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Honduras/Copan: Birding & Mayan Ruins

April 1 – 11, 2016

Discover Honduras, a fascinating country with abundant lakes, lush mountains, and pristine beaches. More than 730 species of birds occur here, including the endemic Honduran Emerald and the stunning Resplendent Quetzal. The country also hosts mammals including manatees, jaguars, monkeys, tapirs, and peccaries. While ecotourism is just emerging, the country has preserved important habitats in 10 outstanding national parks.

Our journey highlights the country's rich biodiversity, friendly, relaxing lifestyle, and several of its archaeological gems. Honduras is perhaps best known for the ruins of Copan, the "Paris of the Mayan World." In addition to this stunning location, we visit the additional prime sites of Las Selpulturas, El Puente, and the Lencan archaeological site, Los Naranjos.

Along with prime ruins, we visit prime birding locations that showcase the country's wide range of habitats, from coastal mangroves near La Ceiba to Lago Yojoa, the country's largest inland lake, to the beautiful mid-elevation forests of Copan.



Expect a rainbow of birds: Green Violet Ear, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Violet Saberwing, Blue-crowned Motmot, Green-throated Mountain Gem, both Collared and Mountain Trogons, Unicolored Jay, Flame-colored Tanager, Barred Parakeet, and more.

Honduras Nature and Birding Tour Highlights

- Travel with the author of the new *Field Guide to the Birds of Honduras*, expert Robert Gallardo
- Spend a full day exploring the stunning, and only partially excavated, Mayan ruins of Copan
- Bird and boat on Lake Yojoa, Honduras' largest natural freshwater lake
- Explore the lush Cerro Azul Meámbar National Park, typically teeming with birds
- Learn about a community eco-tourism project near Santa Barbara National Park

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- Relax and let birds come to you at the new Rio Santiago Nature Resort's many feeders, nestled at the base of Pico Bonito National Park

Honduras Birding & Mayan Ruins Tour Summary

10-Night/11-Day Birding, Natural History & Mayan Ruins Tour, with expert guide Robert Gallardo
 3 Nights Copan / 4 Nights Lago Yojoa / 3 Nights Rio Santiago
 \$3250 per person, double occupancy from San Pedro Sula
 Airport: San Pedro Sula's Aeropuerto Ramon Villeda Morales (SAP)

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Fri., April 1 Arrival in San Pedro Sula, Honduras / Travel to Copan



Arrive today in San Pedro Sula. Your guide, Robert Gallardo, will be there to greet you.

We have a scenic three-hour drive to the Copan area during which Robert interprets geography and aspects of rural Honduran life. It is a real pleasure to bird and see the landscapes of Honduras with such an expert!

If your flight arrives later in the evening, please come in a night early; we can recommend a hotel.

Accommodations at Hacienda San Lucas, Copan. (D)

Sat., April 2 Copan Archaeological Site

Spend the morning birding the foothills along the La Laguna-San Francisco route; a combination of walking and driving takes us to the top of the mountain. We traverse different habitats with the chance to see various species of orioles, Sparkling-tailed Woodstar, Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Black Hawk-Eagle, White-breasted Hawk, and the charming Elegant Euphonia.

Then, immerse yourself in Mayan culture at the magnificent Copan ruins. The elaborate artistry of the stelae and altars in this once-sprawling city is amazing. Many were carved during Copan's golden age (711 – 736 AD). The Hieroglyphic Stairway, which preserves the longest written record of Mayan history, describes the lineage of 16 rulers and is incredible. A local archaeologist joins us for an in-depth interpretation.





site.

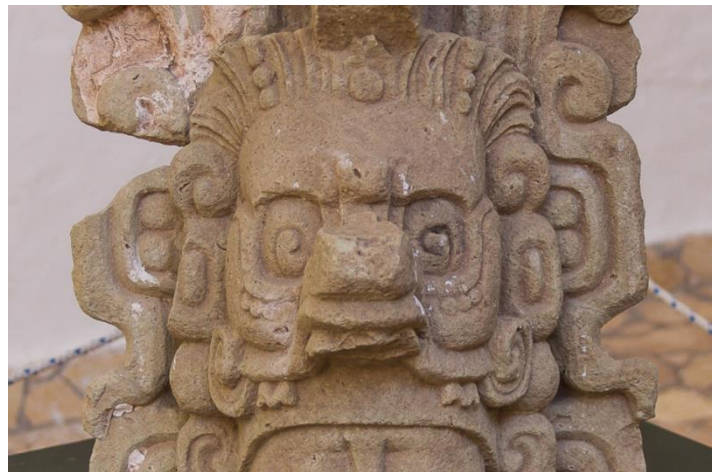
Enjoy a gracious dinner at our lovely hacienda at the day's end.

