

Holiday Highlights
Amazon River Cruise
17 – 31 August 2024

Leaders: Roy Atkins, Miguel Castelino, Luis Segura and Moacir Fortes Jr

Guests: Jean Brown, Kirsten Osa, Jayne Behenna, Jane Atkins, Rosemary Freeth, Carol Dow, Jane Nickerson

Day 1: We meet up at Heathrow for our overnight flight to Sao Paulo.

Day 2: In Sao Paulo, we have plenty of time to collect our bags and check them in again for the onward flight to Manaus. We arrive 15 minutes early and once we have collected our bags we meet Luis, Miguel and Mo and head into town. We have lots of guides on this trip - Miguel is our guide from the tour operator, with Luis from there too and learning this trip... and Mo, or Mojo, is the boat operator who is also an excellent birder and has really local knowledge.

One of the more famous things to see in Manaus is the opera house, so we do a short driving tour of the middle of town with Mo filling us in on some of the background to the city and its history. We pass various buildings and sites and finally park up near the opera house for a closer look. It is a striking building, quite ornate in a rather pinkish stone and with a colourful, glittering tiled dome as part of the roof.

There are a very small number of birds around, with both Black and Turkey Vultures overhead and amongst the feral Pigeons we find a couple of Common Ground Doves. A Pale-breasted Thrush is singing from the trees here and there are a few Short-tailed Swifts overhead.

After a very tasty lunch in a restaurant in town, we drive the short distance to our hotel overlooking the beach. It really does feel like we are at the seafront with some island way offshore - but of course we are looking across to the other side of the Rio Negro, one of the two major tributaries of the Amazon. It is jaw-dropping how big the river is here - and that is before it even meets with the Rio Solimões (part of the Amazon proper) nearby. There are dozens of people on the beach and there is even sand with deckchairs and parasols and lots of people swimming making it feel even more like the coast.

We have some free time in the heat of the afternoon and some people go for a swim and others just chill out or have a nap. In the garden there are a few birds and we gather at the swimming pool at 5pm to see what we can find. The original intention was to bird in some forest beside the hotel, but this area is closed off due to some construction work, so instead we bird just a few bushes and trees and some grass near the pool and it is amazing what we turn up on such a small area. Fork-tailed Flycatcher is a great start and in the same tree we find Tropical Kingbird,

Tui and White-winged Parakeets and both Palm and Blue-grey Tanagers. There are several Orange-fronted Yellow-Finches on the grass and fence and also a Yellow-browed Sparrow. We get good views of Great Kiskadee and a brief Rusty-margined Flycatcher and there is also a very brief White-eyed Parakeet. Common Ground Doves fly in and we identify White-throated Kingbird - so similar to Tropical you could easily not notice them.

Flying around in front of us are the occasional White-winged Swallow and a Grey breasted Martin flies through, we find a Pale-breasted Thrush and as the light starts to fade an Epaulet Oriole appears very briefly and couple of Scarlet-rumped Caciques pass through. For such a small area it is a nice little collection of birds and while a full moon rises the view out across the Rio Negro is just beautiful. It is a fun scene too, with all the people enjoying the beach. As dusk falls an Owl Butterfly appears too - an enormous species with a big eye spot on the underwing.

After a short break we gather for our first run through the checklist then head for a nice evening meal before we crash - it has been a long day.

Day 3: We decide the best way to make the most of the local birding here with such hot weather is a very early start, so we have breakfast at 5am and get straight on our way as soon as we have finished. It is about a half hour drive to the Reserve where we disembark and find a pair of Orange-winged Parrots above our heads.

We are barely entering the Reserve when Mo gets super excited as he spots a small group of Pied Tamarins passing through the trees. We work hard making sure everyone gets to see them as this is a very localised species and if we don't see them here, we won't see them at all. Well pleased we also enjoy watching a group of toucans in the same tree – some of which are White-throated but also Channel billed - quite an identification challenge as they are so similar. Three Scarlet Macaws fly though causing shouts of wow!!

From here we walk through a lovely trail through Amazon Rainforest until we come to the canopy tower. It is a very well built one - perhaps the best our guide Roy has been up - and we set off up the 200 steps - the top being 42m above us.

From the top is an amazing view out over the beautiful primary forest in all directions but in one direction with Manaus in the distance - and we have barely arrived when a group of three Blue-and-yellow Macaws flies by at eye level causing lots of oooos and aahhhs! Roy finds a Black-necked Araçari, a Crested Caracara flies by and a pair of Black-tailed Tityras appears below us.

There is much excitement as Mo spots a troop of Guianan Bearded Saki monkeys working their way through the trees below. They are unusual looking monkeys - very dark with a brown back and long almost bulbous tails and a black 'beard'. A Double-toothed Kite appears - in classic behaviour for this species as they are well known for following groups of monkeys and picking off any large insects they disturb. A flock of Red-bellied Macaws flies by, a small species by macaw standards.

We spot a rather slim, very dark-backed raptor perched in the distance and spend a while trying to work out what species it is. Eventually we get enough details to be sure it is a Grey-bellied Hawk - a great find.

Roy finds Black-spotted Barbet in the trees and as we watch this a pair of Short-billed Honeycreepers appear here too with a Guianan Puffbird above them. In the other direction we find Yellow-throated Flycatcher and Hooded Tanager. We see a pair of Swallow-winged Puffbirds. In the same tree the Short-billed Honeycreeper reappear and with them a Purple Honeycreeper and a female Yellow-backed Tanager.

We spot another raptor flying in which is soon joined by a second - clearly falcons! We are thrilled to realise they are Orange-breasted Falcons and they land in a prominent spot where we enjoy great views. They are very impressive – like large Bat Falcons! Roy is delighted to find a Tiny Hawk - really living up to its name as when first spotted through bins he was sure it was a flycatcher! Mo is super excited about this find – the first he has seen in years. A dark morph Short-tailed Hawk circles up out of the trees and there are two or three Greater Yellow-headed Vultures circling. A flock of about a dozen Blue-and-yellow Macaws fly through and more Red-bellied Macaws too.

As we walk back, we are amazed by the sound of cicadas - they are so loud!! We can't help thinking that...we are in the Amazon Rainforest!!! And this sound and the heat are pretty good signs!

We decide to head down to ground level and get going as we have a two-hour drive to our next destination where we are having lunch. Walking back, we spot a pied cat (like a feline Pied Tamarin!) a couple of Morpho type butterflies one of which, with blue and black wings, Mo calls a Black Morpho. We get fabulous views of Scarlet Macaws in the trees above the car park and we pass a few fish tanks with interesting fish that Mo names for us - though none of us can probably still remember them, perhaps with the exception of the Electric Eel!

It is getting hot now and it is nice to get on the air-conditioned bus. We head back to our rooms to pack and soon gather for our drive to our next location - a two-hour drive to a place called Mari Mari. We spot little on the way but enjoy the scenery and the towns we pass through but there are remarkably few birds. We arrive just in time for lunch and after moving into the cabins we walk down the steep slope to the restaurant area – a lovely outdoor site with a view over a stream and several palm trees with fruit in them that apparently attract birds.

We are genuinely amazed at the quality of the lunch here - a great spread - and it is all delicious with a very nice atmosphere and friendly staff. As we finish our meal Jean finds a female Cock of the Rock... a strange looking bird indeed. There are Greater Yellow-headed Vultures overhead but little else before we head out for a walk into the forest.

We are not going far and there is really only one big target bird, but as we walk through the grounds we spot our first House Wren and in the forest we pass a smart looking Bronzy Jacamar.

We walk on and soon arrive at the Cock-of-the-Rock lek and wow - the first view of them is simply startling! Here we are in the green forest, brown leaves on the floor and darkness below the trees and in these rather dull and dark surrounding there are these startlingly large, bright orange birds! At times there are about eight in view and though they are not doing all that much lekking they are flitting around now and then and even bounce around on the ground. They are just jaw droppingly bright and colourful with strange feathers in their wings and this bizarre head shape as the front feathers of the head stick right out in a semicircle above the bill hiding it completely. The whole scene is surreal! We are here for a good two hours or more, just taking photos and enjoying the spectacle and even then we have to drag ourselves away they are so spellbinding. What a show!

We walk back through the forest to the open area where we had lunch and high in one of the trees, we find a female Purple-breasted Cotinga. Some people walk back to the rooms to don swimsuits for a swim in the stream and pass a stunning male Spangled Cotinga in the cashew trees on the way. A couple of Rusty-margined Flycatchers are flycatching from the palm trees and a Black Nunbird appears. Overhead we enjoy lovely views of fragile looking Fork-tailed Palm Swifts and a couple of other swifts that may be Band-rumped perhaps. A Greater Yellow-headed Vulture perches in the trees over the stream.

At 5.45pm we gather to take a short walk in search of owls. A couple of Little Chachalaca call noisily from the trees as they go to roost and bats start to appear above the trees. We can hear a calling Amazonian Pygmy Owl calling, we get a couple of flight views but it vanishes into the trees every time. We hear a Common Potoo but no views and eventually we call it a day and head for our evening meal.

Day 4: We start the day around the carpark area, finding a whole bunch of birds all flitting around a single bushy area here. There is a Tropical Kingbird in the top joined by both Variegated and Rusty-margined Flycatchers. A Chivi Vireo is calling constantly and a pair of Blue Dacnis are flitting around. A Bananaquit flies in and there are the usual Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers and we get lovely views of Fork-tailed Palm Swifts overhead. Three Blue-and-yellow Macaws fly over and a Short-crested Flycatcher appears in the bushes calling constantly.

