

BIRDING OUTBACK GUYANA

A Chronical of Ecotouring in the Savannas and Rainforests

by

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This diary along with photographs can also be viewed at
http://homepage.mac.com/Donald_Green/Guyana/

The Kwitaro River

PREFACE

This journal started as an occasional letter of my birding activities to my daughter, Jennifer Green, who shares my interests in birds and has now joined me on these trips. It is, of course, an aid to my mind, which is all too eager to discard memories. However, these memories are so pleasant that to lose any part of them would be a shame. It is also for my companions to whom I'll try to get copies. If there are unifying elements in this document it is the birds, the birding, and the wildlife. But the travel through rivers, forests and savanna and the ecology of the tropics was as exciting as the birds and I've tried to comment on those aspects that caught my attention.

This account is based on my trip notes, the log of birds seen and locations visited which were kept daily by the participants, slides I took, and the blizzard of photographs which Ilze Belodis took on the first trip and most kindly distributed to each of the participants, those taken by Steve Mirick and Roger Stanley on the second trip, another blizzard of photographs taken by Polly Rothstein and given to us all on the third and fourth trips and Jennifer's journals and records on the Rewa, Maparri and Kwitaro expeditions. Most importantly it has been redacted, many errors corrected, much memory recalled, and extensively improved by Davis Finch, who, after wading through several versions of this journal, continues to modestly refer to his efforts as "micro-corrections". Would, that when I was an editor, I had as careful and effective reviewers as Davis. Would that he had better writers than me! It is not in my nature to agree with even his every assertion. Consequently, I accept responsibility for all the residual errors.

In addition to my fellow participants, the birders and the fisherman who made these trips a delight, I wish to thank Davis Finch for inviting me; Tony Thorne of Wilderness Explorers and his able assistants Karen Weldren and Louis Singh for their assistance in Georgetown and in making travel arrangements elsewhere; Duane De Freitas, the captain of each of these the expeditions and our host at Dadanawa; his able lieutenants, Oscar Dookie, Ashley Holland, Pip Hiscock and Malcolm Miller. For their warm hospitality and friendship; Dianne McTurk our host at Karanambu; Shirley Humphrys at Mountain Point; Sandy and Duane DeFreitas at Dadanawa and Sandy at Kwatamang Landing, and Colin Edwards at Rockview. A special thanks to all who participated in making these travels a happy and birdacious adventure; our drivers, Cecil and Carl Fredericks; our guides on land and water, Duane, Kenneth, Tommy Kenyon, Percy, Michael Phang, Magnus and Placid Stevens, Silveirio and Richard Winter and our companions; Alwin, Andy, young Duane, Justin, Leland, Leroy, Paula, Nikki, Sammy and Stephen. Probably nothing made this trip more enjoyable than the kitchens at Karanambu, at Dadanawa, on the Kuyuwini, Kwitaro, Maparri and the Rewa Rivers. I am pleased to acknowledge the superb cuisine of marvelous Marjory at Dadanawa, Maparri, Kuyuwini and the Kwitaro, and the chef-ly skills of Dookie, Duane and Stephen who, on the Rewa, knew what to do with a fish.

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THE KWITARO RIVER

The Kwitaro River, which drains the area between the Rupununi River and the Rewa River, is one of the major watercourses of the Southern Rupununi District. Its source lies far to the south between the Parabara Savanna and Marudi Mountain within a few miles of the Kuyuwini River. In contrast to the clear dark waters of the Rewa River and those of Maparri Creek, Kwitaro shares with the Rupununi River the distinction of being a "white" river. The Kwitaro is remote from civilization. In its 120 mile course it has but a single family living on it and is unmarked by road. Access to the Kwitaro basin is overland by Land Rover to Shea Village and by jungle footpath to the east for 30 miles to Brian's Landing. The trail provides access to an occasional slash and burn farm site and is used by the farmers, hunters and fishermen of the Wapashani. The chevron marks on every mature balata tree testify to the fact that the area has not always been devoid of settlement. Before cultured Malaysian rubber made its economic debut in 1910, this had been a thriving area in which every year thousands of pounds of balata were harvested and sent down river. Now a few dozen visitors, naturalists and fishermen bring income to the Wapashani amerindians for whom these are their tribal lands. The Kwitaro-Rewa basin may be the most extensive unexploited riparian corridor remaining in eastern South America. It is exceptionally rich in natural wonders.

Day 1-2 On Nov. 1, 1998, Davis Finch, Polly Rothstein, Jennifer Green, John Heizer, Larry Master, a zoologist of the Nature Conservancy, and I arrived in Georgetown on a BWIA flight after an American Airline flight to Barbados. This new connection was a direct response to the simply awful run-around GAC had given us on our last trip to Guyana both coming and going! In Barbados we had several hours for our connection and so bused to the nearest wild-life refuge, the Graham Hill Swamp. Near the airport we found Cattle Egret, Carib Grackle, and Green-throated Carib, a hummingbird. At Graham Hill we found Grey Kingbird, White-crowned Pigeon, Zenaida Dove, Common Ground Dove, Antillian Grackle, Yellow Warbler, Black-faced Grassquit, Common Moorhens, Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, Little Egret, Snowy Egret, Great Blue Heron, Spotted and White-rumped Sandpipers. As well, mammals included a pair of mongoose (sp.) and several porpoises in the shallow swamp estuary. After a few hours we continued on and arrived at the Pegasus in Georgetown as planned about midnight.

The next day we birded early around the Le Meridian Pegasus and then flew to Dadanawa Ranch in a two-engine Britten Norman BN2. Chatting with the pilots I learned the sad news that Krishna Shankar, the pilot who had flown us to Karanambu in '97 and earlier this year, had died while swimming in the Ireng River. He'd flown a party to Orinduik Falls and gone swimming below the falls where he was caught in the rapids and drowned. On the turn-around flight our chartered plane was modified by putting the seats in the rear, plastic sheet laid down on the deck and half dozen sides of beef loaded. It lifted off to Georgetown within the half hour.

AT DADANAWA With the exception of Larry, all of us were familiar with the hinterlands of Guyana and had enjoyed the DeFreitas hospitality. Sandy DeFreitas met us and we repaired to the veranda of the main house for a welcoming drink. Marjory and the ranch staff offered us a pleasant lunch. A brief walk along the river trail and later a trip to Towa Towan turned up a Ferruginous-backed Antbird but no other birds new to me (this being my second visit to the ranch in this season). The Towa Towan twilight was simply spectacular as over the hill and adjacent marsh many Lesser Nighthawks, fewer Least Nighthawks and several Nacunda swooped and pirouetted. On the road back to the ranch, Pauraque, White-tailed Nightjars and Burrowing Owls were flushed in the headlights of the Land Rover.

Day 2 On Nov. 3rd, after dawn birding around the ranch, we breakfasted, mounted two Land Rovers and set off for Shea (shee-a) Village. The 40 mile trip through the dry savanna was scorching but made just a bit more bearable by contrast to the "Red Hots" Jennifer had thoughtfully included in her kit. The ford at Sand Creek was made easily and eventually Shea Rock was in sight. Shea Rock is a large, rounded, bald rock outcropping standing possibly 500 feet above the rolling savanna of Shea Village. It is a feature much like Australia's Ayer's Rock. We paused here while Sandy made arrangements to insure that we'd have sufficient bullocks available to haul our gear to the boat landing. Further along the road we passed a dozen bullocks heading for Bernard Ritchie's house (N 2° 49.465', W 59° 29.295') which was the staging area for our walk to the first camp. Far off to the east a huge stone obelisk shot skyward above low hills. This was referred to as "Bottleneck (or once as "Bottle") Mountain" and so it appeared. Our trail passed south and east of it. At Bernard's we re-hydrated, lunched briefly and watched our gear being loaded into palm-frond woven panniers balanced on the backs of some of the eighteen bullocks that made up our train. A brief run by Land-Rover to the scrub forest at the edge of the savanna and we were off.

WALKING TO THE KWITARO our party consisted of Sandy, Carl, Marjory, her assistants, Paula, Cheryl and Fay, Duane Jr., Nikki (Sparrow) Persaud, Bernard Ritchie and more than a dozen drovers including their families. One of the drovers, an amerindian named Sobers, is according to Duane and Pip one of the most talented woodsmen and fisherman in this country. He led one bullock, while his wife their two-year son and two-month old baby carried at the breast, rode another. The crew for our river trip, Duane, Justin, Pip (Philip Hiscock), Ashley Holland, "Andy" (Gajandran Nauth Narine) and Leroy Ignacio were waiting at Brian's Landing for our arrival together with part of last November's fishing contingent: Mike Lee, Roger Stanley and Mike Wilson, as well as Mike Wilson's daughter, Danielle. They had brought four boats up the Rewa River from Kwatamang Landing in the past three weeks. For most of the support party it will be a six week nearly four hundred mile round-trip.

Our original plan called for three overnight camps on the thirty mile stretch to Brian' Landing, but even with our frequent birding stops that seemed excessive. We elected to try it with only two camps. Our walk the first day to Kumquat Camp was about 8 miles. The walk was quite easy first through scrub forest and then into taller forest where many birds were heard and a few seen. Our birding stops soon put us in the rear as drover after drover passed us. Chiggers were plentiful on this first trail day. I initially ignored them, an act I came to regret. The trail passed through a slash and burn jungle garden planted with cassava, bananas, plantains and other food and herb plants. This farm was still being expanded and logs and stumps smoldered on the fine sand soil. Around the clearing were a flock of a hundred Shiny Cowbirds and twenty Giant Cowbirds. Marjorie's father had farmed this and other nearby areas and farther along the trail we would pass through the place where she had grown up. Brief afternoon showers and clouds diminished the savanna heat making the walk through the forest pleasant. Our destination was a camp that had been set up next to a small brook, Kumakowri River on the maps, but called Kumquat Creek by Marjorie from the occurrence of kumquat trees there.

KUMQUAT CAMP On arrival at the Kumquat Camp (N 2° 55.677', W 59° 5.365') we found our vanguard had got things well underway, a covered shelter, a spot of something and a great meal of pot roast, pepperpot, rice, potatoes, the works, awaited us. Supper was followed by a thunderous cloudburst too loud even to permit the daily bird-listing ritual...a rare omission. I report it here simply as an unavoidable sacrilege. My hammock was exposed to stormward at the end of the row in the tarpaulin-covered "benab" shelter but I never noticed the weather and slept a fetal doze in slightly damp suspension while a Mottled Owl "whoou"-ed.

Day-3 At breakfast on Wednesday morning we heard news about the outcome of the US elections following an interrupted shortwave program which alluded to yesterday's "miraculous" US election but gave only a hint to the outcome. I finally managed to work the new shortwave radio and to get the whole scoop from VOA. We were ecstatic. To describe Polly as ecstatic when she heard of Charles Schumer's defeat of Al D'Amato would be extreme understatement. We all shared in a truly happy moment.

