



Honduras: Birding & Mayan Ruins
Trip Report
April 1 – 11, 2016
With Guide Robert Gallardo & Participants Joan & John
Report and Photos by Robert Gallardo

Fri., Apr. 1 – Sun., Apr. 3 Copan Area

Joan and John from Massachusetts joined Robert this year on an 11-day natural history tour across parts of western and northern Honduras. They would enjoy the many wonderful sights, bird sounds, and varied cuisine of the Copan area, Lake Yojoa, and the Rio Santiago Nature Resort. The weather was fair and the places we visited were not crowded, which is one of the reasons that Honduras is a hidden gem.



The trip started with three nights in the small town of Copan Ruins in the extreme western part of the country. On the first day we visited the nearby foothills and were delighted at a wide array of resident and migrant birds. Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak filled the fields and we were afforded an up-close view of a gorgeous male Painted

Bunting. A pair of Plain Chachalaca duetted and perched in plain view. This day provided the first of many motmot sightings, beginning with the Blue-crowned and Turquoise-browed. Part way up the hill there was a fruiting native fig where three Emerald Toucanet were feeding, another lovely bird. One nice surprise was the sighting of a Strong-billed Woodcreeper which is typically found at much higher elevations. The colorful and melodious Yellow-backed Oriole were also observed feeding on the nectar of blooming Inga trees.



In the afternoon Joan and John received a guided tour at the main archaeological site of Copan. There they marveled at the towering temples, intricately carved stelae, and the preserved artifacts at the sculpture museum. Of course there were also the colorful free-flying Scarlet Macaw, which are part of a captive breeding and release program.



On the second day we visited the Las Sepulturas archaeological site in the morning and had a perched Gray Hawk and a pair of Laughing Falcon. The Canyon Wren-like calls of the Ivory-billed Woodcreeper filled the air the entire morning. There were a lot of flycatchers, including tyrannulets, pewees, bentbill, Myiarchus, and many others.

In Copan we dined on some Loroco Chicken in cream sauce at Llama del Bosque; a local specialty. Joan and John were treated to a fine dinner at the Hacienda San Lucas, where that night the French Ambassador and his entourage were present. On the final night they tried the cuisine at Carnitas Nia Lola. Although Honduras may not be well known for its food there were no complaints about the dishes that were served up.



Mon., Apr. 4 – Thurs., Apr. 7 Lago Yajoa Area

From Copan we moved on to the scenic Lake Yojoa basin; the country's most biologically rich area. The first full day was spent at the Cerro Azul Meambar National Park, a mid-elevation rainforest situated along the eastern side of the Lake. A Gray-chested Dove flew up onto an elevated perch in plain view, fortunate considering this is an otherwise secretive bird that typically inhabits the dark forest floor. By the visitor's

center a pair of Keel-billed Motmot honked away and everyone was happy to see one of the region's most prized birds. For lunch we decided to go the Lake and on the way, encountered a cooperative Striped Cuckoo on the road. Down by the lakeshore everyone feasted on garlic fish fillets and plantain chips while enjoying some aquatic bird watching. At one moment hundreds of ducks started to



fly for no apparent reason, then suddenly the cause was apparent. A large female Peregrine Falcon came diving from overhead at full speed, wings tucked back, and took out a Blue-winged Teal in mid-air. These types of sightings are few and far between and we felt privileged to be witnesses to such an event.

The next day at the Lake we visited the Los Naranjos archaeological site, also located along the lakeshore. Although it was a fairly quiet morning we enjoyed more marsh birding and watched as Snail Kite plucked up and ate Apple Snails. Inside the archaeological site itself we encountered a lot of butterflies along the

elevated boardwalk. We were also fortunate enough to get scope views of the normally secretive Rufous-and-white Wren, whose flute-like songs echo from the woods. For lunch we enjoyed yet another fish lunch (blackened with Piper leaves) at a nearby lakeside hotel.

On the last day we went up to Santa Barbara National Park to visit some cloud forest. There, a multi-community ecotourism project is working to conserve forest against the expansion of coffee farms. We met up with Pablo and walked along a frontage road where we encountered the tiny Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Slate-throated Redstart, and other birds.