We decide to try for the owl that was calling last night and we hear it but again it won't come in to view, but as we are doing this a Guianan Warbling Antbird starts calling nearby. We spend a while working on this skulking little bird and eventually enjoy some very nice views – a lovely little bird.

As we start back towards the dining area, we spot a tiny flycatcher in the tops of the bushes. It is a challenging one. and we struggle to match it with any in the

book with its two wing bars, smudgy supercilium, tiny size and short bill – but eventually Roy gets a glimpse of a tiny strip of yellow on the crown and we realise it has to be a Yellow-crowned Elaenia - which is not an Elaenia really at all. As we are checking this bird, we also find a superb male Yellow-sided Euphonia and a Silver-beaked Tanager.

We arrive at breakfast and we are amazed at the quality of the breakfast at such a tiny place as we are staying - there is so much to enjoy and some unusual things we are not familiar with including local fruits.

After breakfast we spot Buff-throated Saltator as we walk back to our rooms, then get on our way and take a short drive to an area of forest to 'see what we can find' as Luis puts it. As we start the walk Miguel tells us this is a good place for trogons, but the trail is narrow and feels rarely walked. We have really only been walking for ten minutes or less when we arrive at a spot where Miguel tells us to pause and says he is going to set up his scope and that perhaps Roy would like to set his up too as there is a bird he would like to show us. He then tells us to look up! We are under a large tree and we quickly realise there is a truly massive nest high above us and.... well, it has been suggested that perhaps someone else should describe Roy's reaction to what he set eyes on when he raised his binoculars! Here is Jane Nickerson's take on what happened.

"Tuesday's itinerary suggested a second visit to the Guianan Cock of the Rock lek but as we had enjoyed such a spectacular visit the day before Miguel suggested that we drove out to a forest trail. The trail required us to walk in single file through the forest, something which concerned Roy as he wanted to ensure we could all see whatever treats were on offer. On two occasions he asked Miguel if we were looking for anything special to be told, "it's quite a good area for trogons." Roy moved towards the middle of the group to ensure the guides were spread around the group. We arrived at a small clearing and Miguel gathered us together and asked us to look up. There, high above us in a towering tree, was huge nest with a large bird sitting on top. Roy's line of sight was blocked by a branch, but Jane A realised what we were looking at and firmly grabbed Roy and dragged him to the back of the clearing and told him to look up. At that point there was a stunned silence and then Roy stuttered, "is that, can it be, is it really a Harpy Eagle." We were all overwhelmed but for Roy who has dreamt of this moment for possibly all his life, it was earth shattering. Yes, we were all emotional and some shed tears, including our guides. The icing of the cake was when we realised the Harpy Eagle was sitting on a chick. Our patience was rewarded when the chick appeared and we had superb views of mum and baby. We spent ages just taking in what we were looking at, but we knew we would need to leave this memorable place at some point. We were all finding it hard to tear ourselves away then just when we started to move, she hopped out of the nest and provided us with the most amazing, clear views of a Harpy Eagle perched in very clear sight. This is something none of us will forget but, for some of the guests, Roy's reaction is also something we will not forget. Luis and Miguel had sourced this sighting in a private area of the forest and

had kept it secret from Roy since the start of the holiday... I think they rather enjoyed his reaction too!"

We are all very impressed with how Miguel and Luis played this card so close to their chests. We even had conversations in the last couple of days in which Harpy Eagle came up and they kind of implied it would be very unlikely we would see one. It turns out they have only known about this site for four days. It is such a treat to be surprised by such an astounding bird and Roy is not the only one to become a little emotional.

We spend ages here just taking it in... watching the mother and the chick moving around and there is one particularly spectacular moment when she looks right at us and raises her astonishing crest - like the iconic images in all the books. She is truly massive but at one point she stands up and moves around a little and we get to see the feet and thick set legs - so immensely powerful looking. In contrast the chick looks amusingly cute with its white fluffy head and dark eyes. It looks to have the start of a crest already unless it is just its hair sticking up from sleeping on it. It almost feels wrong to look at a Yellow-green Grosbeak that appears above our heads - how dare we look at such a trivial bird when such a regal sight is on offer!

As Jane says, it feels almost impossible to walk away - or to stop taking photos - but eventually we decide we are unlikely to get any different views, but just as we decide to leave the female stands right up in the nest and flies to a close-by dead snag on the tree. Oh wow! What a view!! We are suddenly very glad we didn't drag ourselves away earlier as we get astonishing views of the entire bird perched right out on the open and facing us - showing the thick black chest bar and now we can see those massive talons and huge feet.

We finally decide there really is little likelihood of any better view and with time racing towards lunchtime we head back. There is time for just a little birding before lunch back at the ranch and here we get excellent views of Guianan Red Cotinga and a superb male Purple-breasted Cotinga too, plus a very smart looking Black-necked Aracari. We enjoy another delicious lunch and say our fond farewells to the staff here who have been lovely.

We are soon packed and get on our way, driving back to Manaus and the next part of our adventure... here we are boarding the *Iracema* for our Amazon adventure!

Arriving at the port is an experience in itself! What a dump... old broken boats and all sorts of derelict buildings and mess, but it gets better as we get closer to the seafront itself and then, there in the harbour, is our boat. It looks lovely and we board a small, motorised canoe to go out to board it and have our first look inside. It is just delightful, like some old colonial style boat inside with three decks... two have cabins, the galley and the lounge plus bar and the top deck is an observation deck for viewing and relaxing... with part of it covered and part open so you can see above. It couldn't be better!

We meet in the bar for a refreshing drink - a caipirinha – which is delicious and very popular in Brazil. Mo explains life on board with a few important pieces of information regarding safety and how to use various things and how to keep track of drinks etc. Then he introduces the crew - Carmen, Lillie, Pedro, Joel, Jo and Miko. We have some time to settle into our rooms and then gather to run through today's checklist - with a big cheer when we get to Harpy Eagle!

After our delicious meal we have ten minutes to get ready for a bit of spotlighting. We are soon into the canoes and then cruise slowly round scanning with torches to see what we can find. We spot occasional Speckled and Black Caimen by their eyeshine, mainly Spectacled Caimen. There are frogs calling all around and we stop to look for some and soon find a Chaco Tree-frog and a smaller species we can't identify. We are delighted to see at least three different Great Potoos looking wonderful in the torchlight. On one boat we pick out a Ladder-tailed Nightjar and the other finds a couple of Hoatzins, but we hope to see them again in daylight. There is one Black-crowned Night Heron plus one each of Boat-billed, Cocoli and Striated Herons.

As we finally arrive back at the boat, we are surprised to see a caiman right beside the boat. This is a great opportunity to see all the identification features, the very dark almost black body, the blotches on the jaw and the short snout etc making it a Black Caiman for sure.

What an amazing day it has been - but wow are we tired now, so we get back onboard and head straight to bed and most of us are probably asleep in minutes!

Day 5: We gather for a snack and coffee at 5.30am then we get out on the water at around 6am. At first it all feels a little frantic there are so many birds flying around. Great Egrets and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Neotropic Cormorant, Tui Parakeet, Anhingas, Ringed Kingfisher and several Wattled Jacanas. Three Scarlet Macaws fly over then we spot Hoatzins in the trees. There are various herons and egrets along the shore and we get good views of Striated Heron. We find Red-capped Cardinal in the bushes and a Lesser Horned, while Large-billed Terns fly by with their striking wing pattern.

We leave the main channel and start up a much narrower side channel that seems much quieter from the boat's perspective and we head slowly along spotting plenty of birds as we go. There are Lesser Kiskadees in the bushes, a Black-collared Hawk and lots of parakeets in the treetops, including both Tui and White-winged Parakeets. Then there is great excitement as we find a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth! It is a very sleepy one and just curled up in a ball asleep. We pass occasional Green Iguanas then get great views of Zimmer's Woodcreeper. It is all a bit confusing as we also think, from the calls, that there are both Zimmer's and Straight billed Woodcreepers here - two almost identical species.

We find several Kingfishers as we go - the enormous Ringed Kingfishers, an Amazon Kingfisher that is a bit smaller, Green Kingfisher that is smaller still and then the

most tricky to find - Green-and-rufous Kingfisher with fabulous views. There are Yellow-rumped Caciques, more Scarlet Macaws, White-eyed Parakeets fly over and we get great views of Glossy Antshrike – a superb black bird with a punky crest, rufous in the female. We enjoy superb views of Black-capped Donacobius, a couple of Greater Anis fly across the channel posing briefly and we get some better views of the bizarre looking Hoatzin.

A Spotted Tody-Flycatcher poses very nicely out in the open - a tiny little thing with a big bill but that bill is nothing compared to our next bird - a Long-billed Woodcreeper! Wow what a crazy looking bird and what a bill!!!! A Roadside Hawk flies through, then we spot a pair of Grey-cowled Wood-Rails beside the channel on the mud. They run away and Mo plays a bit of the bizarre sounding song to coax them back and they start singing a duet in reply. In the top of the bushes a superb looking Slate-coloured Hawk watches us pass before flying away then we get distant views of Little Woodpecker, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Black-fronted Nunbird and Little Cuckoo.