Accommodations at Hacienda San Lucas (B,L,D)

One of Copan's delights is that it is not fully excavated; we hike through forest trails amid Mayan structures to a viewpoint of an impressive plaza. Surrounded by nature, you sense how life may have been. We hope to see White-throated Magpie Jay, Rufous-naped Wren, Green Parakeet, Swallow-tailed Swift, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Turquoise-browed Motmot, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike. There is a Scarlet Macaw breeding and release program here and we witness their bright colors as they light up the



Sun., April 3 Birding Las Sepulturas / Hacienda San Lucas



This morning we bird a nearby archaeological site where nobles and scribes once lived. This small area receives very few visitors, but teems with bird life. Here there are hordes of Rufous-naped Wren, Yellow-green Vireo, Altamira Oriole, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush. We then have some free time to explore the town and maybe find a souvenir.

In the late afternoon we drive a short distance to Hacienda San Lucas, which sits on the hillside across from the ruins. Here, we relax and enjoy the sunset and bird watching on the lawn. Often, the Magpie-Jay and orioles come in to feed, and parrots, egrets, and parakeets fly by to roost, while Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl comes in to hunt. We enjoy a candlelit dinner and indulge in some local dishes.

Accommodations at Hacienda San Lucas (B,L,D)

Mon., April 4 Lago Yojoa

This morning we depart for Lake Yojoa, the country's largest natural freshwater lake. We travel for nearly 3 ½ hours as we drive around the west side of the Santa Barbara mountain range. The water surface covers 50-square miles and sits in a volcanic depression. Cerro Azul



Meámbar NP on the east side covers over 40,000 acres and is comprised almost entirely of mid-elevation to sub-montane rain forests. Around the Lake there are seasonally flooded forests and vast wetlands that contain a variety of plant vegetation.

When we visit the lake basin we look for birds along the marsh, including the graceful Snail Kite. We spend some time (at least one day) looking for Ruddy Crake, Gray-breasted Crake, Spotted Rail, and Gray-necked Wood-Rail in marshy areas. At a nearby private property, we search for the shy Spotted Rail,



which in Honduras is only found here.

Over 375 species have been recorded, and we have the chance to see numerous Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Purple Gallinule, Snail Kite, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Limpkin, Red-lored Amazon, Ringed Kingfisher, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and more.

Tonight we stay at cabins within the cool foothills of Cerro Azul Meámbar NP.
Accommodations near Lago Yojoa (B,L,D)

Tues., April 5 Cerro Azul Meámbar National Park / Lago Yojoa



This morning we explore the incredibly lush Cerro Azul Meámbar National Park. One year, the bird activity was so amazing we didn't leave the parking lot for over an hour! A fruiting tree attracted Collared Aracari, Emerald Toucanet, Masked Tityra, Rufous Mourner, and both Brown and Green Jays. It also frequently attracts the stunning cloud forest beauty, the Blue-crowned Chlorophonia.

Migrants included Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, and Black-and-white Warblers, found with a resident Tropical Parula. On the trail to a lovely waterfall, we should get good looks at Brushy-crested Jay and Keel-billed Toucan, while the waterfall itself is a great place to spot orchids and butterflies. In mature forest we may

intercept a mixed flock with Lesser Greenlet, Plain Antvireo, and more.

We stop along the entrance road where we regularly see Prevost's Ground-Sparrow and Painted Bunting. Close to the visitor center is the best place in Honduras to see the tiny, yet amazing, Black-crested Coquette, which Robert compares to a miniature Samurai warrior, fully equipped with a head dress and body armor! This is also our first chance to see the prized Keel-billed Motmot. Honduras is at the center of this bird's distribution and it is quite common in some places.

Enjoy lunch on the deck of a local restaurant where we watch a leisurely procession of herons, egrets, and shorebirds. With a cold beer in hand and over 30 species of birds in view, participant Ralph Anavy said, "Now this is my style of birding!"

Accommodations near Lago Yojoa (B,L,D)



Wed., April 6 Los Naranjos / Lago Yojoa

We devote the majority of the day to exploring the rich lake basin. We first visit the Los Naranjos archaeological site at the edge of Lago Yojoa. This site is thought to be of Lenca origin and in actuality,

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very little excavation has been done, but there is a small museum with some pottery on display. The area, however, is filled with birds in a beautiful seasonal flood forest.



We hope to get scope views of Red-lored Amazon, Olive-throated Parakeet, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Blue-black Grassquit, Roadside Hawk, Long-billed Starthroat, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, and other species from the trails.