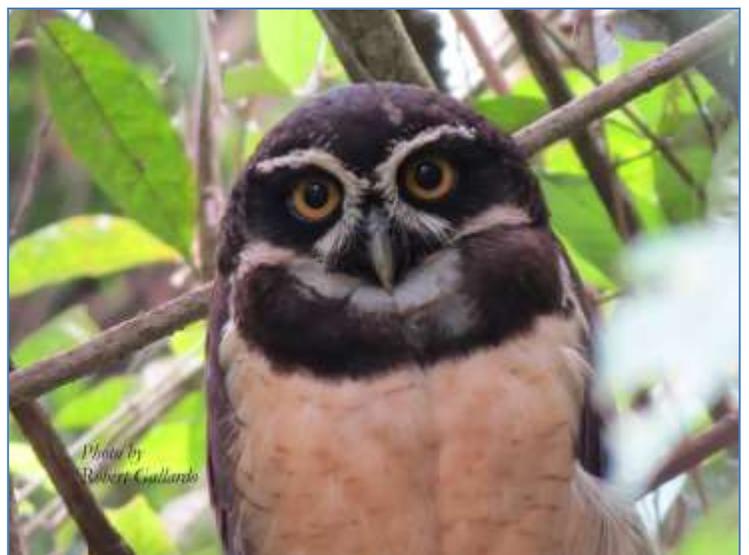


What we found next was a big surprise. In the middle of a corn field was a huge bare stump with a pair of Resplendent Quetzal nesting in it. The female was in plain sight, then suddenly the male flew out of a small nearby tree and they both disappeared into the forest. We then walked along a trail in the forest and heard the flute-like songs of the Slate-colored Solitaire and the very secretive Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush. In the village of San Luis Planes we enjoyed a home-style lunch to end the day.

Fri., Apr. 8 – Mon., Apr. 11 Rio Santiago Nature Resort Area

The final leg of the trip consisted of three nights along the north coast, where we stayed at the cozy Rio Santiago Nature Resort. En route to the coast we stopped at Tela and had a tasty lunch at a seaside restaurant. Upon reaching Rio Santiago we began to enjoy the hummingbird spectacle, where some 200 miniature feeders make for a feeding frenzy for hundreds of hummers. At the feeders alone we observed 13 species, and the lodge boasts some 26 species in all. One typically has to get down to Ecuador to see such a spectacle. Here the Shining Honeycreeper is near its northern range limit and several came and went while we were there.

On the first full day there we walked different trails and encountered some great birds. These included Rufous Mourner, three White Hawk, three King Vulture, Blue Ground-Dove, nesting Golden-hooded Tanager, and Olive-backed Euphonia. This year a pair of Spectacled Owl fledged a chick and we were shown one of the adults on a day roost by the staff. The biggest highlight was a perched Black Hawk-Eagle with prey. This was only the fourth time Robert had seen one perched. To top it off we were all amused by a male Yellow-faced Grassquit



that incessantly confronted itself at its reflection on Robert's truck.

On the last full day of the trip we visited the nearby Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, a mangrove-lined estuary. After a short train ride into the reserve we boarded our boat and ended up having some great sightings. The first was an immature Agami Heron and after it got accustomed to our presence it continued to forage. Although it doesn't have the gorgeous plumage of the adult, we were quite satisfied with this find.



As the morning progressed we encountered some Howler Monkeys; the last troop had 13 individuals, including several young ones. One fed very low in a tangle right in front of us and it was a treat. A pair of White-faced Capuchins also made a showing along with some large iguanas and Shining Morphos. In the village within the reserve we had one final fish lunch. The visit to this reserve ended up being a great way to end the trip.

Photos by Robert Gallardo: Birding Santa Barbara National Park; Painted Bunting; Emerald Toucanet; Yellow-backed Oriole; Guided Tour at Copan with Yobani; Rufous-and-white Wren; Female Resplendent Quetzal Nesting in Corn Field; Spectacled Owl; Immature Agami Heron; Boating through Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge.