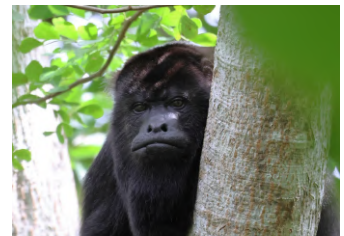


Belize Birding & Nature | Oct. 18—26, 2025

Trip Report | by Dave Mehlman



Guides: Leonard, Eddie Ruano, Raúl, Rubén Blanco, Luís Romero, and Dave Mehlman, with participants: Bob, Gary, Gwen, Laurel, Marilynn, Peg, Sam, and Stephanie



Sat., Oct. 18 Arrivals | Black Orchid Resort | Bird's Eye View Lodge

Laurel, Marilynn, Peg, Sam, and Dave had all arrived the day before at about the same time, so they (of course!) diligently applied themselves to starting the bird list at Black Orchid Resort that morning with a walk on the grounds and up to the Sky Roof. The most amazing highlight was a pair of Pale-billed Woodpeckers, apparently residing in the area, which repeatedly showed themselves at close range for superb views and photographs—the best view Dave had ever had of this species, in fact. We also found Red-lore Amazon, calling Couch's Kingbird, American Redstart, Yellow-throated Warbler, and the first of many Magnolia Warblers to get off to a nice start. About mid-day, Bob arrived at the airport, where he was picked up by Leonard from Bird's Eye View, and they swung by Black Orchid to pick up the group there.

We then drove on the Northern Highway to Crooked Tree Lagoon, where we checked into our rooms on the second floor of the Bird's Eye View Lodge, with its magnificent view over the lagoon. We then met Stephanie, who had arrived the day before and gone directly there, and then convened in the afternoon for a walk around the Lodge grounds. This walk provided a great introduction to what was in store for us; right along the shore in front of the lodge were numerous Northern Jacanas, a foraging Snail Kite, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, and a



Spotted Sandpiper. Walking further, we had decent views of Mangrove and White-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Ovenbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Hooded Oriole. Probably the coolest sighting was a pair of Rufous-naped Wood-Rails scampering about a grassy area near some of the lodge buildings! We also took time to note a fly-over Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and discuss the finer points of vulture identification and saw a pair of Bat Falcons perched high in a dead tree. A fabulous start to our tour!

After this, as we started our daily checklist before dinner, Gary and Gwen arrived to a dramatic entrance and completed our entire group. We then enjoyed a buffet dinner and discussed plans for the following day. After dinner, it was pointed out to us that we should check out the shoreline at dark and, sure enough, there was a foraging Boat-billed Heron right there, visible with the aid of flashlights. With that excitement over, we called it a day and rested up for the following morning.

Sun., Oct. 19 Bird's Eye View Lodge | Crooked Tree Lagoon

We began this day with a magnificent view of the sunrise from the second-floor patio of the Bird's Eye View Lodge, followed by coffee and snacks downstairs. Then, we walked to the nearby boat dock where Captain Leonard was waiting and we climbed aboard for a morning boat trip in the Crooked Tree Lagoon. Our first introduction to the wonders of Crooked Tree, this trip was full of birds in the water, on the land, and in the sky. Northern Jacanas and Neotropic Cormorants were everywhere—too many to fully count! The elegant Black-collared Hawk was seen several times, frequently voicing its apparent disgruntlement with our presence. Snail Kites, Ringed and Belted Kingfishers, Green Herons, and Anhingas were a constant presence, too. Some of the more unique highlights included several Bare-throated Tiger-Herons, both adults and immatures, Great Black Hawk, Barred Antshrike, Boat-billed Herons, a male Northern Cardinal (the only one of the tour), some calling Ruddy Crakes which refused to show, and an immature Gray-headed Kite (which took a while for Leonard and Dave to figure out). After a few hours, we returned to the boat dock, happy but hungry, and enjoyed a nice buffet breakfast (and more coffee!). After breakfast, some took a break while Peg, Bob, and Dave took a walk on the grounds looking for more things. Highlights of this walk included a sub-adult male Orchard Oriole, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, female Vermilion Flycatchers, Morelet's Seedeater, and decent views of both Spot-breasted Wren and Common Tody-Flycatcher, which responded to playback. We all then reconvened for buffet lunch and a short break.

