit chaotic as we tried to salvage breakfast. Diane began to stuff the hot breakfast into homemade scones, and with her kitchen help, loaded them into a plastic tupperware box. Meanwhile, we were rushed out to get on the plane, our luggage having already been loaded. The Caravan aircraft are incredibly noisy, and with the belly loading, it was quite a memorable sight. The wind was blowing from the prop wash; dust was sailing; people were assembling at the rear door and filtering into the craft; baggage was loaded and piled high at the rear; and Diane was buzzing amongst all of us making sure we all had our fill of scrambled egg-hot scone sandwiches. It was all just good fun, and we boarded excited with anticipation for the next leg of the journey.

Since this was a private charter, the pilot flew lower than a regular more powerful commercial craft, giving us excellent views of the dramatic forest-covered mountains. We did two fly-overs at Kaitour Falls, landing on the paved strip by 8:30 a.m., about 50 minutes after takeoff. It had rained just the night before, giving the air a cool, damp feel. The huge bromeliads, some several meters tall and over a meter wide sang with the golden frog calls (*Colostethus beebei*). Several flowering plants were seen, and one in particular, Apocynaceae was in full yellow bloom. There were also blue ground orchids, and several other unidentified flowers were seen. The cock-of-the-rock lek was vacant, but a slate-coloured grosbeak (it had a crimson beak!) was identified as we patiently waited for the other bird to appear. I stayed behind to watch the lek as the rest of the group went to the first lookout, hoping the cock would return. No luck.

At the second viewpoint we identified one of the swifts flying over, a swift that dramatically flew in large numbers beside the waterfall wall and resulting mist. Two macaws were sighted too, and yet another two attempts were made to find the cock-of-the-rock, to no avail. On the second walk, however, we did see several raucous red-throated caracaras, striking big birds of prey (close to vultures, actually), with a red face, blue-black body and contrasting white belly.

The flight over the extensive rainforest to the dirt airstrip near Shanklands was beautiful, as the Caravan pilots weaved us between huge rainshower after shower, all coming from gigantic cumulous clouds. At one point a series of clouds looked as if they were supported by columns of mist-like rainwater, the base of the "column" flaring out as if too much water was being dumped from the clouds and was spilling out beyond where it should. The forest of non-stop broccoli was being washed!

Just after the pilot told me we would have to circle to bide time to wait for a rain shower to pass over our landing strip, they decided it was a go, landing in a torrential downpour. However, they ended up shutting down the craft and waiting anyway, as the rain was pelting so hard we would have been soaked had we tried to run to the waiting boats. In the rain, I saw a small bird just up beside the runway. So through the pilot's open door, I set

14.

up the scope on the tripod and lined everyone up to have a gander at this incredibly bright bird: a red-breasted blackbird. In the grey of the rain, the day-glow colour of the bird's breast provided some good entertainment. The boat ride, past Bartica, took about a half an hour.

Shanklands staff greeted us with tea time (cakes, etc), and some good birding on the lawn followed, including a classic new sighting of another cotinga: the pompadour cotinga! It was a female, but a pompadour for sure. With the scope, in beautiful under-the-rainshower-cloud sunlight, we watched four aracaris peal and eat ripening fruit in one of the big trees. They are profoundly beautiful birds, serrated edges on their huge toucan bills that glistened like steel, ruby red rump and breast band and yellow breast.

Supper was wonderful, as Iola, our cook, did her usual selection of outstanding food. Some good after supper discussions followed. As I write this now, yet another rainforest mystery unsolved: somewhere out there in the moonless black, some creature is making a strange noise,

like plywood being played back and forth as if someone was playing a "saw". Weird. Some kind of nocturnal cicada is calling, frogs have really emerged with all this rain, and a long-horn beetle is bumping into the light above me. The tropics.

New birds seen:

Lineated woodpecker	Red-breasted blackbird
Slate-coloured grosbeak	Shining-green hummingbird
White-tipped swift	Black-headed parrot
Western flycatcher	Turquoise tanager
Red-throated caracara	Pompadour cotinga
Black-necked aracari	

Nov 10: Winston, our Shanklands guide, met us at the forest edge at 6 a.m., and immediately pointed out a troupe of brown capuchin monkeys! We all spotted them, clearly seeing their prehensile tail with its tight curl. They rapidly moved off as a group, but hopefully will stick around for us to see again. This is species number four, and what a great way to start the morning. Several channel-billed toucans and a new woodpecker (the red-necked) was sighted, but the highlight was a group of mixed species of manakins, observed in the dark forest at the bottom of the first trail. In a rapid series of high energy sightings, three species of manakins were seen (Michel, only, spotted the Crimson-hooded); a good but too fast look at a honeycreeper (species?); and an excellent long look at a new trogon species, the second trogon sighting of the trip! This was by far the most thrilling deep-forest birding I've done in Guyana. Closed canopy dark forest birding certainly has its challenges, but this morning search paid off.

After lunch, Marianne and I went for a short kayak up the forest stream, following everyone else's lead (they all did it before lunch), that is only possible when the tide is high. It was beautiful, with the naturally sculptured buttress roots of the big trees dominating the edges.

Later, we met Winston and tried to recreate the birding bonanza of this morning. We had a few parrots, a guan, and some possible manakins, but it was a wash. Marianne had been

15.

in the forest since our kayaking. When we met her, her afternoon highlight was a possible sighting of a golden-handed tamarin! She didn't get her binoculars on it, but her description was accurate. A very good sighting, indeed. Early morning birding, however, is by far the best, without question. An outstanding sunset was had on the west end of the property, followed by an excellent supper. Some star gazing, a nightcap, then to bed.....one last birding outing tomorrow morning, and that will be the trip.

