

PRESS RELEASE

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U.K. Birdwatching Tour in Guyana Greeted by Harpy Eagle

GEORGETOWN – In what appears to be a healthy trend for the local tourism industry, international birdwatchers continue to flock to Guyana. The third birdwatching tour in as many months recently took place when U.K. tour operator, Ornitholidays, brought their first – and completely sold-out – birdwatching group to Guyana from March 1-14.

Ornitholidays principal guide, Mike Witherick, led the group of eight birdwatchers from England and Ireland to some of the same birdwatching locations that he visited on his original trip to Guyana. In February 2007, Witherick visited Guyana as part of a familiarization trip that was sponsored by the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project Birding Tourism Program.

The trip included birdwatching stops at Georgetown Botanical Gardens, Mahaica River, Shanklands Rainforest Resort, Kaieteur Falls, Karanambu Ranch, Iwokrama Field Station and Canopy Walkway, Rock View Lodge and Wowetta Village. For the entire trip, head local guide and President of the Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society (GATBS) Andy Narine, assisted Mr. Witherick in guiding duties.

Witherick, who has led more than 135 tours to all seven continents, said that outside of the unseasonably wet weather, the trip went well. Standout bird species that the group spotted included the Hoatzin, Crimson Topaz, Capuchinbird, the much sought-after Harpy Eagle, and several species of toucans, parrots, hummingbirds and raptors. And while Witherick said the group did not see the desirable jaguar, all were pleased with the number of monkeys they spotted.

When asked to compare Guyana's birdwatching experience to other countries in the region, Witherick said, "My experience [in the region] is limited to Costa Rica, Jamaica, Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago. [Guyana] is the equal of any of these." On the local guides that provided assistance throughout, Witherick said that, "Andy proved to be first class," and the others that joined them at each destination, "were friendly and well informed about the birds in their areas."

Ornitholidays did not originally consider selling a birdwatching trip to Guyana until Mr. Witherick met Judy Karwacki – the tourism specialist working on Guyana's Birding Tourism Program – at the 2006 British Birdwatching Fair. She convinced him that Guyana was a little-known birding paradise that his company should consider selling and invited him to come experience it himself.

After coming on the familiarization trip, Witherick said he saw Guyana's, "birding and general wildlife potential," and began organizing a trip for Ornitholidays. The company's first Guyana trip sold out in less than a week and their trip planned for 2009 is already completely booked. Ornitholidays has also already scheduled a birdwatching trip to Guyana for 2010.

The Birding Tourism Program is receiving support from GTIS, a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). For more information, please visit www.guyanabirding.com.

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