



Honduran Hummingbird Tour

Feb. 4-13, 2015

Trip Report

By Robert Gallardo

Hummingbird Tour with Pamy at La Tigra N.P.



This year marked the very first time a hummingbird tour was undertaken in Honduras. It was offered by Robert Gallardo alongside Naturalist Journeys and would be a tour to remember, in many ways. A star-studded show was arranged that would not only include some great birds, but some other “celebrities” as well. Fifteen people came from afar and near and included: a retired American living in Honduras, a Honduran national living in the U.S., a Canadian, and folks from across the U.S. William Orellana was a trip co-leader and Robert’s fiancé and mother would also come along for the first part of the trip. So, it was a “hefty” bunch.

Some arrived early into Honduras, but eventually everyone met up at Hotel Las Glorias in the piney mountains to the north of the capital. During the first dinner Robert informed everyone that there would be a special “guest birder” joining them the next day; the President of the National Chamber of Tourism. Epaminondas Marinakys (aka “Pamy”) was one of the keynote speakers at the recent book launch ceremony for the “Guide to the Birds of Honduras” and is keen on helping give the birding industry a “push” in Honduras. He had never gone out birding before, but was enthralled at being invited.

Robert O., Pamy, & Robert G. at Wine-throated Hummingbird spot.



Pamy showed up early (and on time) to the hotel and everyone ventured up to the nearby La Tigra N.P. for the first cloud forest experience. The last

stretch of road was too muddy and impassable for the bus so some walked and other were shuttled up. After a breakfast in the crisp, clean air the bird walk started. A small covey of *Singing Quail* was flushed up alongside the road and there were scope views of two perched females. Other species seen along the way up the road included *Slate-throated Redstart*, *Spotted Woodcreeper*, *Green-breasted Mountain-Gem* and a brief glimpse of a male *Resplendent Quetzal*. Although these are all nice birds, there was a “star” awaiting the group atop the hill. The tensioned mounted as everyone approached a small clearing and drop-off and there it was; a

male *Wine-throated Hummingbird*. His minute size and flaming gorget are a sight to see. However, there was not just one or two, but three males. After reveling in this miniature delight everyone descended the hill. During the lunch break a very cooperative *Mountain Trogon* flew in and everyone got eye level views.

Wine-throated Hummingbird



On the way down back to the hotel we stopped at an open area where there were *Salvias* blooming. There were some lovely *White-eared Hummingbirds* and *Green Violet-Ears*, but we had our sights set on smaller kin. Then suddenly one appeared. It was a female *Sparkling-tailed Woodstar*; one of Honduras' smallest species. After more searching and patience a spectacular male finally appeared and would end being the only one on the entire trip.

The day was not yet done. After dinner we went to the U.S. Ambassador's house (James Nealon) nearby for an evening with some bird watchers and colleagues. During this informal get-together Robert presented several gifts that were frames containing collages of photos taken during the book launch ceremony. He also presented the Ambassador with one of the few remaining original plates from the book. Since the publication of the Honduran bird guide Robert has been making incredible strides with key government officials who are finally taking an earnest interest in the bird watching industry. It is probably a safe bet to say that there aren't too many tour companies that can offer these types of experiences with their clients and Naturalist Journeys are proud supporters of Robert's efforts in Honduras.



Hummingbird tour participants at U.S. Ambassador's house in Tegucigalpa. Front row left is Epaminondas Marinakys.

We all then traveled to Marcala, La Paz for the next birding destination. We climbed higher into the western highlands and stayed two nights at Finca Rosael where it turned cool as a short cold front moved in. Early the next morning we all set off to the Opatoro-Guajiquiro highlands. Early on much of the mountain was cloaked in fog, but it lifted a bit and warmed up enough to get the birds moving. There were ample *Salvia* blooms, Mountain Fuchsia and other wildflowers to attract hummers. *White-eared Hummingbird* were the most common, but we also saw *Amethyst-throated Hummingbird*, *Green Violet-Ear*, *Azure-crowned Hummingbird*, *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*, *Magnificent Hummingbird* and *Green-throated Mountain-Gem*. But perhaps the star of the day was not a hummingbird, but a northern Central American endemic. As we waited for nightfall a pair of *Blue-throated Motmots* came in to their nest site and one perched in plain view right in front of everyone. This mossy green species with a blue throat and no racquet tips is always a treat.



Blue-throated Motmot-a regional endemic.

The following day the group traveled to the lovely Lake Yojoa basin to spend the next three nights. Since we arrived early Robert decided to surprise everyone with a boat ride on the lake itself. Waterfowl was abundant and included thousands of ducks, waders, Snail Kites, rallids, and flycatchers. It was a great way to finish the day and start the Lake experience.

