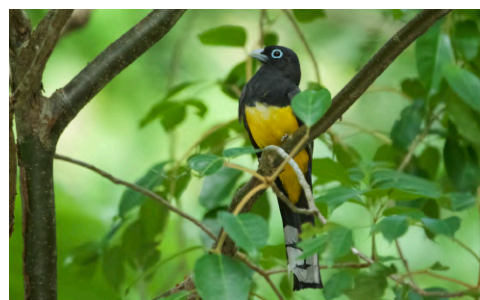
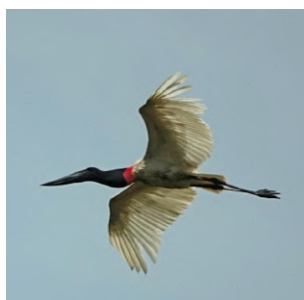


Belize: Green Season | July 20 – 27, 2024 Trip Report | by Bryan Calk



With guide Bryan Calk and participants Edward, Gilbert, Janice, Sherry, Tassy, and William.



Sat., Jul. 20

Black Orchid & Lamanai

This morning a few of us who arrived early met up in the gardens of black orchid for a little pre-tour birding. The property sits on the banks of the Belize River and the gardens are nicely maintained with native and ornamental plants that many species really enjoy. Some of our favorites we saw were Collared Aracari, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture perched in a palm, a Bare-throated Tiger Heron sitting in a nest, and a Black-headed Trogon sitting at eye-level in a palm right outside the breakfast area. Yucatán Black Howler Monkeys gave us a fantastic opportunity to view them as they fed on fresh leaves hanging right over the parking lot. We then headed over to meet the rest of the group and our ride to Lamanai. Along the drive we stopped to meet our local guide Eduardo and pick up our picnic lunch where we had a barren tree that kept attracting a variety of birds to it



including a Red-billed Pigeon, couple of tanagers, woodpeckers, and flycatchers. Along the rest of the drive into the outpost, we crossed ephemeral streams that were flowing over the road and watched for birds out the windows which was very rewarding with Russet-naped Wood-rail and Fork-tailed Flycatchers among others. One we made it to the lodge, we got oriented and settled in, enjoyed a lovely dinner and reviewed our checklist from our first day.

Sun., Jul. 21 Lamanai Archaeological Site & New River Lagoon

This morning, we woke up to the steady sound of light rain, but after some coffee and scones, we were ready to face the day! We started with a walk into the village of Indian church, just outside of the lodge. While the green season May bring a lot of moisture to the area, it sure doesn't mean that the birds go away! Some of our favorite finds were a pair of Black-headed Trogons, Bat Falcon, a variety of flycatchers, and Black-headed Saltator giving nice views. After a traditional Belizean breakfast of eggs, beans, and fry jacks, we headed back out, this time to the archeological site. We spent some time in the very informative museum before heading into the grounds to see the beautifully excavated temples where our local guide Eduardo did an excellent job of educating us on the history of the Maya civilization here. Surrounding the temples is dense jungle, and of course we saw some fun birds and other creatures along the way. A couple of white-nosed coatimundi were entertaining as they poked around the leaf litter, and we were entranced by the rich diversity of plants, fungi, and butterflies. Some stars on the bird front included many woodpeckers like Chestnut-colored and Pale-billed, an Ivory-billed Woodcreeper spent some time rooting around in a hollow of a tree, and Yellow-throated Euphonia and Red-legged Honeycreeper dazzled with their bright colors. We had a nice lunch and took some downtime before an afternoon and night tours on the boat. Ruddy Crake, Barred Antshrike, and Yellow-tailed Orioles blew us away in the daylight, and after dark a Mexican Hairy Dwarf Porcupine greeted us on the dock before we even got back in the boat, where we got great looks at Mangrove Vireo, Northern Potoo, Yucatán Nightjar, and Russet-Naped Wood-rails.

Mon., Jul. 22 Dawson Creek & Pine Savanna, Indian Church Village Life, Jungle Night Walk

