



Caligo Ventures - Honduras Independent Bird Venture
February 22-March 1, 2014
Birding, Nature & Mayan Ruins

Knabe & Brunkow Custom Tour with Robert Gallardo
Honduras 2014-Trip Report



Group at Rio Santiago

“Cheers!”

By Robert J. Gallardo

This year marked the first Independent Birding Venture tour to Honduras with four high-spirited friends and family members from Wisconsin. During the eight days they would have a seemingly endless supply of laughs along with a flurry of great birds and dining throughout. They visited the famous Mayan site of Copan Ruins, the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens in Tela, and finally the Rio Santiago Nature Resort near La Ceiba.

After arrival into San Pedro Sula everyone was whisked away to the small town of Copan Ruins adjacent to the Guatemalan border where we would spend the first three nights. Everyone got settled in to the cozy Terra Maya boutique hotel situated above the central plaza. The first great meal was at Carnitas Nia Lola where we feasted on giant shish-ka-bobs and other plates and “divvied” up mixed drinks. The “dispensing” of drinks would provide for good humor throughout the rest of the tour.



The next morning we arose early and drove up to the nearby foothills to do some bird watching along the La Laguna-San Francisco route; named after two little villages atop the mountain. The weather was wonderful and everyone enjoyed the landscapes, flowers, birds, and butterflies. Amongst the many great birds seen was the near-endemic Bushy-crested Jay, Yellow-backed Oriole, a perched male Spot-bellied Bobwhite, and the ever present Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. The best place in Honduras to look for the ever-so-cute Elegant Euphonia is along this very same road as each year for many months they are attracted to large quantities of fruiting mistletoe. Our visit would not be an exception and we

were afforded breathtaking views of two pair of males and females. *Male Elegant Euphonia- by R. Gallardo*

We would finish up the rest of the day with a tour of the famous Mayan site of Copan Ruins. After lunch, everyone viewed the Sculpture Museum which houses a full-sized replica of the Rosalila Temple and other glyphs. After the museum we all met the ruins guide, Yobani Peraza, who gave a two-hour ruins (and bird) tour. At times it was difficult to avoid the birds themselves at the ruins, especially the released Scarlet Macaws which were a beacon of color amidst the gray-colored stone temples. We finished off the day with another tasty dinner at the Llama del Bosque restaurant.



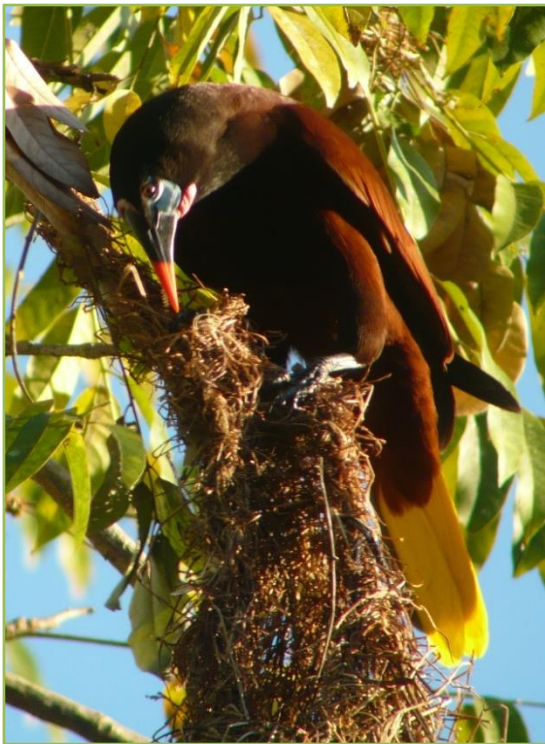
Scarlet Macaws entertain us at Ruins.

The next morning we visited the nearby archaeological site of Las Sepulturas where nobles once lived. We had this seldom-visited sister site to Copan all to ourselves and had some outstanding bird watching. The site was rife with numerous species of orioles and an incredible amount of activity of which at times was almost overwhelming. For some time we were listening to a pair of Laughing Falcons calling back and forth until one finally flew into view and landed in a large Guanacaste tree. Robert got the scope on it and everyone got great views before it flew off. Also present there were many Squirrel Cuckoos, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rufous-capped Warbler, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-naped Wren, Rose-throated Becard, and a variety of migrant wood-warblers. It was a great way to start the day. To finish it we had a lovely candlelit dinner at Hacienda San Lucas atop a hill situated above the ruins site.

