

**GUYANA: A SPECIAL TOUR SUPPORTING
THE RED SISKIN INITIATIVE
October 23–31, 2022**

By David Ascanio

Photo album:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720303626316>

Ebird Trip Report:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/84392>

Our charter flight to the Rupununi landed at the airstrip next to Kaieteur Falls. From this viewpoint, we admired the Potaro River waters dropping massively while vocal swifts swirled in the mist and gained elevation to gather in huge thermals. Contiguous to the falls, magnificent, enormous bromeliads were home to the diminutive and gorgeous Golden Tree Frog. Equally fascinating, the forest provided views of the bizarre and astonishing Guianan Cock-of-the-rock. Welcome to Guyana!



Black-crested Antshrike, female. *Sakesphorus canadensis*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

Upon landing at Rock View Village, we started a journey that would give us the opportunity and the privilege to visit various locations of the northern and southern Rupununi, a vast grassland located in southern Guyana. A stop in a patch of riverine forest allowed us to enjoy views of a pair of Black-crested Antshrikes, a subspecies that is so well-ornated! Later, we made stops at ponds along the road, which provided our first views of Jabiru (Stork), Cocoi Heron, Aplomado Falcon, and Pearl Kite. After an afternoon packed with views of grassland and wetland birds, we arrived for dinner at Manari Lodge and got ready for our next full day in Karasabai, a Makushi village that hosts one of the most wonderful birds of the Neotropics, the Sun Parakeet. The survival of this parakeet in Guyana is due to the efforts of a Makushi community: Karasabai. Once widespread in the forested foothills of the Southern Pacaraima Mountains, it faced intensive hunting because of its beautiful plumage. Today, only pockets of its original distribution remain in Guyana and northern Brazil.



White-tailed Hawk. *Geranoaetus albicaudatus*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

With hopes to see this spectacular parakeet, we left Manari Lodge before dawn and enjoyed a breakfast in the field, serenaded by Purple Gallinules and Red-breasted Meadowlarks while egrets, herons, and a White-tailed Hawk performed well for us. Upon meeting Uncle Ali, we started our search. As we explored the forested slopes, we added Northern Mouse-colored Tyrannulet (this split was uploaded on the eBird database literally this day!), Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Pale-eyed Pygmy-Tyrant, and Tropical Gnatcatcher to our checklist. There was a

Rufous-browed Peppershrike singing constantly, a Chivi Vireo exploring the leaf litter in the *Curatella*, and a Yellow Oriole showing us its wonderful yellow plumage. By midmorning we had enjoyed a wealth of birds, but no Sun Parakeet had been reported.



Sun Parakeet. *Aratinga solstitialis*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

As the day warmed up, we explored other areas along the road and were soon given a gift when six Sun Parakeets were observed flying over our heads. What a wonderful moment! We celebrated the privilege to see one of the rarest and most difficult-to-see Psittacids in the world but were determined to find them perched. We walked stretches of the road, checked fruiting trees, and listened intently in search of the parakeets. We walked the same road two and even three times without luck. But, as the old saying goes, *good luck is about trying continuously*. Returning down the hill, we were about to give up. It was getting too hot. But Uncle Ali asked us to stop for a last check in a tree where he had seen the parakeets recently. He went into a trail and returned running. He had found them! We assembled and walked in quietly, and there they were, five wonderful individuals preening, calling, and doing what they do best: enjoying freedom in their natural habitat. I cannot describe the feeling of happiness and completeness when seeing a threatened species flying in freedom. We celebrated the finding of the parakeet with a lunch in the community and rounded-up a wonderful day with exploration in a wetland, where we nailed a little-known bird species, the Crested Doradito.

After a great deal of exploration and birding in the Northern Rupununi, we started our drive to the wildest part of Guyana, the Southern Rupununi. We took the dirt road around the wonderful Kanuku Mountains and headed south. The landscape was simply breathtaking.



Crested Doradito. *Pseudocolaptes sclateri*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

We drove across stands of Moriche Palms and extensive *Curatella* scrub, plus savannas, gallery forest, and endless grasslands. At scattered ponds we enjoyed views of Masked Duck and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. At every stop we were fascinated with the scenery and the wonderful mountains in the background. Eventually, we made it into a Rupununi shangri-la, the Wichabai Ranch. After a delicious meal we explored the patch of secondary growth edging the forest, getting cool views of some tyrant-flycatchers, the resident Chivi Vireo, and the vocal Flavescent Warbler (a resident species).