We continue on our way down the channel, passing a few fishing boats and we come out into a wide area of water with open areas either side and shorelines dotted with waders. It seems most are Solitary Sandpipers but there are a few Lesser and one Greater Yellowlegs too. A flock of Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures are overhead and we see several Snail Kites and another Slate-coloured Hawk. There are quite a few Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks here and a smaller number of Brazilian Teal and from one spot we find Green Ibis, Lesser Kiskadee, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Striated Heron and Black-collared Hawk. The bank is full of holes made by catfish when the water levels are higher and it seems that Orange-fronted Yellow-Finches are nesting in them.

We continue on our way and pause at a scrubby area where a White-headed Marsh Tyrant is showing very well right beside the canoes, then as we head back for breakfast we pass a nesting colony of Brown-chested Martins. Arriving back at the boat Luis tells us we have seen about 70 species of bird - and all before breakfast!

After breakfast, which is superb, we head out to try our hand at Piranha fishing! This is kind of unexpected, but it is tempting to try it and we are all fascinated to see Piranhas anyway - so out we go. We are given spools of fishing line with a hook and weight and we dangle it over the side of the canoe - but it seems the locals have more of a knack than we do as the boatmen all manage to catch one or two, Roy managed to catch one, but no-one else! Between us we catch three different species. While out we add a couple of other birds to the list... Shiny Cowbird and Yellow-billed Tern. Then we up anchor and set off further down river. It is very relaxing sitting and watching the world go by and some snooze. At times the river here is over 2km wide!

We arrive at a small creek where we had been hoping to go but the water is too shallow, but to our great excitement Jane N spots a small group of two or three Tucuxi - or Grey River Dolphins. We enjoy some lovely views of them as they

chase around not that far from the boat surfacing with a splash and sometimes coming out of the water a little way.

Then we make a landing ashore to visit the village here. Once ashore Mo tells us all about some of the trees. We get to hear how they used to collect rubber from the rubber trees and that this made a huge change to the number of people living at Manaus and other local areas. He even gets a little rubber from the tree we are stood beside. We see a Cocoa tree from which we get chocolate and get to taste the white pulp around the seeds that is very tasty and sweet. There are Guava trees, trees that help heal wounds and can even blows bubbles after breaking a twig of one of them! There are other fruits too and a guy from the village demonstrates how they collect a bunch of bananas by literally cutting down the entire stalk that the bunch is on... and the bananas come back to the boat with us to ripen.

We also see lots of birds here. As we walk from where we land towards the village, we find Black-billed Thrush, Red-legged Honeycreeper, lots of Great Kiskadees, Tropical and White-throated Kingbirds, Rusty-margined Flycatcher and below us, above the reeds, we find both Lesser and our first Band-winged Horneros.

At the edge of the village we discover a lot of birds too with both Cinereous and Chestnut-capped Becards in the same tree with lots of kingbirds, tanagers and other species we are now familiar with - especially great views of Yellow-rumped Caciques. Southern Martins are a bit of a surprise overhead then we reach a scruffy field with remnants of crops and some grassy bits and this seems alive with birds! One of the best is the spectacular Orange-backed Troupial but there are also a lot of seedeaters... these including Wing-barred Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Chestnut-bellied Seedeater, White-lined Seedeater and a Yellow-browed Sparrow.

Short-tailed Parrots are flying around and we are delighted to spot a Striped Cuckoo while we are searching for a Barred Antshrike. This eventually shows very well and in the background there are Velvet-fronted Grackles and a couple of Red-breasted Meadowlark fly over.

We head back for our evening meal and a bit of free time after another amazing day, but we still have a chance to go out for a night outing at 8.30pm. This is apparently a great area for sloths and the aim is to find one or two.... or five according to Mo.

As we set out, we are pleased to discover several Boat-billed Herons scattered along the waterfront, as well as one or two Black-crowned Night Heron. There are caiman everywhere - not that you can see them really but the eyeshine is all around. We have not gone far when Mo spots some eyeshine in one of the trees and we head over and look carefully soon finding that there is an opossum! What a cute little face peering back at us as though it is amazed to see us and we get good enough views to identify it as a Northern Black-eared Opossum.

We move on and have hardly gone anywhere when we find our first sloth and you can see its face looking around and watch it scratching itself. Jayne B is delighted - this is what she has been so keen to see but yesterday was a little frustrating being just a ball of fur. It is not long before we find another - then another - and another! We find sleepy ones, scratchy ones, we find 'armchair sloth' (who looks like he is sitting upright in an armchair) and more and by the time we stop to head back home we have seen an astonishing eight sloths... and Jayne has a very big smile on her face, even bigger than the sloths! Then on the way back we find the most bizarre one yet - hanging full length vertically by its back feet and just hanging there scratching. It looks very strange like it is just hanging out to dry and we stop for a look before heading back - all that and we have only been out just over an hour.

Day 6: We are in an area with some large islands and this morning our intention is to land on a couple of them and take a walk. After an early breakfast at 5.30am we get on our way and head to an island that Mo tells us is good for a number of birds that specialise in islands on the Amazon, but it has to be said he looks little bit shocked when we get ashore. Although it is a recently formed island it had, a year ago, quite a bit of woodland on it but this appears to have been cut for planting crops. It is not a massive area or anything, but it was the habitat we were hoping to visit.

Not all the specialities are in the forest however and we are soon finding new birds as well as a few familiar friends... such as plenty of Large-billed Terns and Black Skimmers as we head towards shore and some Tui Parakeets in the trees as we arrive. We are also greeted by a posse of seven cats (but not with seven sacks!) who seem remarkably pleased to see us! It is only when someone comes ashore to work on the crops and he gives them a fish we realise why they appeared so friendly.

Our first new bird is White-bellied Spinetail - and Mo seems astonishingly annoyed about the name given the belly, he says, isn't white! But when we finally get a view of one from below the belly is white and he seems even more incensed that he can't be justifiably annoyed!

Next, we see what is now called Bluish-gray Saltator - a recent split from Grayish Saltator and then a Pearly-breasted Conebill, a cecropia specialist, so not surprising what tree it is in. A flock of Short-tailed Parrots flies through. then we find a River Tyrannulet - not a species likely to win bird of the trip. We can hear a calling Yellow-chinned Spinetail and soon we get good views of one amongst some seedeaters including Blue-black Grassquit and Lined Seedeater. A Spot-breasted Woodpecker flies in and shows well and is soon joined by a second, plus two Streaked Flycatchers. We also find Riverside Tyrant - a smart-looking black flycatcher with a pale grey bill. An Elaenia has us a little puzzled, but we work out it is an Amazonian Elaenia but not quite as grey as it should be.

We cross the field until we are overlooking some reedy grasses and find Wattled Jacana and a Purple Gallinule here. There are lots of seedeaters down here including Lined, Chestnut-bellied and a new one, Yellow-bellied Seedeater, then Mo says he is going to try for Dark-breasted Spinetail. It does not take long and we enjoy some nice views before we head back to the canoes.

From here we head to what used to be another island but the two have now joined together. There is a lot of bare sand and clearly it has a colony of Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns and Black Skimmers. We pass a couple of distant Buff-necked Ibis on the way and also a single White-rumped Sandpiper, Collared and Pied Plovers and a couple of Spotted Sandpipers.

Once on the island we are delighted to find a few Sand-coloured Nighthawks. What a gorgeous bird, pale with beautiful patterning and in flight they look exquisite with broad white bars in the wing and white in the tail. We get very close views of Collared Plover and then walk over to some taller 'Arrowgrasses' which is the habitat of Parker's Spinetail. This is similar to Yellow-chinned but with a buffy belly and we are soon enjoying excellent views of a pair. We walk over to some trees, but all is quiet here, though we see an Osprey and a Yellow headed Caracara fly by.

Walking back to the canoes we pass several tern and skimmer nests then as we head back towards the boat, we spot an Osprey being mobbed by a Large billed Tern - with lots of twists and turns it is quite spectacular. In the distance a couple of Tucuxi are surfacing. Once onboard we chill out for a while enjoying the sight of the amazing river as we go.

We arrive at the point where the Amazon River (known more locally as the Solimões in this area) meets the Rio Negro - the meeting of the two largest tributaries in the world - and indeed, as Mo says, as far as we know - in the universe! This famous spot is remarkable for the way that the two rivers have such different looking water. The river we have come down is laden with silt and a buffy colour while the Rio Negro is so much darker as there is almost no erosion into the river and there is also tannin in the water from the trees making it even darker - hence the name.

It is remarkable seeing where the two rivers meet as it is such a sharp and obvious demarcation and the waters are clearly not mixing. Looking into the distance the dark and buffy coloured water runs together side by side until they are out of view and Mo informs us that it runs like this runs for over a hundred km before they start truly mixing. Apparently the Solimões is colder and eventually this colder, denser water sinks under the water from the Rio Negro and it mixes that way. The other astounding thing here is that you imagine you are looking at a very wide river indeed... then discover what you are seeing as one bank ins an island about 7 km away and that the other side is actually the more distant trees to the side of that, which is more like 17 or 18 km away - that is how wide the River Amazon is here! It is impossible to describe the view really, it is a truly astonishing place!