We met again on the boat dock in late afternoon for an end-of-day boat trip in Crooked Tree Lagoon. Once again ably guided by Captain Leonard, we had another fun and enjoyable boat trip in this great location. Highlights of the afternoon trip included Pied-billed and Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (alas, always flying overhead), a briefly seen Sungrebe, fly-over Pale-vented Pigeons, Bat Falcon, Black-crowned and Yellow-



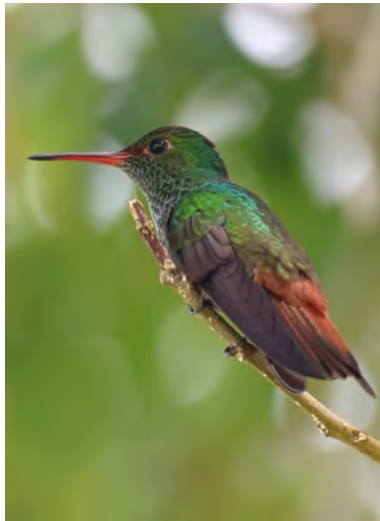
crowned Night-Heron, Squirrel Cuckoo, and a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers. After returning to the dock, we had a brief break, then met before dinner to do our daily checklist and review plans for the following day. An enjoyable buffet dinner followed to close-out our first full day of the tour in Belize. However, the night did not end before the entire group plus the kitchen staff celebrated Marilyn's birthday with an amazing cake—hearty congratulations from all to Marilyn!

Mon., Oct. 20 Bird's Eye View Lodge | New River Lagoon | Lamanai Outpost Lodge

We started today with early coffee and snacks, then met Leonard for a birding walk around the Lodge grounds, including the camping area. This was a fun and enjoyable walk, with many great sightings, including a bunch of Russet-naped Wood-Rails scampering about the lawn, Baltimore, Orchard, and Hooded Oriole, nice views of Rufous-browed Peppershrike, a female Rose-throated Becard, Yucatan Black Howler, Yucatan Gray Squirrel, and a Yellow-bellied Elaenia. During the walk, Leonard kindly offered to get the van and take us over to the nearby patch of savannah habitat, an offer which we eagerly accepted. After parking the van and disgorging ourselves, we almost immediately started finding a bunch of new species for us, many of which are partially or wholly restricted to pine savannah. These included a large flock of colorful Yucatan Jays, Acorn Woodpecker, Grace's Warbler, Common Ground-Dove, and a few, very shy Green Jays. Though this walk was short, it was very productive, so we then returned to the Lodge for breakfast. After breakfast, we did our final packing and settled our bills and bade farewell to the very nice folks at Bird's Eye View.

Leonard then drove the group, with bag lunches, a ways north to Bat's Landing on the New River, where we were met by the crew from Lamanai Outpost Lodge, our next destination. The Landing had very nice, shaded picnic tables and restrooms, so we took a short break to eat our lunches while our bags were loaded into the Lamanai boat. When the lunches were done, we climbed aboard the comfortable boat for the about one hour trip to the Lodge, of course birding along the way! Although we mostly zipped along, some Osprey, Ringed Kingfishers, and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons provided some avian distractions along the way. Arriving at the lovely Lamanai Outpost Lodge, we received our cabin assignments and then a briefing from the manager about life at Lamanai. We then had a bit of free time to unpack and get organized before meeting our most excellent guides, Eddie and Raúl, for a late afternoon walk on the Lodge grounds and in the nearby community of Indian Church.

Although late in the day, this walk was awesome, tallying 45 species—an indication of the diversity to be found at Lamanai. Highlights included Yellow-olive Flatbill, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, a female White-collared Manakin, Northern Bentbill, Barred Antshrike, and a Red-legged Honeycreeper. A fun way to start off our stay



here! We then returned to the lodge, had a brief break, and then reconvened in the “lounge” for our daily checklist, summary of the next day’s activities, and then a sumptuous dinner—the first of many. After that, back to our cabins (with most in the group remembering how to get back in the dark!) for an excellent night’s rest.

