

# Guatemala Nature, Birding & Culture

## Trip Report

March 26-April 6, 2018

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**Participants:** Keith Hansen and Patricia Briceño, guides, with local guides Daniel and Josue, Peg as tour host and six participants: Colin, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Monique, Jeff and Mardi.

### Mon., March 26: Arrivals / Universidad Francisco Marroquin / Museo Ixchel with Adira Castillo

Several of our group came into Guatemala City early, wanting to rest up from travel, and see a bit of the city. Irene, the owner of our inbound company, Operador Latino, set up a delightful city day for us with local guide Adira Castillo. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and as this was Semana Santa, or Holy Week, we learned a lot about Guatemala's fascination with elaborate processions. In some ornate and beautiful churches, we saw some of the massive carved wooden pieces, like floats with statues, but HEAVY wood - some requiring 100 men to carry them!

Many are sized for 12-20 men to carry, still very big. Each town participates, throughout the week there are parades and in Antigua there are massive crowds.

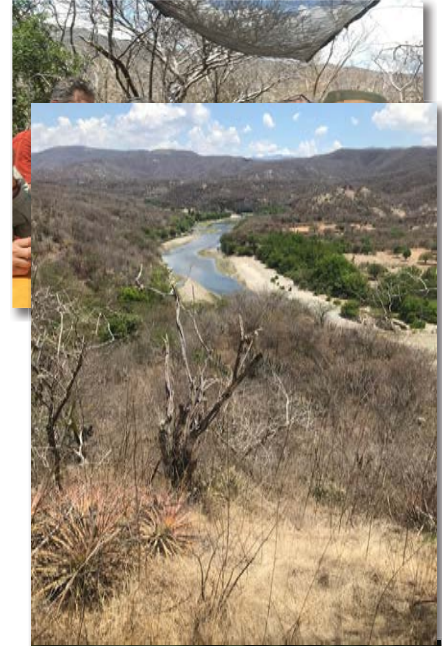


A highlight of today's trip was seeing the Museo Ixchel, dedicated to Guatemalan textiles, where we learned a lot about the different regions of the country and their weaving styles. We have two in our group that know a lot about fiber arts so it was really fun to share this with them.



The birding on the grounds also proved to be very good and we got super looks as Keith showed us Bushy-crested Jay, Band-backed Wren, Azure Hummingbird and coming in to his whistle, a very curious Ferruginous Pygmy Owl that came in to investigate.





This was a good first day and we also enjoyed a lovely local restaurant chosen by Irene for our welcome dinner.

## Tues., March 27: Drive north to Coban – Tropical Dry Forest / Biotopo

Today we drove through Guatemala's Montagua Valley, a famous geological area where two terranes, the Mayan and Chortis meet, bringing very different rock types together as Central American assembled itself over time. The Montagua River flows through the center of the Valley along the seam line.

We wanted to see some of the dry forest birds, and we did so at the delightful farm of Jorge and Blanca Rosa Weher. Daniel Aldana, our birding guide for the first half of the tour, led the way. The Weher family have a new private reserve opened up for birding, and we found out the reason for its protection which is different than most reserves. Fireworks are manufactured here, under tightly controlled conditions, so the farm is private, and access is tight. An odd combination, but it works! Their daughter Amanda accompanied us and was knowledgeable about the forest.

The acreage is large and in very good condition. We found a lot of birds, including White-lored Gnatcatcher, both Nutting's and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Varied Bunting, and three doves: White-tipped, Common Ground and White-winged. The star attractions were two: Lesser Ground Cuckoo and Lesser Roadrunner. The cuckoo was quite elusive, taunting us with calls, and only two of the group got good looks before it slipped away. But the Lesser Roadrunner was just the opposite! We heard several, but the one we saw well and spent time with called repeatedly, fanning its long tail – proud to present the lizard in its mouth to either a mate or nestlings. It lingered long enough for us to get great photos and some video, and in the end gobbled down its prey.



On a wide dirt road, we walked downhill towards the river, and by late-morning it was hot. At our end point, they had a small casita where we got cold drinks, beer, sodas and mineral water which were all most welcomed. They then drove us in jeeps up to a viewpoint of the



river for a fabulous lunch. This was the first time we'd try Pipian, a favorite national dish which is a stew that resembles Mexico's mole, but is more liquid with lovely flavors. They served it over chicken and

vegetables. To our amazement as it as hot and this place seemed so remote, they pulled out ice-cream for desert. Yum! We had to tear ourselves away, Jorge had many wonderful stories and they showed us their lovely home, but we still had a drive and had hopes of finding Resplendent Quetzales in cloud forest (quite a contrast!) at Biotopo Reserve near Coban.

