Belize: Three Great Lodges | March 14-24, 2026
Trip Report by Robert Gallardo

With Naturalist Journeys guide Robert Gallardo, local guides Isaias at Black Rock Lodge, Eduardo at Lamanai Outpost, Steve at Tanager Rainforest Lodge, and participants Pamela, Kristine, Gretchen, Bill, Julie, Jack, Judy, Terrence and Michael.

Belize: Small, but Great

Tucked away along the Caribbean coast of Central America is the small nation of Belize. Barely the size of New Jersey, this country boasts one of the highest percentages of natural forest cover in Central America. The small population that is centered primarily along the coast is reason for this. Going hand-in-hand with the widespread forest cover are benefits for wildlife, such as a great variety (and numbers) of raptors and large cats. If one is going to see a Jaguar in Central America, this would be the place. Belize harbors just over 600 species of birds and is a great place to begin to become familiar with most of the families that occur in the Neotropics. The country is also known for its fine nature lodges, many of which are nestled in, or at the edges of forest reserves.

Saturday, March 14 Arrivals Drive to Black Rock Lodge

Today, our twelve-day adventure began. Four of us were picked up in Belize City by Isaias (our guide from Black Rock Lodge) and off we went. We didn't get far when we found a Common Black-Hawk perched on a utility wire. Upon reaching the Black Orchid hotel we picked four more participants. We made our way to the lunch spot; a restaurant called 'Amigos.' Just as we finished ordering, Terry and Michael caught up to us with another driver

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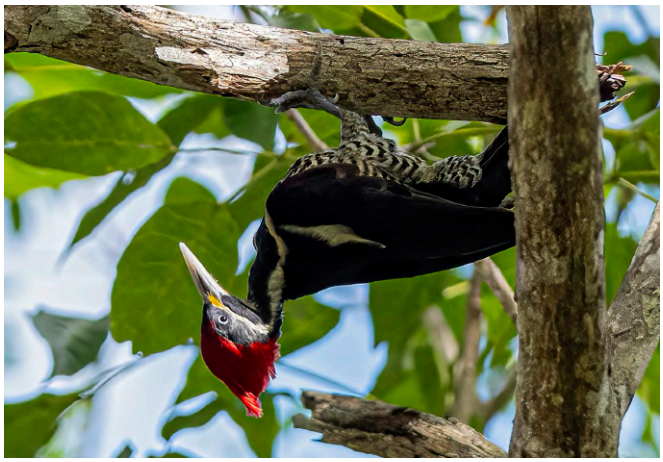

from the lodge. While we waited, we were able to enjoy a few birds that inhabited the grounds. A male Vermilion Flycatcher quickly caught our attention. A Social Flycatcher was spotted as it plucked insects from the lawn. Several migrant Yellow-rumped Warblers popped out onto the lawn as well. A Yellow-throated Warbler came to the restaurant to glean insects from nooks and crannies. After a tasty lunch, we headed out and found a Fork-tailed Flycatcher in a nearby tree.

We continued the drive and before reaching our destination we found a Least Grebe in a small pond. It would be seen almost daily as we came and went from the lodge. We arrived at Black Rock Lodge which is located along the northern edge of the Maya Mountains and sits high above the Macal River. It is a very picturesque place and worthy of a four-night stay. Everyone received an orientation then got checked into the rooms. In the afternoon, Robert took everyone on a short walk along the grounds, and we started at the restaurant that overlooks the river. There were many White-necked Jacobins on feeders as well as a few Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. The giant Scaly-breasted Hummingbird also came in to feed. A Black-cheeked Woodpecker was busy pecking out a nest hole on a nearby snag. An adult and immature Black-cowled Oriole also came in to forage on insects. We moved out to the parking lot to see what was stirring and there wasn't much, so we walked down the entrance road. Kristine spotted an interesting bird, and it turned out to be the migratory Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher. Toward the bottom of the hill, we spotted several Collared Aracaris that came in and perched nearby. It would be the beginning of many toucan sightings during the trip. In a nearby open area the hefty Lineated Woodpecker was found before it flew off to join its mate. It was a great way to start the trip.

We had our first, delicious meal that night and enjoyed some cocktails.

Sunday, March 15 Black Rock | Belize Botanical Garden | Night Drive

Many of us woke to the roaring vocalizations of the Yucatan Black Howler Monkeys that were just across the river. These deep sounds readily reverberate across the rocky canyon walls. At the restaurant we were able to appreciate a female Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle through a scope as she sat on a nest in a distant Kapok tree. Black Rock is probably the most reliable place in Central America to see this spectacular raptor. A pair of Rose-throated Becard came in to forage on insects and we spotted a pair of Crimson-collared Tanagers feeding on *Piper* inflorescences far below. When everyone showed up, we started a walk down a wide path that paralleled the river. The first bird to appear was the stately Squirrel Cuckoo and it came in very close. Some movement in the nearby woods caught Robert's attention and it turned out to be a pair of Northern Emerald-Toucanets searching for a suitable nest site. How cool was that? Scaling back a bit on size, we saw the diminutive Common Tody-Flycatcher. On the way back we came across a handsome male White-collared Manakin feeding on *Miconia* fruits. We also noted a female Blue-black Grosbeak and a male Yellow-faced Grassquit. We had a hearty