Tues., Oct. 21 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

Up early today, we grabbed coffee and a snack in the dining room, then met Eddie and Raúl for a morning walk, again near the lodge and in adjacent Indian Church. This was another wonderful walk with great birds and guides. Right by the Lodge parking lot, we heard and glimpsed a Mayan Antthrush in the dense brush and enjoyed the antics of a couple of noisy Black-headed Saltators in the trees. With some effort on Eddie’s part, a couple of Green-backed Sparrows just showed themselves; a Squirrel Cuckoo put on a much better show for us. Other highlights of the walk included Black-headed Trogon, Collared Aracari, Yellow-billed Cacique, Black-throated Green Warbler, and fly-over Red-billed Pigeons. Finishing this lovely morning, we returned to the dining room for an ample breakfast.

After a brief break, we met down at the boat dock and took the very short boat trip to the Lamanai Archeological Site, about 10 minutes away. Disembarking, we walked ashore and Eddie and Raúl commenced to give us a birding and history tour of this important Maya site in Belize. Although cut a bit short due to rain, we enjoyed visiting the museum for the stelae and seeing the Mask Temple, before retreating to a covered picnic table as the skies opened up. As expected, many birds were seen en-route, including Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Roadside Hawk, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Olivaceous and Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Lesser Greenlet, Bright-rumped Attila, and a Bat Falcon. A White-necked Puffbird was heard, but refused to show itself, much to our dismay. Upon conclusion of the rain, we walked to the other boat dock (along with another, different, tour group) and were boated back to the Lodge. Back at the ranch, so to speak, we had a chance to put on dry clothes and enjoyed a lovely lunch, followed by a free afternoon.

Late in the day, we met for our checklist and dinner in the dining room, then went back down to the boat dock for the much-anticipated New River Lagoon night cruise. We all climbed into the boat and off we went to look for what was out and about in the darkness of the Lagoon. A few Morelet’s Crocodiles were spotted, causing Dave to wonder again why had gone swimming off the dock! Also, many birds were found, thanks to Eddie’s uncanny spotting ability. We found a Northern Potoo, admiring its huge eyes, a few Common Pauraque, several herons (mostly Green) roosting in the trees, a surprised Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and both Ringed and Green Kingfisher. However, the bird of the night, if not the entire tour, was an Agami Heron, flushed up while boating, that flew into a tree for decent views with the spotlight! Kind of a mega-bird for most on the tour, this species is



hard to find any time and doubly-hard in the wet season, so we all enjoyed this most excellent sighting to cap off a lovely night on the Lagoon. On the way back to the dock, we briefly cut the motor to enjoy the peace and tranquility of a calm night on the Lagoon in Belize—what a great feeling. Upon return, we made our way back to our cabins and then turned in after a great day.

Wed., Oct. 22 Lamanai Outpost Lodge

We began the day with our usual coffee and a snack, then met Eddie and Raúl for a walk on the Lodge grounds, this time to the south of the property. As was becoming normal, the birds put on a show, despite the foggy morning, and we had better sightings of Green-backed Sparrow, Gray Catbird, Tawny-winged and Ruddy Woodcreeper, Northern Parula, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Ovenbird, a pair of very poorly seen Slaty-headed Tody-Flycatchers, and a pair of Gray-throated Chats (probably the birds of the morning!). Returning to the dining room, we feasted on another excellent breakfast, then had a bit of time to prepare for the morning's activity.

Meeting again at the dining room, the whole group walked and birded to Indian Church, ending up at Eddie's house where we met his son and enjoyed fresh-off-the-tree coconut water, straight from the coconut. Along the way, we picked up some new species for the tour, such as Black-crowned and Masked Tityra, Hook-billed Kite, Gray Hawk, Blue-black Grassquit, Kentucky Warbler, Wood Stork (several soared overhead with the vultures), and a rapidly flying by Merlin. I have to say that we all were continually impressed by the new species that kept popping up in and around this lovely town!