Laughing Falcon-by R. Gallardo



*A large male
Montezuma Oropendola
at nesting colony at
Ruins.*



The next day after breakfast we began to make their way toward the north coast to the next destination; the coastal city of Tela. Outside of Copan a ways we stopped to do some roadside birding at nowhere else but at an extensive cattle pasture. But this was no ordinary pasture as it revealed a great many birds including Limpkin, Eastern Meadowlark, Mangrove Swallow, and a pair of the elegant Fork-tailed Flycatchers. We continued on our way and made a lunch stop at Power Chicken in El Progreso, a small Honduran franchise. After arriving in Tela and checking into the hotel we went for an afternoon visit to the coastal reserve of Jeanette Kawas N.P. Seen there were numerous species of migrant shorebirds and plovers, frigatebirds, Osprey, terns and other waders.

The next morning we rose early to visit the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens where we enjoyed another field breakfast. As we were eating a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars decided to pay us a visit right at the edge of the road. Along a side road near the entrance there were birds everywhere. The Black-striped Sparrow teased us the whole time as it called from the thickets and we never got to see it. A skulking male Great Antshrike appeared briefly before it disappeared. We did observe many Passerini's Tanagers, Black-headed Trogons, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, a Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Plain

Xenops, and White-collared Manakin. We also got numerous views of a female Blue-winged Warbler as it dashed in and out of the foliage. We were also fortunate enough to find the diminutive Olivaceous Piculet, our smallest member of the woodpecker family, as it worked little branches high in the trees. Later on behind the dorms we found a lone Green Kingfisher along a creek and were afforded scope views. After our full morning at Lancetilla, we checked out of the hotel and had a seafood lunch at Cesar Mariscos right along the beach.

After our seafood we continued down the road a ways more until we reached our final destination of Rio Santiago. This newly “discovered” birding destination is tucked away within the Santiago River drainage basin and is quickly becoming a birder’s mecca. We got checked into our rooms and decided to head up the trail to see if our little feathered friend was around. After a slow ascent up the steps, we reached a viewing area that looks eastward toward virgin rainforest. After a short scan we found our tiny target, the Black-crested Coquette. This little bird was there for one reason and that was a pinkish flowering tree known as *Trichospermum grewiaefolium* within the mallow family. Although found sparingly at other locales in Honduras this site allows the closest eye-level views found anywhere.....and the photos prove it. Susan and Carol got their fill taking pictures of it as it came and went. This is one dazzling hummer!



Black-crested Coquette-by R. Gallardo

Carol and Susan enjoying the coquette



Did I forget to mention that we got our first sighting of a Lovely Cotinga? It was a female that paid us a short visit before it went off to roost.

The following day we all went to the nearby Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge which is a coastal reserve that encompasses more than 50,000 acres of mangroves and wetlands. Although it was a kind of slow morning, we did get close and personal views of the tiny Proboscis Bats, a Boat-billed Heron, Black Caiman, and two species of blue morpho butterflies.

We returned to Santiago and spent a good part of the afternoon looking at and photographing a medley of hummingbirds that are attracted to all the miniature feeders. We would see eleven species in all including such knock-outs as the Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, the giant Violet Sabrewing,

and Band-tailed Barbthroat. This hummingbird show is unrivaled in all of Honduras and can be likened to some sites in South America.



White-necked Jacobin



Crowned Woodnymph



Brown Violet-Ear



Violet Sabrewing

Toward the end of the afternoon we had all gotten our fill of hummers and decided to try our luck at seeing a male cotinga. During a previous visit Robert had identified a prominent tree where many birds come in to perch before going to roost, including the cotinga. So, he had the Santiago staff clear out some branches that obstructed the view and chopped some tall grass. As it was starting to cloud over we all went up to the spot a bit early. After just a short wait the patience paid off when suddenly both a male and female appeared right in plain view. As what was expected their stay was brief, but not before we all could rifle off a bunch of photos. Honduras is at the heart of this species' range and our sightings are frequent, but here along the Cordillera Nombre de Dios mountain range we are afforded with ample opportunities to see it. The Rio Santiago Resort has also proven to provide better viewing and photographic experiences of this magnificent bird than all other places in the area. It was a great way to end another day in Honduras.