While the crew was breaking camp, we birded nearby along the trail getting prime looks at a Spotted Puffbird, Spix's Guan, Red-throated Caracara and an elegant study of a Slate-colored Grosbeak. Chestnut Woodpeckers were found and Amazonian and Saturnine Antshrikes were seen. Other Antbirds seen were: Long-winged and Spot-tailed Antwrens, and Dusky, Grey, White-browed and Warbling Antbirds. This was a good manakin day with looks at Blue-backed and Golden-headed Manakins. For the bird-watcher, manakins have much to recommend themselves: they are small, the males are colorful or strikingly black and white and, in contrast to most other little birds, they tend to sit quietly. Their size and habit of stillness makes them hard to find but, once seen, you do get a good look. The insect-like sibilance of the White-crowned Manakin was with us on the trail this and the next day. In fact, finding this bird became a goal, even an obsession, but during our walk this bird remained unseen as it had on each of my other trips.

The trail led gently down through occasional brooks and up modest rises but generally trending downward toward the Kwitaro River bed. The trail had been newly opened, widened, detoured along gentler slopes and around recently fallen trees. By mid-day we walked through the Mica Creek site (N 2° 57.55', W. 59° 2.035 ') at which Bernard had lived and where Marjory had grown up. It is now used as a hunting camp. Here and there were the carapaces of a half dozen "gopher" tortoises. Near a crude shelter the gap between adjacent buttresses of a mora tree had been closed off with a fence of sticks to form a tortoise-holding pen. Land tortoises are prime forage as they can be collected without weapons, stored alive for long periods with little care and prepared without special utensils. They have been used as food by humans for probably 100,000 years. The usual method of preparation is simply to crack off the plastron, invert the carapace over a fire and cook the animal in its own juices. It is said to be excellent fare. Reptiles are under threat of extirpation throughout the tropics, but tortoises, turtles, and crocodilians are particularly susceptible to population loss. Archaeologists have studied the presence of tortoise shells in human-occupied sites dating back 50,000 years and their work suggests that as little as a 7% population reduction in tortoises can cause their extirpation. They have a lot of factors going against them including: slow growth, lateness in achieving sexual maturity, the relatively small number of eggs laid, and the fact that the eggs receive no parental care after their initial burying. Failure to know whether or not a clutch of eggs actually hatches denies such egg-layers an important response to egg predation, i.e., the ability to start a second brood. In contrast, the brooding instinct of birds is a major survival asset.

At the Mica Creek clearing Bernard pointed out a compact planting of one of several varieties of shrubs used in the smaller streams to poison fish. This plant has long smooth stems banded with light gray bark and poplar-like leaves. The general term for these plants is "conami" or "haiari" (Arawak) for vines and lianas such as: *Clibadium sp.*, *Lonchocarpus sericeus* and *Picadial guaricensis*. The practice of poisoning fish in this way is probably on the wane since under some circumstances it may be destructive to stream ecology. Further along the trail Larry asked Bernard to identify the "water" vine. Almost at once, Bernard cut a large liana the bark of which had a color and texture like that of a grapevine and then cut it again about two feet higher up. The second cut, by interrupting the pressure of fluid drawn to replace transpired water, immediately allowed a steady flow of palatable, virtually tasteless, water from the first cut. Among other aspects of woodcraft was Bernard's demonstration of using "mukru" to weave baskets. Mukru is a small palm (*Ischnosiphon sp.*) growing in jungle glades. The six-foot long stems are about 1/2 inch in diameter and without nodes or branches. Long strips of the outer sheath are collected by peeling 1/8" wide sections from base to top. When washed, cleaned and dried these strips are used to weave baskets and other items. It was this

plant that Placid was preparing while we were at the Kuyuwini River. Sandy acquired for me a beautiful and serviceable example of mukru weaving; a "warishi", the traditional amerindian back-pack.

COKERITE CAMP The trail passed along the shoulder of a large rocky mountain and several hours before sundown we came to the second campsite at Cokerite Creek (N 2° 57.604', W 59° 1.913'). Cokerite Creek in this season is about 10-20 feet wide and deep enough to completely immerse in. It was cool and refreshing after our long hike. While we bathed, Polly was assaulted by one of the large black aggressive horseflies which bit her on the calf. As on our prior trips, insect assaults such as this were rare or, as in the case of chiggers, preventable at this season. Here the creek flowed in from our right and continued south. It gets its name from the cokerite palm which, together with the ite' palm, plays a central economic role in the life of the amerindian. Both of these trees provide good thatch, fruits for food and drink, oil for cooking and medicine. The Cokerite palm is celebrated in the parishara dance ceremony in which these palm leaves comprise the essential costume. Sitting on a level shelf fifty feet from the creek Cokerite Camp could not have been situated more attractively. At these campsites, we "sports" slept under cover, the drovers tied up their cattle and dispersed into the woods where hammocks were hung, and our guides nested nearby. Marjory and her assistants rarely showed any evidence of sleeping!

Day 4- In the morning we birded a short distance along the trail where three Black-bellied Cuckoos foraged close overhead in a low understory. Heard at both camps were Great and Variegated Tinamou (will I ever see a tinamou?). Our travel was often through high groves of mature trees. Bulletwood trees (*Mimusops globosa*) which had been tapped for their latex (balata) were dispersed in the forest. These trees are huge since during the rubber boom it was illegal to cut them down (harvesting rubber from widely scattered trees often meant cutting the tree down and collecting the latex exuding from the roots, trunk, and branches) or to tap a tree with a girth less than 36 inches at chest height. They bear fish-bone tapping scars upwards for sixty feet. The trees bled lavishly a thin white latex almost instantly when slashed with a cutlass. Many different trees use latex to prevent insect attacks and heal damages. Latex colors vary. I've seen white, oxygenated blood red, pale yellow and transparent latex. I spied a small crimson spot climbing up one trunk; a jet-black pseudoscorpion with a bright red abdomen with a captured fly held securely in its chelae. The repeated, high pitched "wheoo, wheoo..." of an unseen passing Ornate Hawk-eagle was heard just over the high canopy. These woods were rich in parrots, Scarlet Macaws were frequently heard and seen, as were Painted Parakeets, Caica, Blue-headed and Dusky Parrots. Among psittacids which were heard but not seen were Golden-winged Parakeets, Black-headed and Red-fan Parrots. A Green and Rufous Kingfisher was seen briefly near a small brook. Both Golden-collared and Yellow-throated Woodpeckers were observed.

We stopped to lunch at the crest of a small rise on the trail. Shortly thereafter, a hunting dog walked up followed by Mike and Danielle Wilson and their guide. Danielle was simply exhausted, Mike his usual active self: eating one of Marjory's cheese sandwiches, drinking a tot of rum, dragging on one of Sandy's cigarettes, and talking a blue streak. Good to see that old campaigner, our companion on the Rewa trip a year ago. He was on a swift run to reach Lethem by dawn tomorrow. Later we learned that in less than 24 hours he somehow managed the feat of a thirty mile walk and a long Land Rover haul to reach his flight. This was a quick stop and soon we parted company and headed for our third camp at Brian's Landing. The terrain now began to show more variety. Clearly, we were approaching a high ridge somewhat to the south of Bottle Mountain. We forded a much larger Cokerite Creek which now trended to the east and began to climb a gentle slope. Three Yellow-billed Jacamars were observed along the trail. Around 2:30 in the afternoon we heard several White-crowned Manakins off to the right and returned to our obsession of finding them. After quite a few minutes of calling and taping responses, Davis's usual way of bringing a bird into sight, Marjory and Bernard began to show some signs of anxiety. Both were concerned about the difficulties of walking over the next mountain, "Smell Mountain", especially in the dark. While Bernard had a very clear idea of how long it took a normally walking party to traverse distances on the trail, dealing with event-focussed groups such as ours was a great puzzle. I discussed the matter with them and suggested to Davis that he break off our quest for the elusive manakin. Reluctantly, even though we were on the verge of success, he did. In retrospect, we found that Brian's Landing was only a short 90 minutes away and the trail over the mountain was only a modest climb at best. Surely, we might have found the White-crowned Manakin had we but terried a while longer.

In a few hundred yards, the trail rose steeply (15°) for a few hundred feet or less. A break in the side-hill foliage near the summit revealed a great view of Bottle Mountain possibly three miles away. Bottle Mountain is a bare rock spire, like a cathedral tower. It is certainly a rock climber's tantalizing challenge and a rare, totally vegetation-free, exposed rock spire environment in this heavily forested country. Whether it is extensive enough to support a genetically unique assemblage of organisms remains to be discovered. A short gentle incline led up to and over "Smell Mountain" and then on a steady down-hill walk we were met by Leroy and shortly thereafter emerged at Brian's Landing to be greeted by Duane's party.

BRIAN'S LANDING (N 2° 56.696', W 58° 58.230') is an ample rock shelf on the west side of the Kwitaro River at the foot of Smell Mountain, one of several places where the feet of the mountains rest in the river. To the northwest, Kalishadaker Mountain, occupies the most south-east corner of the Kanuku Range. North of us (downstream) are mild rapids (Aruararua and Karabiru Falls) where either ledge or rock piles intersect the river. The location of these falls relative to this mountain is the legendary basis for the name of this mountain. On learning that Marjorie knew of a legend explaining how Smell Mountain got its name, I urged her to overcome her modesty and relate the legend. Once the area was inhabited by the primogenitor

amerindian people who lived in peace and harmony. The men of this tribe were exceptionally well-endowed sexually. However, as time passed a curious propensity of the men emerged. They developed the habit of preferring to sniff their mates rather than to service them. All the women, unsatisfied, took umbrage to their behavior and fled downstream. In the process they raised a series of waterfalls as barriers to isolate themselves from their erring males. The fact that a mere waterfall or rapid or two was sufficient to deter their pursuit re-emphasized the fact that their mates were lazy in the extreme. This may also explain the fact that the area is largely unpopulated.

The river here is 40-60 feet wide with a good flow and is navigable from here to the Rupununi. Our camp sprawling along the west bank included a tarpaulin-covered "benab" for the "sports" and hammocks hung here and there in the shrubbery for the support party. In addition, small campsites had sprung up on the east side of river into one of which Sandy and Duane disappeared. Actual count of one of the group photos taken revealed thirty-five people in the whole party. Possibly ten more were absent. Here and there in the riverine jungle, grazing cattle were staked. We relaxed until supper time on the smoothed, much inscribed ledges that form the "wharf" at Brian's Landing visiting with our old fishing pals, Mike Lee, Roger Stanley, Ashley Holland, Duane, Sr., Justin and with the crew who were to ride down river with us: Nikki Persaud (Carl's nephew), Leroy Ignacio, Duane DeFreitas (the younger) and Andy Narine. Nikki, Leroy and Duane's sons had been valued guides on our Mapari trip. Young Duane replaced Justin, who had come up the river with the fishing party but was now ailing. Andy, showing the agility of the first rank soccer player he is, was a good woodsman and boatsman.