After the coconut water, we walked to the nearby Las Orquídeas Restaurant to get a lesson in making tortillas and tamales from the local women's cooperative which is based there—nothing like making your own food! The process, which started with grinding the lime-soaked corn in a metate, was fully explained—some in the group even took a crack at working the mano and metate to whip up their own masa! Unfortunately for us travelers, the “pros” made it look far easier than it actually was, but, fortunately for us, they had made extra masa. After grinding up the masa, we then patted the balls into appropriate sized patties and tossed them on the comal, already hot from the wood fire underneath, and then enjoyed them when they were done. After we finished the tortillas, we moved to a nearby table where everyone had their own set of plantain leaves laid out. We passed around a large bowl of masa, everyone grabbed a bit, then we carefully patted the masa onto the leaves to prepare a tamale, Belizean-style. After patting out the masa, a tasty sauce was spread on top and then a piece of chicken put in the center. At the conclusion, we were shown how to carefully fold up the tamale so it was ready for cooking. The ladies then cooked our tamales for us and gave them to us in bag to take back to the Lodge to eat at dinner. Meanwhile, the “hard-working” tamale crew adjourned to the screened in porch for a true Belizean lunch. A fun experience—nature, food, and culture at the same time!



We then had the afternoon free to rest or bird/photograph on our own. Late in the afternoon, we all met back down at the boat dock and hopped on board the pontoon boat for the legendary Lamanai Sunset Cruise. We set off across the Lagoon towards Dawson Creek under lovely skies, with Raúl whipping up tasty drink concoctions at the portable bar on board. A sweet and lovely way to end our last full day at Lamanai, we also found some birds while enjoying the company and atmosphere. Along the way, we found Least Bittern, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Yucatan Woodpecker, Ringed and Green Kingfisher, and another (hidden, but noisy) Ruddy Crake. Returning from the cruise, we went to the dining room, did our daily checklist, and enjoyed a final great dinner, including our tamales made earlier in the day. Stuffed, but very happy, we then all trundled off to our cabins to enjoy a quiet evening.

Thur., Oct. 23 Lamanai Outpost Lodge | Chan Chich Lodge

With some regret, we were up early as usual for coffee and snacks before meeting Eddie and Raúl for our final birding outing with them. This time, we went down to the boat dock, boarded the boat, and then crossed the lagoon, went up Dawson Creek, and disembarked for a walk in the extensive savannah which characterizes the habitats on the east side of New River Lagoon. Although we had walked in savannah briefly at Crooked Tree, this savannah was different with less pine cover and more grass and shrubs. As we entered the Creek, we commenced birding, soon finding a remarkably cooperative American Pygmy Kingfisher in the shrubs along the creek, allowing for incredible views and photography! We also saw a lovely Hook-billed Kite perched in a tree, along with Pale-vented Pigeon, Mangrove Vireo, and a fly-by Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

After disembarking from the boat, we enjoyed a great walk through the savannah, although it was pretty wet due to the morning dew and overnight rain. Some of the highlights of the 51 species seen during the walk included Scrub Euphonia, Botteri's Sparrow, a passage Blackburnian Warbler, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and a spectacular soaring White-tailed Hawk. For many of these species, this was the only time we recorded them on the entire tour. Returning to our boat, a few lucky folks near the front saw a Canivet's Emerald and Eddie heard, but could not attract in, a Black Catbird. Once aboard, we returned to the Lamanai boat dock under lovely, sunny skies, and then enjoyed a late, but well-earned, final Lamanai breakfast. After breakfast, we had a bit of free time to pack all our gear for travel, settle our bills, and enjoy our surroundings one last time.

At about 1:00pm, the two vehicles from Chan Chich Lodge, our next destination, appeared, all our bags were loaded in, and we set off for our next adventure after taking a group photo with Eddie and Raúl. Our route took us north, then west, and then south to get to Chan Chich; we took a brief stop en-route to observe a massive



number of Northern Rough-winged Swallows at the Blue Creek Ricefields, which unfortunately had neither rice nor water. We took a longer rest stop at the Blue Creek Store, which oddly enough was already stocked with artificial Christmas Trees! Turning off the highway, we encountered a much rougher secondary road through the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area and then onto Gallon Jug Estates. After this drive, we were very happy to arrive at the Chan Chich Lodge, nestled in an ancient Mayan Plaza in the middle of the forest. Upon arrival, we were assigned our rooms and received a welcome refreshment and orientation from the Lodge managers. We then found our nice cabins, got settled in, then met in the lounge for our daily checklist, some welcome drinks, and then an excellent dinner in the dining room.