We have lunch following the Rio Negro out past Manaus and under the beautiful bridge, before continuing up to a spot where we are hoping to see some Pink River Dolphins. It is all very relaxed following the river, then as we approach our destination Mo explains that the locals have effectively befriended a group of Pink River Dolphins here. They are totally wild, but the locals regularly give them fish from their catch, so not surprisingly they hang around here and we have very good chances of seeing them. It is very calm as we stop the boat just opposite some buildings and we are very quickly rewarded! There are several dolphins here and they move all around the area, sometimes surfacing very close to us. They are ridiculously hard to photograph as they seem to constantly change direction and you have no idea where they are going to appear next, but we think there must be at least five or six of them and wow - they really are very pink!! They rarely show their faces when surfacing but now and then we get to see the incredibly long 'beak' lined with lots of teeth and the very bulbous head and beady eye. They don't have a fin, so often you just see a pink ridge of the back as they surface and are gone again.

This is a species we were all keen to see and we are certainly not disappointed as we get so many sightings - they are also larger than many of us expected. It is wonderful to see them but not an easy moment to share - in many of the photos they really don't look like much! They are such a famous feature of the Amazon River and to spend this time with them is simply wonderful, but you really have to be there to understand what a pleasure and enjoyable experience it is - the photos simply don't capture it.

A few species of bird are skimming over the water, including Fork-tailed Palm Swift, Short-tailed and Gray-rumped Swifts, as well as a few martins and swallows we are well familiar with now. Eventually we drag ourselves away and as we get ready to head back a group of Blue-and-yellow Macaws fly by - and a few lucky people spot an Oriole Blackbird.

As we continue on our way we gather on the top deck with drinks, chatting and laughing and it is just lovely watching the Amazon Rainforest go by. As we travel upstream the sky gradually turns red as the sun sets and the stars come out - including those of the Southern Cross - it is just a lovely end to the day.

Day 7: We wake to find ourselves in a spot surrounded by trees standing in the water, a little mist over the surface and - it is simply beautiful! We can't help remarking that this is how we imagined it... though perhaps with taller trees.

After breakfast we head out on the canoes. Sadly, Jean took a fall this morning and has hurt her back and is unable to join us. We are really so sorry for her as she must be immensely frustrated to be missing out, but we are very fortunate to have Carol with us, who is a doctor and able to assess how she is and tell her what to do.

Weaving through the channels as we go further into the trees, we pause to try and find an antbird that is calling. It doesn't want to play but we find an Amazonian Tyrannulet instead and Short-crested Flycatcher. Next we get fantastic views of Cinnamon Attila which flies across and perches right out in the sunshine. We get a couple of brief views of Dusky Parrots as they fly by then find a little group of Long-nosed Bats which are wonderfully camouflaged when they line up on a tree trunk.

The scenery is wonderful, with rolling ground with trees on and a lot of trees standing in water making it look almost like mangroves and the reflections in the water all add to the beauty. There are big termite nest in the branches and wasps nests too as we scan for more birds.

We continue onwards spotting a lot of kingfishers... mainly Green and Ringed but also occasional Amazon and a single Green-and-Rufous. We get excellent views of Lineated Woodpecker and a small flock of Fork-tailed Flycatchers fly in. There are plenty Swallow-winged Puffbirds adorning the tops of the higher bare twigs. We then spend a while trying to sort out what woodpecker we have found before finally getting good enough views to confirm they are Golden-collared Woodpeckers - three of them. We get excellent views of Bronzy Jacamar and there is a very brief Striped Woodcreeper.

As well as birds we find one or two other things of interest... a couple of lizards including one swimming in the water and another on a tree trunk we are told is called a Diving Lizard. There is a Whip-tailed Lizard too and we spot orchids, some amazingly large and colourful striped caterpillars and lots of butterflies but impossible to identify, though at least one is a Blue Morpho of some kind.

We move on and find a pair of Black Nunbirds and some Yellow-rumped Caciques plus an Olivaceous Woodcreeper. By now we have been out for several hours and it is getting very hot and we head back for a short break before lunch.

After a nice long break, in which we chill out and have a nap - we are beside a beach with forest all around - another beautiful spot. At around 4pm we head out on the canoes to do a landing for a walk, but first we go a little way up a channel. A White-throated Toucan is calling from the very top of one of the larger trees and in the distance there are three Paradise Jacamars in the fine twigs at the top of another tree - easily identified by their very elegant outline with very long bill and tail. They then fly straight over us and land in a tall tree in the sun. They are still not so close, but with the sun on them they look fabulous.

The forest is beautiful here with palms and creepers and taller trees and bromeliads, though it is a little quiet as we make a landing. Birds are not coming very fast but eventually we find a Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper and then a little further on a Spotted Puffbird - a gorgeous little bird. We are also astonished when we come into a clearing and there is a truly enormous fungus, perhaps three feet across like

a massive funnel! There are even small trees and other planting growing from the middle!

Mo explains how the forest changes as we gain a bit of height above the water, from one type to another and now we are in dryer taller forest and soon come into what is a natural type of clearing. As we arrive a most beautiful rich song belts out from close by and we work hard to eventually get views of the songster - a Coraya Wren.

We flush a nightjar and Mo leads us into the undergrowth to try and relocate it and suddenly Carol spots it right by the path. It is remarkable tame and just stays there just feet away – a gorgeous Rufous Nightjar with fabulous markings. There are some large bromeliads with tall spikes of pink flowers and at least two kinds of orchids. Time is flying by, so we start back and it is getting gloomy under the trees as we walk. There is even an exciting moment as we hear a Jaguar roar very close by - before we realise it is Mo - he's such a comedian!

We finish the day in style as we head over to the beach, crossing our plank bridge from the boat to the shore then joining the crew for a barbecue... rather bizarrely with a big bonfire to keep us warm despite it being about 30 degrees! What a lovely evening though - with yet more fabulous food and a lovely atmosphere.

Day 8: We have moved the boat a little way overnight and now here we are in some beautiful surroundings amongst the trees. There is forest in all direction and many trees are standing in water and embankments covered in a wide variety of trees and palms and great diversity. With the sunrise the whole scene is stunning, with the reflections in the water and a few birds waking up. It is also interesting to see the tree trunks are striped horizontally – each line showing where the water level stopped and layer of silt was deposited on the tree trunk.

We spot mainly birds we have seen before as we travel, such as kingbirds, various swallows and martins, kingfishers plus a Sungrebe that half swims and half flies across the river in front of the boat. A Muscovy Duck flies through, a single Cocoli Heron, Green Ibis and a Roadside Hawk.

After breakfast we go back out on the canoes down one the narrow channels. At first we are weaving our way through trees stood in the water and we spot lots of Brown-chested Martins in the bare branches of some of the dead trees. Amongst them are a few Gray-breasted Martins and a single Southern Martin which is totally dark blue. There are Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers and a Striated Heron and we remark how few herons and egrets we are seeing now.

Suddenly there is great excitement as we spot a Pink River Dolphin surface close by. It feels nice to see one truly out in the wild though it is hard to predict where it will appear next and we get such short glimpses. As we continue we pass occasional vultures, including both Lesser and Greater Yellow-headed Vulture and a single Turkey Vulture. We spot an Ashy-headed Greenlet but people are more

impressed by a stunning male Spangled Cotinga - and with the sun on it you can see why it has the name. We get a brief glimpse of a Nacunda Nighthawk and two Blue-headed Parrots fly over. A pair of Roadside Hawks seem to be having a bit of a squabble and overhead we see more Short-tailed Swifts with their ridiculously short tails. Lots of the taller trees seem to be adorned with Swallow-winged Puffbirds.

In one quiet corner of the channel a small group of Variable Chachalacas fly in and in the tree tops a female Swallow Tanager and a Bananaquit appear briefly. We get very brief glimpses of a Capped Heron in a narrow channel and while searching for an antwren find a Forest Elaenia instead.

Eventually we arrive at a rocky riffle - which Mo laughingly calls a waterfall. Round here this must count as a waterfall!! He said before we left the boat that we would be able to swim here and several of us take up the offer. It is cool and lovely and we spend a while enjoying ourselves just swimming around, before getting back in the canoes and heading back for lunch.

On our return journey we enjoy good views of Spangled Cotinga again and also a very smart Fork-tailed Flycatcher and many of the same species we saw on the way out. We then arrive back at the boat for a break before our lunch - which is fabulous and includes Peacock Bass that the crew caught this morning and the piranhas we caught the other day! We are more dangerous to the piranhas than they are to us frankly!

The afternoon is spent cruising the river back down to the Rio Negro and then up towards the famous reserve of 300 or more islands known as the Anavilhanas Archipelago. We spot a single Pink River Dolphin on the way, then as we arrive at the islands we spot a large flock of martins in the tree tops. They are all large species with a mix of Grey-breasted, Brown-chested and several Southern Martins. Above us are Short-tailed and Gray-rumped Swifts. A couple of Festive Parrots fly in and we spot plenty of Hoatzins in the bare branches. A Cocoli Heron flies through, a Muscovy Duck flies over and we spot a couple of Black-faced Nunbirds. A Roadside Hawk is perched up here, but we are more excited to see a fly-over Bat Falcon. We spot a couple of Greater Anis, a Pale-vented Pigeon flies over and six Blue-and-yellow Macaws fly through.

We continue, now passing between two of the large islands and spot a couple of Pink River Dolphins up ahead but they are hard to follow. Then as the light really starts to fade we enjoy the wonderful spectacle of Band-tailed Nighthawks flying against the evening light. They are just wonderful to watch and finally we spot quite a few Greater Fishing Bats - very large with long trailing feet.

It is a beautiful finish to the day before we head down to eat at 8pm, then we gather again for a night outing. We head out and start searching for whatever we can find with the torches – soon picking up a couple of Hoatzins, then some eyeshine and we arrive to find it is a pair of Grey-cowled Wood-Rails much to our surprise.

We continue and spot something in the branches and realise it is a tree rat of some kind, but then notice it has a bushy black tip to the tail, so we are unsure what it is. Looking it up later we identify it as a Rio-negro Brush-tailed Rat. We continue on and find another rat - this looks a bit neater but has lost his tail completely! We think it may be a Red-nosed Tree Rat but it is hard to be sure.

Roy picks up more eyeshine and this time it turns out to be a Band-tailed Nightjar and the next eyeshine he finds is a snake! Careful examination suggests an Amazonian Tree Boa - one of the more common species here. We find a large tree frog known as Rusty Tree Frog, then in quick succession two Gladiator Frogs. A Ghost Bat flies around above our canoes briefly - pure white! We spot a small mouse dashing through the twigs and then a bit further on there is another one, a nice warm colour with a long tail. But there are no 'mouse' species here and we later identify it as most probably a species of Spiny Tree and based on distribution we think the most likely being Cayenne Spiny Tree Rat.

Day 9: We grab a coffee at 5.15am and we are about to head out for a canoe ride when we hear a Spectacled Owl calling. We head up to the top deck and a minute or so later this large owl flies into a large tree the other side of the channel. It is soon joined by a second! Wow, what a view.

As we set off there are lots of Band-tailed Nighthawks overhead. Over the far side a Rusty-backed Spinetail is calling, which we then view. This is quickly followed by a three Leaden Antwrens and then a gorgeous Green-tailed Jacamar. A pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers fly into a large tree trunk on the far side and look enormous. We also glimpse a Straight-billed Woodcreeper and get good views of Festive Parrot in the treetops briefly.

We start moving away and hear a calling Black-crested Antshrike and the smart male is soon joined by the rather beautiful female with her ginger crest. We see Waved Woodpecker fly across, then get some nice views of Buff-breasted Wren. Jayne is very pleased with herself when she not only spots another Green-tailed Jacamar but identifies it too and we get great views of Squirrel Cuckoo.

We work on trying to see Grey-breasted Greenlet with great success, but much better is the gorgeous little Klages's Antwren - a little striped humbug of a bird and so pretty. A little further on we enjoy exceedingly good views of Varzea Schiffornis.

It is starting to quieten down a little now as we drift slowly down the channel - it is so relaxing and lovely, then we spot a bright yellow bellied bird high in the treetops - which turns out to be a Yellow-bellied Dacnis. A White-tipped Dove flies through and Lesser Kiskadees are on the riverside as a Blue Morpho flies by - wow what an astonishing sight these are! As we head back, we hear a Black-chinned Antbird calling. We have tried for this species a few times already but at last this one comes out into the open and shows very well.

We head back for breakfast - which even includes a delicious chocolate cake today! Jayne suggests to Roy that she will distract his wife Jane so he can grab a piece but the moment he goes to get it she just totally forgets what she said and he gets caught red handed, much to everyone's amusement.

After a short break we head back out again. This time we go a very short distance to a spot where we make a landing up some steps, to a nice looking area of forest. There should be Wire-tailed Manakins displaying here but it seems very quiet. There is however a Blackish-gray calling. We soon realise we are in the middle of two territories so neither of them wish to stray into the other birds patch... so we move into one of them and quite quickly a nice male flies in and shows well. It is quite distinctive with a white patch in the middle of its back.

We can also hear an Ash-breasted Antbird calling so we go in search and as we do so we come across a Snethlage's Tody-Tyrant - a tiny flycatcher with wing bars, pale eye and a long bill for its size. Despite its tiny size we soon find it as it is calling and calling! We find a Yellow-crowned Elaenia here before we move on and search out the Ash-breasted Antbird. Black-fronted Nunbirds are around as we start back, then Jane N is delighted to find her own antbird! This time it is a Black-chinned Antbird with a pair showing amazingly well.

It is easy to just mention the birds, but there are so many other things here too and it is hard to describe how it feels being in such forest. We have seen a couple of Diving Lizards or Olive Tree-runner as it is called these days and some fabulous butterflies including Blue Morpho, various heliconia species and lots of sulphurs and we find a stunning dragonfly - brilliant red and black. There are bromeliads, fungi and all sorts.

We head back to the boat for lunch then we start travelling upstream to Novo Airao where we are going shopping! Yes... shopping! Who'd have thought it - we felt like we were in the middle of nowhere but here and there in the middle of all this forest there are towns and this is quite a big one. Mo knows a couple of places where they produce local crafts with local materials and they are worthwhile projects too, as we discover when he starts telling us the background to them. Also, there is a health clinic here so Jean can have her back checked as it is still hurting.

The first place we visit is a WWF funded project and we meet a lady who produces mainly woven products. Mats, hats, plant pot holders, place mats, fans and all kinds of things are on display and she shows us how she uses palm fronds to create the strips of material she uses and how she dyes them - all totally sustainably. She also has blow-pipes which are fun to try!

The second place is much bigger with lots of lathes and other equipment for working with wood. This is a spin off from the boat building that was happening here and from which there was a lot of wasted wood. Now this wood that used to be burned is being used to create wonderful things! After looking round the workshop and watching a guy making a beautiful purple-heart wooden bowl (which

really is a bright pinkish purple colour) we head into the shop area, where there are lots of very nicely made bits and pieces - everything from useful bowls and phone holders to simply decorative ornaments, including a beautiful fish that Roy finds impossible to resist. There are dolphins, armadillos, various fish and toucans and all sorts.

From here it is a short drive to a nearby hotel run by Mo's sister and once here we enjoy a cold drink and spot a pair of Green-backed Trogons while we wait for dusk. We are here to go and see Spix's Night Monkeys, but as we set off Miguel spots a small troop of Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys moving through the trees. We enjoy great views of these really pretty little monkeys as they pass through the trees and notice their distinctive bright, buffy-coloured lower arms and hands.

We then walk on down to the spot from where we hope to see the Night Monkeys. It is just a short walk and Mo tells us we need to be quiet and not scare them or they may retreat into their hole for a while. We follow his directions and in the dark of a hole we can see two strange looking faces peering out. They have really big eyes and have pale eyebrow-spots and look very different to other monkeys. We take turns at the scope and they look round, but look so shy! Mo tells us that there is a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls but we don't see them and then the monkeys vanish. With no sign of them reappearing we decide we are unlikely to get any better views anyway and head back up to the hotel, relocating the Squirrel Monkeys as we go.

Back at the hotel we call the taxis and we are soon on our way back to base and ready for another delicious evening meal... how on earth Lillie manages to produce such amazing meals in such a small galley kitchen we have no idea. The fish is so fresh of course and it is just delicious.

Day 10: Cruising overnight means we arrive at Jau National Park before dawn. It is a most beautiful sunrise with the sun creeping up over the horizon gradually lighting the sky and the water and we realise we are seeing both Tucuxi and Pink River Dolphins surfacing in the calm water silhouetted against the rising sun. There are small islands and beautiful forest and we spot a flock of Neotropic Cormorants in the trees on one of the islands and the silhouette of a Black Caiman adds to the view.

We arrive at the spot where we have to sign in, to visit the Reserve and we go to sign the book. From the jetty we spot a pair of Black-tailed Tityra and there are loads of Large billed and a few Yellow-billed Terns. We spot both Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers and a flock of Pale-vented Pigeons flies into one of the trees - feed for a few minutes then leave again. We spot distant Cocoli Herons, Great and Cattle Egrets and Striated Heron.

We continue on our way and the crew are kind enough to bring breakfast up to the top deck, so we can enjoy birding as we eat breakfast... which is not always easy as you try to eat with one hand scanning with bins with the other! A flock of Golden-winged Parakeets fly over. In the tree top Roy is pleased to spot a couple

of Orange-cheeked Parrots - really gorgeous birds. A Muscovy Duck is swimming on the river and on a tree top we find a very smart looking Black Caracara. A few Fork-tailed Flycatchers fly through and we get a brief view of a Sungrebe before it vanishes under the overhanging vegetation.

After breakfast we head out on the canoes. It is really beautiful as we explore amongst the trees standing in the water and also various channels. There are lots of Brown-chested Martins, Southern Rough-winged Swallow and White-winged Swallow in the treetops and also regular sightings of Swallow-winged Puffbirds. In a stand of trees stood in the water we spot a Tropical Screech-owl which flies almost immediately. We search for it and briefly get another flight view and think that is that, but we are amazed when Pedro relocates it further round - an astonishing bit of relocating.

High overhead we spot a Plumbeous Kite circling and then we realise there is a Swainson's Flycatcher calling in the bushes. It looks just like some of the other flycatchers we have seen, but we compare the calls with recordings and it is clearly this species. Also, a Brown-throated Parakeet flies in and out again after pausing for just a few moments.