Day 5 We stayed one day at Brian's Landing camp (Nov 6) birding on a trail on the west (left) shore in the morning and on the east (right) shore in the afternoon. In river-edge brush, Streaked Antwren and Dot-winged Antwren (N 2° 49.570', W 59° 12.987') were seen. This shore brush habitat is the domain of the Streaked Antwren and it was recorded on almost every day on both the Kwitaro and Rewa Rivers. The trail, a hundred yards downstream on the west side of the Kwitaro, led up a short steep bank into a low gallery under heavy thicket. Close by the start of the path we threaded carefully around a tree which bore a large, chest-high "armadillo" wasp nest which was well covered with many large black "marabunta". This is a different species of wasp about twice the size of that we'd encountered at the Parabara forest trail. The nest is tan in color and banded with completed horizontal ridges, not unlike the bands of an armadillo. A Great Antshrike was heard and both sexes were called into view. A pair of Black-chinned Antbirds were found, as were Forest Elaenia, Double-banded Pygmy-Tyrant and a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. Deeper in the woods, a Fork-tailed Woodnymph buzzed us and a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher played hide and seek in the substory. Young Duane spotted a bird spider curled in a leaf on the forest floor. The feet (last segment of each leg) of this large, black hairy spider are remarkable in being pink-- shades of the late forties when black and pink was the "in" color combination. Guira Tanager and Green Oropendola were also among those birds newly seen on the trip. In the afternoon, the group, from which I excused myself, walked along a trail on the east side of the river. Among the new species they recorded were Spix's Guan, Great Jacamar, Black-necked Aracari, Spotted Antpitta, Yellow-crowned Elaenia, Short-crested Flycatcher, Lemon-chested Greenlet, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Black-eared Fairy, and Black-headed Antbird.

Day 6 The next morning from 7:20 to 9:15 we drifted down river several hundred yards until Davis heard a new call, seemingly that of a **Yellow Tyrannulet**. In response to a tape a single bird flew in, looked us over from the top of a streamside bamboo canebrake, and flew away, giving us the first brief Guyanan record for this bird. Later in the trip three more were seen well and as many others heard. If not common, it is a regular component of the shoreline bamboo and brush environment. Davis pointed out that by distribution maps the bird was not unexpected here. The lack of prior record of this bird in Guyana reflects not so much its rarity but more the infancy of detailed bird study in the region. During this float Blue and Yellow Macaws and Grey-breasted Sabrewings were seen.

We returned to camp, gathered for a group photo, bid farewell to Mike Lee, Roger Stanley, Carl and Sandy who were walking out and by 10:15 A.M. we headed down river. At the first bend in the river, Marjory spotted a Black-eared Fairy sitting on a nest in the shoreside brush. How it is possible to see something so well camouflaged and so tiny from a moving boat is a mystery. But now we all know that Marjory's eyes are sharper than ours. During this quite long day, John and I shared the smallest boat with Andy and young Duane. John and I have had many hundreds of miles of white-water canoeing under our belts. Thus we felt obliged to educate our boatmen and guide them through the very few mild rapids and narrow channels that the Kwitaro has to offer. In short, we made ourselves unforgettable pests. When they came to any piece of water that looked challenging, they lined the empty boat down it. It probably made good sense not to risk getting the "sports" wet. In this faster moving section the Kwitaro is small, barely twenty-five feet wide. The hot sun in the mid-morning clear sky was formidable on the river and covering up, or sunscreen, was the order of the day. Duane, Sr was perfectly topped off for the weather with a solar-powered, air-cooled pith helmet I'd given him. We stopped to lunch, rest and bathe on a small mid-stream island in the second of the two rapids. Rocks, jet black and polished by stream action, line these swift but uncomplicated rapids. These are the roots of the Guianan Shield, or intrusions into it, and may be among the oldest rocks in the world.

During our river trip we saw Pied Puffbirds, Green-tailed Jacamars, Golden-spangled Piculet, Ringed Woodpecker and Olive-backed Foliage Gleaner. A Blue-crowned Motmot was heard and seen. The Cecropia trees on the river bank were regularly occupied by pairs and families of Brown Jacamars on this section of the river. Brown Jacamars favor the upper reaches of rivers surrounded by deep forest and as we traveled north they became progressively less frequent. A high point of the day was in late afternoon when on the west side of the river I spotted a large (probably Three-toed) Sloth moving through the top of a

nearly denuded forest emergent. We watched the animal move quickly, almost gracefully, from the end of a branch inward and finally paused with its upper limbs outstretched as if praying to the setting sun. Among the technological advances we had at our disposal was Larry's pair of Canon 12x Image Stabilizing binoculars. The ability to stabilize an image vastly improved our ability to make an identification particularly in conditions where there is difficulty holding a binocular steady such as, from a boat, overhead, or at the usual cramped angle.

COMODI CAMP About 5:45 PM we arrived at Camp #4 (N 2° 59.627', W 58° 54.597') which came to be known as "Comodi Camp." The camp is 8.1 miles from Brian's Landing. It is situated where the river, passing by a large rocky outcropping, has formed a steep sandy shelf. Opposite the camp a few large rocks sit athwart the main flow. Our guides soon had the Lion of Judah flag of Ethiopia flying in mid-stream. This flag is an icon of the Rastafarian religion which is popular throughout the Caribbean. Our guides, young Duane and Andy seem to be followers of Rasta in dress and hair style. Our shelter is on the summit of a rock ledge practically overhanging the right side of the river. Since we arrived close to dark there was no further birding, other than listening for owls and nightjars. Duane has invested in new hammocks for us all. The hammocks are each enclosed in a mosquito netting, capped with a relatively water-resistant fly and have a full height Velcro enclosed entrance rather than a zippered port. These are extremely effective shelters whose only drawback is the horrendous ripping noise one makes on opening and closing the port. Our movements are no secret! At each campsite a frame for a table and seats had been constructed. Considerable thought had gone into the planning and each table frame had been constructed to fit exactly plastic panels which we carried and used as a table surface. Meals throughout the trip had great variety; fish, tasso, eggs, cheese, fowl (when available), labba, murudi and at least one caiman were protein sources; farine, sweet and irish potatoes, bakes, rice, and nuts, such as cashews, peanuts and brazil nuts were plentiful and excellent starch sources, fresh and dried fruits and fruit juices were constantly available. Even though we are on a river with virtually no human settlement, precautions to assure the quality of the drinking water supply were continuous. These were either to boil the water which tended to give it the odor of creosote, or to pump the water from the river through bacterial/protozoan filtering cartridges. The pumping process was tedious requiring about fifty strokes per cup but each day a minimum of two gallons of water was prepared for canteens. At this camp my carelessness with chigger protection was apparent as more than a hundred bites on each ankle induced me to itch at every opportunity. An antibiotic salve helped somewhat, but the major effect of this mite-y assault was elsewhere. I have suffered from a psoriasis on my hands and prior to this trip it was remitting. However, for the next two weeks this auto-immune condition flared up.

Day 7. We arose at 5:00 A.M., snacked briefly and about 6:30 A.M. launched a boat on a down-river drift. Among the birds seen were Black Caracara, the ever-present Black Vulture, Red-fan Parrots, Squirrel Cuckoos, Channel-billed Toucans, Lineated and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers. At 8:00 AM, we returned to camp, breakfasted sincerely, and at 9:00 A.M. explored a new trail being cut by Duane Jr and Leroy which led inland on the right side of the river. The trail initially led through fairly large trees that were evidently regularly flooded and eventually began to climb a small rise. At this rise, a sharp, brief call was heard. Davis identified it as the call note of a White-crested Spadebill and we moved forward to eventually intercept a total of three birds, parents and a young, presumably. As we are all instructed, the key to identifying flycatchers is almost always the bill. This small flycatcher has the broadest bill of any spadebill. The birds were actively feeding and constantly moving. Just by luck I managed to have a bird in good view for many seconds. This was a new bird for me. We turned back to the path which led back down to the varzea. Today we saw all the psittacids we had previously, seen with the exception of Black-headed Parrots. We also saw three Black-tailed Tityra and a Musician Wren. Most notable for me was my first really good looks at Great Jacamars. I had missed the Great Jacamar when I decided to skip the late afternoon exploration of Day 5. We returned at 2:00 P.M. lunched until 3:00 P.M. and then spent an hour and a half exploring a new trail on the left bank of the river. This trail led through nice shoreline brush and tangles on through higher ground forest and trees with the smooth, multicolored bark of sycamores. On the way Black Nunbirds, a squirrel (*S. grandensis?*), and several barely discernible monkeys were seen. Previously recorded antbirds such as Grey, Dusky, Warbling, White-browed, Black-chinned and Black-headed were present at this camp. A new bird call was heard here that was the cause of some question in Davis' mind. On recollection, Davis decided the call was that of an antbird he'd recorded in Brazil. The tape proved that we had found the first Guyanan record for Blackish Antbird (N 2° 59.848', W 58° 54.492'), a bird we saw the next day. Our day was completed by a down-river float from 4:30 to 6:00 P.M. In the evening and the next morning the Cinereous Tinamou was heard as was the Variegated Tinamou, but the sound of the Great Tinamou heard on the walk to Brian's Landing was now absent.

During the day Paula had clambered around the rocks looking for a site from which to fish and discovered a very large anaconda, called locally a "comodi", coiled at the base of a rock cleft in very shallow water. This snake was shedding its skin. At dusk we examined this reptile, took pictures and discovered that there were in fact a total of three comodi, the very large individual possibly close to eighteen feet with a head the size of a large shoebox, a twelve footer and an almost tiny eight footer. Later in the evening Duane and Ashley, who had gone hunting, returned with a four and a half foot caiman that appeared to me to be different from either the black or spectacled caiman. This was prepared for the next day's luncheon. The general impression from the crew was that it was "emergency" food, but I found it palatable, if dry and bland. During supper we celebrated the birthday of Polly's son (Chester) by attempting to play tunes on a toucan-shaped toy plastic trombone, a gift from Chester. The music did not lack an appropriate primitive quality.

Day 8 In the morning we drifted downstream again and discovered that the Red-Fan Parrots had a nest hole in the trunk of a dead streamside tree. A pair of Dusky Purple-tufts, were spotted in riverside trees and flying to nearby trees (for

fruit?). This a bird that Davis had not previously seen in Guyana and one which Ridgely and Tudor state is not well known. The morning walk today was on the left side of the river on the trail that Ashley, Nikki and Andy had extended up a hill to its crest. In the beginning of the walk in streamside brush galleries we had good views of antshrikes, antbirds, and antwrens among those newly recorded were White-flanked and Grey Antwrens. Along the path a Coraya Wren was seen well. In higher forest near the summit we encountered Straight-billed, Chestnut-rumped, and Buff-throated Woodcreepers. Jennifer got a good quick look at a rare bird but one which is unmistakable, a Curve-billed Scythebill. I saw this bird but couldn't focus on the bill, but that bill is so unusual, long and strongly decurved that no other candidate exists. John, Davis and I walked down the side of the hill in search of an elusive anthrush. This was a bird which responded faithfully to tape by calling, but which stayed resolutely out of sight for at least three separate approaches. Finally, we each got a decent view of this **Black-faced Anthrush**. A ground-walking bird, it is water ouzel-shaped, with a delicate blue eye-ring, a white spot between the eye and the bill, a black chin and bib, and a bright rufous rump under a short upturned tail. A very pretty little tyke. While we were thus engaged Larry Master had arrived at the summit and had spotted a Blackish Nightjar. He managed to get very decent video shots of the bird. The next day we all had very good views. The rocky open summit of this hill is arid with yucca, leafless thorn vine and cactus growing amidst large slabs of rock. It was in this area the nightjar was roosting.