breakfast then continued our walk. A pair of Keel-billed Toucans greeted us near the feeder area. A pair of Short-billed Pigeon was feeding in a giant Melastome tree and beyond them we spotted a Purple-crowned Fairy. Isaias stocked the feeder with bananas and papaya and it didn't take long for the show to begin. The pudgy Yellow-throated and Olive-backed Euphonias showed up, then the colorful Red-legged Honeycreepers. And if that wasn't enough, several Red-throated Ant-Tanagers and a pair of Yellow-winged Tanager also came in. It was a kaleidoscope of color! Cracked corn placed on the ground also brought in a pair of obliging Green-backed Sparrows and several Indigo Buntings. When we just about had enough of the feeders, an Ovenbird and Kentucky Warbler were spotted in a nearby row of plants. The first full day afield was off to a magnificent beginning.

We headed out to the nearby Belize Botanical Garden but didn't get very far down the road. Isaias spotted something that flew across the road and landed. It was a male Collared Trogon so we stopped to enjoy this species that is typically found at higher elevations. A bit further we stopped again to admire a few Plumbeous Kites and a pair of White Hawks. We finally made our way to the botanical garden and met our guide. We got held up in the parking lot where we found a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-throated Vireo, Lesser Greenlet, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker. In a distant tree we saw several Olive-throated Parakeets feeding on blossoms. We entered the garden and were showed different plants and a small native orchid collection. It didn't take long to get sidetracked when a perched Lesson's Motmot was found on a liana. It was keen on foraging on fallen fruits and we were afforded lengthy views. We reached a small stagnant lagoon where a big fallen tree lay. To our surprise, an American Pygmy Kingfisher was there and it posed so nicely for extended views and photos. This tiny kingfisher is usually quite difficult to see so well in its normal wetland habitats. Bouncing around in the same fallen tree was a Prothonotary Warbler. Down a path we came across an Olivaceous Woodcreeper, being one of the easier species to identify. Nearby, Isaias heard a familiar call. It belonged to the Tody Motmot. We moved to another side trail until we had just the right angle to get glimpses of this minute motmot. It was a splendid way to end the morning.

On our way back to the lodge we stopped once again to get a glimpse of a Rufous-tailed Jacamar. Perched near a road cut, Isaias believed it was going to nest there. During lunch we caught a quick glimpse of the Wedge-tailed Sabrewing; a large species with a rather limited distribution. A lovely male Gartered Violaceous Trogon was also seen before everyone returned to the rooms for a bit of rest.

We had a fairly early dinner as a night drive was planned for tonight. We headed down the road and it didn't take long to spot something good. It was a Mottled Owl perched near ground level on a snag. What luck! Unfortunately, another lodge car came and spooked it away. We continued and took a detour, taking a dirt road around a citrus orchard. It didn't take long until we encountered a Northern Potoo, perched atop a fence post. It

remained there the entire time we admired it. We would end up spotting six more during the night. Further along we flushed up a second Mottled Owl. Isaias had a spot to try for another owl; the Middle American Screech-Owl. We heard two calling from deep within the thick forest understory but alas, could not locate either one.

We returned to the lodge triumphant with our sightings.

Monday, March 16 Spanish Lookout

Each day brings nice surprises and today was no exception. Right after breakfast we headed out to spend most of the day in the field. We were going to spend the entire day in area known as Spanish Lookout. It was settled by Mennonites who utilized intense mechanized farming techniques and produce a large percentage of the food for Belize. Amidst the vast corn and rice fields are green areas that have been set aside and are rich in bird life. We were driving along when Robert spotted a deep ditch filled with Wood Storks so we stopped. Also seen in the ditch was a Roseate Spoonbill and several Little Blue Herons. We started noticing a lot of bird activity in a stand of trees and it was almost non-stop action. A small flock of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks lifted up out of a concealed wetland. Large numbers of Blue Grosbeaks were moving through some cane grass, as well as Morelet's and Variable Seedeaters. A pair of Scrub Euphonias was spotted atop a distant tree. Small numbers of Red-lored Parrots and White-fronted Amazons came and went. A large flycatcher was seen atop a tall tree and it ended up being a Couch's Kingbird. It is very similar to the common and widespread Tropical Kingbird. Migrant Orchard and Baltimore Orioles were also on the move. At the edge of thicket a female Painted Bunting and a female Barred Antshrike were spotted. To top off the list for that spot was a pair of Gray-crowned Yellowthroat; a resident warbler.

