

# **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  
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**The Maparri Wilderness**

## 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 MAPARRI WILDERNESS

Several miles north of Dadanawa the Kanuku Mountains rise spectacularly above the savanna to a height of about 4000 feet. The Rupununi River cuts a narrow gap through this range. On the eastern side of this gap the range is dominated by three significant mountains running from south to north: Makawatta, Barudin and, on the northern-most edge of the range, Maparri Mountain. The Maparri River is a small river (in our discussions it is as often referred to as "Maparri Creek") draining the notch between the Maparri and Barudin peaks. Its upper reaches are interrupted by rapids and falls. Duane has established a camp below the first unnavigable water. The entire area is recognized as a pristine amazonian wilderness by Conservation International. Ravines and steep walls offer the opportunity for birding in an environment distinct from the savanna and lowland forests through which we ranged in the first two trips. Wilderness Explorers has an established tour, "The Kanuku Explorer," through the area and it is this tour that our party initially considered. Dadanawa Ranch is usually the convenient starting place because it is immediately upstream of the Kanuku gap and, providing the water levels are sufficient, it is an easy run down the Rupununi River to the mouth of the Maparri River. The first overnight camp would be near Sand Creek (the Katiwau River) at an amerindian village where the Rupununi enters the gap. A second camp would be scheduled for an amerindian farm downstream. Our third camp would be at the Maparri site where we would spend four days. We would then boat down river to Karanambu to spend a day before flying to Georgetown. In Georgetown we will spend our last full day boating at the Lamaha Conservancy, a huge complex which is part of the Georgetown water supply, the term "conservancy" is equivalent to our term "reservoir". However, our actual travel differed significantly from these plans. Modest rainfall during the winter and spring of 1997-1998 combined with a water deficit due to one of the harshest droughts in recent memory reduced the water levels such that an easy down-river run from Dadanawa to Maparri Creek was unlikely. Under these conditions an up-river run from Karanambu seemed more feasible. Thus, we opted to fly to Karanambu from Georgetown and proceed from there to Maparri Creek. Although against the current, the approach to Maparri Creek from Karanambu is quicker and with fewer obstacles than that from Dadanawa.

Davis Finch, Ann Kimball and I went by hired limousine to Logan Airport on Saturday, April 25th, and flew to JFK where we were met by Polly Rothstein. Our plan was to stay at Polly's overnight and join the rest of the party, Jennifer Green and John Heizer, at the GAC gate at 6:00 A.M. on the 26th. We birded in Central Park with Claudia Loff where we found 31 species in a couple of hours. We lunched at the boathouse and then drove to the Marshlands Conservancy where the director, Allison Beale, gave us a tour of this important Westchester County refuge. Our trip to Georgetown was blighted by GAC (a curse seems to have settled permanently on our use of this "carrier") who called at 6:00 PM Saturday night to inform us that the flight had been cancelled due to lack of equipment "indefinitely". It looked like our trip would be spent at Polly's. We four, with Claudia and Allison, repaired to an excellent Indian Restaurant, "The Bengal Tiger" in White Plains to plan the next move. On Sunday morning we picked up Jennifer and John Heizer and spent a good deal of the day resting, walking in Polly's neighborhood, reading, looking at videos that Polly had made of a pair of Cooper's Hawks that nested (!) in her front yard. Making the best of it in the evening, our group and Allison proceeded to the Luke's Hong Kong Gardens in New Rochelle where Luke did his culinary best to improve our spirits. The dinner, initiated with oysters in 10 inch shells with ginger sauce, was simply elegant. Entirely chosen by Luke, it featured; eggplant, broccoli and beef, chicken, shrimp with minced pork, rice, peas and on, and on! The conversation veered to Ilza Belodis's question, "If you could push a button to eradicate the human species, would you?" Of course this question is simply whether the human species will ever get it right! I don't remember all the responses, but Allison and Davis clearly would, John and I wouldn't.

On Monday morning we were able to get through to Karen Weldren at Wilderness Explorers in Georgetown who informed us that a flight would leave JFK for Georgetown at 12:30 A.M. on Tuesday April 29. We did some shopping for things that Duane had ordered at the last minute, walked the lovely neighborhood and admired "Puffin's" genius at swiping food from zipped up duffelbags. Supper was a nice pasta dish and a couple of bottles of choice Merlot. At sundown we went to a nearby site to listen for woodcock without success. On return we found our limo waiting to take us to JFK. At 9:30 P.M. we were once again practicing the central rite of the Guyanan religion... standing in line. While we had much experience doing so in the Timehri Cathedral, this was our first indication that the rite was practiced wherever Guyanan's gathered. After joining five separate lines, the first outside in the bitter cold of a northeast April night, at 2 A.M., we boarded our substitute aircraft a very presentable Trade Winds Airline L1011. After fueling up, our crew took to the air at 3:10 A.M. There was plenty of room for the 118 passengers.

One incident marred this flight. During the loading two east indians had loaded their carry-ons in a bin and sat quietly nearby. A huge, corpulent, frog-like, nearly blind, physically intimidating, black man came along, found his seat, opened the bin above his seat and, while complaining that it was his bin because it was over his seat, proceeded to remove the contents and throw them on a nearby seat and place his bags in the bin. This was a very ugly, stupid revocation of the comity typical of air travel, re-confirming the racial tensions of coastal Guyana. While offended, the two east indians behaved with a dignity that few north americans could display. The matter was finally resolved by finding this brutish malevolence other seats with more space some distance away.