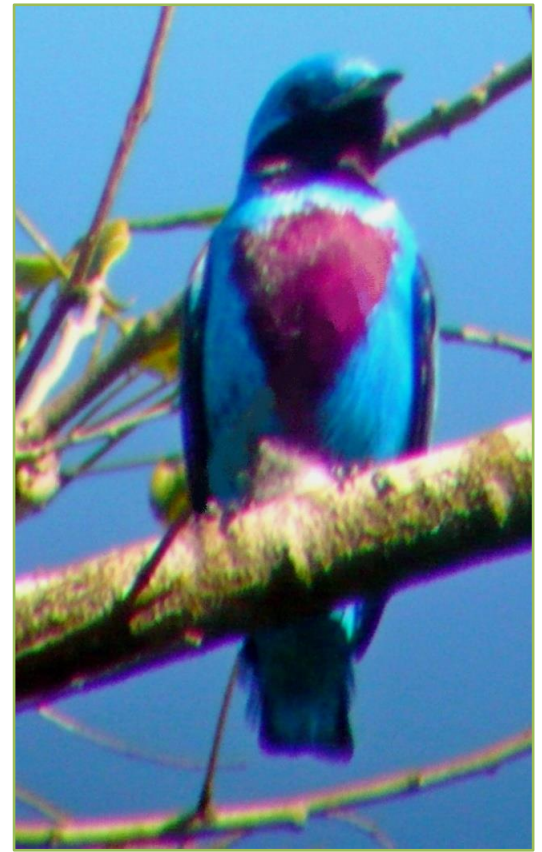


The male and female Lovely Cotinga By R. Gallardo



On our last full day everyone had decided to stay at Rio Santiago instead of making the planned visit to the Aguan Valley. After an early breakfast, we walked down the road a bit with Alex (a Santiago employee who's learning the birds) to see a hawk nest. We found and a Common Black-Hawk on her nest at nearly eye level past a steep drop-off. Just as we were starting to head back, Robert spotted several birds that came in and landed atop a tall tree above everyone. They turned out to be three more Lovely Cotinga males. These were all in full sun and their turquoise metallic blue color and royal purple throat and chest glimmered like a beacon.

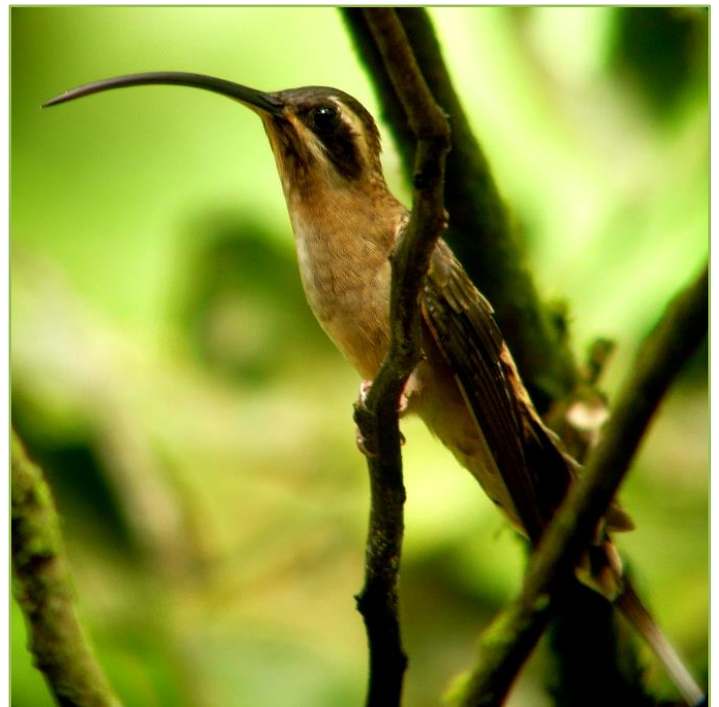
Male Lovely Cotinga- by R. Gallardo



Before heading back we saw four King Vultures over on a far ridge, including two immatures. Spotted rising over another ridge was a Black Hawk-Eagle. We made our back to the lodge then took a short walk to a nearby waterfall. There we found birds everywhere as well including Slaty-tailed Trogon, Royal Flycatcher, White-shouldered Tanager, a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Rufous Mourners, and White-collared Manakin. It turned out to be an incredible morning of birding.

After lunch, Robert and Susan went up a trail to look for the more elusive Sunbittern which haunts the nearby small creeks. Although they didn't find that bird they did run into a lek of Long-billed Hermits whose chatter echoed in the forest.

With this last full day our trip had ended and everyone would get a good taste of Honduras' natural history, culture, and cuisine. We would also record 239 bird species in all including some regional rarities and would leave with great memories and some incredible photos.



Robert J. Gallardo_
Leader

Naturalist & Trip

Bird of each Day

Copan Ruins- Turquoise-browed Motmot
Las Sepulturas- Laughing Falcon
Rio Amarillo, Copan- Fork-tailed Flycatcher
Rio Santiago (arrival)- Black-crested Coquette
Cuero y Salado W.R.- Boat-billed Heron
Rio Santiago (all day)- Lovely Cotinga
Drive to San Pedro Sula- Zone-tailed Hawk

Turquoise-browed Motmot-by R. Gallardo