We continued on until we found a patch of pine forest. Walking down the road was a Gray Fox, looking for something to eat. We stopped to scan the small pines and found a male Canivet's Emerald and two Lesser Nighthawks on day roosts. At a nearby pond we found two Solitary Sandpipers, several Least Sandpipers, a Wilson's Snipe that decided to take off, several Blue-winged Teal and a lone Snail Kite. We continued and along another stretch of road we found several Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and another Fork-tailed Flycatcher. We made our way to some huge rice fields along a protected road. As we drove along, several Black-necked Stilts, a few White Ibis, a Glossy Ibis, and a pair of Green Herons were spotted. We reached a dead-end dirt road and stopped to see what we could find. An Osprey was perched high above a lagoon. We got scope views of several Plain-breasted Ground Doves and discovered that two Laughing Falcons were also nearby. Both were looking down into a grassy area, keen on finding snakes. A lone Anhinga and Neotropic Cormorant were amongst those prowling the lagoon waters. While in that area we spotted two White-tailed Deer which are not easy to see in the entire region due to overhunting.

After this successful morning, we went to the nearby small town and had lunch at 'Sister's'. A Brown-crested Flycatcher called from a nearby grove of trees and a female Green-breasted Mango visited a feeder. After a relaxing lunch we headed out to small forest reserve called Aguacate Lagoon. In the middle of the forest was a small lagoon and a road around it. We heard a Blue Ground Dove calling from high in the trees. It didn't take long until we noticed a small troop of Central American Spider Monkeys that was moving across the road. We made sure to give them plenty of room as they are known to try and get extra 'friendly' with humans. A Northern Schiffornis was also heard calling and we eventually got brief views of this brown bird that inhabits the dark forest understory. A familiar sound reverberated from the canopy and belonged to the Gartered Violaceous Trogon. It took a bit of searching paid off and we got scope views of this handsome bird. Another pair of Keel-billed Toucans came and went. We were about to find a spectacular of the woodpecker family; the Chestnut-colored. A male and female appeared and we were ecstatic to see such a spectacular bird. We heard a Ruddy Crake calling from the floating aquatic vegetation and, like many species in this family, remain hidden and difficult to see. As we were just about to reach the van we saw something bolt through the vegetation between us and the lagoon. Robert spotted where it landed and it turned out to be a female White-whiskered Puffbird. It flew back and forth and we were afforded many views of this cutie. For it being an afternoon walk, we considered it quite successful.

We made our way back to the lodge and as we got closer we spotted a male Black-headed Trogon perched close to the road. It was a great way to end another day afield. Upon reaching the lodge, we took a well-deserved rest before doing our checklist and dinner.

Tuesday, March 17 Pine Ridge | Caracol Maya Site

After breakfast we set out toward another area; the Maya Mountains. This mountain range lies mostly in southwestern Belize and spills into neighboring Guatemala with part of it commonly known as Mountain Pine Ridge. Before reaching the mountains we saw some Collared Aracaris land on a utility pole so we stopped to admire them. Several Keel-billed Toucans also came in and perched in some distant trees were Red-lored and White-crowned Parrots. What a show! A lone Red-billed Pigeon was spotted perched in a nearby tree. We continued up the road and stopped once we entered a mixed pine-broadleaf forest. Since it was cool and overcast, no raptors were up flying and we found two Plumbeous Kites perched right along the road. Isaias heard a faint chatter and atop a tall pine we saw a pair of Black-headed Siskins was seen.

We passed up and over the pine-clad hills and descended a bit back into broadleaf forest. We made another stop to see if anything was stirring. A Blue Bunting was singing; concealed high in the thick vegetation. Some

careful searching, however, revealed its perch. We spotted several Northern Emerald-Toucanets rather high against the hill but one sat still and we were able to see it with a scope. A handsome Golden-winged Warbler and a pair of White-browed Gnatcatchers were also seen there. At another stop we found a White-bellied Emerald flitting in and out of the vegetation. High in the sky we got good looks at Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, a Hook-billed Kite, several Double-toothed Kites, and a Gray-headed Kite. Belize is a great place to see many raptors and our list of them continued to grow.

We finally reached the Maya site of Caracol. This was a large Maya city and has become especially popular since the paving of the new road. We checked in then began a walk along a path where regular tourists didn't go. A small flock of Indigo Buntings was foraging on the grass along with a female Painted Bunting. We entered the tower forest and heard the long, two-note whistle of a distant Slaty-breasted Tinamou. It didn't take long to find something close to us. It was a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher; a tiny flycatcher that inhabits the dark forest understory. A Tawny-winged Woodcreeper appeared, revealing its two-toned wing pattern that sets it apart from other woodcreepers. We reached a plaza and spotted a Golden-olive Woodpecker perched high in a distant tree. The scope helped with that one. A pair of Bat Falcons went screaming by. We came across an active colony of Montezuma Oropendolas that sat high atop a temple. Female Giant Cowbirds were busy inspecting nests to see if any were fit to parasitize. Isaias interpreted some of the history of the site and to the likely demise of the people; overuse of the natural resources. The story is the same across the ancient Maya civilization. At another plaza we found a pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers. We watched as many species of migratory wood-warblers foraged amidst the dense foliage and standing out was a lovely Blue-winged Warbler. This is the time of year when the Gumbo Limbo tree fruits and can attract many types of birds. One such tree was there and it contained an amazing four species of vireos; Philadelphia, Red-eyed, Yellow-throated, and White-eyed. How odd was that? Further down another path we found two Dot-winged Antwrens foraging high in the sub-canopy. A few Golden-crowned Warblers caught our attention and we were able to observe this resident species. After this rewarding walk it was lunch time. Just as Isaias had lunch all laid out, it started to rain. And it poured. Fortunately, we were under a large, covered structure. We had our picnic lunch and let the thundershower pass. We spotted a Louisiana Waterthrush foraging on the wet grass before we departed.