Walk through beautiful, moist subtropical forest where the trees arch over the trail, draped with bromeliads, curtains of Spanish moss, and other epiphytes. Butterflies come in many varieties, and Robert is a master at cataloging them. There is a gravel trail, as well as an elevated boardwalk, where we walk in search of Rufous-and-white Wren, Muscovy Duck, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, White-winged Becard, Red-lored Parrot, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, White-throated Flycatcher, and Ivory-billed Woodcreeper.

Accommodations near Lago Yojoa (B,L,D)

Thurs., April 7 Santa Barbara National Park / Lago Yojoa

Today we make our way up to Santa Barbara NP to enjoy a sub-montane forest. In this area there is a tri-community ecotourism project called "Santa Barbara-the Source of Life" whose goal is to seek and offer viable alternatives to forest degradation.

Here we look for Resplendent Quetzal, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Ruddy Foliage-Gleaner, Green-throated Mountain-Gem, and Golden-browed Warbler.

With any luck we can spot the secretive Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge, which often comes into view as it feeds on sprouting bean plants.

Accommodations near Lago Yojoa (B,L,D)



Fri., April 8 Rio Santiago Lodge at Pico Bonito National Park

Enjoy birding on the hotel grounds at Lago Yojoa before departing to the north coast where we spend our last three nights at a new nature resort nestled at the foot of Pico Bonito NP. The Rio Santiago Nature Resort is situated virtually right against the forest and has a trail system that leads up into the park where you can birdwatch in lowland forest. This park is one of the best places anywhere to see the splendid Lovely Cotinga. It is also replete with hummingbirds due to the feeders placed all around the facilities; there are no less than fifteen species that have been seen feeding here.



From the lodge, lush forests attract multi-colored flocks of tanagers, and at dusk several parrot species can be seen coming in to roost.

Accommodations at the Rio Santiago (B,L,D)

Sat., April 9 Rio Santiago Lodge at Pico Bonito National Park

Today, we devote the entire day to bird watching on the hotel grounds. Found on the grounds and along the trails are species like the King Vulture, Blue-throated Goldentail, Tody Motmot, White Hawk, Brown-hooded Parrot, Royal Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner, Orange-billed Sparrow, Slaty-breasted Tinamou, and Chestnut-colored Woodpecker.

Nature surrounds the lodge, and species can be found here with little effort. Depending on the interest and stamina of the group, we can plan the day accordingly. Pico Bonito National Park is adjacent with trails, and observation right from the grounds brings plentiful results. Awaken at dawn to the call of a forest-falcon!

Accommodations at Rio Santiago Lodge (B,L,D)



Sun., April 10 Cuero y Salado National Wildlife Refuge / Pico Bonito NP



Today we drive a short way to the coast to visit Cuero y Salado National Wildlife Refuge, a preserve of mangrove-lined lagoons and wetlands along the Caribbean coast that offers a nice combination of birds, mammals, and reptiles. Here, two major rivers join to create a complex web of fresh and saltwater lagoons.

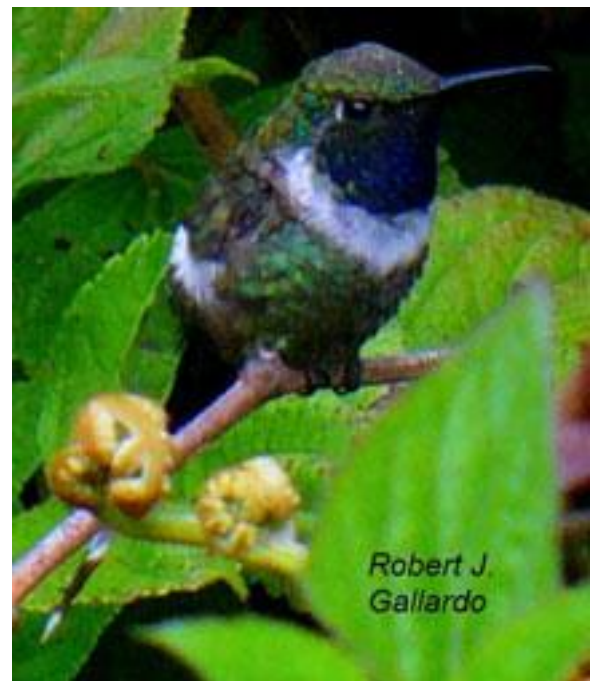
Many species endangered elsewhere in Honduras find refuge in this rich estuary; we may see manatees, migratory birds, parrots, crocodiles, and two species of monkeys. Birds we look for include Boat-billed Heron,

Jabiru, Sungrebe, Brown-hooded Parrot, White-crowned Parrot, Great Potoo, and more.