## **Kaieteur Falls**

Day 1, April 28. On landing at Timehri, we found that Wilderness Explorer's Karen Weldren had simply moved our plans forward and after arrival she joined us on our flight to Kaieteur Falls on the same day we had originally planned to fly there. Our pilot of the Air Services Ltd. Islander as before was Krishna Shankar. The falls were only glimpsed in fragments through scattered low clouds. At the airstrip we met Michael Phang. Michael is a knowledgeable naturalist who distinguished himself by his ability to name plants and animals with their scientific names - something that Davis had rarely encountered in tropical guides. Michael has a store of knowledge of the local history and the environment. Guyana is certainly fortunate to have Michael as the warden on duty here. The weather was very hot, windless and high humidity. Michael escorting us around the falls was especially knowledgeable about plants such as the sundews growing on the wet rock shelves, long narrow-stemmed pitcher plants, flame bromeliads, orchids and a thick-leaved herb with swollen red-stemmed petioles purportedly having skin-healing properties. We essentially repeated our last trip's circuit along the falls. Both male and female Guianan Cock of the Rock were seen at the usual lek site. Over and under the falls a thousand brownish White-chinned Swifts and five hundred very much larger White-collared Swifts swirled. Through this cloud of swifts a half dozen very dark, Chimney Swift-sized White-tipped Swifts weaved and plummeted. At the top of the falls a **Green-tailed Goldenthrout** worked the flowers in a shrub. Jennifer spotted a new bird, a **Black-bellied Cuckoo** in the high canopy above a well-used path. In the brush at the runway's edge Davis called in three Rufous-crowned Elaenias - an increase since last April when we'd found only one here. Dusky-capped Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbird were found. A pair of Blue Dacnis were seen. The Spot-winged Antbird seen here was the only one of the trip.

## **Karanambu**

We next headed for Karanambu where in addition to our host, Dianne McTurk, we were met by Ashley, Duane, Carl Frederick, Malachy Miller, now running Pirara Ranch north of Lethem, and other old acquaintances. What a pleasant reunion in that marvelous oasis. We made a quick boat trip to Simoney Lake spotting the usual waterbirds: Neotropical Cormorant, Anhinga, Cocoi and Striated Herons, Great Egret, Green Ibis, Wood Stork and Jabiru. **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** and Muscovy were seen as were the ubiquitous Pied Lapwings and Spotted Sandpipers. On this trip the only Scaled Pigeon we found was at Karanambu. Other Columbidae seen were Pale-vented Pigeon, Common and Ruddy Ground-Dove and White-tipped Dove. Greater Ani were plentiful as were Short-tailed Swifts. As evening loomed Lesser Nighthawk, Band-tailed Nighthawk, and White-tailed Nightjar were seen insect-hawking over the river. Ringed, Amazon and Green Kingfishers and Swallow-wings were all present. The usual savanna big river suite of flycatchers were present: Tropical Kingbirds, Rusty-margined Flycatchers, Greater and Lesser Kiskadees. Here at Karanambu the typical martin is the Brown-chested Martin. White-winged and Southern Rough-winged Swallows predominate on the river. We staggered into the Karanambu compound in the pitch dark, cleaned up and joined our mates for a pleasant dinner with Dianne.

## **Day 2**

April 29th, in the morning, joined by Dianne and Kenneth, we followed the usual practice of a 5:00 A.M. walk on the runway. It was not an especially good nightjar display, only White-tailed Nightjar was seen although Least and Band-tailed Nighthawks and Paurque were all heard. Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras, Vermilion Flycatchers and Smooth-billed Ani were noted. A chorus of about eight Little Chachalacas welcomed the sun. A new bird encountered this morning was a **Lesson's Seedeater**. Among other seed-eating birds found were Lesser Seed-finch, Grey and Plumbeous Seed-eaters, Ruddy-breasted Seed-eater, calling Grassland Sparrows and the Blue-black Grassquit. After breakfast we visited the Forest Patch. These woodlands produced Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, White-tailed Trogon, Green-tailed Jacamars, Striped and Buff-throated Woodcreeper. Among antbirds seen were Black-crested and Slaty Antshrikes, White-fringed Antwren and White-bellied Antbird. Tyrannulets are frequently found in these woods and today we saw Slender-footed Tyrannulet, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Mouse-colored Tyrannulet, and Pale-tipped Tyrannulet. Elaenia seen were: Yellow-bellied, Plain-crested and Lesser. Among other small flycatchers seen were Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher and my first recorded **Yellow-margined Flycatcher**. Along the forest edges many of the commonly occurring tanagers were present including Blue-grey, Palm and Silver-beaked together with a pair of **Black-faced Tanagers**. This was a good day for hummingbirds. Seen today were Black-throated Mango, Blue-tailed and Glittering-throated Emeralds, White-tailed Goldenthrout, Long-billed Starthroat and a gorgeous new hummer, the **Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird**.

Following a pleasant lunch the party visited the "Neopalma" woods for a look at the Pale-bellied Tyrant-Manakin, an uncommon bird which is, however, a reliable resident near the compound. We next boated upstream to Mobai Pond. This is a seasonally stranded pond that is completely covered with the immense platters of Victoria regis water-lilies. Wattled Jacanas, both sexes, and Purple Gallinule fed and quarrelled on this third dimension of water. On the trip down and back were seen: Black-crowned Night Heron, Osprey, Kestrel, **Crane Hawk**, Roadside and Grey-line Hawks. Parrots seen today were Red-shouldered Macaw, the ubiquitous Brown-throated Parakeet, Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet and Yellow-crowned Parrot. A pleasant visit preceded a delightful meal and it was off to bed in anticipation of a long run to Maparri Creek on the morrow.