In the afternoon we walked the trail on the right bank and once again encountered a Musician Wren singing a simple variation of its lovely melodious concert. Among the other birds newly seen were: Grey-fronted Dove, a Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and Yellow-crowned Elaenia. A drift on the river was planned from which I, being several days shy on my note-taking, demurred in favor of writing. Paula called my attention to the largest, newly shed comodi which she discovered had taken up residence coiled in a rock cleft at the water's edge just twenty feet below my hammock. It is stunningly huge, colorful and beautiful creature. While writing I heard a shot and another about fifteen minutes later. Duane and Ashley appeared with a **Black Currasow** (Powis) which Duane had discovered while hunting on the hill trail, shot at, missed, and later, while walking out, came upon it again. This, too, became a welcome dietary diversion.

Day 9. We birded about camp from 5:00 A.M. until 7:00 A.M. and then headed for our next camp with Duane and Pip as crew. This time we traveled together comfortably in the largest river skiff. We left the remainder of the staff to break camp and overtake us. For most of the morning (7:00 A.M.-11:15 A.M.) we drifted, stopping for lunch and a swim at noon shortly after the gear-carrying boats overtook us. Eventually, we took Justin and Andy's boat in tow and seriously motored down river. This was an especially long trip but one which was simply full of birds and other wild-life. Among mammals we saw a group of six Coatimundi, Squirrel Monkeys (saki-winki), five Spider Monkeys, Capuchin Monkeys and three Tapir, a cow with her spot-streaked calf and another adult. Along the river bank the corpse of a jaguar-wounded tapir had attracted all three common vultures: Black, Greater Yellow-headed, and King Vultures overhead in the classic column of soaring vultures. I followed my practice of keeping the running total of birds called out during this ten hour trip. Among those birds scored for the first time on this trip were: Pied Lapwing, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, White Hawk, Red and Green Macaw, Dusky-billed Parrotlet, Little Cuckoo (N 3° 0.736', W.58° 53.935'), **Blackish Nightjar**, Common Tody-Flycatchers, Plain-crowned Spinetail (N 3° 1.759' W 58° 53.797'), Cocoa Thrush and two **Long-tailed Tyrants**. Two more Yellow Tyrannulets were found and day-high counts of Swallow-wings (162), Drab Water-Tyrants (56) and Brown Jacamars (46) were recorded. In the afternoon we stopped at the only farm on the Kwitaro (Harold's Farm, N 3° 4.329', W 58° 52.926') and traded flour, rice etc. for items such as, sugar cane, papayas, bananas, plantains and limes. Young Duane and Andy climbed trees in a farm orchard and threw ten mammoth, very green papayas into the river and retrieved them. Euler's fly-catcher was heard at N 3° 8.606', W 58° 50.035', comprising a second Guyanan site for this bird.

KASEM CAMP, our fifth campsite, is located at N 3° 11.584', W 58° 48.660'. We arrived at dusk (5:30 PM) having traveled 27.8 miles. The presence in the river of electric eels, called "kasem" by Marjorie, gave this campsite its name. Only the very large, soft-ball sized heads of these eels were regularly seen rising for air in mid-stream although a good view of the whole electric eel was yet to come. We are now quite deep in the Kwitaro basin, perhaps fifty miles from the Rupununi River to the west and sixty miles from the Essequibo basin to the east. This is a completely untracked region. Our view of the wild-life is warped by the fact that we travel only by river. What life is characteristic of the distant uplands is only hinted at by our occasional foray a half-mile or less from the river edge. The camp was almost completely set up. We were camped on the right side of the river on a steep bank of good quartz sand. The kitchen was set up on a level shelf and our benab close above on a clear level area. A rock shelf on the opposite side of the river defines and deepens the river here. Technically, the camp is on an island bounded by the river on one side and a smallish brook on the other. On the opposite shore Ashley had a crew cutting a trail through the woods and up a very steep hillside. The fishing on the Kwitaro is reported to be generally poor. Ashley, Pip (who lives to fish) and Duane come up with a catfish and a lukanani, but mostly its perai (piranha) which are caught and these do not seem to be very big.

Day 10 We drifted downstream from 6:30 A.M. to 8:00 A.M. A Black and White Hawk Eagle was seen from the beach. At 8:45 A.M. we started to explore Ashley's trail on the left side of the river. Along the trail we heard and called in a Golden-headed Manakin and a pair of **Rufous-tailed Flatbills**. A large group of monkeys including at least three different species (Capuchin, Black Spider and Brown-bearded Saki) made themselves evident by the sound of dropping fruits as they fed in a high forest tree. A single fruiting tree can attract a range of monkey species which seem to go about their business with a minimum of conflict. The path was a steep one to the top of a hill much higher (possibly more than 250 ft above the river) than

that we had climbed at the Comodi Camp. At the crest we found a fully wooded forest with 100 foot trees and a new mystery bird. A "see u wheat" call was heard repeatedly in high vine tangles. The call was easily imitated by young Duane with Jennifer's Audubon Bird Call. After some cogitation Davis decided a White-throated Manakin was a good possibility and, after nearly a half hour, we began to understand the movement pattern of this little bird as it responded to tape. The hero of this find was Leroy who was finally able to locate it and put most of us on it (I didn't consider my own glimpse as a *bona fide* sighting). The bird was not an adult male, but from the fact that it called, was probably an immature male. Female manakins are notoriously nondescript and the White-throated Manakin female is among the most bland of the group. The immature male is similar to the female. This wired male raced back and forth among the vine tangles quite unlike the manakins I had seen previously. This was Davis's first Guyanan sighting of the bird. Aside from this new bird the hill-top was remarkably devoid of detectable birds, but this may also have reflected the noon hour activity lull.

On our return to the base of the hill we found Black-spotted Barbet, Cinerous Mourner and a Striped Woodcreeper as well as several previously seen woodcreepers and woodpeckers. Tanagers were observed flying to and from a hole in a tree elbow. We watched for fifteen minutes as a succession of tanagers included Spotted, Turquoise, **Bay-headed**, Flame-crested and a female Purple Honey-creeper repeatedly bathed in a natural bird-bath sixty feet up in a tree. That this would be good placement of birdbaths in any area seems evident. We returned to camp at 2:00 P.M., lunched, and at 2:45 walked along the right bank trail for an hour. Just behind camp we were mobbed by Red-throated Caracaras. Davis thrives on their response to tape or voice, but this time it was just too close to camp. Along the trail we heard the usual assortment of antbirds, flycatchers and greenlets. We returned for a late afternoon boat ride which once again I declined in favor of writing.

Day 11 At 6:45 A.M. we made our usual two-hour drift down the river. At a site where the night before a tapir had appeared along the shore within five feet of the boat, we surprised a labba (*Agouti paca*) at the base of a steep bank. It fled to some nearby logs and submerged. Presumably it entered a hollow log and escaped to a burrow. The usual cast of swallows, swifts, parrots, macaws, kingfishers associated with the river were present but a new finding was pair of **McConnell's Spinetails** (N 3° 11.976', W 58° 48.166') and our first Osprey. With the long days we have already spent on the river, most of the riverine avifauna have been encountered, but hope springs eternal. To me, morning floats are preferable to the evening ones since the light steadily increases rather than decreases and therefore my eyesight improves. However, the chance of seeing nightjars and nighthawks is virtually nil on the morning drifts.

Today we made two walks on the right side of the river. In the morning we found a **Spotted Antpitta**, Rufous-bellied Antwren, Warbling Antbird and a much more cooperative Black-faced Anthrush. After lunch Larry, who had started ahead of the main party, encountered a bird whose description could only be a Ringed Antpipit. None of us saw it but a video confirmed it as the most likely species. A Cinnamon Attila and a Black-tailed Trogon were seen. In the higher elevations various greenlets and flycatchers were heard and a Thrush-like Shiffornis was seen. Our trail meandered toward higher ground along a marshy area where we could hear a large group of White-lipped Peccaries mucking. At this camp our guides found another of the Pink-slippered Bird Spiders (my designation). This one was larger than the one we'd seen earlier and much more active. Placed on a limb it explored with a sedate, measured step and on the hat Ashley was wearing was a distinctive, if worrisome, ornament.

Day 12, Friday, November 13 After a short walk in the woods around the camp we embarked for yet another long day of river travel. We were under way at 7:15 AM. Our goal today was Corona Camp below Corona Falls on the Rewa River. Two Capped Heron were seen in breeding plumage and three Sunbitterns were seen well. Among the raptors seen this day were two **Grey-headed Kites**, an adult and an immature, and my first well seen, unmistakable, **Orange-breasted Falcon**. Along the two rivers we saw our highest number of White-banded Swallows (315) and Band-rumped Swifts (350). Among other birds seen today were Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Sirystes, Cream-colored Woodpecker and **Swallow Tanager**. An hour or so after leaving we stopped to check on the progress of our human-powered and lagging companion boat which was crewed by young Duane and Andy. Duane and Pip motored upstream while we explored the wooded edge of a nearby pond. The shore mud had many tracks including deer and tapir and in the trees a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. Our boat returned quickly and we resumed travel towing the laggards in convoy. Blackish Nightjar habitually roost in the open along the banks of the river and several were seen in exposed sites on the next few days.

The Confluence We passed Pobawau Creek (N 3° 15.927', W 58° 45.087') a western tributary of the Kwitaro which flows out of the Kanuku Mountains at 11:15 AM and arrived at the confluence of the Rewa and Kwitaro Rivers (N 3° 17.371', W 58° 45.087') at 1:15 P.M. The confluence is about 15 miles from Kesam Camp. The heat was incredible and several members of the group swam among them, Jennifer and Duane. Larry, surrounded by butterflies, walked on the beach looking for animal tracks. Hornets dominated the scorching sandbar where Duane had set up the shortwave antenna and received messages from Sandy. Chief among these messages was one for Polly which detailed the resignation of House Speaker Newt Gingrich. It is startling and unforgettable news. Following an initial "double-take" (Can you repeat that message?) we rejoice and John and Polly embraced in victorious joy! In retrospect this was the first, clear news that the most conservative elements of the House of Representatives had finally taken charge of that body.

Here too, wildlife abounded: a Giant River Otter swam across the river toward us while a pair of adult capybara swam across the Rewa below the confluence. After refueling from a cache of gasoline we headed up the much clearer Rewa River.