Fri., Oct. 24 Chan Chich Lodge

In a by-now normal routine, we were up early just after sunrise and enjoyed coffee and a snack in the Chan Chich dining room. We then met local guide Rubén for a morning walk around the lodge grounds and surrounding area. We quickly appreciated the huge avian diversity here; numerous (and noisy!) Red-lored Amazons called from the treetops as Ocellated Turkeys paraded around. Rubén pointed out a calling Cinnamon Becard which we were able to find and Black-headed Saltators and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers foraged in the shrubs. All this and we had not moved at all! Slowly, reluctantly, we began our walk, with new birds turning up almost every step. Louisiana Waterthrushes were quite numerous on the ground, while we found White-whiskered Puffbird, Bright-rumped Attila, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Gartered Trogon, and a singing (but, not seen) Northern Schiffornis in the trees. As we walked along near some of the staff housing, a pair of Purple-crowned Fairies chased each other through the trees, making us all gasp in astonishment at these aptly-named hummingbirds. A streetlight that we examined had about a dozen huge Elephant Beetles on it, evidently attracted to the light during the night. Upon completion of our loop walk, we adjourned to the dining room for a tasty breakfast. While eating, we noted quite a bit of bird traffic in the shrubs by the porch and in a fruiting fig tree in the clearing; we thus added Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-backed Euphonia, Blue-black Grosbeak, and Short-billed Pigeon to our list while seated!

After breakfast, we met Rubén again and went on a morning walk on the entrance road as far as the suspension bridge. This walk, predominantly forested, turned up many nice things, such as Tawny-crowned Greenlet, a Golden-olive Woodpecker (mostly hiding behind a large tree branch), Black-and-white and Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Lesser Greenlet. At the open area by the bridge, we picked up a pair of Morelet's Seed eaters along with Social Flycatcher and a Northern Tropical Pewee. We took a short walk on the muddy Sac Be Trail, finding a Central American Gulf Coast Toad, but there were few birds in the creek at this time of day, aside from a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. On our walk back to the lodge, Rubén pointed out a calling Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, which is frequently the nucleus species of a mixed-species flock. We were able to



find the bird, a female, and some accompanying species, like the stunning Green Shrike-Vireo, Red-throated and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager (the latter identified after-the-fact courtesy of an excellent photo from Peg), and Greenish Elaenia. Upon returning to the lodge area, we had a short bit of free time, followed by lunch on the porch, and then a rest period.

In late afternoon, we all assembled at the reception building where we met Rubén and climbed aboard one of Chan Chich's safari trucks for a late-day wildlife drive to the Gallon Jug Farm, a much more open area. Among the many, many White-tailed Deer enjoying the pastures, we found Groove-billed Anis, Brown-hooded Parrot, an immature King Vulture soaring with Turkey Vultures, several Roadside Hawks, Gray Hawk, Crested Guan, Montezuma Oropendola, and a few Central American Spider Monkeys. We finished this drive just before dusk, then met again for our checklist and dinner. However, we were not done yet; returning to the reception building after dark, we got back in the safari truck for a night drive. This fun drive yielded incredible looks at a Mottled Owl perched on a fence post, several American Barn Owls, Common Pauraque, a Northern Potoo (second one of the tour!), Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and a roosting Black-headed Trogon—what a night!

Sat., Oct. 25 Chan Chich Lodge

Up again early, we partook of our coffee and a snack in the dining room, before moving to the reception building to climb on board the safari truck for a morning run to Gallon Jug, this time with Luís at the wheel. On our way down the entrance road, several Great Curassows ran across the road, providing nice views of both sexes of this large forest bird. Once out in the open, among the usual hordes of White-tailed Deer, we found quite a few birds in the morning light, including Masked Tityra, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Gray and Roadside Hawk, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Red-lore Parrots. Driving along the coffee farm we finally saw a group of Keel-billed Toucans in the trees—for some reason, this species, the national bird of Belize, had eluded us until today. Also present were Olive-throated Parakeets, Brown Jays, and Collared Aracaris, as some Summer Tanagers gave their distinctive call notes in the background. On our way back to the lodge, we found another White-whiskered Puffbird (can't have too many of those!), a calling Northern Schiffornis, and a Plain Xenops foraging right over the road. Returning to the lodge, we enjoyed another great breakfast on the porch, keeping our eyes peeled for birds while eating.