## **To Maparri Creek**

Day 3 The next day we were up, even earlier at 4:15 A.M., for a run-way session which produced few newly seen birds. We left for Maparri Creek in two boats. In one boat was Duane, Justin, Polly, Ann and me. In the other was Ashley, Leroy, Jennifer, John and Davis. Marjory Antone, Sammy Melville, Duane Jr., and Nikki Persaud had gone to camp the day before to prepare for our arrival. The river water was running well presumably from showers up-river although we have not had significant rain locally. Initially we motored through open savanna with deeply cut banks bordered by thin brush, grassy

swards and occasional large isolated trees. Early in our travel we overtook and cut off two large black caiman **in shallows which forced them to swim alongside the boat. Their speed was just about equal to our top speed of 5- 6 miles per hour although when they tired of being herded they shot away at twice that speed. The bird-life typical for these large rivers includes: Swallow-wings (50), White-banded(55), White-winged(40), and Rough-winged (6) Swallows, Cocoi Heron(40), Great Egrets(7), Snowy Egrets (7), Green Ibis (8), Jabiru (4), Neotropical Cormorant (12) Black-bellied Whistling Duck (4), Anhinga (4), Spotted Sandpipers (20) and Pied Lapwings (12). Greater Ani (10), Ringed (6), Amazon (10), and Green (4), Kingfishers. The Drab Water-Tyrant (12) was present all day. As we entered the water gap, Brown Jacamars (9) were encountered in river-bank Cecropias. This is our first sighting of this bird which is extremely common in the smaller rivers of heavily forested areas. At a large bend in the river a Laughing Falcon was at last seen well sitting motionless in a large tree overlooking the river. Swallow-tailed Kites soared over the boat and a pair of Plumbeous Kites flushed from a streamside tree. An agonizingly brief view of a Sungrebe on a shoreside bank didn't rate my list as a countable lifelist bird. Between Karanabu and the mouth of the Maparri there is only one significant rapid which at this water level was flooded and simply fast water. The day was bright with high clouds. Justin sat in the bow conning the river for logs and shallows and occasionally reaching back to restore a wandering chicken to its place under the bow deck. The chickens were, of course, destined for Marjory's culinary attentions.**

About noon we paused at an amerindian farm near a stream entering on our left. This was a pleasant site on a high bank, but pretty much in the open and quite hot. Here we lunched on sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, nuts, juice, water and sweets. We motored steadily and in late afternoon arrived at Maparri Creek. The entrance to the creek is obscure, not unlike any of the dozens of ox-bows along the river. The creek is narrow, fast-moving and winding with occasional fallen and waterlogged trees, but no rocks. We have about a five mile run to make to the campsite. Soon after entering the stream Duane wasted a shearpin on a submerged obstruction causing a short consultation and a quick repair. Somewhat further along our progress was halted by a huge mora that had fallen across the stream. We unloaded the boats, carried our gear around the roots of this tree and the crew lifted and pulled the boats over the tree. The tree was a most adequate bridge with a diameter of 7 feet or more. Near this portage we encountered a Giant Otter which loudly scolded us for our intrusion. Both Spot-breasted, Crimson-crested and Cream-colored Woodpeckers were seen in the area. On the straighter runs of the stream we could see Maparri Mountain up ahead. It is a "sugar-loaf" completely clothed with vegetation. On either side of us the beginnings of a gorge appeared. Just before sundown we encountered another tree blocking the stream that required lining the boats through its branches and, for us, a portage over a sandbar overgrown with an obnoxious thorny vine. Later in near total darkness by the light of flashlights we hacked and chopped our way through another tree which blocked our passage and pulled our boats through it. Shortly thereafter guided by flashlights we arrived at the lit and comfortable campsite.

**Maparri Camp** sits on the top of a high midstream sandy island. Just upstream of the camp is a four hundred foot long rock-filled gorge topped by a waterfall. At the campsite island the river splits into two streams and flows over sandy/clay bottom with only occasional streamside ledge thereafter. Although shallow, the pools among the rocks in front of the camp are excellent for swimming and bathing. A standard tarpaulin-covered shelter has been prepared for the hammocks close by the kitchen and dining area. In many respects this campsite echoes the Kuyuwini Camp. In the early evening we relaxed, talked and drank, some more than others, none more than I. In the evening we had significant rain.

**The Gorge Slope** Day 4 May 1 is our first full day at Maparri. My first view of the rapids is shrouded in mist. Duane had reported that there was a different type of heron, similar but darker than the Rufescent Tiger heron, resident at the waterfall. In the morning I went down to wash up and I spotted a distant heron at the falls but the visibility was so poor I couldn't really tell what it was. It was wary and quickly flew upstream. The identity of this bird became a central objective of this trip and it was not seen again for several days. After breakfast we elected to bird on the right (North) bank of the creek. This entailed ferrying us across the stream in a boat. This was a simple task because a large tree had fallen across the stream and our guides walked the tree while lining our boat across. The river forms a narrow gorge here with extremely steep banks. We climbed for the first several hundred feet at about a steep 30° angle. Our guides offered to cut us walking rods and the offer was uniformly accepted. Eventually, the trail began to follow the contour of the bank with occasional detours around small, sharp ravines. Davis first identified the call and then lured in a Wing-banded Wren from the depths of a ravine. This is a petite-sized bird instantly recognizable as a wren since in outline and tail it is very like a Winter Wren. However, it sports a bright white band on the wing - a characteristic unique in wren-dom. The bird is a quick-moving, wired individual which hangs around and hunts for the intruder with enough determination for us all to see it. The slope of this gorge was dotted with huge house-sized rocks to which clung liverworts, ferns and occasionally lizards. One with an eight-inch long body and a even longer tail sat for several photographs. As expected in a completely new environment our bird-list is almost completely made up of birds we have not seen previously on this trip. Among these are: Reddish Hermit, Fork-tailed Wood-nymph, Chestnut Woodpecker, Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper, White-necked Thrush, Violacious Euphonia and Purple-throated Fruitcrow. Among the antbirds seen today were Fasciated and Mouse-colored Antshrikes and Wing-banded and Grey Antbirds. We walked this contour for several hours stopping by a spring to lunch. As we threaded our way through huge boulders returning, the unmistakable cat-like growl of a Guianian Cock of the Rock was heard. It responded to tape briefly and was seen by most of the party. The huge boulders give this site the character of the location near Kaieteur Falls where Cock of the Rock is common and it seems likely that a lek site could be found nearby. The best bird of the day is spotted by Jennifer in the sub-canopy of the forest on the steep slope sitting

quietly on a limb. It is a **Collared Puffbird** our first on these trips. We tramped down the hillside to the ferry. I elected to walk the log to the consternation of our guides who, I'm sure, expected a disaster and were surprised when I managed it easily. The water level had been steadily rising since our arrival and during the evening it rained. In the afternoon I bathed and loafed. Jennifer had brought several hummingbird feeders and had hung one on the bank near the boat landing. On a branch near this feeder a Reddish Hermit was perched and gave a close view to all. However, I don't recall any hummer actually feeding at the feeder. Perhaps these tropical birds are too specialized for particular flowers, while our northern hummers are generalists that adapt quickly to new sugar machines.

Day 5 The next morning it was raining and we made a late start to explore a trail that Nikki has cut on the left (South) bank of the river. We ferried across to the left shore. Near the river this bank has a broad shelf at the base of the gorge wall. Our guides are camped on the left bank and Nikki's trail runs from their camp downriver for a half mile. This is an interesting environment consisting of large, high trees. Where the river channel permits light to penetrate are thicker "jungle" edges and palm thickets. Almost at once we spot a flock of white and black tanagers with bright red bills feeding on fruits directly overhead in a very high tree crown- a truly neck damaging position. These are my first **Red-billed Pied Tanagers**. As we move along the trail we devise a flock of foraging **Grey-winged Trumpeters** which, in reforming, pass close by calling to one another with a low "howt". These birds didn't fly but walked rapidly around us offering many quick glimpses but not one lingering look. We spotted a Blue-crowned Motmot whose racket tail failed to impress me. Illustrations all seem to promise something more elaborate. Later in Trinidad at Asa Wright I saw this bird in all its beauty. Davis, hearing a Cinereous Mourner, taped its voice and played it back to him. This energized the bird which then proceeded to launch into a non-stop monotonous repetition -sufficiently annoying that we readily fled the area. In these woods we encountered Golden-collared and Lined Woodpeckers and the ubiquitous Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. A number of yellow, soft plum-like fruits are found under a tree. They are tasty and sweet, easily identified with "plums" which they are called although they are unrelated. We crossed several trails of leaf-cutter ants and I followed one to a hive entrance which was about an inch high and 5 inches wide. In another location we found a mound of about thirty feet long and ten feet wide and raised to possibly five feet above the ground level which was composed of the waste from successive generations of leaf cutter ants. The litter was soft and it was easy to sink to knee depth in the mound. This mound appeared to be extending uphill away from the river. Although the song of the **Cocoa Thrush** was by now familiar to me, I had not yet managed to see one well. While near this mound, Davis lured one in and I finally had a decent sighting. We return to camp and while bathing discover that a pair of White-tailed Trogons have built a nest in a tertiary in a tree a dozen yards out in the river. They are seen regularly thereafter.

After lunch, from 3:00 P.M. to 7:00 P. M., we drifted down river to the brook near the abandoned farm on the river's right bank. The waning day was windless and, except for birdcalls, quiet. The "belling" of the White Bellbird was a regular sound through the day but, while several quicker eyes spotted one, I've yet to see this tree-top herald. In contrast, Scarlet Macaws are constant unwary, "squawkers" and Channel-billed Toucans are frequently heard "yelping." Here Red-billed Toucans are heard as frequently as the Channel-billed Toucan. During the drift Polly spotted a Green Aracari. Her feat was emphasized by the length of time it took the rest of us to spot this leaf-green bird sitting still in a green-leafed tree. In a large tree overhanging the water a pair of Red-fan Parrots displayed and somersaulted about a limb while in the distant skyline treetops a troop of Red Howler Monkeys scrambled around the branches feeding. At the mouth of the Farm Brook we saw a pair of Squirrel Cuckoos building a nest in an almost impenetrable vine column. Among birds seen on this drift are: Olive-backed Foliage Gleaner, Warbling Antbirds, Amazonian Anshrike, **Neotropical River Warbler** and **Black-tailed Tityra**. In the grove of Cecropia trees at the Farm Brook are about ten cacique nests. These are all **Red-rumped Caciques**. They seem to all appear at once and disappear together as a flock. When they are near the nests there is a great deal of displaying, bickering and entering and exiting of the nests. In much higher trees along the bank hang the nests of Crested Oropendula looking for all the world like bull scrota on a hot day. Two birds I had not previously seen, **Cinnamon-throated** and **Strong-billed Woodcreepers** were found. In twilight a Short-tailed Nighthawk made several close passes overhead. We returned in the dark for a nice social hour and repast.