The appearance of the Rewa is different from the Kwitaro here. In addition to the clearer black water, the trees on the banks seem more majestic, and the river here and there has sandy riffles and bars that the Kwitaro lacked. After a few meanders it runs nearly a straight course. The birds are not as abundant at this hour, but monkeys are and include, Saki winki, Black Spider and Bearded Saki. Along a bank we encountered the Southern River Otter. This is a smaller, darker otter than the Giant River Otter. After three hours we approached a rapids near a river S-curve, dis-embarked and walked over a shelf on the left bank where we are met by the boats that have been lined through the rapids. We ferried to the right bank, walked over some rocky ledges around more shallow rapids and re-embark. Ashley and Leroy, already at the campsite, came down to help us negotiate the rapids. Our camp is about a third of a mile above this point on the right bank along a wide pool almost in sight of Corona Falls. The distance from Kesam Camp is 25.2 miles. It is a lovely campsite. Our benab is close by the river up a steep bank in a clearing surrounded by modest sized (30-50 ft) trees. This is the camp at which the fishing party stayed for several days. In contrast to the Kwitaro, the fishing here is good, although possibly better at other seasons. Certainly this is a place where there are very large fish, pacu running to seven pounds, and very large perai, possibly baiara and aruwana. The best fishing is closest to the falls. We had a quiet night following a good meal.

CORONA CAMP (N 3° 10.842', W 58° 40.535') Day13. I arise about 5:00 A.M. and proceed to rummage in my gear. When traveling I find that nothing beats a good rummage! It is an opportunity to find that which has been lost, discover what you forgot you had, stow away the un-necessary, give away the unwanted, collect the laundry, and generally resist the ravages of entropy. On this trip I was not alone as we had more than our share of convictable rummagers. Carried to the extreme, rummaging becomes pathological and even opens up the (remote) possibility of impeding the progress of the entire trip (it is conceivable that some have wanted to bird whilst I rummaged in my bag for an item). But how could this crew complain? Unquestionably, the antidote to pathological rummaging is to reduce the load to the absolute bare minimum that is, so few items that there is nothing left but order. Of course the mammalian memory thrives on extracting order from the disorder in which we live and only in a very few minimalistic dwellings (see House Beautiful, they show one such every year) is such order displayed. This is simply because achieving and maintaining this degree of order is so much more effort than rummaging, anathema to a serious rummager and not nearly as much fun as a good rummage.

At first light Larry amused us by decoding bat ultrasonics with a signal transducer (I don't intend to give the impression that Larry is a walking electronics shop, but he gives a great imitation of one). One small bat flew a rigid flight pattern in a circular course under the lower trees so that the bat was seen and its sound heard together. Bats constitute the largest mass of vertebrate life forms in these forests. Several different frequencies and periodicities suggested that different bat species were also heard. The possibility of entering new worlds of sound and sight are exciting. I know virtually nothing about bats. Considering their evolution to fruit and pollen eaters it seems there should be types specialized for searching for nocturnal insects by leaf gleaning or branch creeping. Perhaps these questions can be answered by bringing night-vision equipment along on these trips to look for bats, insects and other nocturnal creatures. The concept of extending the range of human senses to wavelengths (infra-red and ultraviolet light, ultra-sound, and infra?-sound) beyond our capacity for un-aided perception seems a door to a world we've barely explored.

The first walk of the day is along the right bank to Corona Falls. The path itself is interesting passing through smaller trees perched on rocky ledge on to an open area with pineapple-like plants and shrubbery bearing bromeliads and aerophytes. Corona falls is spectacular and well-named. The falls is a series of ledges; the topmost, crown-shaped, is a gently curved hundred feet wide and thirty feet high, water falling over this corona collects in a large pool which runs down a steep flume to plunge into a larger pool below from which it exits in a right-angle turn. A Fasciated Tiger Heron is seen fishing along the steep flume as we get close to the falls. This is a rare bird and only the second site for which it is recorded in Guyana. The first being discovered by Duane DeFreitas in April, 1998 at Maparri Creek. It is a bird associated with tropical rapids and falls and its feeding probably takes advantage of the distraction that rapidly moving water is to migrating fish. Two adults and an immature were seen here. I took several photographs of our party with the falls in the background. A close look at the rocks in the falls showed that they had a extensive beard of hanging submerged plants (*Lacis fluviatalis*). The plants had long quarter inch diameter stems with linear leaves attached along the stem. Interestingly, on the surface of drying rocks the plants had sent up thin one sixteenth inch diameter fruiting stalks, completely different from the underwater stems, each bearing a single white flower. These were attractive to both honeybees and stingless bees many of which were actively visiting these flowers. When mature, each stalk contained a single ball-shaped seed-pod with several seeds. The vegetative stems and leaves of this plant are a favored food of pacu. Later we met Duane, Ashley and Pip who had walked up to the falls along the shore and caught a number of pacu. This is one of the most delicious fish I ever have eaten.

We walked next to the small brook behind the camp. The brook is shallow but running with a good current and, unlike the Kwitaro, it is diamond clear. In the brook were three electric eels. The scene was so fascinating that it consumed almost all of the remaining morning activity. The eels were similar in size, each about 18-24" long. The brook water was so clear that we could watch every detail of the movement of the large electric eels as they investigated the minnows drawn to the pieces of "bakes" we threw into the water. The propulsion of the eels is completely by control of the undulating waves traveling forward or backward along the ventral fin while the body is kept relatively straight. Direction and elevation is essentially by the small pectoral fins, and modest bending of the body. Occasionally, minnows approaching an eel would panic, assumedly from a detected electric field, but we saw no eels feeding following these "panics". Associated with these eels was an occasional

popping sound, whether from an electrical discharge or an explosive exhalation was not clear to me. Apparently electric eels continuously shine an electric field on their surroundings which they monitor and can detect perturbations in the field. Being able to "feel" distant objects without physically contacting them is certainly a useful ability in the turbid waters of the Kwitaro or at night. Among the many small minnows in the pool were a dozen hatchetfish each an inch and a half long. They had highly expanded and elongated pectoral fins and brown stripes running along their flanks and rested passively just below the surface film where they could easily be examined with binoculars. Larry captured absolutely fantastic videos of this idyll.

In the afternoon we walked into the woods behind the camp where Jennifer and I had a fleeting glance at a rapidly foraging group of antbirds among which was, what we later recognized to be, a **White-plumed Antbird**. One very good sighting today was our first Lineated Woodcreeper. However, the biggest bird of the day was found when we heard the "sizzle" of the bird that was the object of our obsession, the White-crowned Manakin. Davis began playing the tape and the bird responded. It was obviously close by but invisible to all of us. All of us, that is, except young Duane who had collapsed about twenty feet ahead of us to rest from his trail-chopping exertions. He raised his head and there was a male **White-crowned Manakin** displaying and singing just in front of him. Like any good manakin he sat rock still on a low branch, as if sitting for his portrait. The jet-black male with its bright white forehead, cap and nape is unmistakable. Our search for this bird had started almost a year earlier on the Rewa and this was a most satisfactory conclusion. We returned to camp for a swim in the cool Rewa and a lunch of beautifully prepared pacu. We then walked up the trail to discover a pair of Spot-backed Antbirds, our first and only of the trip. We also recorded our first Wing-banded Antbirds this day, my first **Pink-throated Becard** and two Flavescent Warblers. Altogether a most productive day in gorgeous surroundings concluded by an evening drift toward the portage area. This evening Marjory announced there would be no more rum. Sadly, I broke out my donation, a liter of decent scotch whisky, and we toasted lovely Corona Falls on the Rewa.

Day 14. At the camp table several varieties of stingless bees greeted us at breakfast and lunch as they investigated jam-smearing knives and spoons. These were quite different from the jet-black bees so common at our Maparri Creek camp. One type had a golden thorax and another was distinctly brown. Larry was quite interested in them and their nests. There are many species of stingless bees each with its own distinctive nest entrance: some with a simple cone-shaped tube, others with a tube surrounded by characteristic wax/propolis/latex protrusions like great flowers, others with a large horizontal mouth-like landing platform. During the course of our trip Larry managed to video the hives of at least five different species. We boated down the river this morning from 6:20-7:45. Three sunbitterns calling and repeatedly displaying on the river edge close to the boat were a splendid sight. The birding group walked a new trail on the left side of the river from 8:15 to 1:15 P.M. where they saw an Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Bat Falcon, Marbled Wood-Quail, Straight-billed Hermit, Spot-winged Antbird and Scale-backed Antbird.

Rather than bird, I went fishing at the falls with Duane and Pip. Opposite the camp there is a well-defined trail along the left bank. It is about six to eight feet wide, often paved with log rollers that amerindians use to haul their dugouts ("kanous") above Corona Falls. According to our map there is approximately 50 miles of navigable water above the falls. Here and there the path was overgrown with vines and bamboo but for most of the course it was a well marked and cleared avenue. We arrived at the top of the falls and fished in the pools below the corona's cascade. I had a very close look at two more Fasciated Tiger-Herons on this side of the river. Using lead-head jigs, spinners etc. and baiting the hooks with the waterfall plant I hooked and lost a large pacu, then landed a beauty of about 7 pounds. Pip and Duane each caught several and in no time we had six good pacu. The pacu is plate-shaped, quite thick in cross-section and a very strong swimmer. It is an extreme challenge to land one caught in swift water. The ledge at the falls is covered with boulders. These have been inscribed with petroglyphs figures of individuals and the typical three parallel feather or fish incisions so common at other river sites. Rock incising seems to have been a common activity in these parts of Guyana. It is hard not to conclude that they constitute property markers although such a conclusion is clearly a product of my own culture. Below the falls outlet, I caught a very large and dangerous looking perai - at least a five pound fish. Pip was sufficiently impressed to warn me away from its mouth while he disengaged the hook. Throughout the trip our guides were solicitous and kept us under their care when there was the slightest chance of our injury. Before I left I had a bath and shower under the waterfall. We returned to camp by wading along the shore, an occasional (disasterous for my camera) dip in the river, and balancing on the left bank ledges. It was a damp return.

In the afternoon we walked on the right bank trail from 2:50 P.M. to 4:50 P.M. One of the better birds seen was a **Bright-rumped Attila**. At one point a Plain Xenops responded to a taped call by flying in, looking at the tape recorder and flying off never to return. Polly's observation about the recorder fit the bill, "It talks the talk, but it doesn't walk the walk!" This day we saw our first White-lored Tyrannulet, a bird we had heard repeatedly at every campsite. At 4:50 PM the main party decided to walk up to Corona Falls on the left bank trail. I declined in favor of my well established aversion to stumbling around the woods in the dark and the fact that I'd already been there. The party returned in the dark at 6:15 PM but not without difficulty since John tripped going over a log and lost his glasses, which were recovered the next day.