Across the New River from the lodge is the entrance to Dawson Creek, and this morning we traveled upstream and made landing at the savanna habitat, where acidic granitic soil means causes a change in habitat. Instead of dense broadleaf jungle, the trees here are pines, oaks, and palmettos growing in small stands scattered across



grassland. Several special species are more easily found here, and during the time we birded here before breakfast, we found many of them like the critically endangered Yellow-headed Parrot, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Botteri's Sparrow, and Yucatán Woodpecker. After another delicious breakfast we headed back out on the trail, this time right around the lodge and into the village of Indian Church to learn about the many uses of native and cultivated plants in the area from building materials to medicinal uses. In the village we saw where our guide Eduardo grew up and got a sense of how the locals live day to day, including meeting Eduardo's family and sampling some coconuts fresh off the tree. At the local women's coop, we learned the traditional methods for preparing and grinding corn to make tortillas and tamales and got to try our hand at it! The results were promptly devoured, and we were served a proper lunch of chicken and onion soup, garnachas, and empanadas. After an afternoon siesta, we met up again at the docks for a sunset cocktail cruise on the water which produced some excellent birds along the way like Yucatán Jays, Black Catbird, and Yellow-billed Cacique. We made it back in time for dinner where we got to sample our tamale making skills from the village (yum!!) and then headed out on a night walk down the trails near the lodge. This proved very fruitful with Yucatán Banded Gecko, Mottled Owl, and Common Pauraque being major highlights for us!

Tues., Jul. 23 Belize Zoo & Black Rock

Today we were sad to have to say goodbye to Lamanai, but excited for new adventure ahead as we made our way to Black Rock. We departed by boat up the New River with fun sightings of a pair of Bat Falcons hunting insects together over the lagoon, a few Anhingas, Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, and at the boat landing we were thrilled to find some confiding Black Catbirds building a nest in a palm frond.

We met Isaias, our guide from Black Rock, and began our drive to the lodge with a stop along the way at the Belize Zoo for lunch and a quick walk around to enjoy their exhibits and the wild birds that take advantage of the nice habitat here. All the animals in captivity are species native to Belize that were rescues or rehabilitated animals unable to be released back for the wild, and we enjoyed getting to see them up close and personal. Lineated Woodpeckers, Grace's Warbler, and Hepatic Tanagers were some of our favorite wild birds spotted while walking around the exhibits.

We then continued on to finally make it to our new accommodations where we were immediately enchanted by the beautiful setting and lodge itself. The wildlife was showing off for us too with Central American Agoutis,



Nine-banded Armadillos, a bonanza of butterflies, 8 hummingbird species, and a variety of fanciful flycatchers right at the lodge dining room. We went through our daily checklist and enjoyed a yummy dinner with tree frogs, toads, moths, bats, and more to entertain us on the way back to our rooms.

Wed., Jul. 24 Black Rock & Belize Botanic Garden

We woke this morning for coffee and some pre-breakfast birding down to the garden area of black rock. We had an incredible couple of hours of birding with nearly sixty species seen and heard, including three species of kingfisher on one tiny pond, Purple-crowned Fairy, Slaty-tailed Trogon, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager. As we arrived back at the dining area, we witnessed a couple of Brown Jays moving through the canopy being pursued by a host of birds we had seen nesting in a tree off the deck including both tityras, Rose-throated Becards, Social and Piratic Flycatchers, and others - it was pure chaos! We enjoyed a yummy breakfast before loading up in the van and heading down the road to the Belize Botanic Garden, a privately run site where Marvin gave us a tour of the grounds, teaching us about the beautiful plants both native and cultivated. Along the way we saw many great birds of course, as the grounds are beautifully maintained for them. Band-backed Wrens were a group highlight, as well as a pair of Tropical Royal Flycatchers building a nest, a plethora of both Gartered and Black-headed Trogons, White-necked Puffbird, and both Tody and Lesson's Motmot.

Back at the lodge we ate lunch and independently enjoyed a lowkey afternoon off, with reading in hammocks, cooling off in the pool overlooking the river, finding and observing Aracari nests, and photographing butterflies as some of our choice activities. We gathered again in the evening for our checklist and dinner, then went on an informal walk around the main lodge building with our flashlights looking for critters of the night. Mahogany Tree Frogs, Long-tongued Bats, and a variety of beautiful moths were some of our favorites.

Thurs., Jul. 25 Spanish Lookout & Aguacate Lagoon

We headed out early this morning to explore the low elevation agricultural areas around the Mennonite community of Spanish Lookout. We started at the rice fields, a vast area of what was previously jungle that has since been converted to agriculture. This open habitat is great for many raptors and other rangeland species, and the forest edge and larger ponds, canals, and brush-lined irrigation ditches made for lots of different micro habitats and an impressive diversity of birds. The highlights and exciting moments were really too many to count. At one point we jumped out of the van to watch a Great Black Hawk being mobbed by Red-winged



Blackbirds, which led us to finding a Gray Hawk being chased by a Laughing Falcon while thousands of dragonflies filled the air and a few stunning butterflies stole our attention, but especially the Dark Purplewings - wow! The birds and nature were almost overwhelming. A King Vulture came soaring over us, a Rufous-breasted Spinetail showed itself nicely in the open, Black Terns floated northward on their migration route, a Gray Fox scampered down the road, and we saw more Fork-tailed flycatchers than just about anything.

