

## Some notes on birding Junglaven by Guy Kirwan

During 23–30 December 2006, together with four colleagues, I made a birding visit to Campamento Junglaven on the middle río Ventuari, Amazonas state, Venezuela. The trip formed part of my third visit to the country, following two long trips there in the 1990s. We recorded several species apparently new for the area based on the lists presented in Zimmer & Hilty's (1997) paper in Orn. Monographs 48 (*Studies in Neotropical ornithology honoring Ted Parker*), the range maps in Hilty's *Birds of Venezuela* (2003), and Dave Sargeant's privately published list (c.1994), though bird tours (notably Sunbird and Birdquest) continue to visit the area and may well have recorded some of these before. One of the personal highlights was acquiring some neat field experience with Cinnamon Neopipo in reasonably tall *terra firme* on white-sand (having finally tracked down the beast at Alta Floresta, Brazil, and gotten some experience with the voice helped). The purpose of these notes is simply to draw birders' attention to the area, once again, and to provide some practical advice to those considering a trip to the region.

We booked our trip through Chris Sharpe of Birding Venezuela ([www.birdingvenezuela.com](http://www.birdingvenezuela.com)), who set things up perfectly. Rather than taking a scheduled service down to Puerto Ayacucho, we flew direct from Caracas Charallave airport to Junglaven in a six-seater private plane, which provided an amazing appreciation of the country's landscape, almost skimming the tops of tepuis and putting up Jabirus in the llanos (OK, a slight exaggeration).

There are two camps at Junglaven, the Campamento Junglaven and the Campamento Camani. We flew into the latter and departed from the former. The condition of Camani is superior to Junglaven in terms of the accommodation, but both were acceptable. Electricity is, needless to say, supplied by a generator and there were thankfully no breakdowns during our stay. One recent trip report mentioned how the staff disappeared to the nearest village on a Christmas drinking binge, leaving them somewhat in the lurch for meals etc. We came mentally prepared for the worst. Fortunately, the lady (Nancy) in charge of cooking did not perform a bunk (though the rest of the staff did) and we pulled through without having to draw lots for who got eaten! The food was generally quite acceptable (the soups indeed were excellent) and Nancy did her level best to make meals as varied as possible. Captain Lorenzo, the 80+-year-old owner of Junglaven and a born raconteur, suggested to us that he would in future not open over the Xmas / New Year period because of such problems, but Chris Sharpe will be able to let you know the latest. I didn't have any problems with biting insects and rarely even needed to apply any spray or cream to ward the beasties off.

I'd recommend to birders that they plan to stay at both camps, rather than just visiting Junglaven, as Camani provides immediate access to some of the best savanna areas (one can get most of the cotingids, Pale-bellied Mourner etc. right there at the camp), as well as being a much shorter boat journey to reach some of the better *várzea* forest replete with Amazonian Black Tyrant, Blackish-gray Antshrike, Spot-backed Antwren and Cherrie's Antwren, amongst others. Junglaven camp, of course, is far better for accessing the *terra firme* and the lagoon areas (with Agami and Zigzag Herons virtually 'on tap'). Some white-sand birds like Black Manakin were common around both camps, but other specialities like Yellow-crowned Manakin (Camani) and Brown-headed Greenlet (Junglaven) appeared to be common only around one or the other. The *terra firme* forest is too far to comfortably access from Camani camp (as we found), especially if Lorenzo's truck breaks down (as happened to us), but you can reach tall forest in just five minutes from Junglaven itself. Lorenzo proffered the information that he thought curassows were now rarer than they had been in the past, and likewise primates, because of hunting. I can't comment on the veracity of that statement, given no previous knowledge (other than what I had read), but we saw the *Mitu* only twice and likewise the *Crax* just twice, with one encounter with the *Pipile* and a couple each with

the *Ortalis* and *Penelope*. Others talk of seeing tinamous regularly, but we saw one very briefly (and I missed that).

In sum, we recorded *c.*290 species including quite a few heard-only. Undoubtedly, my having spent a lot of time in Amazonian Brazil recently ensured a higher trip list than might otherwise have been the case. A week at some Amazonian sites in the latter country would produce 50–75 more species than we recorded at Junglaven, but for those keen on their Venezuela lists or searching for an accessible site to see the Imeri endemics then Junglaven is a great experience, however be prepared for at least one thing to go wrong during your stay. This is Amazonia not Europe or North America. I managed to get three out of four of the new birds I was searching for, but Brown-banded Puffbird continues to elude me...