Day 15 Today, at 7:00 AM we set out for our seventh campsite. This is our longest day on the river so far and is the start of our return to Annai. Our next camp is 35 miles away. Approaching the portage below Corona Camp, I spotted a bright crimson and gold bird perched in a leafless gray bush at the water's edge. This was a male **Crimson Topaz**, a large, very showy hummingbird with two long central tail plumes, crimson all over except for its greenish-gold gorget. Rarely have I seen a bird shine as did this jewel. Shortly thereafter an apple-green female made herself visible, the male flew at her, re-settled to show

himself off even better and eventually they flew together up river. As we disembarked, we flushed a Blackish Nightjar, then another from the rocky shoreline. A **Rufous-throated Sapphire** was observed carrying nesting material and working it into a nest in a small bush that grew out of the shoreline ledge, a precarious location that would certainly be submerged in high water. Soon after this we encountered three more Rufous-throated Sapphires in the portage area. During this passage we also saw a White-chinned Sapphire. A quick fly-by over the river of a Guianan Red Cotinga was recorded but not by me. At the waters edge on the banks of the portage trail were craters of the "bombardier" frogs each filled with eggs or tadpoles in various development stages.

Motoring down a quite straight swift run, several of us spotted a small bird leave a nest in a branch overhanging the water perhaps ten feet out and about six feet high (N 3° 13.075', W 58° 43.190'). We sneaked back, grabbed some brush and awaited its return. Soon a male Streaked Antwren worked his way out the branch and darted into the nest. He was incubating two eggs. The nest was about two and one half inches in diameter, tightly constructed of rootlets and fibers but of thin enough construction that the eggs were clearly visible through the bottom of the nest. Somewhat farther along the river we spotted a new flycatcher in the second rank of trees beyond the shore. Davis thought it was a **Dusky-chested Flycatcher** and it responded to the tape flying closer and then returning to a tree-top perch on the skyline. This, only the second Guyanan record, was found at N 3° 13.542', W 58° 43.557'. Another very good bird, a Dot-winged Antbird, was seen along the river at N 3° 16.987', W 58° 45.051', just shy of the Rewa/Kwitara meeting. We arrived at the Kwitara River junction at 10:45 A.M., spent a half hour, cleaned out the fuel cache and picked up a spare engine stowed for emergency use and continued our journey.

This was a long, hot day. In its upper reaches the Rewa is a fast millrace virtually running in a straight line to the northwest. On meeting with the Kwitara, the Rewa meanders, often many miles from a true course toward the northeast. At one point a large 4-5 mile loop curves back to within a few hundred yards of itself. The river has occasionally broken through at this point, but is not yet committed to the new course. We lunched on a steep sandy shelf just after the big loop. While lunching we picked up and carried off plastic wrappers and batteries left by an earlier negligent fishing party. Further along the river, Pip went ashore and recovered a pretty decent casting rod that had been absent-mindedly abandoned by Roger Stanley on the trip up-river. Bat Falcon and Plumbeous Kite were raptors newly seen (by me) today. Among other new birds were Black-tailed Trogon, a White-collared Swift and a Green Aracari. This was a long trip generally made under power. At 4:30 PM we made camp at a large sandbar on the left side of the river. Resident on this large, high sandbar were our first pairs of Large-billed Terns and Black Skimmers.

In the evening and for the next few days we heard both the Variegated Tinamou and the Undulated Tinamou. The Undulated Tinamou replaced the Cinereous Tinamou in this region. The Cinereous Tinamou is associated with the forests typical of the smaller watercourses like the Kuyuwini, Mapari Creek and the upper Kwitara/Rewa basins, while the Undulated Tinamou seems more characteristic of the broader river valleys such as the lower Rewa and the Rupununi River near Karanambu. The Variegated Tinamou was recorded in every forested habitat on this trip.

LEONID CAMP (N 3° 26.802', W 58° 35.102') was the first site which did not have a previously built structure for our hammocks. Ashley led most of the staff into the woods at the north end of the bar where they quickly chopped the parts for a "benab." The structure is a simple one depending on gravity, the tension of the hammocks, and the compression of lateral supports to make a strong support to keep the hammocks off the ground and firm. The benab is a rectangle about fifteen feet wide and about 25 feet long. It is made of two sets of three posts (each ten feet long and six inches in diameter) opposite one another and each sunk two feet into the ground. The post at each corner of the structure is anchored by a tree with its fork braced against the post and its butt in the sand toward the opposite post. A 25 foot tree trunk is wedged between the fork and its post and runs the length of the set of posts tying the side together and providing a beam on which to tie the hammocks. The forked tree defeats compressive forces preventing inward collapse and the hammocks supply tension preventing outward collapse. The structure can be further modified with end gables and beams to support a roof of palm fronds or a tarpaulin. The entire process from tree chopping to completion was done in about ninety minutes. The only tools required are the cutlass, a shovel and a plentiful supply of softwood trees with long unbranched trunks.

At night there was a spectacular meteorological event, the Leonid Meteor Showers from which I named this camp although others, more impressed by the bird-life, called this Black Skimmer Camp in allusion to the noisy pair with which we shared the sand dunes. From all the subsequent reports this may have been the very best place in the world from which to view the Leonid Meteor Shower. Davis's description of ionization trails that hung in the sky for minutes, exploding meteors and nearly constant bombardment were exciting. Strangely, Davis felt no obligation to wake others and only he and Larry enjoyed this most rare event. Next time, wake me up!

The dunes and high river bars are nest sites for river turtles and turtle tracks are obvious at this time of the year because nesting coincides with falling water levels. Such tracks lead turtle egg collectors to the nest. As with tortoises, river turtles are especially susceptible to nest predation which has resulted in a general reduction of turtles of all types and the extirpation of the giant arran turtle from much of its range. We are pleased to learn that Duane has begun to practice obliterating turtle tracks by sweeping the beaches to conserve these animals. This beach had been swept. Leaving Leonid Camp was a simple matter of packing hammocks and cooking gear and stowing it on the boats. Our party has consistently encouraged leaving a camp without

trash. One of the absolute pleasures of these campsites is their cleanliness especially the absence of plastic, metal and paper trash. So we burn anything flammable, bury unburnable material in a waste pit, and give all our used up batteries to John who plans to dispose of them in Montana (I think I'd like to visit Montana simply because it must have so little trash it has to import its from Guyana!). The benab remains for future travelers until the floods carry it away.

Day 16 Today's trip of 35 miles will be as long as yesterday's. We are up, breakfasted and leave by 6:06 A.M. We are barely out of sight of the camp when Davis hears the call of an Olive-backed Foliage Gleaner. Immediately Duane motors to shore and Pip holds the boat in place by grasping the shoreside brush. The tape brings a bird in, but it is one of those shy critters that refuses to perch in the open or even allow itself to be well framed in an opening. One by one, with Pip's boat maneuvering, we all get a glimpse of it. Jennifer, who consistently has the best eyes and is always the first to see a bird, begins to call out field marks at Davis' prompting: "rufous head, back's not olive, buffy breast, no, the throat isn't white". Davis confirms that this description doesn't sound at all like an Olive-backed Foliage Gleaner, but it is answering the tape in a regular and predictable manner. Could it be a **Chestnut-crowned Foliage Gleaner**? Davis plays that bird's tape and elicits a very unusual response, the bird calls back but now its call has a different, strangled quality quite different from the original call. We conclude after a few more sightings that it is a Chestnut-crowned Foliage Gleaner and a new bird for Guyana. The sighting was at N 3° 27.362', W 58° 35.298'.

As we arrived at our solution to the "Foliage Gleaner Problem", Duane noticed that our companion boat a few hundred feet upstream was signaling quietly by hand waving, no shouting. We motored up and found an adult puma (*Felis concolor*) sitting on the lip of a steep bank. It regarded us passively sitting upright on its haunches unafraid and unconcerned for a few more minutes then got up and padded off into the forest. I have lived near bobcats, tracked them, and never seen them. Cats as a group are exceptionally secretive. Sighting a puma is an extremely rare event, one which was new to Duane, and certainly the high point of our mammal viewing on the trip. We did see Capybara and Giant Otter on this river stretch. As we proceeded down the river we encountered our first Yellow-billed Terns, Wood Storks and a Jabiru. We had day high counts of the trip for White-winged Swallows of one hundred and Sunbitterns of five. Capped Heron in gorgeous breeding plumage consisting of blue face skin, soft yellow wash to the neck and cape, startling white plumage all topped off by the black cap reached their highest day count of ten and Green Ibis of sixteen in this section of the Rewa.

At noon we stopped at Fish Pond a large shallow inlet of the river which was pretty nearly dried up. The fishermen fished with modest success while we lunched on a hot muddy bank and watched a half dozen very hefty black caiman cruise the pond. This pond had been the objective of the fishing party last November who found it completely dry then. Nevertheless, it has an excellent reputation as the place to fish when the water level is high. Early in the day, Nikki had set off alone down the river, paddling his skiff. Although we motored, he managed by steady paddling to keep ahead of us most of the day. We finally passed him in mid afternoon. Nikki is a real phenomenon; expert woods-man, good trail breaker, indefatigable boatsman and a guide whose exceptional leadership qualities were frequently called upon. As we approached the place where we had camped on the Rewa last November we explored a riverside ox-bow pond as a potential fishing site, but it, too, was drying out.

Either from the bright light or from looking through binoculars all day, my eyes bothered me. While normally my visual correction is such that I view binoculars through glasses with the neutral diopeter setting, I noticed that now I had to correct the right eye by more than three marks on the diopter setting to achieve good focus and that without my glasses a neutral setting gave me a sharp image. In short, I suddenly did not require glasses. It seems likely that the shape of my eyeball or cornea changed for whatever reason. This condition lasted only for the next two days.

Following my usual practice I kept a count of species and numbers of birds on these day-long trips. In this journey from south to north on rivers of increasing size interesting trends can be seen in the distribution of the more frequently encountered species. Brown Jacamar are strongly associated with the upper reaches of the Kwitara/Rewa Rivers and fall off rapidly as we go downstream. To a lesser degree the Swallow-wing is associated with the upper regions of these watersheds as are the White-banded Swallow and the Band-rumped Swift. The passerines that are tightly tied to the river almost regardless of the environment through which it flows are the Drab Water-Tyrant and the White-winged Swallow. A table showing the occurrence of the most numerous species as we progressed northward follows, but note that miles 36-96, and 95-130 share the 20 mile trip to and from Corona falls.