After breakfast, we reconvened for a morning walk around the lodge grounds, hoping to find the tree with feeding manakins mentioned to us by Emil, one of the staff working the dining room. Although we never did find any manakins, we had a great morning walk. An interesting find was a Gray Fox scampering around the manager's house, perhaps the same one seen under Stephanie's cabin. Bird-wise, great sightings included some Crested Guans crawling through the trees, a spectacular Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, several Blue-black Grosbeaks, a group of Black-cowled Orioles, a Gray Hawk sunning itself with



outstretched wings and tail at the top of a tree, and a Black Hawk Eagle, heard screaming so high in the sky it was invisible. If all that was not enough, two Bat Falcons flew by as we returned to the lodge—what a way to end the morning! After returning, we enjoyed lunch followed by a short siesta period.

After the afternoon break, we met at the reception building for a drive in the safari truck to Laguna Verde to finish the day. On our way there, we found a Green Kingfisher and some Indigo Buntings by the suspension bridge. On our way through the forested area, we found some nice things, including a Rufous-tailed Jacamar (oddly, the first and only one of the tour), Wedge-billed and Ruddy Woodcreeper, Plain Chachalaca, Great Black Hawk, and another calling Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. We arrived at the Laguna to find a serene setting as the sun sank low in the sky behind the lake (not very verde at this season!) and clouds dotted the sky. Some Couch's Kingbirds called out as we admired the view and we watched a Ringed Kingfisher across the lake; toward the end of our stay, a Great Tinamou called out to check in on our last outing of the tour. We then returned to the lodge, freshened up, met for our checklist and discussion of departure plans for the next day in the lounge, before moving to the dining room for our farewell dinner.

Sun., Oct. 26 Chan Chich Lodge | Departures

Due to the drive time from Chan Chich back to the Belize City airport, we had an early start to the day with coffee and snacks and everyone got a to-go breakfast burrito to carry with them. We used a van and small pickup to carry us and our gear and after saying goodbye and spotting some final Central American Spider Monkeys, we headed off. We made our way through the Gallon Jug Estates to the south, passing by several trucks of UK soldiers undergoing jungle training, and took a brief bathroom break at a gas station in Spanish Lookout, a large Mennonite farming community. Of course our alert group was birding on the way as we drove, and we picked up several new species for the tour including a Laughing Falcon, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Eurasian Collared-Dove, and Variable Seedeater—nice work by all. When we left the gas station, the vehicles took slightly different routes, with the van going directly to the Philip Goldson International Airport and the truck going first to Burrell Boom, to drop off Gwen and Gary at the Black Orchid Resort for an extra night, and then to take Dave to the airport. At the airport, we checked in successfully, completed our important exit paperwork, and then headed home, with fond memories of Belize dancing in our heads the entire way back.

Photos: Group (David Mehlman - DM), Gartered Violaceous Trogon (Peg Morgan - PM), Yucatan Howler Monkey (PM), Ringed Kingfisher (PM), Green Iguana (PM), Pale-billed Woodpecker (PM), Magnolia Warbler (PM), Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (PM), Boat-billed Heron (PM), Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (PM), Lamanai (Laurel Hallman - LH), Mexican Hairy Dwarf Porcupine (PM), Boat-billed Flycatcher (PM), New River Lagoon sunset (DM), Ocellated Turkey (PM), Dawson Creek Savannah (DM), Roadside Hawk (PM), American Pygmy Kingfisher (PM), White-whiskered Puffbird (PM), Black-cheeked Woodpecker (PM), Mottled Owl (PM), Golden-fronted Woodpecker (PM), Gray Hawk (PM), Morelet's Seedeater (PM), Laguna Verde (DM)