We continue on our way, pausing to check some birds here and there but nothing new, then we get good views of a Great Black Hawk circling overhead. We spot several Fork-tailed Flycatchers then start going up one of the narrower channels. This proves quite quiet but beautiful, with lovely forest either side. There are lots of beautiful dragonflies including bright red ones, a brilliant green-striped one and tiny amber ones just an inch long. We spot a large lizard running on the shore then it stops dead and creeps very slowly onwards and we soon identify it as a Northern Caiman Lizard. At the far end of the channel, we enjoy very brief views of Brown Capuchins as they cross the channel and vanish into the trees in moments. Time is flying by now and we decide to head back for lunch.

We take a nice long break in the hottest part of the day, as it is both very hot and humid, then at around 4pm we head back out for another canoe ride. We spend the next couple of hours poking our noses into various little creeks and exploring and we find some nice birds indeed. As we go into the first channel, we spot a Squirrel Cuckoo and then get good views of a Green-and-rufous Kingfisher. We are doing really well for these. We also get good views of another Straight-billed Woodcreeper and Roy finds a roosting Band-tailed Nighthawk very close by. We spend a while trying to see a Cherrie's Antwren, spotting a hummingbird as we do so... which turns out to be an Olive-spotted Hummingbird. Eventually we get some nice views of the antwren, though it remains deep in the vegetation much of the time.

We hear a piculet calling and it then flies in - a lovely Golden-spangled Piculet all barred underneath. We find a few odds and ends we are very familiar with now, but in the next creek we are delighted to get some great views of the bizarre looking Long billed Woodcreeper. As we come back out a Green-backed Trogon shows

well and out final little exploration of the next creek produces a Short-crested Flycatcher and a distant White-throated Toucan on the skyline, before we head back for another delicious evening meal.

Day 11: We have a potentially very exciting start to the day today as we try to see one of them most tricky birds we might see on the holiday - Rufous Potoo. This is nothing like as easy as some of the other species from this family being in denser forest. The crew have constructed a plank bridge across to the land, then we head up a short slope and into the rainforest - in the dark at 4.30am!

The plan is to go so far into the forest - listen - hear one - Mojo to head in to find it then call us in and we head to see it... and the first part of the plan works well... up to the point where Mojo calls us to come and see it. Unfortunately, he had to walk so far into the forest we couldn't hear him whistle (if we ever do this again we will bring radios!!). It is likely we would have missed it anyway as after a few minutes he says a bat frightened it and it flew anyway. Instead, we stand in the forest in pitch dark listening to the sounds of the forest at night and wow - what an experience! When he reappears we follow him to the area he saw the bird and hear another one or the same calling some way away. We walk towards that one and reach the spot and Mojo puts his torch on it - but before any of us can see it, it vanishes into a hole! This seems unlikely so he starts to wonder if he had the right bird and perhaps he had found a small owl. Either way daylight is starting to come so any potoos will go to roost - so.... a little frustrated and disappointed, we head back to the boat for breakfast, but none of us would have missed the experience of the forest at night. Jean has enjoyed a lovely start to the day with dolphins, Black-fronted Nunbirds and a variety of other birds and beautiful sunrise.

After breakfast we head back out on the same trail and walk slowly through the forest. It seems very quiet but after a few minutes we hear a pigeon calling, which sounds to be Plumbeous Pigeon. It is high in the treetops and then it flies across and lands in the treetops above our heads. It is hard to make out much detail, but this is a very plain bird anyway, so we are not too worried.

We walk on and actually manage to see a Screaming Piha - a species we have been hearing here and there all holiday. There is also a very brief Golden-collared Woodpecker here. We walk on and hear a bird that sounds rather like one of the warbling antbirds. It hops around and we get lots of glimpses, which appears to be of a bird with a yellow belly? At first we think it must be one of the splits but as one or two of them have yellow undersides, but then we realise it has a yellow supercilium. That is a surprise and means it is not a warbling antbird at all but a Yellow-browed Antbird! Yay, a very nice find.

Our next bird proves tricky as it perches above our heads with just its backside visible, but it looks rather chunky and think it might be a puffbird of some sort. We try to get better views and eventually Roy finds a spot from which he can see a white neck, black chest band then brown and black mottling under that. This fits just one species - Brown-banded Puffbird - another good find.

The forest here is beautiful, with a lot of palms and plenty of creepers and trees of all kinds - large thick trunked ones, fallen branches everywhere, amazing fungi, interesting flowers and some beautiful leaves. Cicadas are a constant background noise. Birds seem very thin on the ground, but it is still a very enjoyable walk. We arrive at a more open area where we feel birds might be more easily spotted but it is still very quiet. Then suddenly Pedro is pointing excitedly - he has spotted some monkeys! They take quite a bit of seeing as they are distant at first and hard to see but you can see branches moving and then gradually they move to a slightly easier area, where we get better views. After seeing nothing for so long this is of course when another new bird appears - a Yellow-throated Woodpecker... where do you look!

Back at the boat we decide to cool off with a short swim, which is very pleasant and refreshing. Fortunately, while Jean finds walking difficult for her back, she can swim with no problem and whenever we swim from the boat she grabs the opportunity! We are rather thrilled when a small group of Tucuxi appear close by - one even jumping right out of the water. Jane N swims over and gets surprisingly close and they don't seem the least worried. How delightful to do such a thing!

The boat moves as we enjoy lunch and then continues travelling through the afternoon. Some chill out on deck, others in the lounge where it is cooler but some of us sit and watch the forest go by spotting a few nice birds we do so... there are lots of Swallow-winged Puffbirds on the treetops and Jean is on fine form spotting Spangled Cotinga, Black Caracara and various herons, egrets and vultures.

We make a stop to go ashore and have a look at some petroglyphs. We cruise by the rocks in the canoes looking at the rocks here, in which have engraved shapes. Some just look like patterns, some are suggestive of pregnant women, others may be monkeys, fish... or maybe a bow tie! It is surprisingly quiet for birds with just a small group of Shiny Cowbirds and a Common Ground Dove.

Afterwards we cruise back out of the Park spotting lots of parrots along the way. These are mainly Orange-winged and lots of Festive Parrots plus a few White-throated Toucans. There are lots of Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques and we spot two Olive Oropendola's amongst quite a lot of Cresteds. There are a few Short-tailed Swifts overhead and we spot a couple of Tucuxi as we go, then Carol spots a raptor that turns out to be a Laughing Falcon.

After our evening meal we head out for a night ride in the canoes. We soon start finding our first birds with both Ladder-tailed Nightjar and Band-tailed Nighthawk. We also find a very large Rusty Treefrog (also known as Goliath Frog). There is a Spiny Tree Rat sitting very still in the bushes These are almost impossible to identify to species, but Mo thinks perhaps Cayenne Spiny Tree rat due to the distribution. Mo spots an opossum and we head to the shore see if he can find it, but it gets away. Here we are amazed to see a Knife Fish - a very strange looking fish that is very long and thin with a single fin underneath that gives it the ability to move in a straight line forwards or backwards. We spot a Marine Toad (also

known as Cane Toad) which is famously a total nuisance in Australia but is perfectly ok here as it's part of the native fauna.

At one spot we sit very quietly listening for night birds. There is no sound other than frogs and insects and amazingly the sounds of nearby dolphins blowing as they surface. Wow! Much less welcome are the Night Wasps that are attracted to the lights, making scanning for wildlife with a touch more precarious than usual.

As we head back we are thrilled to spot an Agami Heron - one of the more spectacular herons with its incredibly long bill and lovely blue colour. It looks fantastic as it perches in the tree and stays there as we enjoy good views - what a great finish to the day!

Day 12: We start the day with a canoe ride and have really not gone far at all when we spot a Plumbeous Kite in the tree tops, plus a mixed flock of Pale-vented and Ruddy Pigeons. There is an Orange-winged Parrot in one tree and in another a lovely Gray-lined Hawk. We spot a Bat Falcon then a couple of woodpeckers in the dead trees - the first being Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, a new one and the second being Crimson-crested. We discover a fruiting tree. We have seen remarkably few and this one is clearly attracting birds. There seem to be lots of small birds flitting around eating the berries and some are clearly what we assume are female euphonias... then we realise some are Golden-bellied Euphonias both males and females with a little white on their faces. Over the next hour or so we spot a lots of species... Purple-throated Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Turquoise Tanagers, Clay-coloured Thrush, Silver-beaked Tanagers and in the background at least three White-breasted Toucans. We find a nice male White-bearded Manakin and there is a great buzz of excitement when Roy finds a Golden-headed Manakin - what a superb little bird. A Variable Chachalaca appears briefly though rather obscured and of course there are a few of the more common species we know already.

We also hear some calling Howler Monkeys, so we decide to pull ourselves away and see if we can locate them. On the way we spot more birds, including an amazing number of Swallow-winged Puffbirds, a stunning Spangled Cotinga in the tree tops and a flock of Caica Parrots flies through with obvious yellow napes.

We can't hear the howlers anymore, so we start exploring again and find Green Kingfisher and then get brief views of a Squirrel Monkey. It is very hard to see and we only get the briefest glimpses but Mo knows their calls and he says this is a Common Squirrel Monkey.

As we come out of the channel a King Vulture flies over, while also up above us are Greater Yellow-headed Vulture and Short-tailed Swifts. A couple of Green Ibis fly by then we pause to enjoy great views of Bronzy Jacamar. A couple of Scarlet Macaws fly over and shortly afterwards five Blue-and-yellow Macaws. We glimpse a Sungrebe again and still we struggle to get good views of one.