Miles	0-8	8-36	36-61	61-96	96-130	130-165
	Birds per mile					
Brown Jacamar	4.9	1.7	1.4	0.9	0.5	0.2
Swallow-wing	12.3	5.0	4.0	1.6	1.8	2.1
White-banded Swallow	25.0	8.8	12.6	3.7	4.7	1.4
Band-rumped Swift	12.3	2.2	3.0	13.0	7.2	2.2
Drab Water Tyrant	1.9	2.0	1.8	0.7	1.0	0.7
White-winged Swallow	2.5	1.9	2.1	2.7	2.9	1.0

Caiman Camp

In the late afternoon we arrived at our eighth camp, Caiman Camp (N. 3° 42.917', West, 58° 44.548'). This camp was on the right side of the river at a point where it took a ninety degree turn to the right. Facing us across a deep pool was a fifty-foot high perpendicular wall where the river had gouged the left bank. Kitchen and staff accommodations were set up on the sandy bank while our benab resided forty feet up a series of sandy steps and about one hundred and fifty feet along a trail in the midst of a spectacular grove of trees many of whose branches did not start until 80-90 feet up their trunks. The large pool in front of the camp was the home of many large caiman. We watched as a really large caiman entering the pool from downstream. The smaller caiman fled, rigorously maintaining their distance, although it did not appear that the larger caiman was actively attacking them. The number of Black Caiman and the second morning's capture of one led to naming this Caiman Camp. This camp is also known to the fishing party as "Piowrin" Camp for it was here that Justin landed an unforgettable 58 lb "Banana Fish", a catfish like that we'd seen last year at Karanambu. It is a matter of fact that where there is a congregation of caiman, that's where the fish are. Pip managed to catch medium sized baiara here. I'd indicated that I wanted the skull of one as a gift to my piscatorially oriented colleague, Dr. Stacia Sower. The baiara is a fish which has two amazingly elongated fangs in its lower jaw which fit into scabbards in the roof of their mouths. Nikki carefully debrided the skull of all accessible flesh, and I dried the skull for the next three days., finally sprayed it with krylon plastic and presented it to Stacia. Above the campsite before the bend on the opposite side of the river a jungle was emerging on low deposited sand and in the bare branches of the higher trees we saw Blue-throated Piping Guan. Interestingly, their position in relation to the orientation of the river's bend and the character of the streamside forest was nearly identical to that where we first saw them last year at the Rewa campsite.

As we settled in, Marjory (accidently?) stumbled on, not one, but two, bottles of rum in spite of her previous claim that we were out. Now that we were well on the home stretch conservation of rum was no longer critical. But, of course, these were absolutely the last bottles. I fixed a libation for John who's toast was "Happy Birthday!", I responded "and many more." Two days later I learned that today (November 18) was actually John's birthday. We enjoyed the evening while waiting for the last possible display of the Leonid Meteor Shower which did not materialize.

Day 17 In the morning while on a downstream birding drift we were puzzled by a jet black, short-tailed bird that was flushed in shoreside brush but which kept out of sight. Eventually it was seen again, flushed across the river, and slowly we reached the conclusion that it was a Greater Ani which had lost its tail. On the river we had a good overhead view of a **Hook-billed Kite** and later both mature and immature kites together. This morning we birded across the pool on a forest trail that led through fairly high and thick edge cover and into a very high mature forest of strongly buttressed trees and finally to varzea on the shore of a narrow river inlet. As we proceeded along the trail, Larry began to take a considerable interest in the unique ecology of hollows in standing trees. Nearly every tree had some sort of cavity at its base and some were so large that it was possible to stand in them. In this domain were spiders, outsized leaf-hoppers that had bubbled large "spittle" cocoons around themselves, bats, and later that day, a very large, buff-colored tailless whip scorpion (Amblypygi sp.). Larry has a very decent Sony Camcorder replete with low light, high magnification, image stabilization, close-up and, you name the "bells and whistles" with which he's documented much of what we've seen. Happily we did not encounter snakes in these hollows although this environment seemed made for them.

One of the birds seen on this walk was real puzzler. Nor have we completely solved the puzzle although Davis is focussed on a particular suspect. It is rare to hear a birdsong that Davis cannot identify, but during our return a strange bird call was heard in the lower branches of a canopy of modest height. The sharper eyes of Larry and Jennifer found the bird which they described as small and greenish. Davis got "on it", too late, just as it left its perch. This was a difficult bird to find and eventually it ceased responding altogether. Davis had heard the same call last year at the nearby Rewa camp. His suspicion is that it was an Olive-green Tyrannulet, a bird of which Ridgely and Tudor write, "Rare (perhaps in reality more difficult to see or collect) in canopy and borders of humid forest. Not well known". We decide to try for it again tomorrow at the old Rewa camp.

In the afternoon we walked along a level trail on the right side of the river finding several new birds. The Cayenne Jay, as always, played hide and seek in the largest limbs of the highest trees. We called in a pair of Rufous-throated Antbirds for a great look. Attempts to call in the White-plumed Antbird, which is often associated with Rufous-throated Antbirds, failed not because none was near, but rather because the over-excited bird kept overflying us and finally flew into the next "county". A Rufous-capped Antthrush was called in and observed as it walked on the forest floor about twenty-five feet away. This bird has the rail-like shape of the Black-faced Antthrush, but differs in having a distinctive bright rufous pate and blackish throat, a very handsome bird. Also found today were Crimson-crested and Golden-collared Woodpecker and a Plain-brown Woodcreeper. Back at camp Jennifer lifted her hammock bag and discovered a medium sized black scorpion had taken up residence under it. I was obliged to tend to this, the first scorpion I have seen on our trips.

Day 18 Morning found a four foot long Black Caiman tethered to a stick in the beach sand. During the evening Marjory and Paula had been visited by two caiman. Paula had lassoed both of them. The largest had simply been too much to hold. The smallest gave us all a good close-up view and photos of Polly and of Leroy holding it. We released it and it streaked for the pool. Davis lurked about the nearby woods and shore recording birdsong once, at least, haranguing the camp's miscreants for making too much background noise. At about 7:00 A.M. we continued our trip down the Rewa with the plan to camp on the Rupununi

River after another 35 miles. The old Rewa Camp was an hour away and we stopped there to walk Tommy's trail from 8:00 to 9:20 hoping to find the mystery tyrannulet. No luck. The higher water this year had quite changed the shoreline. The sandbar, mostly submerged, was the stalking ground of Wood Storks and a Jabiru. The fishing was not as good as it had been in last year's lower water. We continued our boating over familiar territory passing Sobers's fishing camp, one of Pip's future goals, and stopping for a ninety minute lunch break at the site that we'd used on the previous trip. After a quick dip and a good lunch, we continued on arriving at Rewa Village on the Rupununi a half hour later at 1:20 P.M. The usual cast of river denizens were present, in addition, we saw our first **Short-tailed Hawk**, a light phase bird. As expected along savanna rivers, both Southern Lapwings and Brown-throated Parakeets were found as was a Black-throated Mango.

Centipede Camp. (N 3° 52.176', W 58° 53.587') We motored up the Rupununi in the hot afternoon sun searching for a suitable site on which to build a camp. At 5:10 P.M. we found a decent site on a high, lightly wooded, bank opposite a small inlet. In their usual efficient manner the staff cleared the underbrush in a grove of trees, hung hammocks, put up a table and benches while Marjory and Paula stoked a fire and prepared dinner. While walking along the shore collecting firewood, Jennifer discovered a site where fisherman had scaled an arapiama. I think Duane suspected that Marjory might still have a bottle of rum set aside for medicinal purposes. At his suggestion, I queried Marjory and, *voila!*, this magician produced the very last bottle for our evening cocktail. In the evening, as well as the next morning, we enjoyed very good views of a half dozen Band-tailed Nighthawks which made passes over the river close by the camp. At supper a small (quarter-inch long), light-colored winged insect (ant/termite/ mayfly?) appeared in great abundance. They seemed to be involved in a group activity gathering in rapidly swarming clusters focussed on small depressions including the dimples in our table surface and apparently trying to dig into the surface. Clearly, they were engaged in some sort of mating/ feeding/ swarming behavior. The following morning the table still had small groups of these insects trying to burrow into its dimpled plastic surface. In the evening we heard Tropical Screech and Spectacled Owl. In the early morning hours we heard a Tawny-bellied Screech Owl and Davis called in the Tropical Screech Owl.

Day 19 Spines of various palms (such as the genus *Acrocomia*) are a constant serious hazard in the jungle. In some places every palm seems covered with them. Many plants have spines only when they are small and prone to grazing, others have them as well when they are fully mature. These are often long, thin and hard and can be most painful when stepped on. Just such an accident happened to Andy when a spine pierced his right little toe just beneath the toenail. This morning John operated on Andy. Happily, John travels with a formidable medical kit so that Andy received the full emergency treatment including a local anesthetic, sterile instruments and forty-plus years of experience. The next day he showed every evidence of regaining his full prowess as a soccer star. The morning walk was in the woods immediately behind the campsite. Initially, this area was varzea devoid of ground cover and washed clean of the normal litter of the past seasons. As we went forward to slightly higher ground the underfoot bark, leaves and brush increased. This appeared to be the classic environment of the Saffron-crested Tyrant Manakin which Davis quickly found. We also found Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, and both Lineated and Striped Woodcreeper.

We heard an odd bleat, puzzling even to Davis. We searched for its source near the leaf-strewn forest floor. While the rest of us searched small twigs and branches for a bird, Jennifer, always with the best eyes, from twenty feet away spotted the source of the noise. On the forest floor was a tree frog held in deadly embrace by an immense centipede (*Scolopendra gigantea*) that was eight inches long. We watched spellbound for at least an hour as the centipede worked its way around the frog eventually passing entirely from one side to another gnawing and injecting its venom as it proceeded. The frog was clearly weakened as the assault went on and eventually, its bleating ceased and its eyes began to close. The ability of one of the earliest (Ordovician) land organisms, a simple-plan arachnid, to catch and physically overwhelm such a clearly modern (Triassic) vertebrate as the tree-frog simply terrifies. The tree-frog probably had taken refuge in a folded leaf in the treetops, one occupied by the centipede. Once the centipede had attached itself to the frog, both fell to the ground and the frog was locked in a death grip of an adversary that evolved perhaps 300 million years before its species had evolved. The photographs and especially the video of the event are simply chilling.

Our scouts have possibly discovered a new bird. Pip and Duane on a fishing expedition have spotted a bird which was one of my trip objectives, a Boat-billed Heron, in the inlet across the river. We broke camp about 10:30 A.M. and made a run into the entrance of the inlet. Poling our way into the shallow inlet we had great looks at Yellow-billed Terns perched on flooded tree trunks as we approached the area where the "Boat-billed Heron" had been seen. Nothing! In disgust we turned around and headed back. As we did the **Boat-billed Heron** left cover and flew into the water's edge at the end of the bay. It was an immature bird, well concealed by its camouflaged plumage, but enough in the open that we each could each "get on it".

Now we had a long (35 mile) run up the Rupununi to Annai. Always hot, almost bored, we spent a long day on the breast of the Rupununi. Where last year we had seen pairs of Southern Lapwings on nearly every sand beach and bar along the river, on this trip we saw few pairs. We did encounter two separate large flocks of Southern Lapwings; one with 19 birds and the other with 23 birds. I surmise that these are "staging" flocks waiting for the river to fall sufficiently to allow the establishment of breeding territories. In contrast, most of the Pied Lapwings we saw were pairs. Memorable birds include a Pectoral Sandpiper, a **Blackburnian Warbler** and a good look at a Plain-breasted Dove as we entered an awkward passage through a shallow sandbar area in the home stretch.