We departed Caracol but didn't get far when a perched raptor was spotted close to the road. It was a Great Black-Hawk that was beginning to dry itself after the rain. It was very wet, and stayed there for the longest time, showing all of its plumage and poses as it preened. It was one of the rare moments of seeing a magnificent tropical raptor in all its glory. Other birds started to become active and right beside the road we heard a Mayan Antthrush, Fawn-throated Foliage-Gleaner, and a Nightingale Wren. The thick vegetation made it virtually impossible to see any of them. We continued and since it was raining as we did not stop in the pine mountains

to search for other birds. As we approached the lodge, we found an immature Cooper's Hawk perched atop a dead tree.

We reached to the lodge and had some downtime before having our final dinner at this wonderful destination.

Wednesday, March 18 Depart Black Rock | Green Hills Butterfly Farm | Travel to Lamanai

We enjoyed one last breakfast at Black Rock before departing. The views, sound of the rushing river and howler monkeys would be missed. A pair of the gaudy Russet-naped Wood-Rails was foraging at the fruit feeders; bidding us farewell. Just down the road Isaias spotted something; quail. We found a female Black-throated Bobwhite that had landed in the middle of the field and sat there motionless. The remainder of the covey was concealed in the fence row. What a great find. A ways further down the road we stopped again and found a Mangrove Vireo and a White-bellied Wren. Isaias heard the faint call from a prized bird; a Rose-throated Tanager. One was vocalizing high in some low trees but was one layer back. With some persistent searching we were able to see a male of this regional endemic.

Down the highway a bit further we found two King Vultures that were taking to the skies. Two Great Black-Hawks also soared across the road. The birds did not want to let us go. We finally reached the Green Hills Butterfly Ranch and were met by one of their guides. We received a tour of the butterfly house where they mate and lay eggs. The structure had a plastic roof so the butterflies didn't mind the light rain. We were then shown one of the rooms where thousands of larvae are reared. It was an incredible process to witness and amazing to see such mass production. There were nectar feeders on the grounds and they were buzzing with hummers. There were numerous of the more common species, but we also saw a Long-billed Hermit, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, and a male Violet Sabrewing. We had another delicious picnic lunch before heading out. We had a long ways yet to go. We did, however, find a Piratic Flycatcher that was calling atop a high tree.

We made it to the flat lowlands and turned north, eventually reaching Bat's Landing. We got a group photo with Isaias and said our 'good-byes.' We were met by Eduardo and would be our expert guide while at the Lamanai Outpost Lodge. We boarded a boat in a light rain but were grateful when it passed. We cruised down a narrow channel lined with a nice variety of vegetation. A lone Eastern Kingbird was seen; signs that birds were already moving up from South America. Many Mangrove and Northern Rough-winged Swallows flitted to and fro. A lone Limpkin, Roseate Spoonbill, and a pair of Bare-throated Tiger-Herons were also spotted. A Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture came soaring by, allowing close looks at its multicolored head. A pair of Short-tailed Hawks was

observed as we continued along the channel. We got our share of kingfishers, including six Ringed, several Belted, and four Green.

We reached the dock at Lamanai and ended this multi-faceted travel day. Everyone was shown their rooms and we met up later for cocktails, checklist time, and dinner. This lodge serves some of the finest dishes in the region.

Thursday, March 19 Lamanai Maya Site | Night Cruise

We woke up early and had some hot coffee before starting the day. Eduardo took us out the lodge's gate and we did a short walk through the community of Indian Church. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak zipped in and perched atop a branch. It would soon be migrating back to breed somewhere in eastern North America. A Green-backed Sparrow flew across the road, disappearing into a thicket. Something flashy caught our attention. It was a Hooded Oriole, and it had its sight set on food. It headed straight to the flowers of a small banana plant where it nectared just up from ground level. Nice! At one point we reached a large patch of Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) which often attracts birds to its nectar and fruit. A pair of Buff-throated Saltators was feeding on fruits while a male and female Red-legged Honeycreeper sipped nectar. The day was off to a nice start.

We had a full breakfast then boarded the boat for a short ride to the Lamanai Maya site. According to archaeologists, this was one of the last major Maya sites to be abandoned. We walked down a forested trail and it was quiet at first but that quickly changed. A mixed foraging flock began to appear and in it was a Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Golden-olive Woodpecker, and Ochre-crowned Greenlet. Leading it was a female Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. The black-and-yellow male was nowhere to be seen. Then Eduardo spotted a female Gray-collared Becard. Throughout part of its range it occurs in highlands and is a species that is generally difficult to find anywhere. We reached a plaza and Eduardo interpreted some of the ancient Maya history. Robert was sitting on a wall and turned around to see a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars sitting on a tree root below. They were likely nesting in the temple wall. Almost at the same time a Slaty-tailed Trogon appeared, drawing everyone's attention to this rather large species. A faint chatter caught Eduardo's attention and it belonged to the Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet. It appeared right over our heads and we got a brief glimpse of this tiny flycatcher.