The power of nature was experienced in the heat, the humidity, the beauty, and a heavy and thunderous storm that cleared the skies for an impressive night, accompanied by a Tropical Screech-Owl singing, a White-tailed Nightjar foraging, and the whole Milky Way illuminating the ceiling over our heads. It was simply magical.

The South Rupununi has been somehow neglected by the birding community until recently, when a Smithsonian Institute team discovered a colony of Red Siskins there. Dr. Mike Braun played a key role in the discovery and also built community awareness around this wonderful species. Nowadays, there is an incredible corp of volunteer rangers who protect this species and its habitats under the leadership of the South Rupununi Conservation Society (SRCS). For that,

we owe a big thank you to the Guyanese leaders who have put together creativity and effort to deal with the challenges and limitations to protecting wildlife with limited resources and under rough conditions.



The SRCS team took us birding to several areas, and the key one was an exploration of the slopes of the Kanuku Mountains. Here, again, we fell in love with the landscape and walked among savannas and grasslands to arrive at a location where they have been tracking Red Siskins—and we got them! Seeing this species that almost went extinct was not only a privilege but allowed us to learn about the challenges facing its protection.

Heading back to Lethem to spend a full day near the border of Brazil was not a farewell to the South Rupununi but a commitment that we are now ambassadors in communicating the tremendous effort that everyone there is putting forth to preserve the siskin, Giant Anteater, River Turtles, and much more.

A final morning of birding in the gallery forest of the Ireng River helped us to understand bird distribution in these vast savannas and, apart of the amazing views of Hoary-throated Spinetail, Mato Grosso Antbird, and Rufous-tailed Jacamar (restricted distribution here), we also nailed the diminutive and cute Bearded Tachuri, Grassland Yellow-Finch, White-throated Kingbird, Pectoral Sandpiper (a boreal migrant!), and Grassland Sparrow. In closing the morning, and before the drive back to Lethem for the flight back to Georgetown, I stood on top of a hill, looked around (rotating 360 degrees), and took a last breath of this land that challenges me as a leader and also made me fall in love with it. Until the next year, Rupununi!



Pectoral Sandpiper. *Calidris melanotos*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to have worked with my colleagues Mike Braun and Ron Allicock in wonderful Guyana, and an honor to be your VENT leader. Please consider joining me in other destinations equally contrasting and hosting a unique flora and fauna. Some of these tours and cruises are:

The Amazon River Cruise

Photo album (2022 cruise):

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72177720296806653>

Video (2016 cruise):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b3xYG0cPSo>

Costa Rica: A Relaxed & Easy Tour

Photo album (2021 tour):

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/albums/72157720089099045>

Video (2015 tour):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzgD6NfVNSE>

Cuba: Supporting the Cuban people while birding this amazing island.

Photo álbum (2022 tour):

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/sets/72157643519265893/>

Video (2015 tour):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIRHvB1jzdl>



Burrowing Owl. *Athene cunicularia*. Photo: D. Ascanio.

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MAP OF LOCATIONS



Source: Google Maps

1. Georgetown
2. Mahaica River
3. Kaieteur Falls
4. Rock View Lodge
5. Karasabai
6. Lethem
7. Wichabai

ITINERARY:

- 23 October 2022. Arrival to Georgetown.
- 24 October 2022. Georgetown botanical gardens, Hope Channel, Mahaica River.
- 25 October 2022. Kaieteur Falls, Rock View Lodge.
- 26 October 2022. Karasabai.
- 27 October 2022. Drive to Lethem. South Rupununi. Wichabai.
- 28 October 2022. Iqutau. South Rupununi savanna.
- 29 October 2022. Wichabai. Drive to Manari Ranch.
- 30 October 2022. Manari Ranch, Ireng River. Flight to Georgetown.
- 31 October 2022. Departure.

KEY:

GE: Georgetown and coastal areas including Mahaica River.

KF: Kaieteur Falls.

NR: North Rupununi (north of the Kanuku Mountains).

SR: South Rupununi (south of the Kanuku Mountains).

BIRDS:

Tinamous / Tinamidae

Undulated Tinamou - *Crypturellus undulates*. Heard only, SR.

Ducks, Geese & Waterfowl / Anatidae

White-faced Whistling-Duck - *Dendrocygna viduata*. SR.

Muscovy Duck - *Cairina moschata*. SR.

Brazilian Teal - *Amazonetta brasiliensis*. SR.