The first full day was spent at the nearby Meambar N.P. where there are excellent bird watching opportunities. Along the road we found *Prevost's Ground-Sparrow* and a pair of *Bat Falcon* at their annual nest site. We had a sunrise field breakfast atop the Lake Yure dam where we enjoyed a 360° view and birding. Up at the park itself we saw many great birds including trogons, many motmots, flycatchers, and woodcreepers. After a short hike to a nearby waterfall Robert spotted a star hummingbird that is only readily encountered at a couple of sites in Honduras; the tiny *Black-crested Coquette*. It was perched high, but everyone got scope views.



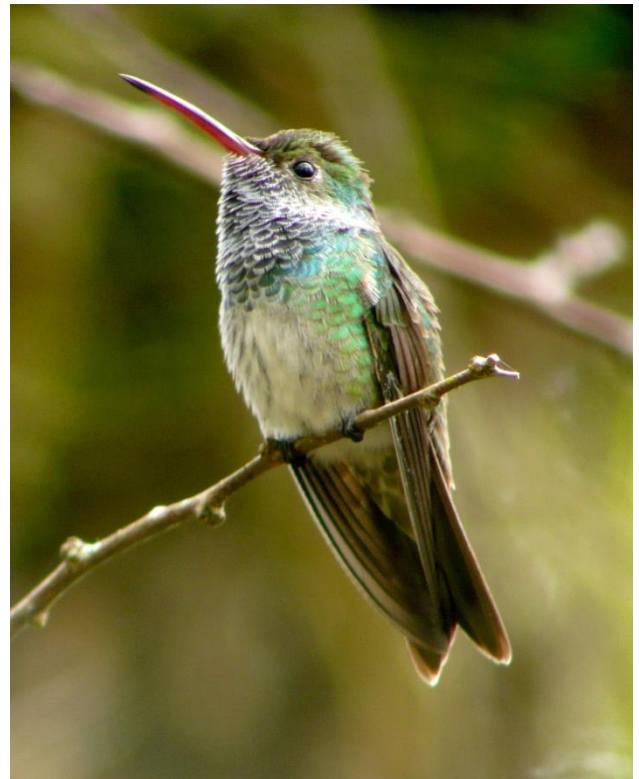
Black-crested Coquette.

The second full day at the Lake was spent at a dry forest site where the endemic *Honduran Emerald* finds refuge. It is situated deep within the Santa Barbara corridor on private property where Robert has been working with the owners in the hopes that they will someday form a private protected area. It is not yet open to the public and only Robert has permission to take people there to see this special bird and other species. After arriving and breakfast it didn't take long to find the first Emerald, a beautiful male, and was seen through the scope.

The rest of the birding was kind of slow until the end of the walk when we stumbled upon a *Lesser Ground-Cuckoo*. This species is quite secretive and a skulker in thickets, but most got views of it as it flew then walked across the trail.

The endemic Honduran Emerald.

The final destination of the trip was the Rio Santiago Nature Resort, located along the foot of Pico Bonito N.P. This is THE premiere destination along the north coast of Honduras and likely one of the top hummingbird sites in all of Central America. Twenty-four species of hummers have been recorded there and on most given days of the year about half can be observed. It would be a great way to end the tour. During our 1 ½ days there we soaked in the hummingbird show and hiked some of the many trails. A total of 12 hummingbird species were seen there, including eye level views of *Black-crested Coquette* along the ridge trail and the charming *Band-tailed Barbthroat*. Sharon H. finally got to see her *White*



Hawk which had eluded her for so many years and we got eye level, scope views of one perched. On the last afternoon, as Robert started this report in his room, he heard a familiar sound coming

from nearby. It was the soft mournful whistle of the *Blue-crowned Chlorophonia*. Deciding to investigate he went outside to discover a large fruiting native fig and saw that there was much activity in the tree. He eyed a bird and it turned out to be a male *Rufous-winged Tanager*. This stunning green and blue tanager ends its range in northern Honduras and is difficult to see anywhere. It was there with females, other tanagers, euphonias as well as the chlorophonia. The tanager was new for everyone, including the property itself.

Male Blue-crowned Chlorophonia.



We recorded nearly 280 species of birds in all, including 25 species of hummingbirds. Many photos were taken and many new friendships were made. Wonderful landscapes were seen throughout and more people can now say that Honduras is a safe and beautiful place to visit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R.J. Gallardo", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert J. Gallardo