ANNAL As we motored along, Davis, a barely recidivistic non-smoker, offered to roll a cigarette for Pip in the bow. Davis proceeded to roll one of the most full, luxurious tubes of Brazilian tobacco yet seen on the trip. Clearly, this non-smoker had some expertise and practice. He passed it to me lit, I puffed a drag or two and passed it to Pip in the bow. Two, no more than three, minutes after Pip dragged on this toke we hit a rock. The cigarette, lost overboard in the crash, was forgotten and soon we were in sight of the Kwatamang Landing where Sandy (with ready-rolled cigarettes) awaited us. As always, Sandy, the soul of hospitality, was joined with many of our old friends, Among them Dianne, Carl, Justin and Danielle. Our deep thirst was assuaged with a plentiful supply of rum, and ice cold Banks and Polar beers and our hunger met by meat patty and cheese sandwiches. After a mild bout of carousing we fled to Colin Edward's Rock View Lodge for clean-up, a pleasant hour of visiting and the usual bountiful supper that Rock View tables.

Day 20 Our flight from Annai was at 8:00 A.M. the next morning and on time. While awaiting the flight, we did the usual things: a great Rock View breakfast such as I've celebrated elsewhere, the group photo (evidence we'd all survived and surely all been improved by our journey), popped a Banks or two and proceeded to examine Colin's livestock. Pip discovered that a pet labba had a craving for Banks beer poured down his throat while a Giant Anteater slurped beer from a cup with its long serpent-like tongue. Tapir and deer were kept in nearby compounds and macaws, parrots and monkeys in the aviary. Amidst a blizzard of fond farewells and grateful thanks for an absolutely terrific wilderness experience we boarded and within the hour landed at Timehri. Here another new experience awaited us, a nurse stood ready to take blood samples from each of us as part of an initiative to evaluate our malarial infection status. All passengers coming from this flight were required to have blood smears taken. Neither Sandy nor Duane who were flying to Georgetown with us had been put through this routine before. Was this the doing of Roy Thomas's (the Regional Supervisor for Malarial Control in Lethem) whom I'd met last April on the flight out of Karanambu? I did learn in this episode that the Lariam pills taken, before, during and after the trip are about 70% effective against malaria. Because of the almost complete absence of mosquitoes at this season, and our use of mosquito netting and bug repellent our threat of malarial infection was minimal. For those who live year-around in the outback malaria is of constant occurrence and virtually none of our guides and traveling companions have escaped it.

In short order, Louis picked us up, delivered us to the House Proud gift shop, the Pegasus, to the river wharf district to look for a Crab Hawk, and to the Botanical Garden. The Botanical Garden as always is a very productive area now very much recovered from the "restoration" attempt of last year. Among the birds seen here were two types of spinetails, Plained-crowned and Yellow-chinned Spinetails also Spotted Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow Warblers and Variable Seedeaters. This is a site where we can expect Blood-colored Woodpecker and fairly late in our walk we found a pair. Grey Kingbird is also expected here and was easily found. While walking along the woodland trail Jennifer took an extra hard look at a termitarium and turned it into a Two-toed Sloth. Probably the closest sloth sighting I've ever had and one that would certainly have been missed by us all since it so clearly appeared to be a termite nest. Another surprise find was a very good view of a Little Cuckoo. Pied Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh Tyrants and an American Pygmy Kingfisher were also found. Parrots seen here were Yellow-crowned, Orange-crowned and Blue-headed. In a large tree overhanging a pool we found the expected waders: Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons and my first adult Boat-billed Heron. In another pool the tame manatees always on the look out for food offerings, begged and assumed their most charming attitudes. It is hard to imagine the deprivations that drove early mariners to think of these gargantuan beasts as mermaids.

Whenever I have been in the Guyanan outback, relations with everybody, guides, indians, drovers, kitchen staff and strangers met on the rivers could not have been more harmonious and friendly. In Georgetown our interactions have been with Wilderness Explorers agents, Le Meridian employees and taxi drivers who have always been most helpful and cordial. However, Georgetown is a world away from the Rupununi Districts and two events showed just how different they are. At the Botanical Garden we were accosted by an individual seeking a handout. When denied, he proceeded to verbally assault us in the most disgusting terms. The man was clearly mentally deranged and a public threat for which there was apparently no public remedy. We stopped to search for a Rufous Crab Hawk and, while we were parked scanning the river shoreline, a thief rode by on a bicycle, reached in, swiped John's knapsack and was gone before anyone noticed. The loss included medicines, eyeglasses and his plastic-embedded bird copy of the illustrations of "Birds of Venezuela", costly, but luckily did not include passports or tickets. This brazen theft is probably not unexpected in a country as impoverished as Guyana, but in the Guyanan hinterlands I have not seen anything even slightly like either of these events.

In the evening the DeFreitases, Dianne McTurk, Karen Weldren, her husband Neil, Trudy Thorne and our party gathered together for a marvelous dinner at the Cara Lodge. Unfortunately, Tony was in England at a meeting and missed this first-rate affair. Then it was back to Le Meridian for a short nap and out to the airport at 3:00 A.M. to catch a BWIA flight to Miami via Trinidad and on to New York. As we boarded the plane at Timehri the reason we had elected to fly BWIA was clear: on the airstrip sat GAC's 757, jacked up with no tires on it! In Miami, Larry, John and Jennifer left us for connecting flights to Boston, Montana and California, respectively. Polly, Davis and I made a quick connection to New York and by limousine to Polly's house. By 7:00 P.M., Davis and I were driving to New Hampshire where we arrived about 11:00 P.M.

BIRDING HABITATS The areas in which we birded have some of the least perturbed environments in the neotropics. It is an area which is postulated to have played a major role as a plant and animal refugia in Amazonian history and in the face of

impending environmental threats may once again serve that important role. Many of the species we've seen have been cited in *Neotropical Birds, Ecology and Conservation* (Stotz, Fitzpatrick, Parker and Moskovits, U. Chicago Press) as representative of the undisturbed ecology of the habitats we visited. Examples of species which are characteristic of undisturbed Tropical Lowland Evergreen Forest which we saw were: Lined Forest Falcon, Gray-winged Trumpeter, Long-tailed Hermit, Plain-brown and Chestnut-rumped Woodcreepers, Olive-backed Foliage Gleaner, Dusky-throated and Cinereous Antshrike, and Rufous-bellied, Brown-bellied and Long-winged Antwrens in addition to Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Rufous-capped Antthrush, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and Blue-backed Manakin. Examples cited of species of undisturbed Flooded Evergreen Forest birds that we saw were: Green Ibis, Sun Bittern, Striped Woodcreeper, Black-chinned Antbird, Pale-vented Thrush and Tawny-crowned Greenlet. It is clear both from the numbers of species we encountered and the numbers of sightings of individuals of these species that the Rupununi, Rewa, Kuyuwini and Maparri Rivers offer a unique window onto the undisturbed ecology of the neotropics and in their present undeveloped form are a most important resource to Guyana and its people.

Does the area offer still more in the way of ornithological surprises? Undoubtedly. The area has not been surveyed intensively. Our trips were river-bound, and while this is certainly the most well studied environment, of the species of birds we saw, 1.25% of those were new to Guyana. The prospects of finding new birds in areas like the Kanuku Mountains and the isolated mountainous areas such as Kusad are alluring. On these four trips in Guyana I had a grand total of 489 species, 477 seen and 13 heard. Of these, 62 were species I had previously seen in the ABA area. Thus, 88% of the species were new to me. Of special note were the first and second recorded occurrences of Euler's Flycatcher in Guyana, and reasonable assurance of its breeding in the Rewa River Basin; the first and second Guyana records of Rusty-breasted Nunlet and Fasciated Tiger-heron; the first three occurrences of Spot-winged Antshrike; two of only a few sightings of Dot-winged Antwren for Guyana; new Guyanan records for Yellow Tyrannulet, Dusky-chested Flycatcher and Chestnut-crowned Foliage-gleaner. The finding of the Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin in three sites along the Rupununi River represents a major range extension for this species. Seeing the infrequently encountered Crimson Fruitcrow was still another high point, as was finding the Capuchinbird in three localities.

Literature of Tropical Interest One element of great importance was a reading list for Guyana which Davis gave me prior to the first trip. It is absolutely critical to arm oneself by reading a comprehensive book describing the ecological and natural history of the tropics. For this, John Kricher's "Neotropical Companion" (Princeton Press, 1997) is without peer. In my loitering in bookstores I have encountered new books of interest among them: Stanley Brock's, "Jungle Cowboy" written by a former manager of Dadanawa offers great insight into the region, people and animals; Henry Walter Bates's (1863) "The Naturalist on the River Amazons" (a Penquin Nature Library Selection, reprinted in 1989), is a simply marvelous, thoroughly readable semi-scientific account of the insects, plants, and other fauna seen during Bates' eleven years in Brazil. Bates, an associate of Alfred Russel Wallace, was one of the original thinkers in the development of the theory of natural selection and the discoverer of what is known as "Batesian mimicry." "Mad White Giant" by Benedict Allen (Macmillan, 1985), is an account of his extraordinary 1500 mile journey much of it by foot from the mouth of the Orinoco River to the mouth of the Amazon River in 1983 during which he spent time with Wai-Wai amerindians on the Guyana-Brazil border. In a similar vein, R. O'Hanlon's "In Trouble Again" (Vintage Books, 1990) is a formidable synthesis of good science writing, historical perspective, quirky humor, terror and cannily perceptive reporting of a journey in the other direction - from the Rio Negro to the Orinoco. A truly great adventure read! Another adventure book exploring the French Guyana is Francis Maziere's "Expedition Tumuc-Humac" (Doubleday, 1955). Describing two ethnographic/photographic/recording trips to the southernmost borders, it is an alert and perceptive view of amerindians who have had until then little contact with non-amerindians. Victor G. C. Norwood's "Jungle Life in Guiana" (Robt. Hale Ltd, London, 1964) is a well-researched book that touches on both historical and contemporary aspects of the region. "Amerindian Testimonies" edited by J. Forte and I. Melville (pub. Janette Forte, Georgetown, Guyana, 1997; an earlier printing in 1987 was made by Boise State University, Boise, ID) presents the results of twenty-two interviews with amerindians of the major Guyanan tribes concerning their customs and life. An "Insight Guide" produced by Hans-Ulrich Bernard is a photographic gem that touches on many aspects of the neotropics. "One River" (Touchstone, 1997) by Wade Davis describes hundreds of years of the history of ethnobotanical exploration in the Amazon in writing that is entertaining, engrossing, and which begins to approach the richness of an Amazonian forest. One cannot begin to appreciate the forests of Amazonia without some knowledge of the trees. Palms are a good place to start learning since most are small enough to be seen and sufficiently distinctive to identify. "Field Guide to the Palms of the Americas" by Henderson, Galeano and Bernal (Princeton University Press, 1995) which I borrowed from Maggie Wittner, my favorite book-hawk, was for me a crucial beginning in appreciating the mysteries of palms.