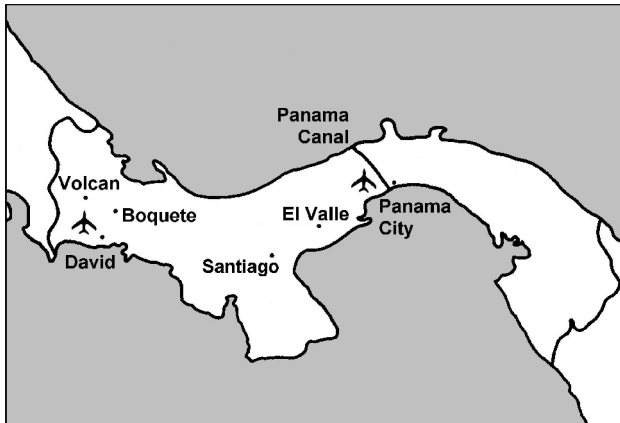


# PANAMA

*Central American birding made easy*



Panama is one of the must visit destinations for birdwatchers. Easy access to some of the best birdwatching on the planet draws many people to this small Central American country. Close to the capital is the lowland rainforest of Soberania National Park and the world famous Pipeline Road, some of the most accessible areas for birdwatching in Central America. To the west we will find ourselves close to the border with Costa Rica. Here, the higher slopes of Volcan Baru are home to abundant birdlife including the amazing Resplendent Quetzal. From the town of Santiago we will visit lowland wetlands at Macanas Marshes as well as crossing the continental divide into the Santa Fe National Park. Finally, we will search for foothill species in the vicinity of the beautiful town of El Valle de Anton.



*Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher*

All accommodation is of a high standard, food is excellent and tap water is safe to drink. In addition to the abundant birdlife (we can expect more than 400 species), there are many mammals that can be seen, all with the help of our local guide. We will visit in the driest month, which also coincides with the start of the spring raptor migration.

## ITINERARY

### SOBERANIA AND CHAGRES NATIONAL PARKS

Arriving in Panama City in the evening, we will transfer straight to the Radisson Summit Hotel for a stay of five nights. Here we are at the edge of the rainforest on the banks of the Panama Canal and just 20 minutes from the city!

On our first morning we will quickly forget about the previous day's journey. In the forested grounds there are Keel-billed Toucans, Collared Aracaris, Crimson-backed Tanagers and tiny Orange-chinned Parakeets. Pheasant Cuckoos and Green Shrike-vireos call from deep in the forest. Lethargic Sloths wake from their tree top slumbers whilst Capybaras regularly come to drink and bathe at a small pool.

The engineers who built the Panama Canal realised that it was vital to protect the surrounding forest. The trees regulate the flow of water and prevent the canal from silting up during the rainy season, while the system of locks relies on a steady supply of fresh water for its operation. The Soberania National Park was created to protect this forest and the result is the best preserved and most accessible lowland rainforest in Central America. Here we have the opportunity to observe the stunning Blue Cotinga at eye level from an observation

tower. Numerous hummingbirds including the White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango and Violet-bellied all visit feeders at the Rainforest Discovery Centre.

Access to the national park is along the celebrated Pipeline Road. Many forest species have become accustomed to the presence of people here and show well on the trailside. We will go in search of Purple-throated Fruitcrows, Black-breasted Puffbirds, Whooping Motmots, Golden-collared Manakins, Slaty-tailed Trogons and Cinnamon Woodpeckers. The presence of an ant swarm, with its attendant birds, provides one of the highpoints of Neotropical birding. The mixed species flocks may include Black-faced Antthrush, Bicoloured Antbird, Spotted Antbird, Ocellated Antbird, Northern Barred Woodcreeper and Kentucky Warbler.

At a variety of wetlands in the area we have a good chance of seeing Boat-billed Heron, Rufescent Tiger-heron, Grey-necked Wood-rail, Greater Ani and Lesser Kiskadee.

A short drive from our hotel will take us to some dry forest at Chagres National Park where we can look for the common but secretive Rosy Thrush-tanager, as well as Lance-tailed Manakin, White-necked Puffbird, Rufous-and-white Wren, White-bellied Antbird and the endemic Yellow-green

Tyrannulet. The various mammals likely to be seen include Two-toed and Three-toed Sloth, Geoffroy's Tamarin, Agouti, Coati, Mantled Howler Monkey and Northern Tamandua.

### **VOLCAN BARU**

On day six, after a morning's birding near our hotel, we will take a flight to David. It's then just a 90 minute drive up to our next hotel on the edge of Volcan Baru National Park.

At 11,411 feet above sea level, the dormant Volcan Baru dominates the western province of Chiriqui. The Western Highlands, along with neighbouring Costa Rica, harbours many species of bird that are found only in this region. Four nights at the excellent Casa Grande Resort in Bambito will give us a great opportunity to explore the verdant cloud forest which cloaks the surrounding mountains.

We will find a whole new range of birds here including Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tufted-cheek, Flame-throated Warbler, Collared Whitestart, Black-cheeked Warbler, Sooty-capped Bush-tanager and Yellow-thighed Finch. The forest resounds to the hauntingly beautiful songs of Black-faced Solitaires and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrushes. We also have a great chance of seeing the world's most beautiful bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. Hummingbirds are a feature of this mountain. White-throated Mountain-gem, Magnificent Hummingbird, Magenta-throated Woodstar, Scintillant Hummingbird and Volcano Hummingbird are all likely. Skulkers such as Wrenthrush and Silver-throated Tapaculo can prove trickier to observe.

At a nearby farm, shade-grown coffee plantations offer a good habitat in which numerous birds can be seen, including the localised and recently split Chiriqui Yellowthroat. Migrant wood-warblers from North America are found in good numbers: Golden-winged, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Tennessee and Mourning Warblers are all easier to see here than on their breeding grounds.

### **BOQUETE**

On day ten we will drive round to the eastern side of the volcano for a two night stay at the beautiful old fashioned town of Boquete. The Panamonte Inn is a hotel with lovely gardens, and the accommodation and food are superb. It is close to Los Quetzales Trail where we can see Black Guan, Three-wattled Bellbird, Blue-throated Toucanet, Sulphur-winged Parakeets, Prong-billed Barbet, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Elegant Euphonia and another opportunity for Resplendent Quetzal.

### **SANTIAGO AND SANTA FE**

On day 12 we head east to Santiago, stopping at the coastal resort of Las Lajas to seek out the endemic Veraguan Mango.

From Santiago, we will have a full day in the highlands of Santa Fe. Here, the birdlife has a distinctly Caribbean flavour, with Emerald, Speckled and Crimson-collared Tanagers, Black-faced Grosbeaks, the tiny Snowcap hummingbird and Caribbean slope endemic, the Lattice-tailed Trogon, all likely. Birds like the enigmatic Sunbittern, Ornate Hawk Eagle, Black-crowned Antpitta, Yellow-eared Toucanet and the Blue-and-gold Tanager are all highly sought-after possibilities.

Two nights at Santiago will also give us time to visit Las Macanas Marshes, home to thousands of Blue-winged Teals, and hundreds of Great Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Glossy Ibis and other wetland birds. Occasionally we have seen Caspian Tern, Wood Stork and Roseate Spoonbill here. The surrounding lowlands are good for Savannah Hawks, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Northern Harrier and other raptors.

### **EL VALLE DE ANTON**

Our last destination is the pleasant town of El Valle, which nestles in the crater of a huge extinct volcano. At nearly 2000 feet above sea level, temperatures are pleasant and life is very relaxed. We will stay at the lovely Los Mandarinos Spa Resort, at the edge of town, for two nights. Nearby trails take us in search of Spectacled Owl, Red-crowned Ant-tanager, Rufous-capped Warbler and the elusive Tody Motmot.

The hills above El Valle are home to the unusual White-tipped Sicklebill, a hummingbird which is attracted to flowering heliconias. This is also a great place to search for Orange-bellied Trogon, White Hawk and Spot-crowned Barbet.

After lunch on day 15 we will then drive two hours to Panama City, arriving in good time for our evening flight home.

### **CLIMATE AND PACE**

In the Canal zone and other lowland areas it gets hot, so we will birdwatch during the cooler parts of the day. At higher elevations the temperatures are very pleasant. March is the driest month, although rain is nevertheless a possibility. Most days we will make an early start but have a short siesta in the afternoon. The birding sites are close to the hotels so, with the exception of the transfer days, travelling is kept to a minimum. Basic fitness is all that is required. There is some uphill walking, but at a sensible pace.

### **ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD**

Full-board accommodation is provided, with five nights at the Radisson Summit Hotel near Gamboa, four nights at the Casa Grande near Volcan, two nights at the Panamonte Inn, Boquete, two nights at La Hacienda, Santiago and two nights at Los Mandarinos Spa Resort in El Valle. All accommodation is of a high standard with private facilities en suite.

### **PRICE INCLUDES .....**

All birdwatching excursions with Bird Holidays leader and expert local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 8<sup>th</sup>, ending with lunch on 23<sup>rd</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by mini-coach, national park entrance fees, one domestic flight and international flights.

### **WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED**

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

### **INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

Return flights from most UK airports to Panama City (via Amsterdam) using the scheduled services of KLM. Outbound flight departs early morning, return flight arrives back early afternoon.

<b>16 nights</b> including one overnight flight:	<b>8<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018</b>
<b>Principal leader:</b>	<b>John McLoughlin</b>
<b>Local guide:</b>	<b>Euclides (Kilo) Campos</b>
<b>Maximum group size:</b>	<b>10 clients with one leader and a local guide</b>
<b>Cost with discount (if you book before 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017):</b>	<b>£4390 per person sharing (£690 single supplement)</b>
<b>Full Cost:</b>	<b>£4540 per person sharing</b>
<b>Deposit:</b>	<b>£1000 per person</b>