Due to traffic we did not reach our quetzal spot until 4PM, in future year's we'll not pair this with the dry forest but give it its own day. We looked at a place that Daniel had seen them at three days prior, but finding no fruit there, he headed us on to another possible spot. He asked the guards and locals at a café where we stopped and they also said it had been three days since they had seen them, the fruits of their favorite feeding trees now gone. So, sadly we missed this iconic species, but as is typical, other species helped make up for it. We had good views at some secretive forest species and near the lodge feeders, Unicolored Jay. We enjoyed a coffee here before the last part of the drive to the city.

And what a lovely hotel! Historic, with four-poster beds and antique furniture, a flower filled courtyard, large shading tree and in some rooms, fireplaces. The staff greeted us warmly. We had a very good dinner and did our bird list, many new species for people today!



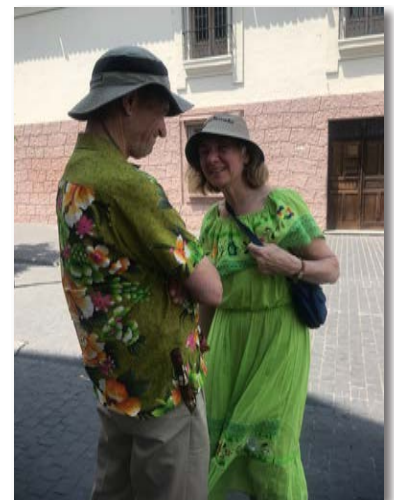
### **Wed., March 28: Finca San Ramon (am and pm)**

Helene was our local guide for the cultural option to see Coban and the cooperative our group would visit just out of town. Mardi dressed for the exchange in her lovely embroidered blouse.

Helene, and a local weaver and member of the co-op, Maria, took our group to a small village located a few miles from Coban. We visited a small community of weavers to see their beautiful work and their long process it takes to complete one piece. We admired the women weaving using the back strap looms and one of the members showed us how they prepare their elaborated head dresses used for ceremonial purposes.

We also visited a small coffee shop where they offer blends of local coffee with cardamon. We learned a lot about growing coffee and cardamon, and we found out that Guatemala is currently the world's largest growing of cardamon. We then had lunch at the hotel, and Jeff brought back cardamom treats.

Our birders went to a private reserve, similar to Los Nubes, but a shorter drive without risk of crossing a Semana Santa week procession and the traffic involved in that. It was a lovely morning! First out of the bus was a small flock of Emerald



Toucanet, scope views – nice! Highlights included good views of Gray Catbird, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Slate-throated Redstart, Magnificent and Black-throated Green Warblers, Rusty Sparrow, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Crimson-collared Tanagers. We climbed up a switchback trail at a birder's pace, finding Black-headed



Nightingale Thrush and as it leveled out, a Tody Motmot, of which we got great views. He was highly territorial and called repeatedly, with work we could find him among the lush vines and tangles. After lunch at the hotel, we ventured out again, deciding we'd like to go back to the



same spot as the travel time was small and the birding so good. Daniel found us many highlights this afternoon including Collared Trogon, a Spotted Woodcreeper, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Golden-

browed Warblers that landed very close to us, and as we walked down at dusk, the sounds of Vermiculated Screech Owl. Pacific Parakeets screeched in to roost in the large tree of our urban hotel yard as we went to dine.



Dinner was an amicable time to trade stories of our day. Jeff returned with candies, guava and milk, to share with those that went birding. This cultural exchange was one of the highlights of the tour for him. We had chicken with a delicious sauce of avocado, lemon and pepito seeds with herbs and for the vegetarians, Chile Rellenos.

And then there was the procession, oh my. Well into the night, midnight and beyond, they passed by our hotel with drums, tubas and song. While this was a grand experience, we'll schedule a different week than Semana Santa next time!

## Thurs., March 29: Travel Day / Productive Gas Station Birding / Los Tarreles

Today we had a long way to go, but Daniel had some good stops in mind to break up the day. He gave us an overview of birding in Guatemala that was very helpful, talking about the regions of the country and its special birds.