Day 6 On May 3 we get up early and gather around the table downing coffee, juice and fresh baked bread for a post-dawn snack. Small, uniformly black, stingless bees have discovered the camp and crawl in unbelievable numbers around the sweets and jellies, but what they are really after is flour. Marjory can barely knead the bread without including a bee from the numbers that swarm on the flour of her kneading board. They confuse it with pollen, as do honeybees, when pollen is scarce. To distract them Marjory places a few tablespoons of flour in a foam plastic cup and sets it down away from her kneading board. In just minutes the cup is filled to the brim and overflowing with bees. It is an amazing demonstration of the ability of these colonial insects to overwhelmingly and rapidly exploit a food source.

**The Farm Brook** was our birding objective today. The off and on rain during the past two nights has raised the water level enough so it is possible to easily motor and pole the boats well into the brook which meanders around an old farm site. We landed on the bank and began to explore this area which is flooded occasionally but unlike varzea is probably never inundated for long periods. Very quickly we spotted a Black-tailed Trogon in the rather low understory. Dusky, Red-fan and Blue-headed Parrots were seen, as well as several Scarlet Macaws. Painted Parakeets were heard. A **Straight-billed Hermit** is a life bird sighting and we found our first Black-eared Fairy of the trip. In a vine-curtained glade, Davis called in a Coraya Wren, a bird that had called for the past two days but we had not seen. This bird was seen well.

As we moved past this glade, our guides Justin and Sammy, proclaimed that we should move quickly and quietly past a fallen hollow log as they suspected that it harbored a snake, possibly a fer de lance or a bushmaster, both deadly poisonous. Their diagnosis was based on an odor said to be characteristic of the snake. I clearly could detect a distinctly different odor in the area. It is my experience that snakes do smell, copperheads often smell like cucumbers, so I'm not surprised by the warning. The bushmaster which grows to an prodigious size is alleged to be one of the most aggressive of poisonous snakes. It is viviparous and is said to defend its young by rushing at the intruder. Of course, everyone wanted to see this snake and out came the binoculars and cameras to peer into and photograph every aspect of the log while our guardians stood nearby with their shotgun at the ready. In a very short order two schools were firmly founded: those who claimed there was a snake in the log and they saw it, and those who saw no snake. Most interesting was the fact that those asserting they saw the snake were Polly, Ann and Jennifer, whereas none of the males in the group claimed to see it. But the matter did not end there! Photos were taken, ultimately developed, and have been interpreted and re-interpreted as to what they show. Whether the inability to see snakes is genetic, a sex-linked trait, or the ability to perceive objects as snakes is a psychological manifestation, a Freudian matter, remains unclear but nevertheless the controversy is ongoing. There is little question that this region has its share of snakes as shown by my find several hours later. While closely examining the buttresses of a large tree I noticed a football-shaped, 6 inch x 9 inch, mass of hair lying on the ground. On close examination it was evidently composed exclusively of keratin, hair and seven claws. This bolus represented what remained of a sloth which had passed through a large snake. No sign of flesh, bone, tooth or cartilage was present, only the keratin components. I assume the snake was a boa constrictor although in some situations an anaconda or even a large bushmaster might have an opportunity to capture a sloth. In any event I came away from this find with a new respect for the durability of hair and wool, and the inability of snakes to digest it, and the remarkable capacity of wool moths to dine on them.

We continued along the brook toward a small waterfall and called in a Neotropical River Warbler for a very good close look. During this day we saw Great Antshrike, Pygmy Antwren, a pair each of Dot-winged Antwren and Black-chinned Antbird. Also newly recorded were Lemon-chested Greenlet, Slate-colored Grosbeak and Yellow-throated Flycatcher. We returned to camp for lunch at 12:40 P. M. and at 3:00 P. M. we set off again on a downstream drift. While we had seen most of the birds associated with this stretch of river, we did have a good find in high trees lining the left bank of the river, a male Pompadour Cotinga with three females. Along the shore leguminous trees sport long brown pods like locust fruits. These pods contain about ten beans each surrounded by a sweet, glutinous pulp. The pod is tough and getting at the pulp is difficult, but worth the effort.

Day 7 Today at 7:30 A.M. our objective was once again the north mountain slope trail. We found a Greyish Mourner and a Screaming Piha, a bird that has been a audible constant throughout the trip. We continued along the path on the crest of the gorge through large trees several of which had littered the ground under them with hefty, dense softball-sized fruits. Not infrequently we heard the sound of fruit crashing to the ground often dropped by monkeys. Loitering under these trees seemed unwise. Eventually, we encountered a massive foraging party of antbirds, greenlets and flycatchers. There may have been hundreds of birds in this group and, in response to a feeding tape, they were in our area for perhaps a half hour. Among the antbirds were: Saturnine and Cinereous Antshrikes, White-browed Antbird, Grey, Brown-bellied and Long-winged Antwrens. Plain-brown and **Barred Woodcreepers**, Plain Xenops, Wing-barred Piprites and Tawny-crowned Greenlet were among the foragers. Breaking away from this horde, we heard a new call. The located bird turned out to be a **Fulvous Shrike-Tanager**, a new bird with a color pattern reminiscent of an orchard oriole. Pairs both of White-breasted Wood Wrens and of Long-billed Gnatwrens were seen on this walk as was a Double-banded Pygmy-Tyrant. A Ringed Woodpecker was identified. One of the best birds of the day a **White-necked Puffbird** was spotted by Ann. I had failed to see the **Royal Flycatcher** during the November '97 Rewa trip, but today had a very good look at one. Another life bird was the **McConnell's Flycatcher** a good indicator of this forest type, undisturbed, primary growth *terra firme*.