We returned to the lodge, had lunch, then some down time. We wanted to get some rest before the next activity. We convened later on then had dinner. Right after that, we started a night cruise and started down a channel. A Northern Potoo was spotted atop a snag in the middle of the marsh. We came across some foraging

Proboscis Bats and then found a few resting on a tree trunk. Eduardo found a pair of roosting Russet-naped Wood-Rails which was a treat. We then came across a sleeping Green Kingfisher, a Ringed Kingfisher, and a Pygmy Kingfisher. How special was that? Two Greater Fishing Bats came flying toward us then disappeared into the darkness. Then Eduardo spotted a Northern White Bat foraging overhead. A small Morelet's Crocodile was seen hiding underneath a large, fallen tree. As we continued, some shining eyes caught our attention and belonged to a Yucatan Nightjar; a regional endemic. We came across a couple of Boat-billed Herons that were foraging. It was almost non-stop action and was a spectacular cruise. Eduardo then began to return to the main lagoon, guiding through the channels by pure starlight. It seemed unreal. Upon reaching the lagoon he turned off the motor and pointed out a myriad of constellations in the dark sky. This guy really knew his stuff.

We returned to the lodge after having one of the most incredible experiences of the trip and called it a night.

Friday, March 20 Lamanai Area | Sunset Cruise

In the Yucatan region and elsewhere in Central America exists pine savannah habitats consisting of low-lying areas filled with grasses, Caribbean pines, and marshy hammocks. They often harbor a unique array of flora and fauna, including special birds. Right across the lagoon from Lamanai is a patch of this habitat and this was our day to explore it. We hopped in the boat and started to make our way up a small channel that led to the savannah. A Snail Kite graced us with its presence. We were then treated to a Black Catbird that was perched in a nearby shrub. A Yucatan Woodpecker then flew in and landed on a nearby snag, also allowing for a nice view. Two regional endemics in a row! We reached the spot where we would walk a ways into the savannah. A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was spotted which represented a localized resident race. We also heard a Carolina Wren calling from within a nearby patch of forest, also representing a resident race. The familiar Acorn Woodpecker was spotted; a species likely having the largest distribution of any woodpecker. We saw several pairs of Yellow-lored Amazons fly by and were hoping one would stop for a better view. While looking at some migrant wood-warblers in an oak, a Buff-bellied Hummingbird came in to inspect us. We walked further into the savannah and got a good look at a White-bellied Wren that was foraging at the edge of some forest. In the distance we could hear the sweet calls being emitted by a pair of Yellow-headed Amazons. We could then discern that they had stopped. We continued until we arrived at the edge of a clearing and found this special bird perched atop a distant pine. We observed them for quite some time with the aid of a scope. It is, in fact, an endangered species and we felt fortunate to see this majestic bird. We began to walk back to the boat and saw two pair of Mealy Amazons fly past. A handsome male Vermilion Flycatcher foraged right along the trail. Eduardo heard the faint song of a Botteri's Sparrow; a denizen of this habitat. Upon arriving at the boat we found a very vocal Rufous-browed Peppershrike in a nearby tree.

We returned to the lodge to have a filling and delicious breakfast. Afterwards, we walked into Indian Church for a different experience altogether. It was Eduardo's community and he knew everyone. We ended up at a women's cooperative where they manage a small restaurant for locals. One of the members showed us how to make a tortilla by first grinding cooked corn on a stone mortar. It looked easier than it actually was. Most everyone took turns grinding a wad of corn and afterwards molding the tortillas. They had a small fire already stoked so our tortillas were fired right there and then. We were then served a delicious lunch that included a tasty red sauce. Afterwards, we each made a tamale with corn meal that was already prepared for us. They were to be taken back to the lodge and served with our dinner. It's always nice to experience some of the local culture whenever possible.

We returned to the lodge and had some downtime in preparation for the afternoon activity. We boarded the boat in the late afternoon to begin a sunset cruise ride, replete with some cocktails! Along with our tasty selection of beverages, we were also going to look for wildlife. We returned to the same channel that led to the pine savannah and firsts found a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. Eduardo heard a Least Bittern calling not far away and we got brief glimpses of this tiny, secretive bird. Robert heard a Spotted Rail calling in the distance so we stopped to see if luck (and patience) were on our side today. It was. This handsome bird came creeping in and walked past us, always partially hidden, but we could see its spotted pattern and long, yellow bill. It would end up being the rarest bird seen on the trip. We continued sipping on cocktails and then found a White-throated Flycatcher; a resident *Empidonax* species. A Striped Cuckoo called in the distance, but remained hidden from view. Upon returning to the lagoon we found a flock of White Ibis soaring gracefully northward.

After this wonderful afternoon cruise we were ready for another delightful dinner. And so ended another spectacular day in Belize.