At a rest stop on Calle 100 at El Rancho, at a gas station break, we found a lot of bird activity! White-fronted Parrot, Plain-capped Starthroat, an Altamira Oriole working on a nest, Turquoise-browed Motmots (in flight from above – WOW!), and a variety of more common species entertained us at this stop.

Lunch was at Las Cebollinas, in a lovely courtyard where we could sit outside and enjoy fresh air. It was a Mexican restaurant complete with hats of the Poncho Villa style as decoration, free to try on – fun! Mardi's favorite green dress matched the napkins. We had guacamole, and various dishes and salsas. Fortified, we continued on, lots of driving this day.



Keith helped us pass the afternoon with a talk on an artist's view of birding. He highlighted diversity (who will forget all the families named in 90 seconds!) and his reverence for birds shone through. His tips would influence us all throughout the week to look at more details of feathers and form, not to just name the species.

We enjoyed the chance to view rural life as the miles went by. However, at the day's end (in our least favorite town of the trip) we ran into traffic of a... procession. This time we nearly got caught, and it was only with Francisco's driving skills and ability to back up a narrow lane, then Daniel's GPS that we found a route to our rural lodge, through another small town. Phew!

We arrived to Los Tarrales, a wonderful eco-lodge, just at dusk. A chorus of Clay-colored Robins serenaded us and Cinnamon Hummingbirds worked the Vervain bushes

lining the entry to the dining area for one last sip of nectar for the day. Dinner was in a cozy dining room decorated with family photos and scenic of the coffee farm that hosts the lodge. Colin suggested we share a nice red wine, and we enjoyed chicken lasagna, homemade bread, grilled



eggplant, a big salad and for dessert, pineapples with cinnamon. A very full day and we fell into our very



comfortable beds!



## Fri., March 30: Full Day at Los Tarrales Nature Reserve

We woke up to the luxury of a full day at Los Tarrales, walking trails and birding the grounds. Daniel suggested we meet at the soccer field, just beyond the lodge, where good vistas and large trees surrounding the open area afforded good birding. We had super looks at Pacific Parakeets in the scope. A thrill was to see the regional endemic, White-bellied Chachalaca, well.



After breakfast, we walked a system of trails from the lodge. Right away we got good views of a Lineated Woodpecker, sweet! It was hard to make any progress as we kept seeing birds, but one stop in particular stands out. We entered a thick grove of bamboo, encouraged by Everilda, our local guide, to look carefully for a roosting Mottled Owl. Indeed there were two, one flew out giving away the chosen roost site that day, but the other was there, staring down disdainfully upon us. Wow!

Coming out of the bamboo thicket, we had good views at another charismatic species, White-throated Magpie Jay.

They repeatedly crossed the clearing en route to a fruiting tree, where we watched them manipulate large berries to feed. Keith was on point for his sky-watching and pulled out a Gray Hawk and two Short-tailed Hawk as we came out to a clearing with a view.

We walked a loop trail through varied habitat, climbing a bit. We had views of Red-billed Pigeon, Lesson's Motmot, White-tipped Dove, Squirrel Cuckoo, and a treat for all, two pairs of Gartered Trogons, calling and posing for scope views. Everyone loved getting scope views of Lesson's Motmot, and the colors of Golden-olive Woodpecker were a treat.





Other notable sightings included Greenish Eleania, and towards dusk on our second walk of the day, a Spot-breasted Oriole. An excellent day!

## Sat., March 31: Los Tarrales am / Lake Atitlan

We got an early start, hoping to give the group a glimpse at Scaled Antpitta which Peg had seen coming back from the lagoon the night previous. While we did not have luck with this elusive species, we did hear Barred Antshrike, and at the lake got scope views of two Least Grebe, a Northern Waterthrush, a Snowy Egret and a Black-crowned Night-Heron. A Green Kingfisher was fishing along the far shore, and on the nearshore we had numerous brilliant blooms of Torch Ginger. The light was

ethereal and the spot just lovely – great way to start the

day. We returned to breakfast, with Daniel raving about the joys of breakfast here, pancakes and eggs, black beans and fresh fruit today. Walking back, a group of Collared Aracari put on quite a show for us. A family of Rufous-naped Wren was highly vocal and active near the coffee nursery for young plants we passed on the way to the lagoon.



We then headed up the mountain in four-wheel drive vehicles, ascending some of the path we walked yesterday and beyond. We gained elevation, stopping several times to bird, eventually coming out on a wonderful mirador (lookout) spot with benches and a grand sweeping vista of Atitlan Volcano. On this sun-bright day it was magnificent.

And as Keith always has an eye trained to the sky, we had an awesome morning for raptors, with Black Hawk Eagle,

Great Black Hawk and King Vulture among the highlights.

The forest stops were very productive and Everilda, our local guide, aided Daniel at finding many species. They were very quick to get them in the scopes, a treat for us all.

As Keith also had his scoped trained on the specialties, we were well armed to see specialties such as the Long-tailed Manakin, for the trip Charlotte's vote for a favorite species. We found a good number of flycatchers with time to study them today: Common Tody, Yellow-olive, Yellow-bellied, Willow, Boat-billed, Social and Sulphur bellied, along with Tropical Pewee, Great Kiskadee and Tropical Kingbird. The fruit-eating species were happy with an abundance of diet items and included Masked Tityra, several tanagers, and Rose-throated Becard. We saw 20+ Western Tanagers, bright in their plumage, so this

must be an important wintering place for them. White-throated Robin was a treat to find, as well as Black-headed and Grayish Saltators. Other bright migrants included Baltimore Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

We had lunch and then some free time to pack and wander. Several took advantage of finding a cell signal up by the large shade tree of the village church to catch up on news and emails. Colin and Peg tried to get photos of Cinnamon Hummingbirds quite common and active along



the hedgerow of Vervain. The

family here was so delightful, and Mary, the daughter due to get married in May, checked us out and collected the bar bills. They sold coffee from the farm we looked forward to as it has been delicious and plentiful during our stay.



On to Lake Atitlan and the other side of Atitlan Volcano. Francisco had the bus squeaky clean to drive us to a dock at Toliman, where he left us to drive the luggage around while we were free to cross the lake. Being the Saturday before Easter, the lakeshore beach was full of life, and it was such fun to take it all in. Fabrics of the women are so colorful, it's just a feast for the eyes. There were food vendors, kids with toys, and music playing. Vendors strolled by with scarves on their arms bearing a rainbow of color.



We boarded the boat and started across, stopping in a reed-lined cove to look for ducks and other waterfowl. We found Ring-necked and Keith pulled out a female Redhead, plus numerous American Coot and a few Common Gallinule. There were Great Egret, a Green Heron and a small flock of Barn Swallow.



We landed on the other side at Panachel and walked the few blocks to the hotel through vendor booths again bright with fabrics, ponchos, pants, hats and paintings. We ducked into our wonderful oasis of a Hotel Don Rodrigo and checked into our rooms which had a view of the lake, and San Pedro Volcano which several of us would climb the following day.

Some enjoyed a rest while others made their way out to the busy market. Many businesses and the schools shut down for Semana Santa (Easter) week, and this day was the holiday culmination, so it was crowded and bustling. We



walked back through it en route to a local restaurant, the parties continued long into the night and those closer to the street in our hotel had a noisy night. Our dinner was very good, with vegetarian dishes and roasted lamb. Back through the streets, Jeff met several musicians and hoped to play music with them perhaps the following day.

## Sun., April 1: Easter Sunday Chichicastenango Market

We woke to bright sun along the lakeshore, and after breakfast headed out for a much-anticipated visit to the oldest continuous market in the New World, that of Chichicastenango. Patricia had kept reminding us, “wait for Chichi” as we started our shopping, and we looked forward to a kaleidoscope of textiles and local handicrafts. It was a drive of about an hour and a half, plus a stop at a high overview of the lake where we posed for photos on a beautiful morning.

We assembled at an historic hotel just off the market, and met Oscar, our local guide who got mixed reviews. He did patiently shepherd us through the crowds, which on Easter Sunday morning were intense. Another year we would go at our own pace, as it was frustrating to pass quickly through some of the most beautiful stalls. What was fun was seeing the local vegetable market, colors as brilliant as the textiles, which we found out was set up on the local basketball court two days a week. It was teeming with life, and with luck we could watch from a mezzanine perch above. There were grain vendors, bean vendors, meat vendors, candles, embroidery threat vendors, yarn sellers, and booth after booth of *huapiles*, the local woven and embroidered shawls worn by women, one more beautiful than the next. Each region has its own style; here at the market you could see and compare many of them.





We wound through the booths to the steps of St. Thomas church, where there was a flower market of splendor. Each inch of the steps was covered by lilies, cannas, and other colorful blooms. Soon a loud gun-like boom announced the procession would come out of the doors atop the stairs, and we were just at the right place to see it begin. With incense and more smoke bombs, a misty air enshrouded the



paper mache creations carried by men, on parade as a testimony of joyous faith on a special day. We were immersed in all the activity – quite something to behold!

Each Sunday and Thursday of each week, the labyrinth-like market is filled with colorful stalls offering their traditional textiles, wooden masks, ceramics, seasonal vegetables and fruits, handmade candles, copal, flowers and almost anything can be found there. People from all the different regions of Guatemala and wearing their traditional clothing come to the market to offer their wares. We visited a stall where women were making tortillas with black corn. They were very generous showing the participants the way they make them. One curious note about Chichicastenango is that the famous Popol-Vu was discovered by a





Dominican priest in a convent adjacent to the Santo Tomas Church.

By lunch the crowds had etched on our nerves a bit so we sought the quiet oasis of the Mayan Inn. Local soups and a chicken, pork or vegetarian entrée were served, followed by homemade ice-cream. After lunch some toured the local cemetery with Oscar while others went back for a calmer time looking at the wares of local vendors. We helped the Guatemalan economy this day!

We then returned to Panachel. Our birders disembarked to walk for an hour or so in a local hotspot for birding that Josue suggested we visit. While we did not find the hoped for Belted Flycatcher, we did hear a Whiskered Screech Owl, and we got brilliant views of a Blue-and-white Mockingbird, a regional specialty. We also picked up Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Golden-fronted, Acorn and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, our first White-eared Hummingbirds, Cabani's Wrens and two Rufous-capped Warblers.

Tonight, we opted for dinner at the hotel which was very good. A long and full day, we retired to our large and comfortable rooms. For our climbers that would go in search of the Horned Guan, a "Holy Grail" bird on this trip, it would be a very early morning....

## **Mon., April 2: A Hike to See the Mythical Horned Guan / Local Weaving Villages**

Today was the day, for intrepid hikers to launch their quest for finding an almost mythical bird, the Horned Guan. This species is one that until you lift the binoculars and greet it in your sights, you can't fully take in its essence. To do that required us to take a boat across the lake, a truck ride up the cobbled streets empty except for street dogs in the pre-dawn hours, and then a hiking climb, of at least 3000 ft. Jeff and Mardi had their sights set on getting to the top so they took off with our local guide and made it there by about 11AM. They saw Singing Quail (looking like little chickens in the trail) and Emerald Toucanets in the lush tree canopy. Peg, Keith and Josue took it easy, taking in a lot of great birding before reaching the realm of the guans at 8500 ft. or so.

The hike starts about 5000 feet, and the first area is open forest in a rocky quebrada. Right away Peg picked up a familiar sound, Mexican Whip-poor-will heard from the parking lot. It was just barely light, and another familiar sound ensued – this one Josue encouraged in with playback, bingo – a Whiskered Screech Owl. We enjoyed views of Blue-and-white Mockingbird (several), McGillivray's Warbler, Guatemalan-style Steller's Jays, and mixed flocks of warblers, this time adding Nashville to our growing warbler list. We took a water and snack break and heard Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo.



With some encouragement it came in, looking all the world like a puffbird – what a cutie! Josue was lighting quick with his scope despite dense vegetation so we got really good looks.

We wound our way up, fascinated by the vegetative changes, and also by a steady stream of good birds. We got into the guan habitat (huge, lush trees with massive canopies and flowering trees) about 11:30AM. It was a quiet time of day, and we thought we might have pushed a bit more, but hey – it was a lovely excuse to wait as for sure the guans would get active in the afternoon. We watched hummingbirds, a Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and even got a glimpse of two Black-throated Jays.