Additional birds seen:

Red-necked woodpecker (Michel)	Crimson-hooded manakin
Black-throated trogon	Cayenne jay
White-crowned manakin	White-bearded flycatcher
Golden-headed manakin	Blue dacnis
Dusky parrot	

Nov 10: For the first 45 minutes this morning we didn't move from the base of one of the big trees on the lawn: three species of tanager, two species of aracari, three species of parrot, a barbet, a tityra, and a new woodpecker. It doesn't get any better than that. Upon entering the forest, a large group of wedge-capped capuchins were spotted, giving the best yet sightings of their faces. Then we thought we would try our luck with the manakins, and for the next hour we played cat and mouse with their flight noise and calls. Not a single confirmed sighting! We did however have some very good piha sightings, and one did a wonderful song that sounded as if his "piha calling spring" had suddenly come unwound! Then the highlight: a group of brown-bearded sakis engulfed us! They came in from a distance, and the four of us (David, Marianne, Michel and I) stood our ground, not moving a muscle (except for our bino arms). The monkeys didn't notice us at all, and moved slowly through the canopy. Most passed on either side of us, but one went right overhead! As he walked, he suddenly looked down and noticed us, and gave out a fear squeal, urinating immediately, lightly sprinkling me as I stood directly under. I managed some video, but except for the occasional glimpse, most of the action consisted of moving leaves. The experience lasted at least 20 minutes, and numerous sightings were made where we could clearly see their bouffant hairstyle, beard, rusty brown back and long, thick blunt tail. Once they had seen us, the degree of vocalization increased, and several

were seen tail-wagging in excitement. This was a wonderful farewell and an excellent conclusion to the trip.

After breakfast, several of us played croquet on the lawn, David cleaning up on the first game according to rumour, and Gordon on the second. Our one hour boat ride to the landing where Louis picked us up was uneventful, if not a bit wet with some spitting clouds. Michel was dropped off at a guest house on our way to the airport in the evening (he's staying on and will meet up with his fiancée to do some more travelling). Soon we were off to Tobago (changed planes) and on to Canada, where in Toronto, we were met with near-freezing temperatures.....back into the cool weather, always good to return to.

Additional birds seen:

Grey-breasted martin  
Black-spotted barbet  
Black-tailed tityra  
seen)

Green-rumped parrotlet  
Yellow-tufted woodpecker  
Strong-billed woodcreeper (133 birds  
seen)

## 16.

Mammal sightings:

- \*Howler monkey (Heard throughout the trip, saw at Karanambu)
- \*Brown-bearded saki (at Shanklands)
- \*White-faced saki (at the Burro Burro River)
- \*Brown capuchin (at Shanklands)
- \*Golden-handed tamarin (at Shanklands, viewed by Marianne)
- \*Giant river otter (at the Bura Bura River, Iwokrama and Karanambu)
- \*Agouti (at Iwokrama and Shanklands)
- \*Bats, numerous, including long-nosed bats (Burro Burro River, Iwokrama and Karanambu), fishing bats (Iwokrama, in the "hand!"), various insectivorous bats.

Bird sightings:

- \*133 species

Other sightings:

\*Included numerous frogs, black caiman, a tree boa, river turtle, geckos, toads (including the big *Bufo marianus*), green iguana, tegu lizard, heard the infamous and real-life "in the flesh" grunt fish, some very cool insects, including incredible numbers of morphos butterflies, postmen, and the clouds of yellow butterflies in Iwokrama, and the incredible huge spiders. The numerous red and yellow flowers, big trees, thick vegetation, green, green, green.....full of life. This was a classic rainforest experience, and Guyana certainly produced for us.

# Guyana Trip Log

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## Calgary Zoo Tour

Guyana Trip Log  
October 3 - 14, 1998  
Written by Brian Keating, Tour Leader  
Brian and Dee Keating (keatingb@calgaryzoo.ab.ca)  
Murray and Penny Young  
Ray and Lois Garety  
Bud and Georgina Clarke  
Nipper and Eleanor Guest

Compiled November 1998 for:

**Wilderness Explorers**  
Cara Suite  
176 Middle Street  
Georgetown  
Guyana  
Tel : 592-2-77698  
Tel/Fax/AH : 592-2-62085  
E Mail : info@wilderness-explorers.com  
Home Page : www.wilderness-explorers.com

### 2.

Oct 3: We left at 12:30 a.m. on the red-eye to Toronto with no hitches, and the connections in Toronto and Miami were perfect. At the stopover in Trinidad, however, the aircraft developed some kind of problem. After an hour's delay, we were shunted into another craft (fortunately there was one there!). After nearly 20 hours of travel, we at last arrived in Guyana. Wilderness Adventures drivers Teri and Louis met us at the arrival hall and quickly transferred us into two well-kept vans. The drive into Georgetown along the black, winding airport road passed at least three roadside parties blaring music, crowded with Saturday night socialites. We saw the occasional donkey on the road, the ubiquitous third-world dogs, and lots of smells, from burning vegetation to open sewers. Sometime after 1 a.m., the bed at the Pegasus Meridian was a welcome sight. The nearly full moon shone down on us, with Jupiter just above, in a clear sky, and the air was alive with the sound of frogs. It's great to be back in the tropics. But for now, we are all definitely ready for a horizontal position. The frogs will have to wait.