Saturday, March 21 Lamanai | Travel to Belize City | Flight | Tanager Rainforest Lodge

Before heading on to our next destination we wanted to give the lodge grounds another shot. We took a walk along a wide trail that lead to some small ponds, scrub, and forest. The first bird we ran into was a Gray-throated Chat calling from deep within a thicket. We tried so hard to see it but alas, it circled around to another thicket and went quiet. Further down the trail we did see the tiny Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet and a Gray-headed Dove that was calling from a high vantage spot. Another Northern Schiffornis was calling and Robert whistled it right in. It landed so close that bins were not even needed. We heard several Blue Ground-Doves calling from high spots in trees and they all eluded us. As Robert was scanning for them he did spot a White-necked Puffbird and we saw it in the scope. We were coming back around on the loop trail when a Yucatan

Flycatcher and perched in plain sight. We got wonderful views of this regional endemic. Next on the list was a male Black-headed Trogon that was perched very close to the trail and we admired it. Just as we thought the walk couldn't get any better two more White-necked Puffbirds were found perched low on a Cecropia tree. One darted out and grabbed a prey from a nearby thicket and returned to its perch. It had a Mexican Skink and beat it to death against the branch before swallowing it. What a show and grand finale to our stay at Lamanai.

We had a hearty breakfast then loaded up the boat. It was time to say 'bye' to this wonderful part of Belize. Eduardo took us back and kept our eyes out for anything good. A lone Purple Gallinule made a showing, as well as a Laughing Gull and an immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. A group of White-nosed Coatis was seen feeding high up in a small tree. The tree must have been fruiting. The highlight, however, was the sighting of a Jabiru that had just taken to the skies and was soaring low. What a majestic sighting. We reached Bat's landing and said 'farewell' to Eduardo.

We had a relatively quick drive back to Belize City and were dropped off at the airport. The airport itself was so frantic with hundreds of foreigners. Were they there for Easter vacation? Who knows, as long as they weren't going our way! We boarded the plane and nearly filled it up with just us. Forty-five minutes later we approached Punta Gorda and could actually see a mountain range in northwestern Honduras. Steve Choco, our local guide, was there to meet us. We grabbed our gear, loaded the vehicles, and off we went. Driving by the seashore we spotted a Sandwich Tern and a few Magnificent Frigatebirds.

Within 45 minutes we had reached the Tanager Rainforest Lodge. We received an orientation then everyone got checked into their rooms. Later on we reconvened to do a short walk on the grounds. Two Golden-olive Woodpeckers came in and perched briefly. There are two fruit feeders around the main building which attract a wide range of birds and today we began to see some different species. A pair of the gaudy Orange-billed Sparrows was spotted as they snuck in to feed on scraps that had fallen on the ground. We found our first Tennessee Warbler of the trip and it was found in an *Inga* tree. We also heard and saw numerous Northern Tropical Pewees on the grounds. We passed the entrance gate and spotted a White-tailed Kite soaring by. More pairs of Red-lored Amazons flew past, no doubt heading to a roosting area. During the walk we were also able to observe all three species of Saltators; Black-headed, Cinnamon-bellied, and Buff-throated. Upon returning to the lodge we heard two duetting Laughing Falcons and it was a pleasing way to end the day.

Sunday, March 22 Lodge Trails | Chocolate Queen | Night Drive

We woke this morning to entirely different surroundings and different bird sounds reverberated through the air. Steve put fruit on the feeders and the show began. A pair of Russet-naped Wood-Rails came wandering in,

strutting their bubblegum-pink legs and gaudy plumage colors. A few Red-throated Ant-Tanagers began to dominate the closer feeder until the Plain Chachalacas arrived. At the distant feeder a collage of colors began to assemble with the arrival of Scarlet-rumped, Crimson-collared, and Blue-gray Tanagers. A pair of Central American Agoutis joined the show. Robert spotted a Gray-chested Dove that had wandered in from the nearby woods. High up in the trees was a pair of female White-collared Manakin feeding on a fruiting vine. A pair of Spot-breasted Wrens was also foraging high up; seemingly unusual for this species.

We had a hearty Belizean breakfast then began our morning walk. We didn't get far when we came across a rather large feeding flock up in the trees. It included a nice assortment of migrant wood-warblers and a pair of Greenish Elaenias. It didn't take long to spot another beauty that inhabits these forests: the Golden-hooded Tanager. As observed at many sites elsewhere, they were foraging on Melastome fruits. Much to our surprise, we came across a pair of Bright-rumped Attilas close to ground level and it appeared they were searching for nesting materials. It is rare to see this canopy-dwelling flycatcher so low, but we were happy to have found them. By the river Steve spotted a handsome Amazon Kingfisher, marking the last species possible to see in Belize. Not far down the trail we could hear a Mayan Antthrush calling. We walked closely to where it was calling and waited patiently. It ran across the trail ahead of us and we were glad to see this otherwise secretive bird. A Long-billed Gnatwren emitted its whiny call-in a nearby tangle and a few participants got glimpses of it. Steve spotted something moving through the canopy and it turned out to be a female White-winged Becard. A tiny bird that escaped us while in Lamanai was the Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher where we heard one calling from a thicket at the lodge. Another was heard during this walk but this time it was actively foraging and came into view several times. A Yellow-billed Cacique was skulking in a nearby thicket and Michael was the only one to see it. We made our way to a small clearing that featured a replica of a typical Maya house. What really caught our attention, however, was a Rufous-breasted Spinetail calling from the edge of the forest. We made our way there and found it foraging amidst the viny tangles. We enjoyed watching it, the northernmost species of spinetail. Calling from the trees above us were several Yellow-green Vireos and we were able to observe yet another Austral migrant. The skies darkened and we made it to the Maya house just as a downpour descended upon us. It didn't last long and we were able to continue the walk. Down another trail we encountered a pair of Dusky Antbirds foraging in the dark forest understory. Another calling bird, however, caught Steve's attention. It was a Great Antshrike; the largest member of this family in the region. We watched and waited patiently until it appeared. It was a stunning black-and-white male. What an outstanding morning we had.