Peg enjoyed a little trailside snooze after the big effort to get there, then refreshed she went on a wander. She actually got a cell signal and was checking in with the office when, oh, the sound of wings! Guans are not quiet as they land, it sounded very much like piping-guans in Trinidad. Up went the binoculars and OH MY. There was a big black guan with the most unexpected head ornamentation, just sitting on a massive curved branch as if packaged for perfect inspection. What to do! The others were below, and we did not have radios – an international call to Josue! The ring tone was answered, and soon both joined her, they had both seen guans before but shared in equal delight at watching it feed, preen and rest. Josue got right to work digiscoping with Peg's iPhone so we could share the sighting. It was a wonderful moment, accomplished by effort and patience, and one we'd never forget!



Our cultural option group gathered about 9:30 to wait for our boat ride to take us to the town of San Juan la Laguna. The ride took about 45 minutes to cross the lake. Once we got there, our local guide Santos who took us to visit several local co-ops located around the town, greeted us with a big smile. The first place we



visited was a co-op formed by midwives and healers. They gave us a small lecture about medicinal plants and showed us their garden where they grow some of the plants they use to treat their patients.

Our next stop was at co-op of weavers where we got an interesting dyeing demonstration using natural dyes extracted from barks, leaves, insects and wood chips. Elizabeth got to try spinning with cotton using a spindle. She has such a big smile!

After visiting the weaver's co-op, we walked towards a small organic chocolate factory located a couple blocks away. One of their members showed us how the chocolate is processed using the local ingredients. We admired the variety of combinations that they offer for sale. After making a few purchases, we walked to the place where we had lunch.



We were greatly delighted that our lunch spot was with a local family. The house was very humble, but charming. We were greeted by the daughter of the family and she also sat to have lunch with us and showed us how to eat our meal. We were served a delicious soup made with Guisquil, a green squash popular in that region and a small chipilin tamale that is eaten by breaking the tamal in pieces like bread and soaking in in the soup. We also had fresh vegetables as our main meal and hibiscus flower for drinks. After lunch, we decided to have some time to explore the town on our own. We made a few more purchases until we met our boat ride back to Panajachel.

At dinner we reunited and enjoying sharing tales of the day.

## **Tues., April 3: Caleras Chichavas Farm and Rincon Suiza for Pink Warblers & More / Antigua**

Today was “Pink Warbler” Day and everyone looked forward to seeing this sought-after species. Peg was right at home in this habitat, the pine-oak woodland, which stretches all the way through Mexico and into Southeastern Arizona. Right out of the car we were seeing Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Hepatic Tanager, White-eared Hummingbird and Greater Pewee – fun! We parked at a small farm that made cheese, and Jeff and Mardi took off for a hike, later returning to sample some.

Birding, we proceeded slowly and got cracking views of a Blue-throated Motmot (spotted and scoped with skill by our local guide Josue) and then a real treat, in some high trees at Caleras Chichavac, a group of Black-capped Siskin. Still with all these stunning birds, it was the mixed flock of warblers that made our hearts race, and among them, the fabulous, almost iridescent Pink Warbler, surely one of the most beautiful among all the wood-warblers, which is saying a lot!

We had an ample if not a bit crazy lunch across the street, including delicious desserts, and then walked trails behind the restaurant, finding more mixed flocks and more Pink Warblers, too much fun! We added Red-faced Warbler to our list, another Southeastern Arizona common species.

At some point we had to pry ourselves away, as ahead lay the World Heritage site of Antigua, where we had lodgings right in the heart of things. We got there with a bit of time to browse some of the shops – oh my, we might be in trouble here!

We had a lovely dinner there, and settled in – a few walked the streets after dark to enjoy the lights.



## Wed., April 4: El Pilar Birding, Antigua / Cooking Class Fun / Free Afternoon

Birding El Pilar was a nearby location to the city for us to add in more birding, and perhaps saved some of the shoppers (Peg) some money! We just were not ready to quit, and it was really fun to be out early, in open forest that attracted several new species for us, including Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Bar-winged Oriole, and White-eared Ground Sparrow.

The property has hummingbird feeders which also brought some new birds, including Rivoli's; Green-throated Mountain-gem, a regional endemic; Rufous Saberwing, another regional endemic; Azure-crowned and Berylline Hummingbirds. They were very active, giving us good looks, especially of Rufous Saberwing, quite common here.

A cooking class? This was set up for us, and we all went as we literally cooked our lunch! As we feasted on our efforts on an open-air roof deck, we all said almost in unison, this was way more fun than we expected! The location was out of town a bit, and they were ready for us with cooking stations, the ingredients for the national stew set out for us to cut, chop, sauté, and assemble. The smells were divine, and Monique was stirring the pot as so many delicious things were added. We got to sample



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some lovely goat cheese tacos first, they kept us plied with wine, and there were wonderful photo ops with all of us having big smiles on.