New World Quail / Odontophoridae

Crested Bobwhite - *Colinus cristatus*. NR.

Pigeons & Doves / Columbidae

Pale-vented Pigeon - *Patagioenas cayennensis*. NR, SR.

Common Ground Dove - *Columbina passerina*. NR, SR.

Plain-breasted Ground Dove - *Columbina minuta*. NR, SR.

Ruddy Ground Dove - *Columbina talpacoti*. NR, SR.

White-tipped Dove - *Leptotila verreauxi*. NR, SR.

Eared Dove - *Zenaida auriculata*. NR, SR.

Cuckoos / Cuculidae

Smooth-billed Ani - *Crotophaga ani*. NR, SR.

Nightjars & Allies / Caprimulgidae

Nacunda Nighthawk. *Chordeiles nacunda*. SR.

Least Nighthawk - *Chordeiles pusillus*. SR.

Swifts / Apodidae

Tepui Swift - *Streptoprocne phelpsi*. SR.

White-collared Swift - *Streptoprocne zonaris*. NR, SR.

Fork-tailed Palm-Swift - *Tachornis squamata*. NR, SR.

Hummingbirds / Trochilidae

Ruby-topaz Hummingbird - *Chrysolampis mosquitus*. SR.

Blue-tailed Emerald - *Chlorostilbon mellisugus*. SR.

Plain-bellied Emerald - *Amazilia leucogaster*. GE.

Glittering-throated Emerald - *Amazilia fimbriata*. NR, SR.

Hoatzin / Opisthocomidae

Hoatzin - *Opisthocomus hoazin*. GE.

Rails, Gallinules & Coots / Rallidae

Purple Gallinule - *Porphyrio martinica*. NR.

Finfoots / Heliornithidae

Sungrebe - *Heliornis fulica*. NR.

Limpkin / Aramidae

Limpkin - *Aramus guarauna*. NR, SR.

Thick-knees / Burhinidae

Double-striped Thick-knee - *Burhinus bistriatus*. NR.

Plovers & Lapwings / Charadriidae

Pied Lapwing - *Vanellus cayanus*. NR, SR.

Southern Lapwing - *Vanellus chilensis*. NR, SR.

Jacanas / Jacanidae

Wattled Jacana - *Jacana jacana*. NR, SR.

Snipes & Sandpipers / Scolopacidae

Spotted Sandpiper - *Actitis macularius*. NR, SR.

Solitary Sandpiper - *Tringa solitaria*. NR, SR.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers / Laridae

Large-billed Tern - *Phaetusa simplex*. NR, SR.

Storks / Ciconiidae

Maguari Stork - *Ciconia maguari*. NR.

Jabiru - *Jabiru mycteria*. NR, SR.

Frigatebirds / Fregatidae

Magnificent Frigatebird - *Fregata magnificens*. GE.

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns / Ardeidae

Pinnated Bittern - *Botaurus pinnatus*. SR.

Cocoi Heron - *Ardea cocoi*. NR, SR.

Great Egret - *Ardea alba*. NR, SR.

Little Blue Heron - *Egretta caerulea*. NR.

Tricolored Heron - *Egretta tricolor*. GE.

Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*. NR, SR.

Striated Heron - *Butorides striata*. NR, SR.

Capped Heron - *Pilherodius pileatus*. NR, SR.

Black-crowned Night-Heron - *Nycticorax nycticorax*. NR.

Ibises & Spoonbills / Threskiornithidae

Scarlet Ibis - *Eudocimus ruber*. GE.

Sharp-tailed Ibis - *Cercibis oxycerca*. SR.

Buff-necked Ibis - *Theristicus caudatus*. NR, SR.

New World Vultures / Cathartidae

Black Vulture - *Coragyps atratus*. NR, SR.

Turkey Vulture - *Cathartes aura*. NR, SR.

Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture - *Cathartes burrovianus*. NR, SR.

Osprey / Pandionidae

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*. NR, SR.

Hawks, Eagles & Kites / Accipitridae

White-tailed Kite - *Elanus leucurus*. SR.

Snail Kite - *Rostrhamus sociabilis*. NR, SR.

Crane Hawk - *Geranospiza caerulescens*. SR.

Rufous Crab Hawk - *Buteogallus aequinoctialis*. GE.

Savanna Hawk - *Buteogallus meridionalis*. NR, SR.

Great Black Hawk - *Buteogallus urubitinga*. NR, SR.