We headed down the road toward our next destination; the Chocolate Queen. Before getting there, however, we spotted a pair of Thick-billed Seed-Finch foraging on grass seeds and a pair of Plain-breasted Ground Doves sitting on a fence. We arrived at the chocolate facility in time for lunch. We were then given a very technical (chemical) explanation about chocolate and how it is made. We were then given the task to de-husk a small handful of cacao beans before getting to taste some samples of their products. Steve spotted two King Vultures

part way through the talk. Everyone had the opportunity to purchase a variety of chocolates before we ended the visit. Just as we were going to board the van a small Mexican Parrot Snake crossed the path in front of us. It is a lovely tricolored, harmless species that feeds on lizards and frogs.

We returned to the lodge and rested up a while. We reunited to do a checklist over cocktails then enjoyed another delightful dinner.

After dinner, a few decided to participate in a night drive. We flushed up a pair of Common Pauraques along the entrance road. We drove down the main highway a ways until arriving at a community called Mafredi. There, we turned off on a dirt road and headed into the darkness. In an open, grassy field we found some eyeshine, belonging to a Common Racoon. A Southern Opossum crossed the road as well. We spotted yet another Northern Potoo for the trip. We reached a point and parked. Steve wanted to look for a Great Potoo he had seen there before. We spotted an American Barn Owl flying over an empty field. Shining our lights caught an eyeshine atop a tree in the distance. It was, in fact, the Great Potoo. There was wet area between us and the potoo but it was traversable. We were able to zigzag our way through the corn field until we were almost right under the bird. Our group of photographers was able to get some shots of this magnificent bird. We returned to the van and Steve spotted a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron roosting high above in a giant Kapok tree. We started heading back and found another Barn Owl; this one being perched. Just before reaching the turnoff to the lodge Robert spotted a moving eyeshine that stopped in some trees. We got out and put the scope on it. It was a Striped Owl. Yippee! We could hear two others calling and found one perched closer, atop a snag in the middle of the near-barren field. We were elated to have seen such a wonderful bird. We returned to the lodge a bit late but were happy with the nights' outcome.

Monday, March 23 Tunich-ha Property | Rice Fields | Blue Creek

Our last full day in Belize was upon us and we would make the best of it. We headed out right away to a new destination. We stopped in the neighboring community (where Steve in from) and he knew more or less where to search for another nice bird: the Spot-breasted Oriole. Voila. Within a few minutes one appeared and we were happy to see this stunning bird.

We reached a private property called Tunich-ha and were met by one of the proprietors. After a brief orientation we began bird watching. There were numerous fruiting Melastomes that were bustling with birds and we didn't need to go far to see some stunners. In one tree we saw both Red-capped & White-collared Manakins as well as a pair of Golden-hooded Tanagers. Also present was a nice assortment of trogons including the Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, and Gartered Violaceous. There probably aren't too many places where one could see all of these species together in a parking lot! It was time for breakfast and would turn out to be the

best we had in Belize. We continued our walk on the grounds and came across another pair of the lovely Chestnut-colored Woodpecker. One can never get enough of birds like those. We spotted a few Eastern Kingbirds perched high atop some emergent trees. There long migration flight from the Amazon basin back to North America was partially fulfilled. We continued to scan the fruiting Melastomes and found numerous vireos including two Philadelphias, a Yellow-throated, a Red-eyed, and White-eyed. It was a nice way to compare between species. Steve spotted a Gray-headed Kite that was soaring fairly low and we admired its beauty. It then suddenly performed some wing fluttering which is apparently a courtship ritual. It was a breathtaking sight to witness. We were getting ready to leave but decided to check one more spot nearby. A species that had evaded us the entire trip was the Northern Plain-Xenops and we finally were able to see one as it foraged almost at ground level.

We continued down the road and stopped at some rice fields. It was a spot we passed last night in the dark. Coming close to us was a Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and allowed us to see its multi-colored head. In a nearby stand of trees Steve spotted a few Yellow-tailed Orioles and we were delighted to see such a large and colorful species. Bill spotted what he thought was a kestrel and it landed on a distant palm tree. Robert lifted his 12x50 bins and could see the birds' long tail and stripe down the face. Aplomado Falcon! We hoped in the cars and drove to another pullout spot which would give us a closer view of this special bird. Through the scopes we could admire the details of this prized bird. Finding on trips in Central America is not an easy task.

We then continued on to our final destination: Blue Creek. It is a small Maya community that is situated at the base of some karstic formations with a clean flowing river running through it. We parked and began our walk up the beautiful canyon, lined with rainforest. We quickly spotted a giant Green Iguana sitting low in the crotch of a giant Gumbo Limbo tree. Not far from it we found a White-bellied Emerald building a nest quite low to the ground. Through the scope we could admire its fine construction skills, honed over centuries. A bird we heard many times while in Belize was the Ivory-billed Woodcreeper but we never got to actually see one. This changed when one was spotted foraging along a large palm frond which seemed quite odd for this species, or any other woodcreeper for that matter. Another one that eluded us the entire trip was the Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and we finally saw one at the edge of the path. Steve said this was a good place to see Tropical Royal Flycatchers and we hoped to find one. As everyone was tuned in watching some warblers Robert heard the flycatcher calling from the woods on the other side of the river. We moved down the trail a bit to a better spot with views toward the other side. It paid off as one came our way and foraged along the river. Its mate joined it and we followed them a ways. What a great bird to see on our last day. We came across another small flock of foraging birds and amongst them were two handsome Worm-eating Warblers. We reached a small eatery that overlooked a large natural pool. We were sure to get a group photo on the pier. We were about ready to turn back when the soft calls of a Collared Trogon caught our attention. A beautiful male was perched in plain sight and we admired it

through a scope. Right behind it was a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper foraging along a dead snag. We made the return walk to the village and had a delicious lunch in a local diner.

We returned to the lodge and had a break. Later on we came together and had a trip recap, remembering many of the highlights. Everyone had their favorite bird(s), moments, and outings. After dinner Robert gave a presentation on the birds and butterflies of Honduras.

Tuesday, March 24 Lodge | Flight to Belize City | Departures

Before departing the lodge we wanted to look for one more bird: the Bare-crowned Antbird. This charismatic species has its northern limit of distribution in Belize and is found on the lodge grounds. We walked part way down a path where it was known to frequent and heard it calling. We waited patiently and soon a male came in to view. It was a splendid way to end the trip. We had breakfast then Steve took us to the Punta Gorda airstrip. We said our 'goodbyes' and soon we were in the air. In no time we reached Belize City where we all went our separate ways.

Favorites of the Trip

Michael-Roseate Spoonbill, all trogons. All lodges great.
Terry-Lesson's Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbirds. All lodges had charm, food best at Lamanai. All guides were great, including the young guides in training. Boat rides were charming.
Pam-Jabiru and Aplomado Falcon. Liked all boat rides. Enjoyed Black Rock and Tanager lodges.
Kristine-Chestnut-colored Woodpeckers, King Vultures, and White-whiskered Puffbirds. Greater Fishing Bats. Enjoyed Eduardo's balance of culture and birding knowledge. Food was great everywhere. Liked the slow boat rides.
Gretchen-Snail Kite and Plumbeous Kite feeding and preening. Enjoyed all boat rides. Great service at all lodges.
Judy-Yellow-headed Parrots. Enjoyed Black Rock Lodge. Appreciated help and enthusiasm from everyone.
Jack-Kingfisher 'attitudes,' especially the Ringed. Keel-billed Toucans. Loved boat rides and night activity. Enjoyed Black Rock. Knowledge and enthusiasm of guides great. Enjoyed the cultural activities.
Bill-Spotted Rail, Tropical Royal Flycatcher, and Great Potoo. Enthusiastic local guides. Night activities fun.
Julie-Spotted Rail creeping along. White-necked Puffbirds up close. All local guides wonderful. Their cultural knowledge and enthusiasm. All boat rides. Night drive at Black Rock. Chocolate factory tour impressive.
Robert-Rose-throated Tanager, Spotted Rail, White-necked Puffbirds, and Aplomado Falcon. Seeing Greater Fishing Bats. Night boat ride at Lamanai. All three guides were fantastic, especially Eduardo.

Photos: Group (Robert Gallardo - RG), Red-legged Honeycreeper (Jack & Judy Weaver - JW), Lesson's Motmot (Bill Schneider - BS), Lineated Woodpecker (JW), Black-cowled Oriole (Julie Schneider - JS), Collared Aracari (JS), Olive-backed Euphonia (BS), Red-throated Ant-Tanager (BS), White-collared Manakin (JS), Group Birding (JW), Olive-throated Parakeet (JS), Tody Motmot (JS), Keel-billed Toucan (JS), Great Black Hawk (BS), Red-legged Honeycreeper (JS), Morel's Crocodile (JS), Birding on the water (RG), Black-headed Trogon (BS), White-necked Puffbird (BS), Basilisk (JW), Striped Owl (BS), Red-capped Manakin (RG), Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture (BS), Tropical Royal Flycatcher (BS), Relaxing at the lodge (JW), Collared Trogon (RG)