After a lunch break during a tremendous tropical downpour, we continued to Aguacate Lagoon where the mosquitoes and downed trees kept our visit short, but nice views of a Collared Forest-Falcon and a few species of Woodcreeper made it worth our while. Finally, we popped into the Spanish Lookout gravel pit where we found a couple new species, including a particularly charismatic Thick-billed Seed-Finch. Back at the lodge we gathered up for dinner where a stunning White Hawk was perched across the river from the veranda overlooking the Macal River. After a dinner and cocktails, we walked over to a small pond behind the lodge with our flashlights and found Cane Toads (including one that leaped right at Gilbert!), Brown's Leopard Frogs, and the stars of the show, Red-eyed Treefrogs, and a Cat-eyed Snake.

Fri., Jul. 26

Mountain Pine Ridge, Rio Frio Cave

Finally, it was our day to head up to an area that makes this part of Belize truly unique, the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. The higher elevation here is dominated by Caribbean pine and where it transitions to lowland jungle can produce some really impressive diversity. We stopped briefly on the road out where Yucatán endemics Rose-throated Tanager and Gray-throated Chat played hard to get. We wended through the city of San Ignacio on the way up the mountains and made another couple of impromptu stops along the way to pick up Cabanis's Wren and Sepia-capped Flycatcher (plus a bonus barely fledged Red-legged Honeycreeper with mom and dad) as well as some Green Jays. When we actually got up into the pines, we were greeted by Plumbeous Kites streaming overhead as we started our way down the Slate Creek Lookout trail, hoping for raptors from the overlook. Along the way, Black-faced Grosbeak and Stub-tailed Spadebill delighted us, and while waiting for raptors at the overlook, Rufous-capped Warblers and a pair of White-browed Gnatcatchers entertained us. A King Vulture soared out over the jungle below us, but the real show happened when we left the overlook and headed up the road. A rotted bit of roadkill had attracted about ten King Vultures as well as several of the more common Turkey and Black Vultures down to eye-level and then soaring low just above us, almost too close to fit



in the camera frame at times! It was totally shocking to all of us and left us with huge grins saying “WOW!” But more surprises were in store as we arrived at the Rio Frio Cave. White Morpho butterflies danced down the trail above us like spirits of the jungle, leading us to the incredibly impressive tunnel cave with a cavernous opening 65 feet tall with a stream rushing out of it. We climbed inside and all fell silent as we took in its majesty, with small stalactites hanging from the ceiling and the chittering of bats coming from the crevices. The birds in the area were not to be outdone though, with White-whiskered Puffbird, Green Shrike-Vireo, and Montezuma Oropendola as some of our favorites from the area.

The scenery hits kept coming though, as we ate a traditional Belizean lunch of chicken, rice, beans, fried plantains, and fruit at a new picnic spot overlooking an area where the Rio On cascades down the granite forming a series of waterfalls and pools. A Rusty Sparrow came to greet us before we finally headed up to the highest parts of the MPR where we lucked into a nice mixed flock with Black-headed Siskins, Yellow-throated and Grace’s Warblers in the same tree, a family of Golden-hooded Tanagers, and Blue Ground Doves. After an incredibly eventful day, we headed back to the lodge for our final checklist and dinner as a group!

Sat., Jul. 27 Departures

On our final day, we bid Black Rock farewell over one final breakfast on the verandah. As we drove back to the airport, our local guide Isaias spotted one final farewell gift for us, a family trio of Jabiru soaring over the road ahead of us as we were just a few minutes away from the airport. We pulled to the shoulder to watch, and almost as if they knew we were watching, they circled back, flew right over us, and landed in a wetland right by the road for amazing views of the babies begging the parent for a snack. WOW! What a way to end an already magical trip.

Photos: Group (Bryan Calk - BC), Collared Aracari (Bill Michalski - BM), Jabiru (Edward Rooks - ER), Black-headed Trogon (BC), Coatimundi (ER), Brown Jay (BM), Butterfly (ER), Black Howler Monkey (ER), Group at Lamanai (BC), Yellow-throated Euphonia (BM), Common Tody-Flycatcher (BM), Mottled Owl (BC), Green Kingfisher (BM), Scenic (Tassy Hayden - TH), Red-throated Ant-Tanager (BM), Tody Motmot (BM), Rufous-capped Warbler (BM), King Vulture (BM), Scenic (BC), White-whiskered Puffbird (BM), Ivory-billed Woodcreeper (BM), Collared Aracari (BM), White-necked Jacobin (BM), Rio Frio Cave (BC), Butterfly (ER), Yucatan Banded Gecko (BM)