We take a short narrow gauge rail train ride through farmland and wetland before arriving at the visitor center. We then take a two-hour boat ride through the mangrove estuary to look for birds like Gray-headed Kite, Scaled Pigeon, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Mangrove Cuckoo, and the spectacular Agami Heron. We are also on the lookout for the huge Black Caiman, old Green Iguanas, Mantled Howler Monkeys, White-faced Capuchins, Boa Constrictors, and Northern Tamandua.

At day's end, we return to a parade of hummingbirds at the feeders and a final evening together to tally up our species list and reminisce on highlights of our adventure.

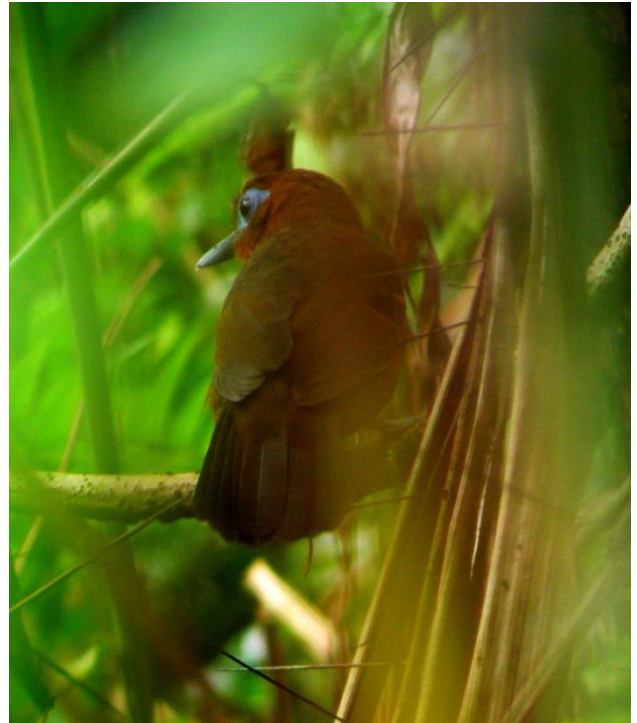
Accommodations at the Rio Santiago Lodge (B,L,D)



Mon., April 11 Departures, or stay on at leisure to explore the Bay Islands

This morning we travel about three hours back to the airport at San Pedro Sula; please make flights out after 12:00 PM. For those who are continuing, you can catch a flight or ferry to one of the Bay Islands.

You can catch a flight home to the USA direct from Roatan, if you do go over to the Bay Islands. A number of resorts have all-inclusive packages, or adventurous ones can travel on their own.



COST OF THE JOURNEY

Cost of the 11-day journey is \$3250.00, from San Pedro Sula, is based on double occupancy, and includes: 11 nights accommodation, all meals from Dinner Day 1 through Breakfast Day 11, group airport transfers, transportation in Honduras, park and preserve entrance fees, professional guides, and miscellaneous program costs.

This cost is based on a minimum of 4 persons; if there are fewer than 4, a small group surcharge (typically \$200 – \$400) may apply. It does not include items of a personal nature, such as beverages from the bar, portage, laundry, phone calls, or gift items. We also recommend a gratuity for our local drivers and guides; the amount is left to your discretion. Single supplement is \$TBD.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Honduras is served by a number of major airlines, including American Airlines, Continental, COPA, TACA, AeroCaribe, and Iberia. Gateway cities include, but are not limited to: Miami, Houston, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Plan to arrive no later than 2:00 PM on or before April 1; please try to schedule departing flights after 12:00 PM on April 11.

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Mayan Ball Court, Peg Abbott (PA); Robert Gallardo, NJ stock; Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Robert Gallardo (RG); Copan ruins and trees, Steve Wylie (SW); Turquoise-browed Motmot, SW; Flower and Mayan Ruin Detail, SW; Lago Yojoa, PA; Spotted Rail, RG; Bare-throated Tiger Heron, SW; Purple Gallinule, Tom Dove (TD); Rufous-tailed Jacamar, RG; Emerald Toucanet, SW; Park sign, PA; Clear-wing butterfly, Cracker Butterfly, SW; Resplendent Quetzal, RG; Golden-hooded Tanager, RG; Brown-throated Parakeet, SW; White Hawk, RG; Collared Forest-Falcon, RG; Boat-billed Heron, TD; Sparkling-tailed Woodstar, RG; Malachite Fence Lizard, RG; female Bare-crowned Antbird, RG.