Oct 4: Up at 8 a.m., we had a quick breakfast before being met by Tony Thorne and Louis. We first went to the market, which contrary to what Tony had been told the day before, was closed. We still managed to gain entry and walked the dark corridors past a multitude of typical boarded up stalls, imagining the usual hustle that this place witnesses on most mornings. The market structure was built at least two hundred years ago, making the entire scene look like it's from a black-and-white movie set. Behind the main structure, adjacent to the wharf, was a narrow walkway past more stalls, one of which was open. Contained within was a fellow with several cages, two containing about 20 small birds and another with two parrots, likely orange-winged. He explained that the small birds are used in gambling, with bets placed on the one people think will whistle the most in a set period of time! Apparently these birds go for up to US\$30.00 each, and much more for the proven whistlers! Better than cock-fighting, certainly, as none get killed in the process.

Along the street we met a fellow with a huge green iguana over his shoulder. The iguana's arms and legs were bound tightly behind the poor animal's back. The lizard looked pathetic, and when I asked the man to show it to the group, he swung it off his shoulder as if it was a sack of flour, hitting the concrete with a thud. I picked it up for everyone to have a closer look, we discussed the species, took some pictures, then with a tip, I gave it back to the owner. He wanted to sell it for GU\$3,500 (CN \$35.00), but offered a \$500.00 discount for us. I gave him a \$100 (CN \$1.00) tip. Guyana could likely do very well with a breeding program, like the ones in Central America used for producing meat and new stock to replace animals from the wild.

After a nice tour of the city's largest wooden cathedral by a very enthusiastic minister, we completed an interesting tour of Georgetown's oldest buildings. Peter Katoo came in for the afternoon to meet us at the Zoo after lunch. We had about 50 posters for the Zoo, (assembled by very keen Calgary Zoo Docents) and we made a point of photographing the gift-giving, with the group holding the colourful laminated posters (thanks to Xerox) in front of Peter's new aquarium. We were impressed with the changes Peter has been able to make in the previous 18 months, including renovating the peccary pen into a roomy jaguar exhibit, moving the puma into the back pen that was originally for the lions (of which there is only one left now....a deworming accident), and the creation of a multi-species pen. After some entertaining birding in the botanical gardens, we headed back to the Pegasus for supper, a BBQ poolside, and a slide talk by Dr Graham Watkins, the Acting Director General for Iwokrama, an international centre for rainforest conservation and development.

### 3.

He also presented some insights on the potential of some of the negative impacts of development upon the land, the forest and the wildlife within. Tony gave a good intro. to the outline of our trip too.

#### Birds seen:

Snowy egret	Wattled jacana
Little blue heron	Ruddy ground dove
Tricolored heron	Orange-winged parrot
Striated heron	Green kingfisher
Cattle egret	Lineated woodpecker
Yellow-crowned night heron	Whimbrel
Laughing hawk (falcon)	Smooth-billed ani
Lesser kiskadee flycatcher	Palm tanager
Great kiskadee flycatcher	Blue-grey tanager
Silver-beaked tanager	Carib grackle
Pied water-tyrant	Rufous crab-hawk

Oct 5: It was too late to bed last night, then once there, a poor sleep for me because of all the excitement, and up at 4 am to be ready to fly to Annai at 6 a.m. With a 25 lb. weight limit each, we had some serious culling of stuff, and even then, our total group overweight was some 32 pounds, costing about Gu\$16,000 (Cn\$16.00). It was a Caravan aircraft that took us into the interior, flying over some wonderful green tropical forest, and finally through some very dark rain clouds.

The Rupununi was flooded, so much so it looked like a swamp from the air with water stretching to the horizon, shimmering amongst the grassland to the east against the low sun. The box-like Caravan hydroplaned down the strip, kicking mud the entire way, making quite a

sight. Colin Edwards of Rock View Resort was there to meet us, break-dancing with energy and smiling from ear to ear as we had so fondly remembered him.

After a relaxed walk around his place, meeting "Tony the tapir", "Annie the anteater" and "Sheena the peccary", we settled in for a nice breakfast in his cosy kitchen.

Soon after we all piled on the deck of the Bedford truck to begin a 3 hour rumble for 25 miles down the road to Surama Village, stopping for some excellent birding here and there, with a jabiru stork being the highlight. Meadowlark, various birds of prey, some excellent flycatchers including a water tyrant and a fork-tailed flycatcher, were some of the birds we saw before entering the forest.

A brief, cooling rain ended just as we drove into the forest, followed by the sun, creating an explosion of calling cicadas. We walked a length of road, allowing for some superb looks at macaws through the scope, nearly full frame! Outstanding.

At Surama, we were taken to the newly-built guest house for an excellent lunch. Due to the previous three days of unseasonal heavy storms, the Burro Burro River was in rainy season-like flood with levels five meters above normal. We found out our boats had been lost (they were tied to a tree, and now sat under several feet of rushing water), and our

#### 4.

camp was flooded out. Schedule change: we went to see their cassava co-op, some farm plots, did an excellent walk on the road, some birding (after first walking across a flooded bridge), and after supper, enjoyed a "ceremony" put on by the village. The evening was conducted in the new UNICEF school, and we, being the guests of honour, sat in some new wooden chairs. The headmaster gave several speeches, including some incredible comments on the value of tourism to his little village. He told us about the near disaster they saw happening around them five years ago, when they started in the consumptive wildlife trade, and how species of once abundant birds all but disappeared in a very short time. Somehow they thought better of it, and stopped the parrot (and other bird) catching and snatching, and focused instead on the idea of non-consumptive eco-tourism. The children sang several songs, as did the moms from the group, and our group responded with a rousing chorus of Home Home on The Range. And, hey, we weren't bad! After our rendition, I did a little speech and we presented the head master with some of the laminated wildlife posters the Docents put together, some pencils, and some school books complete with a "donated by" insert that Wilderness Adventures organised for us. The evening was warm, genuine, and most memorable for all of us. We felt we were a privileged few, being among the first to be a part of this new and hopefully successful focus on an alternate form of income raising for this little, remote village.