Roadside Hawk - *Rupornis magnirostris*. NR, SR.

White-tailed Hawk - *Geranoaetus albicaudatus*. SR.

Gray-lined Hawk - *Buteo nitidus*. NR, SR.

Zone-tailed Hawk - *Buteo albonotatus*. SR.

Owls / Strigidae

Tropical Screech-Owl - *Megascops choliba*. NR.

Spectacled Owl - *Pulsatrix perspicillata*. Heard only, NR.

Great Horned Owl - *Bubo virginianus*. SR.

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl - *Glaucidium brasilianum*. NR, SR.

Kingfishers / Alcedinidae

Ringed Kingfisher - *Megaceryle torquata*. NR, SR.

Amazon Kingfisher - *Chloroceryle amazona*. NR, SR.

Green Kingfisher - *Chloroceryle americana*. SR.

Jacamars / Galbulidae

Rufous-tailed Jacamar - *Galbula ruficauda*. SR.

Toucans, Toucanets & Aracaris / Ramphastidae

Toco Toucan - *Ramphastos toco*. NR.

Piculets & Woodpeckers / Picidae

White-bellied Piculet - *Picumnus spilogaster*. SR.

White-barred Piculet - *Picumnus cirratus*. SR.

Blood-colored Woodpecker - *Dryobates sanguineus*. GE.

Little Woodpecker - *Dryobates passerines*. SR.

Lineated Woodpecker - *Dryocopus lineatus*. SR.

Falcons & Caracaras / Falconidae

Black Caracara - *Daptrius ater*. SR.

Crested Caracara - *Caracara cheriway*. NR, SR.

Yellow-headed Caracara - *Milvago chimachima*. NR, SR.

Laughing Falcon - *Herpetotheres cachinnans*. SR.

American Kestrel - *Falco sparverius*. NR, SR.

Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus*. SR.

New World & African Parrots / Psittacidae

Yellow-crowned Parrot - *Amazona ochrocephala*. NR, SR.
Orange-winged Parrot - *Amazona amazonica*. NR, SR.
Green-rumped Parrotlet - *Forpus passerinus*. SR.
Brown-throated Parakeet - *Eupsittula pertinax*. NR, SR.
Sun Parakeet - *Aratinga solstitialis*. NR.
Red-bellied Macaw - *Orthopsittaca manilatus*. NR.
Red-shouldered Macaw - *Diopsittaca nobilis*. SR.

Typical Antbirds / Thamnophilidae

Black-crested Antshrike - *Sakesphorus canadensis*. SR.
Barred Antshrike - *Thamnophilus doliatus*. SR.
White-fringed Antwren - *Formicivora grisea*. SR.

Ovenbirds & Woodcreepers / Furnariidae

Straight-billed Woodcreeper - *Dendroplex picus*. SR.
Pale-legged Hornero - *Furnarius leucopus*. SR.
Pale-breasted Spinetail - *Synallaxis albescens*. NR, SR.
Hoary-throated Spinetail - *Synallaxis kollari*. NR.

Manakins / Pipridae

Pale-bellied Tyrant-Manakin - *Neopelma pallescens*. SR.
Blue-backed Manakin - *Chiroxiphia pareola*. Heard only, SR.

Tytiras & Allies / Tyriridae

Black-tailed Tityra - *Tityra cayana*. SR.
White-winged Becard - *Pachyramphus polychopterus*. SR.

Tyrant Flycatchers / Tyrannidae

Mouse-colored Tyrannulet - *Phaeomyias murina*. SR.
Bearded Tachuri - *Polystictus pectoralis*. SR.
Forest Elaenia - *Myiopagis gaimardii*. NR, SR.
Greenish Elaenia - *Myiopagis viridicata*. NR.
Yellow-bellied Elaenia - *Elaenia flavogaster*. NR.
Lesser Elaenia - *Elaenia chiriquensis*. NR.
Pale-tipped Tyrannulet - *Inezia caudata*. NR.
Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher – *Poecilotriccus sylvia*. NR.
Common Tody-Flycatcher – *Todirostrum cinereum*. NR.
Yellow-olive Flycatcher – *Tolmomyias sulphurescens*. SR.
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher – *Tolmomyias flaviventris*. SR.
Vermilion Flycatcher - *Pyrocephalus rubinus*. SR.
Pied Water-Tyrant - *Fluvicola pica*. SR.
White-headed Marsh Tyrant - *Arundinicola leucocephala*. SR.
Bright-rumped Attila - *Attila spadiceus*. Heard only, SR.
Short-crested Flycatcher - *Myiarchus ferox*. NR, SR.
Brown-crested Flycatcher - *Myiarchus tyrannulus*. SR.
Great Kiskadee - *Pitangus sulphuratus*. NR, SR.
Boat-billed Flycatcher - *Megarynchus pitangua*. NR, SR.
White-throated Kingbird - *Tyrannus albogularis*. SR.
Tropical Kingbird - *Tyrannus melancholicus*. NR, SR.
Fork-tailed Flycatcher - *Tyrannus savanna*. SR.