We make a stop at the far end of one of the channels so that people who wish to can have a little swim. It is a lovely spot and they really enjoy it - and meanwhile Mo goes in search of tiny fish! He says this is a good area for Cardinal Tetras and manages to catch a few which he shows us later... just delightful little things and real 'aquarium fish' with iridescent pale blue and red stripes.

On our way back we have a flock of White-eyed Parakeets fly into the trees in front of us. We pause to look and they all fly out again! We then make a stop to try for American Pygmy Kingfisher and almost straight away manage to find one that sits for long enough for us all to get a good view before darting away. As we pause to try and see another Sungrebe, with no luck, Joel catches a fabulous Peacock Bass - that's lunch sorted!

Back at the berry bush on the way back we add more birds to the growing list - with Yellow-crowned Manakin, Pied Puffbird overhead, a stunning Spangled Cotinga, Short-crested Flycatcher, Green Honeycreeper, Blue Dacnis again and Golden-sided Euphonia. Our final bird as we head back is a Black Caracara - a very black one with a bright red face. It has been a fantastic morning and we arrive back with time for a short break, before another delicious lunch.

After lunch we have a nice break as we change the position of the boat, before we head a shore in search of Capuchinbird. It is an interesting route in, you could say, but we weren't stuck on a log for long and neither between the two small trees and at other times rocking the boat from side to side soon got us moving again... and as long as you spot the twigs coming you can just break them off before they hit you or duck!

We glimpse a Sungrebe as we head to shore and also a Black-chinned Antbird, then we walk up the slope a short distance, scanning the trees all around. The problem we face is that this is not breeding time for Capuchinbird which makes the chances of finding them so much harder. No birds fly in and after walking around a little and trying a few spots we finally have to concede that we aren't going to see one.

As we get back to the canoes we spot a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper which looks tiny after some of the other species we have seen, then we battle our way back out pausing to enjoy fabulous views of American Pygmy Kingfisher.

We pass a couple of Greater Anis as we continue, then come out into a wider area of water where we spot a small group of Guianan Red Howler Monkeys sat quietly up in the treetops. They really are very red too! We spot another Green-backed Trogon, hearing many Screaming Pihás calling, spot a few Festive Parrots and pass both Large-billed and Yellow-billed Tern sat side by side.

As we explore the next little creek Roy scans for monkeys or birds below the canopy and suddenly his entire view is Harpy Eagle!!!!!! Who would have thought it possible to see two (or three if you count the baby one) Harpy Eagles in one trip... even the crew have not seen one for three years or more! For a second

he is lost for words, then calls to everyone to point out what is there but people look sceptical... "It really is!!" he says.

We watch this enormous bird look round and bob its head as if looking for prey. It looks so powerful it is hard to put into words just what an impression this bird makes with its massive talons and huge bill and piercing eyes full of menace. It looks brutal – you would not want to be a monkey that looks over its shoulder to see that coming! We stare in wonder for a minute or two then it leans forwards and launches off the branch flying across above us and vanishes into the trees - wow!!

How do you follow that. We feel in shock but elated then Mo says there is a Diving Lizard on the tree trunk and it feels kind of amusing to go and look at this after such a moment.

We start back towards our boat spotting Streaked Flycatcher, a distant Paradise Jacamar, fly-over Golden-winged Parakeet, Olive Oropendolas flying over and a slim grey bird in a tree we never manage to identify!

We notice a fisherman in a small canoe coming out of the low bushes and head over to see what he has caught. He has several fish of different sorts and a terrapin! This is the first terrapin we have seen on the entire trip which seems very surprising. Mo offers him money to buy several fish off him for our next meal but releases one fish back in the water. He explains that it is about a foot long or less and may grow to around two meters – so better to let it have a life. We take the terrapin, a Yellow-spotted Side-neck Turtle, back to the ship for people to see before we release that too- it has bright yellow spots on its head and is also called a Yellow-spotted Amazonian River Turtle depending on your book.

After our evening meal we decide to have one final night ride in the canoes. We head out into the dark and soon find our first eyeshine... an Amazon Tree Boa and a much better view than the previous one. One of the boats gets a brief view of a Great Potoo, while the other finds a Bamboo Rat that vanishes far too quickly. We are amazed to find a small group of Brown Capuchins high in some palms and then a single Squirrel Monkey – amazing to see monkeys at night when they seem so hard to find in daylight. There are Boat-billed Herons and we also see a few more Night Wasps which are not as much fun!

Day 13: After coffee we stay on the boat and cruise down the river, relaxing on the top deck to watch the forest passing by and see what we can spot. In the early morning light we see several Tucuxi all around us. It is so peaceful and calm it is just wonderful and we can hear the dolphins blowing as we drift downstream. They seem to be impossible to photograph being so completely unpredictable where they will surface next.

We are enjoying the quiet and scanning the treetops when a Muscovy Duck flies by and we spot Olive Oropendolas nest building the trees above us. Festive Parrots adorn the trees and then we hear what sounds almost like a foghorn! At first

we wonder if it is a curassow then Mo tells us this is an Amazonian Umbrellabird. Wow! Who'd have thought it. A few minutes later suddenly something reminiscent of a Black Woodpecker flies across the channel – those of us quick off the mark even manage to see the crest! It lands briefly in the treetops before flying on further away but after a while we spot a second. This too proves a tad elusive, but we hear and see more and it is our fourth bird that finally lands somewhere that we can actually see it. What a strange looking bird it is - all black with this big forward leaning crest and pale eye. This is such an iconic bird of the Amazon and we are delighted!

Mo has been whistling Ringed Woodpecker call since the start of the trip and now at last it pays off when one flies right over the boat and showing briefly. We spot Black-fronted Nunbirds, Short-tailed and Grey-rumped Swifts and a couple of Orange-fronted Yellow Finch – and yet more dolphins!

As we continue Mo suddenly hears a call from a Wire-tailed Manakin and we decide to go ashore and see if we can see them. It doesn't take long to make a landing and we walk the short distance to where we heard it calling and sure enough - in less than a minute - he has found one. Soon we are enjoying superb views of this delightful bird – all bright red and yellow and with the weird thin feather shafts sticking out the end of its tail like a brush.

As we are looking at these a Leaden Antwren appears too and there is a strange moment when suddenly we are surrounded by dozens of small wasps. Mo tells us all to keep totally still and quiet telling us they are just passing through! It feels slightly nerve-wracking, but we stand in silence as they fly through, landing here and there and then they are all gone! A Blue-tailed Emerald hummingbird happens to choose this moment to appear and some people were so determined not to move they missed it!

Heading back towards the boat we make a stop to look at a perched up Dusky Parrot - at last one that is landed long enough to see properly. As we watch, a Bare-necked Fruitcrow flies over! Back at the ship there are more dolphins and Jean tells us she has been enjoying watching them for more than an hour with both species around the boat.

We now set off towards Manaus and most of the rest of the day we are simply cruising the main river- we spot more dolphins, but a lot of people simply relax on deck or chill out in their cabins or have a snooze. We pause for a beautiful large, pink-flowered orchid (a Violet Cattleya) but don't see much else of note.

We finally arrive at a sand bar emerging from the reducing waters surrounded by Amazonian trees and it is amazing how close to the shore we can get. We enjoy our last swim in the Amazon which is just perfect, even sitting on sunken trees and drifting with the current before swimming back to the boat. In the background the guys are lowering chairs, tables and the barbecue and even sweeping the beach for us! Before we get changed after our swim Mo brings out the turtle for release.

We place it on the sand and it stays there for a while but when we move it closer to the water's edge it instantly senses the chance to go and positively dashes into the water - it is nice to see.

As the light fades we are surprised when a Blackish Nightjar flies out of the trees and lands briefly on the beach before flying away. Then the barbecue is lit and we enjoy a lovely final evening with music – a little dancing on the sand and truly delicious food – the fish this evening was caught earlier today and is big enough to feed everyone! It is just the most wonderful way to finish the trip as we relax and chat and laugh and the light fades.

Day 14: We wake up at Manaus... and suddenly it really feels like it is over. It has been a truly magical trip with so many highlights and wonderful moments. After breakfast we do the final checklist and also do our traditional round up and it is just a delight to hear what species, places and wonderful moments people enjoyed. We start with species... and someone starts us off by asking if anyone has not chosen Cock-of-the-Rock or Harpy Eagle – and there is only person not choosing Harpy Eagle! Both of these species are so massive in status they deserve so many votes of course but to see two Harpy Eagles in one trip is simply astounding! (Three even - though one was just a little one). We chat about these two species and how wonderful our sightings were, reliving the moments, then ask what else people have chosen.

As we go round the group the list of species that people loved seeing grows rapidly. Kingfishers, nighthawks and antbirds all get a mention and several cotingas including the Umbrellabird, Spangled, Purple-breasted and Red Guianan Cotinga (as well as the Cock-of-the-Rock of course!) Spectacled Owl, Large-billed Tern, Tree Boa and various bats score too and Mo chooses Tiny Hawk as one of his species as he sees them so rarely. Jayne of course chooses some furry things including sloths which was what she was very keen to see from the start! Wire-tailed Manakin scores five votes which brings it in third place and both dolphin species score well with Pink River Dolphin scoring three votes... but more to come of them later.

Favourite places are quite tricky as the names of most places are so hard to remember... but various beautiful channels we visited - especially those with a beautiful atmosphere and trees standing in water are popular. Where the two waters meet was also worthy of a mention as well as the beautiful sandy island. Two people choose the boat itself – with one of those specifically mentioning the upper deck. It has been so relaxing up there cruising along and chilling out or birdwatching as the world goes by.

Magic moments are always interesting to hear about and Mojo starts us off with a mention of the fruiting tree, with so many birds coming in one after another. The Pink River Dolphins has to be right up there though - what an astonishing experience! This might have scored even higher had it not been for those amazing Harpy Eagles that were also highlights for several people. Then there were the night outings by boat and standing in the pitch dark in the forest before dawn and both barbecues even get a mention. So many amazing experiences and we all agree that

the sheer variety of places and experiences and wildlife has been a huge factor in making the trip so wonderful. Then add to that the wonderful food and the chance to go swimming so often and what a trip it has been. We add a huge thank you to Miguel and Luis and to Mo for everything they have done - they have all been superb and such fun and made everything work so well. What a trip it has been.

After that Luis has to leave early for his flight and we all say goodbye and wish him well, then we have plenty of time to pack and get ourselves organised before we say our fond farewells to the crew and to Mo. Miguel is on our flight to Sao Paulo and comes with us to the airport for the flight, then we say goodbye to him too and head to our onward, overnight flight home.

BIRDS

Anhinga
Neotropic Cormorant
Buff-necked Ibis
Green Ibis
Black-crowned Night Heron
Boat-billed Heron
Striated Heron
Rufescent Tiger Heron
Snowy Egret
Great Egret
Western Cattle Egret
Capped Heron
Cocoi Heron
Agami Heron
Black-bellied Whistling Duck
Muscovy Duck
Brazilian Teal
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture
Greater Yellow-headed Vulture
King Vulture
Osprey
Snail Kite
Double-toothed Kite
Plumbeous Kite
Gray-bellied Hawk
Tiny Hawk
Slate-colored Hawk
Gray-lined Hawk
Roadside Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Great Black Hawk
Black-collared Hawk
Harpy Eagle
Orange-breasted Falcon
Bat Falcon
Laughing Falcon
Black Caracara
Crested Caracara
Yellow-headed Caracara
Limpkin
Hoatzin
Variable Chachalaca
Gray-cowled Wood-Rail
Wattled Jacana
Purple Gallinule
Sunbittern
Sungrebe
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Pied Plover
Southern Lapwing
Collared Plover
White-rumped Sandpiper
Large-billed Tern
Black Skimmer
Yellow-billed Tern
Common Ground-Dove
Ruddy Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Feral Pigeon
Pale-vented Pigeon
Plumbeous Pigeon
Ruddy Pigeon
Red-bellied Macaw
Blue-and-Yellow Macaw
Scarlet Macaw
White-eyed Parakeet
Brown-throated Parakeet
White-winged Parakeet
Golden-winged Parakeet
Tui Parakeet
Orange-winged Amazon
Festive Amazon
Dusky Parrot
Caica Parrot
Orange-cheeked Parrot
Blue-headed Parrot
Short-tailed Parrot
Greater Ani
Smooth-billed Ani
Striped Cuckoo
Little Cuckoo
Squirrel Cuckoo
Tropical Screech-Owl
Amazonian Pygmy Owl
Spectacled Owl
Great Potoo
Ladder-tailed Nightjar
Sand-colored Nighthawk
Nacunda Nighthawk
Rufous Nightjar
Band-tailed Nighthawk
Blackish Nightjar
Band-rumped Swift
Grey-rumped Swift
Short-tailed Swift
Fork-tailed Palm Swift
Green-throated Mango
White-necked Jacobin
Glittering-throated Emerald
Blue-tailed Emerald
Olive-spotted Hummingbird
Green-backed Trogon
Ringed Kingfisher
Green-and-rufous Kingfisher
Amazon Kingfisher
American Pygmy Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Paradise Jacamar
Bronzy Jacamar
Green-tailed Jacamar
Black-spotted Barbet
Swallow-winged Puffbird
Black-fronted Nunbird
Black Nunbird
White-fronted Nunbird
Guianan Puffbird
Brown-banded Puffbird
Pied Puffbird
Spotted Puffbird
Black-necked Aracari
Channel-billed Toucan
White-throated Toucan
Golden-spangled Piculet
Yellow-throated Woodpecker
Little Woodpecker
Golden-collared Woodpecker
Spot-breasted Woodpecker
Waved Woodpecker
Ringed Woodpecker
Yellow-tufted Woodpecker
Lineated Woodpecker
Crimson-crested Woodpecker
Olivaceous Woodcreeper
Wedge-billed Woodcreeper
Long-billed Woodcreeper
Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper
Red-billed Woodcreeper
Amazonian Barred Woodcreeper
Straight-billed Woodcreeper
Zimmer's Woodcreeper
Striped Woodcreeper
Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper
Lesser Homero
Wing-banded Homero
Dark-breasted Spinetail
White-bellied Spinetail
Yellow-chinned Spinetail
Red-and-white Spinetail
Rusty-backed Spinetail
Parker's Spinetail
Black-crested Antshrike
Glossy Antshrike
Barred Antshrike
Blackish-gray Antshrike
Klage's Antwren
Cherrie's Antwren
Leaden Antwren
Ash-breasted Antbird
Yellow-browed Antbird
Black-chinned Antbird
Guianan Warbling Antbird
Spangled Cotinga
Purple-breasted Cotinga
Guianan Cock of the Rock
Guianan Red Cotinga
Amazonian Umbrellabird
Bare-necked Fruitcrow
Screaming Piha
Wire-tailed Manakin
Golden-headed Manakin
White-bearded Manakin
Yellow crowned Manakin
Varzea Schiffornis
Black-tailed Tyrta
Cinereous Becard
Chestnut-crowned Becard
Forest Elaenia
Amazonian Elaenia
Yellow-crowned Elaenia
Yellow-bellied Elaenia
River Tyrannulet
Amazonian Tyrannulet
Snethlage's Tody-Tyrant
Spotted Tody Flycatcher
Yellow-olive Flycatcher
Riverside Tyrant
White-headed Marsh Tyrant
Rusty-margined Flycatcher
Lesser Kiskadee
Great Kiskadee
Yellow-throated Flycatcher
Streaked Flycatcher
Variegated Flycatcher
Crowned Slaty Flycatcher
White-throated Kingbird
Tropical Kingbird
Fork-tailed Flycatcher
Swainson's Flycatcher
Short-crested Flycatcher
Bright-rumped Attila
Cinnamon Attila
Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Chivi Vireo
Gray-chested Greenlet
Brown-headed Greenlet
White-winged Swallow
Barn Swallow
Gray-breasted Martin
Southern Martin
Brown-chested Martin
Southern Rough-winged Swallow

Black-capped Donacobius
Coraya Wren
Buff-breasted Wren
House Wren
Pale-breasted Thrush
Black-billed Thrush
Cocoa Thrush
Crested Oropendola
Olive Oropendola
Red-rumped Cacique
Yellow-rumped Cacique
Velvet-fronted Grackle
Shiny Cowbird
Giant Cowbird
Red-breasted Meadowlark
Orange-backed Troupial
Epaulet Oriole
Oriole Blackbird
Hooded Tanager
Yellow-backed Tanager
Silver-beaked Tanager
Blue-gray Tanager
Palm Tanager
Swallow Tanager
Turquoise Tanager
Red-capped Cardinal
Bananaquit
Yellow-green Grosbeak
Grayish Saltator
Buff-throated Saltator
Yellow-bellied Dacnis
Blue Dacnis
Green Honeycreeper
Short-billed Honeycreeper
Red-legged Honeycreeper
Purple-throated Euphonia
White-lored Euphonia
Golden-sided Euphonia
Pearly-breasted Conebill
Orange-fronted Yellow Finch
Wing-barred Seedeater
Lined Seedeater
Yellow-bellied Seedeater
Chestnut-bellied Seedeater
Blue-black Grassquit
Yellow-browed Sparrow
262 species

MAMMALS

Northern Black-eared Opossum
Brown Four-eyed Opossum
Guianan Red Howler Monkey
Brown Capuchin Monkey
Squirrel Monkey
Humboldt's Squirrel Monkey
Guianan Bearded Saki
Pied Tamarin
Spix's Night Monkey
Greater Fishing Bat
Proboscis Bat
Northern Ghost Bat
Sac-winged Bat sp
Pink River Dolphin
Tucuxi (Grey River Dolphin)
Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth
Red-nosed Tree-rat
Amazon Bamboo Rat
Rio Negro Brush-tailed Rat
(Cayenne?) Spiny Tree Rat

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Spectacled Caiman
Black Caiman
Green Iguana
Northern Caiman Lizard
Tropical House Gecko
Giant Ameiva
Forest Whiptail
Rainbow Whiptail
Diving Lizard
Amazon Tree Boa
Yellow-headed Sideneck
Cane Toad
Manaus Tree Toad
Rusty Tree Frog
Chaco Tree Frog

OTHER THINGS

Blue Morpho butterfly – various spp
Owl Butterfly
Cracker Butterfly sp
Heloiconia Butterfly – various spp
Caterpillar of Pseudosphynx tetrio
Firefly
Lantern bug
Carpenter Bee sp
A variety of wasps incl Night Wasp
Some stunning dragonflies
Various orchids and bromeliads
Piranhas at least four types (caught)
Arapaima (captive)
Knife Fish
Cardinal Tetras
...and lots lots more!