New birds seen:

Black vulture  
Turkey vulture  
Crested caracara  
Savannah hawk  
Roadside hawk  
Pearl kite  
Pauraque  
White-vented euphonia  
Eastern meadowlark  
Jabiru stork

Fork-tail palm swift  
Fork-tailed flycatcher  
White-headed marsh tyrant  
Mealy parrot  
Burnished-buffed tanager  
Red-billed toucan  
Toco toucan  
Red-breasted blackbird  
Red-and-green macaw  
Great egret

Oct 6: We departed to walk to the Burro Burro River just after 6 a.m., walking first through rolling semi-open grassland and tree islands. Good birding, including an excellent look at a pearl kite, some toucans, and at last a confirmed classic look at some scarlet macaws. In fact, once we had our first macaw sighting, we saw them by the score, including a tree with at least 7 or 8 in it. Apparently they will soon be leaving, migrating into the Amazon. High up in one tree, a Spix's guan sat very still, trying not to be noticed, with his red chin waddle giving him away, and the spotting scope (a 22 power birdwatching telescope) making the view possible. Morphos butterflies were abundant in the forest, often sitting on the ground lapping moisture or minerals. When they flew away, they appeared and disappeared with each wing beat. One of the guides spotted a remarkable moth that had what appeared to be "feather pencils" on the posterior end, which looked as if someone had glued a bunch of down feathers to it!

The river itself was certainly swollen, and in fact we couldn't get to the main channel because the water was too high in the small tributary. We expected to be back by 8 a.m., but rolled in, tired and thirsty near 10! Breakfast was consumed with vigour, to say the

5.

least.

After a shower and a break, five of us walked to a nearby silk cotton tree (a Kapok), just to see this king of the forest. The tree was nice, but the highlight was a huge common toad find. It puffed itself up and leaned into the "danger" as if to hide its face and further expose his neck glands to a potential "bite". The thing was as big as a grapefruit, with lovely eyes and a very fat body. Just my kind of toad!

Two trucks arrived a bit late, around 2 p.m., to take us to Iwokrama. We made a couple of roadside stops, once to observe two macaws mating, and behind them, two Guianan toucanets eating fruit! Our drivers put the trucks into 4 wheel drive in a few muddy spots. At one point I saw the pug marks of a jaguar. The sky became darker and darker until all hell broke loose, with the rain coming down in sheets. At times we must have been hydroplaning, as the road was awash in muddy water. Just before sunset, we arrived riverside, and the boat was called in to pick us up at Kurupukari Landing, sparing us the bumpy driveway into the camp from the main road.

The camp has changed a lot in 18 months, with the rooms arranged in a very nice way, the masses of cots removed, floors redone and varnished, and generally a lot more welcoming. Everyone was really pleased, and before supper, some 5-year rum was used to have a celebration drink.

After supper, we spent about two hours on the river with 4 staff: the boat driver, the caiman catcher, a bow paddler and the night lighter with a million candle power light powered by a car battery. We wanted to catch a caiman (a South American alligator) just to see one up close, then to release it. An attempt was made on at least 7 caiman, with no luck. The catcher even had a noose around one at one point, but somehow it slipped away. To have a small caiman in the hand would have been great, but for everyone to see at least the eye shine made it all worthwhile. We did see a boa (fairly small, no bigger than a metre) up on a branch, lots of fishing bats and other unknown bat species, numerous nightjars, two small owls, a snake bird, and the highlight: a huge tree frog. It was greenish-grey in colour, with large classic frog eyes, a narrow waist, long slender legs with webbed fingers and toes, terminating in fat, sticky pads. We had a chance to get a close look at it, do some video, and let him go. Into bed late again, with the prospect of the morning arriving too early. What a blast.

New birds seen:

Crested oropendola  
Dusky parrot  
Swallow-wing  
Spix's guan

Scarlet macaw  
Screaming piha (heard)  
Guianan toucanet  
Anhinga

Oct 7: We were in the boat for our morning float by 5:40 a.m., and moments later the engine was off and we were drifting. Starting off with a pair of skimmers and pied lapwings, we drifted in silence, enjoying the quiet of the morning. The wall of green that bordered each side of the river towered over us, perhaps 40 metres tall. Parrots flew overhead now and again, but they were surprisingly quiet. Just the sound of dropping

6.

seeds came from the green wall, an indication of the parrot populations in the canopy. Their sloppy eating habits of food dropping, acts of course, as seed dispersal. A few groups of howlers called, their deep growls coming from the green depths, but other than that, we were skunked for primate sightings.

At a sand bank, we got out to stretch and look around, and found capybara, jaguar, iguana and caiman tracks. Some parakeets, nunbirds, and swallow-wings were identified, and an unseen trogon teased us from some thick foliage. The outstanding sighting, however, was of three green aracaris with their toucan-like bills and bright plumage. The birds were in perfect light, harvesting the fruit from a Congo palm, stripping each finger-like morsel and popping the bits

into their mouths. Their colours were brilliant, and we oohed and ahed for some time. An interesting fungus-like egg mass of tiny white moths was later found by Lois, and some fun was had working out their place in the scheme of things.