Peppershrikes & Vireos / Vireonidae

Rufous-browed Peppershrike - *Cyclarhis gujanensis*. SR.

Lemon-chested Greenlet - *Hylophilus thoracicus*. SR.

Chivi Vireo - *Vireo chivi*. SR.

Crows, Jays & Magpies / Corvidae

Cayenne Jay - *Cyanocorax cayanus*. NR.

Donacobius / Donacobiidae

Black-capped Donacobius - *Donacobius atricapilla*. GE.

Swallows / Hirundinidae

Southern Rough-winged Swallow - *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*. NR, SR.

Gray-breasted Martin - *Progne chalybea*. NR, SR.

White-winged Swallow - *Tachycineta albiventer*. NR, SR.

Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*. NR, SR.

Gnatcatchers & Gnatwrens / Polioptilidae

Tropical Gnatcatcher - *Polioptila plumbea*. SR.

Wrens / Troglodytidae

House Wren - *Troglodytes aedon*. NR, SR.

Bicolored Wren - *Campylorhynchus griseus*. NR, SR.

Buff-breasted Wren - *Cantorchilus leucotis*. SR.

Mockingbirds / Mimidae

Tropical Mockingbird - *Mimus gilvus*. NR, SR.

Thrushes / Turdidae

Pale-breasted Thrush - *Turdus leucomelas*. NR, SR.

Spectacled Thrush - *Turdus nudigenis*. NR.

Pipits / Motacillidae

Yellowish Pipit - *Anthus lutescens*. SR.

Finches, Euphonias & Siskins / Fringillidae

Purple-throated Euphonia – *Euphonia chlorotica*. SR.

Finsch's Euphonia - *Euphonia finschi*. SR.

Red Siskin - *Spinus cucullatus*. SR.

New World Sparrows / Passerellidae

Grassland Sparrow - *Ammodramus humeralis*. NR.

Oropendolas, Caciques, Orioles and Allies / Icteridae

Eastern Meadowlark - *Sturnella magna*. SR.

Red-breasted Meadowlark - *Leistes militaris*. NR, SR.

Orange-backed Troupial - *Icterus croconotus*. NR.

Yellow Oriole - *Icterus nigrogularis*. NR, SR.

Yellow-hooded Blackbird - *Chrysomus icterocephalus*. NR.

New World Warblers / Parulidae

Tropical Parula - *Setophaga pitiaiyumi*. SR.

Yellow Warbler - *Setophaga petechia*. NR, SR.

Blackpoll Warbler - *Setophaga striata*. SR.

Flavescent Warbler - *Myiothlypis flaveola*. SR.

Tanagers, Seedeaters & Saltators / Thraupidae

Red-capped Cardinal – *Paroaria gularis*. NR, SR.

Hooded Tanager - *Nemosia pileata*. SR.

Blue-gray Tanager - *Thraupis episcopus*. NR, SR.

Palm Tanager - *Thraupis palmarum*. NR, SR.

Burnished-buff Tanager - *Stilpnia cayana*. NR, SR.

Chestnut-vented Conebill - *Conirostrum speciosum*. SR.

Blue-black Grassquit - *Volatinia jacarina*. NR, SR.

Ruddy-breasted Seedeater - *Sporophila minuta*. NR, SR.

Gray Seedeater - *Sporophila intermedia*. NR, SR.

Wing-barred Seedeater - *Sporophila Americana*. GE.

Plumbeous Seedeater - *Sporophila plumbea*. SR.

Bananaquit - *Coereba flaveola*. NR, SR.

Grayish Saltator - *Saltator coerulescens*. NR, SR.

MAMMALS:

Giant Anteater. *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*. . NR.

Giant Otter. *Pteronura brasiliensis*. Flash views, NR.

White-tailed Deer. *Odocoileus virginianus*. SR.