The rest of the afternoon was free to explore the city. And our final dinner could not have been better, in an elegant lovely former home, with high ceilings, beautiful art and first-class service and food.



## Thurs., April 5: Morning in Antigua / El Pilar Birding / Return to Guatemala City

Today we had a choice of nature or culture. Adida returned to do a city tour of Antigua, a city so rich in architecture and history. Her knowledge is great, her interpretive style relaxed but so informative, that all were glad to reunite to learn more about this beautiful, colorful city. She took everyone up to a Mirador for a marvelous view of the grid of streets all lined with colorful stucco buildings. Elaborate churches and parks with flowering trees were plentiful. Time passed quickly from 9AM to Noon, when



all met back up for lunch at a local restaurant.



The birders wanted one more chance to tally some species and opted to return to El Pilar, which had been quiet the day previous. Patient Francisco returned early to join us for 6:30 AM breakfast and it was about a 20-minute drive up into the hills. What a great birding spot close to the city,



a mix of extensive dry tropical forest and a lush riparian corridor. Most of the dry forest was leafless as this is the end of the dry season, in May the rains will come. We recognize the deep red bark of Gumbo



Limbo trees and soon were immersed in birds that frequented this terrain.





Right away we knew the morning would be good. There was much more song than the day before, and we got into a group of warblers, Tennessee, Townsend's accompanied by a noisy Warbling Vireo. Keith called excitedly as he'd located one we hoped to see well

(heard only the day previous), the White-eared Ground Sparrow. We got cracking views, and good photos as this skulker came up to investigate us repeatedly. Bushy-crested Jays called as they flew across the canyon, flashing their azure-plumage in the sunlight. Walking uphill first to an overlook, we had a chance to see Bar-winged Orioles well, finding a male and female working on a cast-off avocado on a canal wall leading towards the swimming pool. A Clay-colored Robin joined them and we had super scope views. A pair of Blue-throated Motmots flew between thick branches, overhead we got scope views of Elegant Euphonia.

We returned to the entrance area and walked into the shaded glen of riparian habitat, listening to a new cast of characters. An immense Strangler Fig tree rose above us, with shrines to Jesus and Mary below and branches arcing to the sky. Band-backed Wrens explore the vines entwined on it.

The hummingbird feeders were active, sporting over a dozen at a time, mainly Rufous Saberwing and Berylline, with an occasional Azure-crowned Hummingbird coming in. Up the trail we had scope views of Collared Trogon, as Josue's brother joined us. Three bird guides in the family. We had fun brainstorming the name of their company, as their last name is Lux, we championed Aves de Lux, Three Brothers Birding Guatemala. Aaron also had a scope, so we had three trained on the calling trogons. Fun! Next up were Singing Quail, a sought-after species for the morning. They were calling loudly, and with patience we got to see them, with both crossing the trail. Peg was ready with her camera settings set for the dark forest. We spent time with Rusty Foliage-gleaner as our last species. What a place!

After lunch we headed to Guatemala City, Adira continuing her historical overview of Antigua as we drove into Guatemala City, only about 45 minutes away. We dropped our trio going on to Tikal off and were at the hotel by 3 PM with time to regroup, shower and pack.

## **Fri., April 6: Departures or off to Tikal!**

While those on our extension enjoyed their first full day at Tikal, the rest of us head to the airport for International

flights. Airport check-in was very easy, tempting shops beckoned to buy yet more colorful fabrics and coffee with our last Quetzales, and soon we were on our way. A great trip!

## Notes from Tikal

Just three of our group, Monique, Colin and Elizabeth went north to Tikal, flying to Flores where our expert local guide, Miguel, was waiting for them. He is known for his knowledge of both archeology and birding so they were in good hands, and having flown there Thursday as we went back to our airport hotel, they texted that they were enjoying dinner at Jungle Lodge, their lodgings adjacent to the park. And all looking forward to their time at the Mayan Ruins of World Heritage Site, Tikal.



Until the next adventure!

Photo credits: Lineated Woodpecker, Tom Dove; Horned Guan painting from the Tarrales Dining room; all other photos, Peg Abbott.

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