After breakfast, we took a packed lunch and motored downriver about 20 minutes in the boats to a trailhead up to the top of Turtle Mountain, a hike with a view about 1000 feet above the river. We hopped out of the boat quickly, as we had to do a fast trot through a mass of army ants! Loading the lunch into our packs, we began the two and a half hour trek through the steamy, humid forest. Passing classic forest trees with huge buttress roots made it an excellent first serious rainforest hike for everyone. We identified glass wood (its grain straight like cedar, making great firewood and house posts), greenheart (the country's most important economic tree), crabwood (its nuts loaded with oils that work as a skin lotion to reduce itching from biting insects), and balata trees complete with the scars of Amerindian rubber collecting. At a pond, we suddenly came upon three river otters, who, with the expert calling of Zachariah, our local Amerindian guide, came in really close to check us out! What an experience! They dodged back and forth between the roots and submerged vegetation, closing in especially near to Dee and Zac! I missed the video because of the tricky lighting, but got a good look at the bug-eyed face of one of them. Apparently they frequent this pond when the river water is really high.

From there we set a very steady pace, passing by an ocelot den at the foot of a rock outcrop, and eventually we emerged at a stunning viewpoint above the Iwokrama Reserve. When I set my pack down, a cryptic grasshopper of immense proportions went into a wonderful wings-up stance, trying to intimidate me! I grabbed and bagged it for later photography.

We searched in vain for spider and howler monkeys, though Zac saw the former and tried to call them in using some excellent monkey mimic calls. Howlers called now and again, but no sightings were made. A macaw flew way below us, presenting a very nice view, but the show was taken by a fruiting tree not 10 metres from us: in no time, we saw three species of manakin, two tanagers, two honeycreepers, and a euphonia. We went nuts doing all the identification, having one brilliant sighting after the other.

Then the wind picked up, a rainbow appeared in full view across the entire vista. To all this "natural high", Zac was trying to call in some black spider monkeys. The entire sight was surreal, presenting an awesome image that I will never forget. I tried to capture it on

7.

video, but I'm sure it'll just be a scant representation of the moment. Zac stood, arm draped around a tree, half hanging on and leaning into the tree, looking down into the forest canopy far below. The storm-induced wind was blowing strong, and the rainbow off in the near distance was brilliant. A light rain had begun, and it threatened seriously for more. Zac all the while made spider monkey noises, using his hand as a way to vary his voice, patting it onto his open mouth. With rain increasing in intensity, most had left the cliff edge and were making their way down the steep trail. Zac was so keen, his intensity held me, Dee, Ray and Lois there until we too had to eventually pull ourselves away. The return trip down took just over an hour. No spider monkey, but a rich experience indeed. I found an interesting scorpion on the way back.

Lorna, a researcher working at Iwokrama, gave us an excellent talk after supper on balata, the rubber-tree alternative. She imparted some very important thoughts on the survival of the rainforest through economic gain. Her research is looking at two items, the balata tree and the nibbi vine, and their market potential, development, and their importance in economic terms. She is looking for arguments for the justification of leaving intact forest ecosystems for the country. The idea of setting up a sustainable industry will be a major part of her work, ensuring a continual income for the locals. We had some good discussion after her presentation, further exploring the concept of the reality of our ever-consuming world and how wildlife preservation will fit in.

I then spent about an hour showing all the Amerindian camp staff Jupiter and its moons, and our own waning moon, through my spotting scope. In a touching moment, one fellow came up to me and quietly said: "Thanks for being so patient with us"..... What wonderful, warm, gentle people.

New birds seen:

Black skimmer  
Amazon kingfisher  
Yellow-billed tern  
Pied lapwing  
White-winged swallow  
Drab water-tyrant  
Large-billed tern  
Green honeycreeper  
Purple honeycreeper  
Golden-headed manakin  
White-throated manakin

Yellow-rumped cacique  
Red-capped cardinal  
Painted parakeet  
Green aracari  
Black nunbird  
Capped heron  
Black-collared martin  
Great tinamou (heard)  
Osprey  
Bay-headed tanager

Oct 8: We started the day at 4:30 a.m. to try to be in the boats by 5 on our attempted jaguar drive. Although we were unsuccessful with that agenda item, we did see three agouties, a red-and-green macaw nest, (actually two) with birds in them, a bat falcon on the top of a dead tree, several toucans and many others. The highlight, however, was at a site with several bloodwood trees in bloom with clustered red tube flowers.

Hummingbirds, mostly mangoes of various unidentified species, were everywhere, having their spats and fits of territoriality. Then the prize appeared, a crimson topaz

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hummingbird. With two long tail feathers gracing a rufous tail, an iridescent rufous chest and a ruby throat that glowed in the light, the male entertained us for at least a half an hour. We watched through the scope as he returned time and time again to the same two or three perches after each battle or feeding foray. In the sun, he became a living jewel. Behind us sat a red-billed toucan, overhead flew parrots of various species, but this tiny little bird kept us focused. Zac said later that it was his first sighting of this bird in the 3 years he has worked at Iwokrama!

Later, we went upstream past the local village to two sites where there were some interesting petroglyphs. The petroglyphs, all etched into the rock, are of unknown age, meaning, and origin. One consisted of a honeycomb-like pattern, another was a lizard or iguana. Several others were unidentifiable as much of anything. At the first site, there were four kids that did some serious body surfing through the rapids. No fear here! Georgina suggested this is not the kind of thing a mother would appreciate! It was amazing seeing these little kids bobbing up and down through the boiling water.

On the way upstream, Zac saw an iguana in an incredibly difficult, well camouflaged spot, and we spent some time trying to find it with our binoculars.

On the way back from our expedition, we paused at Martin's Island for a swim and cooldown at the beach. He had a puma skin there, which he said was "left" by a gold miner. Pretty sad whatever the story, as the pelt was pitiful with the fur being short and the skin itself crudely skinned and tanned.

After lunch, we had a short farewell ceremony in the cooking shelter beside the dining room, where I presented the tip and some gifts to express our appreciation. Our drive to Rock View Resort was hot but comfortable in the good vehicle of Iwokrama, arriving by mid afternoon. In short order we were sipping drinks in the pool and listening to wonderful story-telling by Colin.

Colin's resort has really become lush and thick with well organised flowering vegetation that appears to attract a wonderful variety of bird life. As I write this, I just heard the buzz of a hummingbird, several parrots in the distance, and a variety of unidentified chirps and calls all around. It's a paradise, and he has a lot to be proud of.

Later: After an entertaining discussion with Colin over drinks in his living room-come-museum, we settled in for a delicious home-cooked meal served by Velda and her family. Rupununi beef, chicken, Brazil beans, rice, farine (a cous cous-like meal), mixed salad, sorrel drink and beer. For dessert, we had guava cheese and cream. The entire supper experience had a warm feel, with Colin's family members hovering and serving, making everything just right. Good fun was had by all.

Colin's ranch house was built in the 1950's, and used to be a rest house for those involved in the huge cattle drives of 40,000 head through to the coast. The returning cowboys would find this ranch "the" place to be. His bar, a former meat butchering and hanging room, is now a local going concern.

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Velda is wife #3 with whom he has children # 5 and 6. In his living room stands a meter tall statue of a woman squatting in childbirth: a gift for a previous wife. This carving must weigh in at 600 pounds, and is carved from one solid piece of tree. A basket full of arrows and spears sit in the corner, and other paintings and carvings adorn every shelf and wall space possible. A large hammock hangs from a centre support to the wall. One can easily tell that every item, every carving, tells a story. Colin arrived in South America from England at the age of 22, and he's in his 50's now.....he says this is his final resting place. I suspect Colin was one serious rolling stone in many of his former years.

Since there are only four guest cottages (but four more are in progress), Dee and I were to sleep in the farm house, but have elected instead to sleep outside where it's cooler and where we can catch a breeze. We have a "nest" of a comfortable mattress under a mosquito net, all set up under the thatch of the pool-side bar.

New birds seen:

Blue-and-yellow macaw  
Mottled owl  
Crimson topaz  
Bat falcon

Lesser swallow-tailed swift  
Barn swallow  
Black currawong

Oct 9: Six of us were up and in the land rover by 5 a.m. for the 30 minute drive back to the forest edge to spend some time birding. As we stood beside the jeep drinking our coffee in the pre-dawn glow, three oropendolas, silhouetted in the eastern sky were doing their breeding display calls, showing off some remarkable acrobatic contortions, complete with bizarre squeaky, wet rubber-like calls. From that great start, we proceeded to add seven new birds to the list, including a woodpecker, an aracari, a dove, a parrot and another species of oropendola (a green). A superb walk in nice cool weather. Meanwhile, the others added a toco toucan as their morning highlight from the "rock view" at Rock View Resort.

After breakfast, we visited with Annie the anteater, Sheena the peccary and Tommy the tapir, photographing them all. During a late morning swim in the pool, we found a new species of hummingbird, as it sat patiently in the scope for all to see. After lunch and our farewell tip and gift ceremony, we boarded the Bedford truck and began the long grinding drive to the Rupununi River, stopping for a green ibis, Savannah hawk, jabiru stork and a huge mud puddle that we walked around to off load the truck. Arriving at the pick up point, Ginep Landing, we departed only about 15 minutes late (at 3:45 p.m.), but arrived at Karanambu Ranch well after dark, somewhere around 7 p.m. Our boat engine was guzzling more gas than it should, causing us to run out of fuel three times. Fortunately, there was a second boat, and refills were easy. During the first "forced" delay, Nipper tied us up to prevent a downriver drift, and I told a few jokes. The joy of it all was the bizarre call of an ibis, which sounded like some unearthly creature. A tiger heron flew by, and some saw a leaf preener. During the final nocturnal tour, we enjoyed the fireflies and the stars.

Diane McTurk was in wonderful form when we arrived, pouring rum punches and, over a delicious supper, telling wonderful stories of her upbringing, cattle selling problems, ranch life and so on. I bungled remembering Dee's birthday, so Colin was nice enough to call

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ahead and tell Di, so a cake was ready and a happy birthday cheer was had in Dee's honour. We collapsed into bed at 10:30 p.m. anticipating another early rise tomorrow morning.

New birds seen:

Rock dove  
Spotted sandpiper  
Brown-throated parakeet  
Black-necked aracari  
Scaled pigeon

White-tailed hawk  
Green oropendola  
Southern lapwing  
Glittering-throated emerald  
Tropical mockingbird

Yellow-tufted woodpecker  
White-necked heron  
Tropical kingbird  
Muscovy duck

Green ibis  
Pale-legged hornero  
Pale-vented pigeon  
Rufescent tiger heron

Oct 10: On the river at 5:30 a.m., we were following our guide, Kenneth, as he was blazing a new trail around the regular path due to the high water levels that resulted in flooding. At Acouri Pond, the height of the water level coupled with the beautiful sight of the giant Amazonia pond lilies and their blossoms was a showstopper. Jacanas, gallinules, egrets, herons, kingfishers and an assortment of other birds welcomed us to the pond. A crane hawk perched on a branch right beside us, and gave us an excellent view of this gymnogene equivalent of South America. A huge caiman also made an appearance, bringing a reality check to the "quaint" feel of the place.

Before lunch we played with the two giant river otters, Lara (the baby), and Peter the Great, now just over four years old. We had a ball swimming with them, feeding fish (piranhas), and just enjoying.

At 3:30 p.m., 8 of us drove out into the ranch landscape, and did a nice walk through a forest (highlight: a trogon!), followed by a rum punch at a pond, backlit with a fiery red sunset, complete with reflections. Several Nacunda nighthawks flew over, just as we were getting ready to drive back to the lodge.

Dinner was entertaining in a different sort of way, as the Anglican Bishop of Guyana joined us. The conversations took on a less intense tone than usual, and we told jokes for about an hour after dessert.

New birds seen:

Purple gallinule  
Greater ani  
Yellow oriole  
Crane hawk  
Vermilion flycatcher

Great black hawk  
White-tailed trogon  
Black-crowned night heron  
Bare-faced ibis  
Nacunda nightjar

Oct 11: Because the trail into Crane Pond needed to be re-cut due to the flooded sections, we elected to go to the Oxbow Lakes and Simoni Pond to look for otters and monkeys. As it turned out, we happened upon a small group of brown-bearded sakis feeding hardly 10

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metres above the water in the flooded forest. Their thick, blunt-ended tails gave their presence away, as did their sloppy feeding habit of dropping food items. I got a good look at their brown coat, and some in the boat managed excellent looks at their faces, including their strange-looking Afro-bouffant hairstyle. Interesting monkeys, as they are reputed to be specialised nut feeders, possessing a gap between their molars to fit the nut to be cracked.

The route to the ponds was beautiful, with overhanging trees making a complete canopy most of the way, giving an intimate feel to the engineless float in and out. We saw more of the "water-roosting" bats, which looked like bark chips on a tree from a distance. They flew like butterflies when we disturbed them. Some good birds were seen, too, including a squirrel cuckoo. Mornings are the best without question, with the birdlife being most active, the changing light and sunrise painting the Rupununi sky, and especially the air feeling cool and crisp. Because the boating was so nice, we rolled into camp some time after 9 a.m. for breakfast.

At 3 p.m., 8 of the 10 of us headed to Crane Pond to see the nesting egrets, herons, aningas, boatbills, jacanas, and gallinules. Wetting our shirts and hats in an attempt to keep cool, the walk turned out to be shorter than expected, and very pleasant. The new trail skirted the flooded portions, literally tunnelling through mats of sharp vines with grass-like leaves that were armed with serious cutting edges. The pond appeared, and Dee immediately identified a sun grebe, a new one for us. Good omen, as from there, we saw all the listed birds above. An aluminium boat that has seen better days appeared from the bushes, and with half our group in it, Ashley and his assistant paddled over to the giant pond lilies. The leaves, most measuring over a metre across, complete with perfect up-turned edges, would easily support a baby

human, according to Diane. The flowers are as big as a dinner plate, and vary in colour from pink to white. The sun was low, making some perfect filming opportunities.

Quickly departing once we all had had the chance to do the boat trip, we motored back downstream, slowing to look at a large black caiman Ashley guessed was over two meters long. We soon met up with Diane and Murray and Penny in their boat. They excitedly told us that a group of howler monkeys were just a few hundred metres downstream, high in a tree, in a sleeping "clump". We quickly found them, and had some excellent looks from the boat. Ashley pulled over to the bank to give me a chance to clamber up the edge to put up the scope for all to get a better look, and no sooner did we find an opening in the canopy with a clear view to a howler, that they clambered out of view. Too much commotion I guess. However, we all were rewarded with a rain shower of poop and piss from the now disturbed monkeys. I did manage some video, though, and it turned out surprisingly well.

Needless to say, sundowners were enjoyed in celebration on the river, drifting under an incredible sunset sky, nightjars and bats dripping from the forest as it grew darker.

Good stories by Diane during supper made for another very enjoyable evening.

New birds seen:  
Ringed kingfisher

Green-tailed jacamar

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White-ringed flycatcher  
Squirrel cuckoo  
Sun grebe

Boat-billed heron  
Golden-green woodpecker  
Cream-coloured woodpecker

Oct 12: The Caravan aeroplane was late, but we still made it to Kaieteur Falls by 9:30 a.m. after a 40 minute flight. We had a somewhat rushed and scattered goodbye with Diane and her staff, as I performed the task after the aeroplane had landed, not knowing the pilots wouldn't turn the thing off.

The warden at the falls, Michael Phang, met us, and he proceeded to do a very nice tour. At the cock-of-the-rock lek site, three of us did see a pumpkin-coloured streak whiz by (the male), and I got a good look at a female, enough to see her crest. Sadly, neither stuck around for a look with the scope, but an excellent video encounter with a golden frog in one of the huge bromeliads was a bonus. The falls were looking very good, with normal flow (I'm pleased the El Nino drought is over!). We took our time walking the trail, quizzing our guide on the plants and birds. At the falls, we had time for a relaxed lunch (egg sandwich with mustard?), to poke around and play with the tadpoles, photograph the wildflowers, and enjoy the view.

After four hours on the ground, we took off, flying another 40 minutes over the vast, unbroken forested landscape. We descended from the high plateau past huge cliffs and rugged escarpments, carpeted in thick green forest. Blackwater rivers meandered amongst the broccoli-like canopy in the lowlands, and the flooded forest glistened here and there. Huge rain showers forced the pilots to do a bit of extra air miles to avoid their rough and wet character. It's a thrill to see that kind of untouched expanse of such biologically productive landscape. I just hope they can preserve a healthy chunk of it.

Upon landing just upstream of Bartica, we were picked up in two fast boats and transported to Shanklands Resort. We met with Iola and her cooking team, and after an orientation, we met our guide Winston, and did a short walk into the forest. A reasonable look at a brown woodcreeper was had by most, then we returned to the open to look for a toucan, and we found one: an aracari.

