

In Search of the Rare and Stupendous Harpy Eagle

In January, driven by my Bird Photography Habit, Cathy and I set out for the rain forests of Darién Province in eastern Panama to see and photograph the rare and stupendous Harpy Eagle. The first photo shows us at the endpoint of the Pan-American Highway; it is extremely wild territory from there to the Colombian border. We traveled with a small group including a local Panamanian naturalist and a US bird expert from VENT (Victor Emanuel Nature Tours).



Cathy and Warren at the end of the Pan-American Highway

From our base, a tent eco-lodge called Canopy Camp, the journey was not so easy: a bouncy ride on the back of a truck along a rough dirt road down to the small Emberá river port of Puerto Limón, on the Rio Chucunaque (the Emberá are the indigenous people who live alongside and in the rivers and streams in that area); from there, courtesy of the Emberá, a ride in a long dugout canoe down the Rio Chucunaque to another settlement called Alto Playón.



Dugout canoes on the Rio Chucunaque



An Emberá lady - note the eye-catching machete, and note also that she goes through the rain forest in bare feet

From Alto Playón, there was a 45-minute horseback ride, helped by local guides, along a slippery up-and-down rain forest trail.



Warren setting out on horseback - if I look at all calm and relaxed on the horse, I am faking it

Finally, we hiked 2 kilometers up another rain forest trail, where the horses could not go — to come to a vantage point from which we could see an active Harpy Eagle nest at the top of a towering Ceiba tree. All this, by the way, in steamy tropical heat - but I am not complaining.

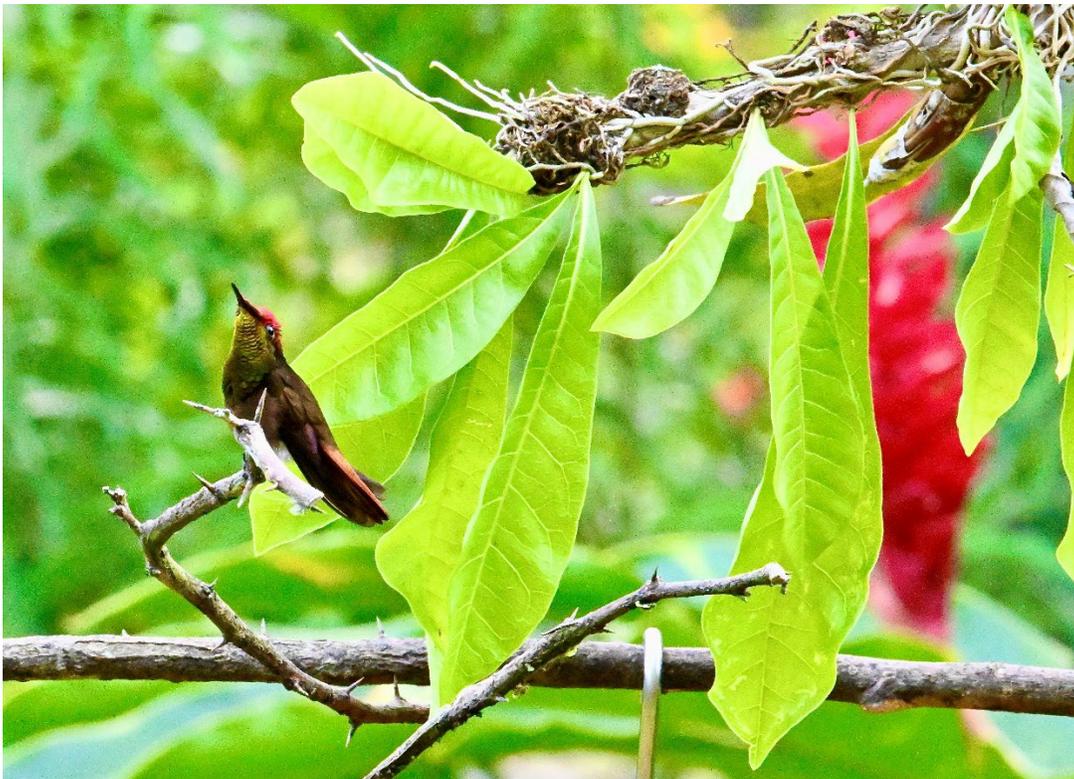


My effort to capture an image of a powerful, formidable Harpy Eagle standing sentry near a nest

Of course, we saw a great many other spectacular birds in Darién Province, such as the Crimson-Crested Woodpecker and the very special Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird, 238 bird species in the course of a week.



Crimson-Crested Woodpecker



Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird

And there were other creatures, seen and unseen, such as the Black Scorpion we found in our shower. In the pre-dawn morning, the constellation Scorpio was up, which seemed appropriate, and we could listen to the calls of the Mottled Owl and the Great Potoo, as well as many other mysterious rain forest sounds.

Warren

Learn more about the Harpy Eagle: [Harpy eagle - Wikipedia](#).