



GUYANA
Naturally

GUYANA BIRDING

PRESS RELEASE

November 10, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours Guides Provide Positive Feedback After Familiarization Trip of Birding Destinations in Guyana

GEORGETOWN—During a post familiarization (FAM) trip debriefing session, two esteemed birding guides, Steve Hilty and David Ascanio, from Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT), provided a positive assessment of Guyana's future potential as a worldwide birding destination. The FAM trip, which took place from October 28 through November 4, was part of the birding tourism program that is a joint partnership between the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project.

After spending seven days birding throughout Guyana, including stops in Georgetown, Iwokrama Rainforest, Rock View Lodge, Wowetta Village, and Karanambu Ranch, the two guides sat down with tourism representatives and media to give their impression on the following: Birds of Guyana; Guides; Accommodation and Infrastructure; and Conservation Issues.

Reflecting on their trip and the birds they saw, both men had only positive things to say. "There are a lot of birds in this country, that's for sure," reported Steve. David agreed, adding, "Everyday [we saw] at least one or two species that is really high for birdwatchers...I was really, really impressed with the birds." David believes that Guyana has an "unbeatable lowland birding experience in the Guianas."

In their assessment of the birding guides in Guyana, Steve and David agreed that in this area Guyana is behind other South and Central American countries. But as Steve said, "Guyana being very new, it's not surprising...this is not something you can learn in a few weeks or even a few months." They both said that local guides need to work on their communication skills through training programs. Instead of sending local guides to train with professional birders in neighboring countries, David said that, "There are so many good potential guides [in Guyana], that it would be best to bring [professional guides] from outside to give workshops."

Their overall feedback of the guides, however, was good. "We met some people that were very knowledgeable about bird identification and bird songs," Steve said. Commenting on Kenneth, Karanambu's guide, he added that he is, "one of the most gifted bird spotters I've ever met...he could work almost anywhere as a nature guide." David added that he was very impressed by the passion and commitment of Guyana's guides. "Every single guide we had on this trip had a passion for birds. It was amazing." David said these two aspects are important in guides, as they are essential tools that cannot be given to them, like a book or binoculars.

On Guyana's accommodation and infrastructure, Steve and David had generally positive comments, but were surprised that Guyana doesn't have a highland lodge. "You have a lot of mountains which are a major untapped resource at this point," Steve said. "There are no facilities or lodges which allow people to access the highland birds. In a tour program, you want to try and tap into as many different types of habitats as you can during the course of a trip."

The VENT leaders both pointed to Iwokrama, Rock View, and Shanklands as good examples of what high-end birdwatchers expect in accommodations. (VENT has run two previous birding trips to Guyana that included stays at Shanklands). Of Iwokrama, Steve said it is, "world class, a national treasure." Both guides saw the Forest Reserve as Guyana's biggest tourism asset. "I see Iwokrama Forest Reserve as being a particular advantage [to Guyana]," Steve said. "You have access to undisturbed rainforest there, and that's harder and harder to get to, especially with tour groups." David echoed Steve comments by calling Iwokrama, "A world class birding site."

– more –





VENT Guides Give Positive Feedback on Birding in Guyana (page two)

When asked what, in their opinion, are Guyana’s strengths in attracting birders, David said, “What is really impressive in Guyana is that there is a lot of untouched habitat here, and that is a tremendous advantage for any country.”

Steve said that Guyana has, “lots of great forest with many glamour species (both birds and mammals) of interest to visitors.” Steve added that while Guyana does face competition from nearby countries that are already established as birding destinations, the English language is a definite plus in attracting new visitors. (One aspect of the birding tourism program is to create itineraries that combine trips to Guyana with Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, and Suriname).

In a final bit of advice, Steve, who has been guiding trips in South America for 30 years and is the author of several books, including *Birds of Venezuela*, the most common book used for birding in Guyana, said that those working in Guyana’s tourism sector should stay focused, remembering that programs like this take time to develop. Steve also said that if Guyana had good access to the highlands and more development in the southern Rupununi to combine with the birding destinations that already exist, “it would put Guyana in a world class position to attract visitors for birds and wildlife.”

Both guides said that they were so impressed during their Guyana FAM trip that they will begin developing a land-based tour to Guyana to offer to VENT clients. David, who also owns Ascanio Birding Services, a birding tourism company that targets the UK market, said he would also be introducing a Guyana tour to his clients.

The VENT FAM was the first of three trips that bring international birding tour operators and media to Guyana to sample the country’s birding experience. The second FAM trip will run from November 17-26; the third FAM is scheduled for February 2007.

The FAM tour programs would not be possible if tourism suppliers were not pledging their full support. For the VENT program, GTA-GTIS is grateful for the generous donations of accommodations and in-kind and reduced cost services from BWIA, Cara Lodge, Grand Coastal Inn, Iwokrama, Rock View Lodge, Karanambu, Community and Tourism Services (CATS), and Wilderness Explorers.

The Birding Tourism Program is receiving support from GTIS, a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The birding initiative’s success relies on the involvement of several partners, including GTA and the Government of Guyana and Guyana’s tourism private sector, including THAG and its members.

###

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Indira Anandjit
Director, Guyana Tourism Authority
P: 592-223-6351
E: ianandjit@guyana-tourism.com

Kirk Smock
GTIS Public Affairs Specialist
P: 592-642-7184
E: ksmock@carana.com

With support from