Supper was a fine affair on the balcony, followed by some good banter and story telling.

New birds seen:  
Guianian cock-of-the-rock

White-collared swift

Oct 13: I awoke to howler monkeys calling very close in the adjacent forest. Our early morning walk began well, with Nipper immediately seeing a large monkey, likely a capuchin, soon after we entered the forest. From there, birding was painfully slow in very difficult deep, dark forest conditions, first starting beside a very quiet manakin lek. Winston, our guide, did

his very best to show us some forest birds, but in nearly two hours, we had yet to see even any bird, though lots was happening well above us in the canopy, judging by all the calls. The moment was salvaged when Ray found a Spix's guan, and we managed to put a scope on it. In the thick canopy foliage, we watched this huge bird walk ever so carefully on some unseen arboreal walkway of branches, picking fruit as

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he went. A moment later, a group of four cayenne jays appeared, coursing through the lower canopy level like a group of teens looking for trouble. On the walk out, the big prize sighting at last occurred: a family group of white-faced sakis. They were feeding on some passion fruit-like berries, then seeing us, moved off to the mid-upper canopy, pausing several times in full view for us to observe and photograph. The males have stunning round white faces and black thick fur coats, and a tail that is long and blunt. We followed them for a short distance, allowing for some excellent video, then gradually they drifted into the forest. After breakfast, we went back into the forest to do another saki watch, and amazingly, we found some and obtained excellent views with the scope. As a finale, we spotted a barbet with a group of three yellow-tufted woodpeckers, and a nunbird slaughtering a large preying mantis to feed it to a boisterous youngster.

A much needed river cooldown was had by Nipper, Dee and I, as Ray and Lois and Bud and Georgina went kayaking. It was soon raining in classic tropical style, eventually chilling the river water, forcing us out.

After lunch we again did some superb birding around the grounds, seeing a tody, a tityra, a new tanager and yet another new toucan. Later, Murray announced that Bud had noticed the grass was blowing on the ground, but there was no wind! We had a few moments to watch leafcutter ants (not enough time here!), then rushed over to the two waiting vehicles to take us on a short drive upriver to do some late-day birding. The significant sighting that made it all worthwhile here was a family group of four jacamars, with their long tails and needle-sharp beaks, all pointing skyward. One of the adults caught a dragonfly right over Murray's head, returned to the perch and forced it down whole. A very nice way to end our last full day in Guyana.

New birds seen:

Cayenne jay

House wren

Shiny cowbird

Black-spotted barbet

Blue dacnis

Black-tailed tityra

Channel-billed toucan

Tourquoise tanager

Grey-breasted martin

Common tody-flycatcher

Paradise jacamar

White-bearded flycatcher

Oct 14: I did a solo walk, the last one of the trip into the forest, after a nice coffee at sunrise with Nipper, Ray and Lois. I did the usual thing upon entering the morning gloom of the forest: walk about 30 meters, stop, look and listen. At the junction near the lek of the manakins, I saw a branch move and a small primate run along it. I quietly hurried up the path to get a look, and there staring back at me was a golden-handed tamarin! There were at least two, likely more, but I only had one long look at this individual, and it too, sat and stared. I could see his golden-coloured front and back feet, as he sat facing me. A moment later, just as I managed to set up the video, it left his perch, and disappeared into the thick foliage, to re-appear even closer to me just for a moment. I secured momentary looks and shaking branches from then on, with the entire encounter over in under five minutes. My first tamarin sighting, what a pleasure!

At the bottom of the hill near the forest tidal creek that Dee and I explored last year, I

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received a calling card on my hand as I held the tripod. A golden-headed manakin was at least 25 meters above, feeding on some fruits in the canopy. His stunning yellow head contrasted sharply with its jet black body, presenting a colourful diversion from the gloom of the dark forest floor.

I met Dee near the forest entrance, and almost at once we spotted a group of brown capuchin monkeys and managed a good look at one. The morning walk was capped with the best toucan

video I have ever managed, or have ever hoped to get: a red-billed displaying in a near-full frame. Stunning.

We departed after lunch, and after an hour's speedy boat ride, Louis and another driver were waiting to take us to our dayroom at the Pegasus, and onward to the airport. Dee and I said our goodbyes at the hotel, but had one of the drivers drop us off at a friend's home, (Dee's hairdresser's brother's family). We had an excellent visit with the family, caught a cab back to the hotel, then began to repack for our next journey: the kayak trip in Argentina.

Mammal sightings:

\*Howler monkey (Heard throughout the trip, saw at Karanambu)

\*Brown-bearded saki (at Karanambu)

\*White-faced saki (at Shanklands)

\*Brown capuchin (at Shanklands)

\*Golden-handed tamarin (at Shanklands)

\*Giant river otter (at Iwokrama)

\*Agouti (at Iwokrama)

\*Bats: including long-nosed bats (Iwokrama and Karanambu), fishing bats (Iwokrama), various insectivorous bats.

Total Bird Sightings:

128 species

Other sightings:

Included numerous frogs, black cayman, a tree boa, mata-mata turtle, giant river turtle, geckos, toads (including the big *Bufo marianus*), green iguana, tegu lizard, heard the infamous and real-life, grunt fish (eat your heart out), some very cool insects, including incredible numbers of morphos butterflies and other species, the clouds of yellow dragonflies at Shanklands, and the occasional handleable tarantula. The numerous red and yellow flowers, big trees, thick vegetation, green, green, green.....full of life.

Dee and I had an uneventful drive (the way we like it) to the airport at 3 a.m., with Louis chattering away, to catch our flight.