We returned to camp at about 1:45 P. M., lunched and at 3:00 P.M. went again for our evening boat drift. Near the camp we saw a smaller caiman which Duane feels may be a small species which is unique to this area. In addition to the usual drift birds, this evening's birds included a Black-necked Aracari, Black-headed Parrots and Grey-fronted Doves. Toward sundown we observed about ten Guianan Saki, a like number of Brown-backed Saki and three Red Howler Monkeys in the skyline trees. Here and there the shore-line brush is interrupted by large rocks on the vertical surfaces of which Long-nosed and Sac-winged Bats often plaster themselves, taking flight as we approach. A curious aspect of some of the rocks is a series of long vertical grooves giving the surface the aspect of a folded curtain or a cluster of organpipes. Surely these are the result of weathering, but why in this fashion? My guess is that the grooves indicate the paths of roots that have channeled acidic water along the rock surface. We see many examples of trees on rocks from which the soil has eroded leaving the tree with roots clasping the rock and growing vertically into the eroding soil. We return to the camp in dusk, and gather about the table to exchange privy tales and consume candied ginger and other treats. I am my naughtiest by giving our guides and hosts small dutch cigars.

Day 8 It has not rained for the past two days and the water has gone down markedly. Duane had seen the mystery heron again yesterday and since our time at this camp is short we decide to explore upstream in hopes of spotting the bird. At 6:30 A. M. we ferried across the stream to the left bank and walked upstream above the waterfall, but saw no trace of the mystery bird. The walk today is again along Nikki's trail. Shortly after entering the woods we spotted a band of Black Spider

Monkeys in trees off to our left. At my urging, I'm afraid, Davis played a monkey tape. All hell broke loose! These large, black, red-faced monkeys proceeded to shout at us and to throw limbs, some very large, and other things down on us with great accuracy. They shadowed us for the next few hundred yards before deciding we had been satisfactorily intimidated and losing interest. We continued along the path for the most part seeing birds we had previously located although we had a good look at a Spix's Guan, the first I've seen alive. A Red-necked Woodpecker was newly discovered together with two Chestnut Woodpeckers and our second Collared Puffbird. On the trail of a Ferruginous-backed Antbird that Davis heard, we found instead my first Golden-headed Manakin high on the side of the gorge in rather open gallery woods. Davis called in this beautiful well-named bird which zipped from perch to perch with a constant sputtering "pip"-ing. This was a steep climb which Ann wisely elected to forgo and when we rejoined her we found both Silvered Antbird and Streaked Antwren in lower shoreside tangles

On return to camp we learned that the mystery heron was in place at the falls at the top of the rapids. A good look at it proved it was a Fasciated Tiger-Heron. This is the first recorded occurrence of the bird in Guyana. These tiger-herons "usually perch on boulders in turbulent streams" (Hilty and Brown, 1986). Their absence from prior Guyanan birdlists reflects the novelty of bird surveying in mountainous environments such as Maparri Creek. There were two birds present, an adult and an immature. At camp I photographed the leg and arm lesions representing Leishmaniasis infections which both Justin and Nikki had. They'd contracted the disease on a trip last November, been diagnosed recently and were on a series of daily antimony injections. Duane skinned out and cleaned a labba that he had shot and which was to be carried shortly. Once again we drifted down river from 3:00 to 7:00 P. M. This ground was pretty well worked over during our river trips on nearly every evening. Our expectations were modest. But, in a distant tree a brilliant blue bird caught my attention. I lost it but others quickly identified it as an adult male Spangled Cotinga. We had a first view of a Pauraque near the Farm Brook pool although we had heard them numerous times on this trip. We spent the greater part of the evening studying pairs of Scarlet Macaws and Red-fan Parrots as they settled down for the night.

**Return to Karanambu** Day 9 Today we go back to Karanambu. We started at 7:50 A.M. drifted and motored down Maparri Creek until reaching the Rupununi at 2:45 P. M. and arriving finally at Karanambu at 6:25 P. M. The day is gorgeous, bright and, initially, not hot. As we drifted down from the camp a rail was spotted. We stopped and are rewarded with good views of a Grev-necked Wood-Rail sneaking along under the canopy of the bushes overhanging the shore. The down-creek trip was much like the upstream run. We dodged all the same trees and obstacles, but now the water was significantly higher and the running was easier. At one stop we spotted a number of tanagers and other species feeding in Cecropias on the edge of the stream. The variety was impressive: Turquoise, Guira and Silver-beaked Tanagers, Black-faced Dacnis, Red-billed Pied Tanagers and Pink-throated Becard. Among these was a miniature parrot, the Dusky-billed Parrotlet. These tiniest of parrots enthrall me for reasons that I don't fathom. In a distant tree, I identified a Bare-necked Fruitcrow. This bird was one that I had missed the year before at Karanambu Landing. Two new raptors were seen: White hawk and Black Hawk-Eagle. Also seen on the Maparri this morning were Yellow-green Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, and Cinereous Becard. In spite of these finds, the bird of the day was a tiny heron. As we passed a very dense large clump of bushes growing over the river, Davis heard the voice of a Zig-Zag Heron. We stopped and he played a tape. Parking our boats at the edge of the bushes, we peered, and peered, etc. until finally Jennifer led the way to spotting the bird. This is a tiny dark heron, sharing its characteristic fine barring with the tiger herons. It is small, decidedly larger than a Least Bittern and smaller than a Striated Heron, and gives a "chunky" impression. Its camouflage is superb and the bird sits quietly or walks slowly along the branches making full use of this protection. After seeing the bird we drifted to the lower edge of the bushes to let the other boat get a good look. As we did so, a second Zig-Zag Heron flew into the bush from downstream. So we got a second look of this rare bird.

The Rupununi was running much higher on our arrival and there was indication that it had been higher still while we had been up the Maparri. Since we still had a four hour trip, we got underway quickly. Several birds we had missed on the trip to Maparri were seen as we went downriver. Among these were Rufescent Tiger Heron, Bat Falcons, Limpkin, Red and Green Macaws and Caica Parrots. Among the hummers seen were White-necked Jacobin and a male and three female Racquet-tailed Coquettes. Many Black-bellied Whistling Ducks were flushed along the river. In a nest tree two Jabiru stood and surveyed our passage. For the first time we gained the attention of kabaura flies. These miniscule relatives of our blackflies (Simuliidae) were invisible, but the fifty or so tiny, non-itching bites dotting our wrists and arms were clear evidence of their presence. As the sun was setting, we noticed that the higher branches of the Cecropia trees lining the river bank were draped with large iguanas. They lay casually parallel on the branches some with their tails hanging negligently down. Our passage caused them no detectable alarm. The evening spectacle of nightjars on a broad river is always a treat and tonight Band-tailed, Short-tailed and Lesser Nighthawks swooped and side-slipped through a brilliant cerise sunset outlining purple thunderheads on the horizon. We were met at Karanambu Landing by Peter, the Otter, who was begging for attention and I suspect fish, but ignored because in the failing light none of us could distinguish him from his malevolent alter ego, Alex.

Day 10 Today was spent around Karanambu, first the dawn patrol on the airstrip, later the others went to Mobai a pond area, not feeling in peak condition I pooped out. In the late afternoon we drove to the marsh area (Maiacapa) near the GAC airstrip. In the early morning at least two Double-striped Thick-knees lurked about the compound and the airstrip. A pair of Crested Bobwhites were seen, one almost continuously calling from the top of a low bush. New today on the morning walk were Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, Grassland Yellow-Finch and a Shiny Cowbird. A pair of Dusky Antbirds, a Barred Antshrike, a

White-flanked Antwren and a Striped Cuckoo were seen. Both Black Collared and White-tailed Hawks were seen today as well as Snail Kites. For those who went the trip to Mobai was rewarding. Among the birds seen which had not previously been recorded on this trip were Black-banded Woodcreeper, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Greenish Elaenia, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant, Hooded Tanager, Capuchin Bird and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. All in all, a productive outing.

At the GAC airstrip were many of the expected marshbirds. Among those seen for the first time on this trip were Red-breasted Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Eared Doves, Pied Water-Tyrant, and White-headed Marsh Tyrant. As we have seen before at the GAC airstrip we saw Aplomodo Falcon, Cattle Egrets, Bi-colored Wren and in a distant tree a mystery bird which turned out to be nothing more than a Tropical Mockingbird, but our first for the trip. It was a splendid evening with a soft breeze blowing and mild temperature. As is so often the case in the late afternoons here, the mountains above the marshlands to the northwest were the spawning area of great towers of cumulus clouds framed by the shafts of light from the setting sun. I am beset by an almost overwhelming sense of beauty. As we stood birding an amerindian family with a primitive wooden-wheeled oxcart came along the path. They were women and children all dressed up heading for a party at a house near the west end of the runway. At sunset the sky silently filled with Least Nighthawks. As we returned to Karanambu we found an amerindian lying on his back by the side of the runway all tangled up in his bicycle. In all likelihood he was an alcoholic casualty of the big party down the runway. We left him breathing normally, but inert, oblivious to pain. The next morning, when we ventured this way again for our flight into Georgetown, he was gone.

**Georgetown** Day 11 I woke up Jennifer at 5:07 A. M. and trotted out to the airstrip to appreciate the dawn chachalaca chorus. The dawn is as lovely as the sunset was. The Crested Bobwhite song, now a familiar cheery, "Bob -/ white'...sqeek," comes from several different directions as they proclaim their territories. At 7:30 A. M. we head for the GAC airstrip to catch our flight to Georgetown. At the GAC strip we find a Yellowish Pipit among the usual birds. At 8:10 A. M. our plane an "Irish Mail" named Robert Roberts arrives, this is a box-car, rear-loading, twin-engine workhorse which has seen a few years. I saw the first of this type of plane in the fifties. It showed its years as we climbed away from Karanambu through low rain clouds and we were showered with water from the leaky roof. Almost the entire group dozed off immediately while I photographed the sleeping beauties. I struck up a brief, almost drowned out, conversation with a medical worker in an adjacent seat, Roy Thomas. Mr Thomas is the Regional Supervisor for the Malarial Control Programme, Lethem. I promised to write him on my return and will do so when I finish this travelogue.

Our flight was uneventful. We were met by Louis Singh and shepherded to House Proud, the Pegasus and ultimately spent the afternoon at the Botanical Garden. The Botanical Garden is a marvelous island of bird-life in the city. In the margins of its pools we found "peeps" such as, Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers. A Plain-bellied Emerald darted and hovered about a flowering tree. Along the back path we flushed a pair of Great Horned Owls. In higher trees were Orange-winged Parrots. Two of the more distinguished residents of the Botanical garden are Blood-colored Woodpeckers and White-bellied Piculets which we easily found as we did Yellow-chinned Spinetails, Spotted Tody-flycatcher and Variable Seedeater.

**The Lamaha Conservancy** Day 12 Early (4:30) the next morning we set out for the Lamaha Conservancy. This water conservation project is essentially a huge swamp that is threaded with channels and open water pools. While there are palms and other trees on the higher ground its essential character is that of a marsh with varied shrubs, reeds and grasses. Our transportation was a broad outboard with several spacious bench seats that easily accommodated the party. We motored slowly along a wide canal bordered by high trees with much bird-life. Parrots and both Red-bellied and Red-shouldered Macaws were in constant attendance as large groups flew from roosts to feeding areas. The dawn had that magical muted character of transmitted, in contrast to reflected, light which enhances color contrast. In shoreside shrubs we found a Little Cuckoo, White-lined Tanager, Grey Kingbird, Piratic and Sulphury Flycatchers and a Buff-throated Saltator. Also seen were a wren, the Black-capped Donacobius, Moriche Oriole, and a new spinetail, the Pale-breasted Spinetail. As we drifted by a densely overgrown bank we first saw one, and finally up to six, Least Bitterns very close to us. We also flushed a number of Azure Gallinules, all seemed washed out, none seemed as pretty as the illustrations in De Schauensee and Phelps, but they are so obviously rails in form and so distinctive in color that they can be nothing else. The canal winds along a forest edged with palms inhabited by groups of Fork-tailed Palm Swifts which speed by us always in a hurry to be elsewhere. A Masked Yellowthroat and a Cinnamon Attala are spotted. Along the bank I get my first really good look at an American Pygmy Kingfisher- by days' end we'd seen five. As we passed heavy reed stands, we flushed a large brown heron, the Pinnated Bittern. Like our own American Bittern, the Pinnated Bittern is a master of deception and is rarely seen until it moves. We motored slowly by a group of workers in life jackets fully immersed in the water hogging out weeds to keep the channel open. We had passed a barge with an attached cutter and scoop arrangement to mechanize this operation but it was not working on this channel. After a few more meanders we flushed a very large stork which flapped briefly then soared away giving us all good views. The white head ruled out a Wood Stork or Jabiru, it could only be a Maguari Stork. The expected Yellow-headed Vulture vulture in this area is the Lesser and we saw only one.

As we entered an area in which small shoreside trees tended to form a canopy over the boat, the engine quit. It took quite a while to simply remove the engine cover since the boat had but one tool, a rusty pair of pliers. But eventually the cover

was removed the choke/ throttle /whatever was corrected. While the crew was distracted, we heard two of the resident rails nearby: the Rufous-sided and the Ash-throated Crake. Davis managed to call the **Rufous-sided Crake** up onto a bank and within a few yards of the boat where some of us, but not all, saw it. We found Green-tailed Goldthroats along the canal. Our goal was the Lamaha Guest House a spacious structure with a large open veranda, guest rooms and several outbuildings. We rested to recover from the strain of bright sun and hot wind and lunched on sandwiches and drinks that Louis had brought. We then set out to search for a Lamaha Guest House specialty, the **Point-tailed Palmcreeper**. In very short order Davis called it into a grove of palms less than one hundred feet from the compound. My expectations for birding in this unique new environment were greatly exceeded.

**Asa Wright, Trinidad** Day 13 Our GAC flight was scheduled to depart at 6:00 A.M. We had planned a 2:00 A. M. departure from the hotel. We returned to the Pegasus and sat down for an early supper which was interrupted by a message from GAC that once again our flight had been cancelled for lack of equipment. There was an alternative, a 6:00 A. M. BWIA flight to Trinidad, if we could make the connection. In hopes of getting on the BWIA flight we went out to Timehri as planned at 2 A.M.. Good news, there would be space on the BWIA flight: bad news, there was no one from GAC to authorize a ticket transfer from GAC to BWIA. What an amazing fact that at the home base of GAC there were absolutely no GAC personnel to be found! But Louis persisted and a truly competent BWIA agent made an executive decision to authorize the tickets herself. Then and there we all decided to never ever use GAC again and on a subsequent flight we used BWIA.

We had a uneventful flight to Piarco, Trinidad, disembarked and found that we had seven hours before our continuing flight left. This, Davis pointed out, was plenty of time to visit the famous Asa Wright Nature Center in the Cerro del Aripo mountains above Piarco. In a hired van we drove up there and spent a pleasant morning, luncheon and early afternoon before taking our van back to the airport. Great side-trip, Davis! With the assistance of Sheldon Driggs, a gifted Asa Wright naturalist, we had a short but most effective walk near the compound. The similarity of the birds at Asa Wright to those in Guyana is at once evident. Forty-eight of the fifty-five birds we identified were also common in Guyana. Not unexpectedly Great and Cattle Egrets, Black and Turkey Vultures were present. We saw two other accomplished fliers, White Hawk and, on a nest with young, my first **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**. Ruddy Ground Dove, Greater and Smooth-billed Ani were seen. New birds seen were a **Lilac-tailed Parrotlet**, a **Copper-rumped Hummingbird**, a **Cocoa Woodcreeper** and eight **White-bearded Manakins** displaying at a lek site within two feet of the ground. The best bird, certainly the bird that we saw and heard best, was a **Bearded Bellbird**. Only 30-50 feet away we had excellent views of this bird perched and regularly calling its loud note which has been likened to striking an anvil with a hammer. Other new birds for me were a **Tropical Peewee**, a **Tropical Parula**, a **Golden-crowned Warbler** and a Rufous-breasted Wren was heard.

On schedule our van showed up and we left Asa Wright. At 4:00 P. M. we left on BWIA for Miami where John and Jennifer left us for flights to the West. After passing customs, we flew on to JFK, bade farewell to Polly and caught a flight to Boston. There, after playing telephone tag, we managed to make the connection to Bob Patterson, our limousine driver, who delivered us to our individual homes in chilly New Hampshire.