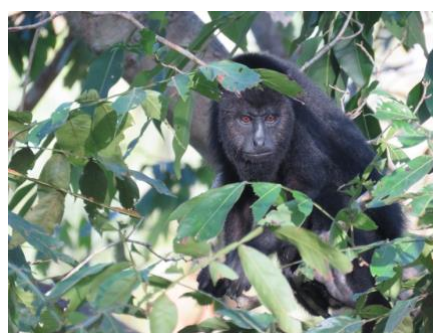


Belize: Three Great Lodges | Nov. 10-20, 2022 | Trip Report | by Pat Lueders



With guide Pat Lueders; local guides Isaias, Mike & Steve, and participants Callie, Cathy, Cindy, David, Doug, Jack, Laurie, Livia, Robert, Steve, and Thomas



Thurs., Nov. 10

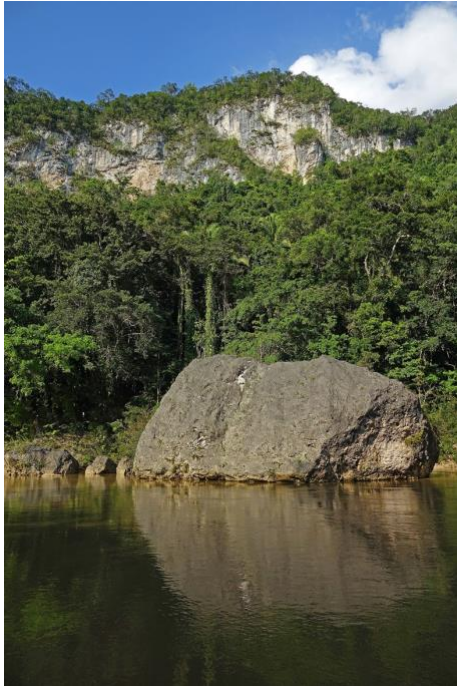
Arrivals | Drive to Black Rock Lodge

As everyone arrived in Belize City from various U.S. locations, we gathered at the Belikin Brewery in Belize City to get acquainted, enjoy a delicious lunch and, for some, to savor their first taste of this refreshing, local beer. The drive to Black Rock took us west on the George Price Highway, traveling through many local cities including the capitol, Belmopan, and the charming town of San Ignacio. This introduction to many small towns of Belize and the variety of its agriculture was a great way to enjoy our first day in the country. The isolated road to the lodge raised our level of anticipation, and we were amazed as we followed the picturesque Macal River to arrive at this breathtaking, isolated location! We settled into our lovely rooms, gathered at the lodge to watch the active bird feeders and enjoyed the first of many delicious meals.

Fri., Nov. 11

Birding Black Rock Lodge | Belize Botanical Garden

While enjoying our first cup of coffee, we excitedly watched the large variety of birds visiting the feeders including Collared Aracari, White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, Yellow-throated and Olive-backed Euphonias and a new visitor that had just arrived: Green Honeycreeper. Wow, what a great start! As we



walked the grounds of the lodge before breakfast with our expert guide, Isaías, we saw a Squirrel Cuckoo feeding on fruit and a Red-capped Manakin close by. Yellow-winged Tanagers, Green-backed Sparrow and a Common Tody-Flycatcher were also found on this delightful stroll. Many of our U.S. warblers and vireos spend the winter in Belize, and we saw 11 on our first morning walk.

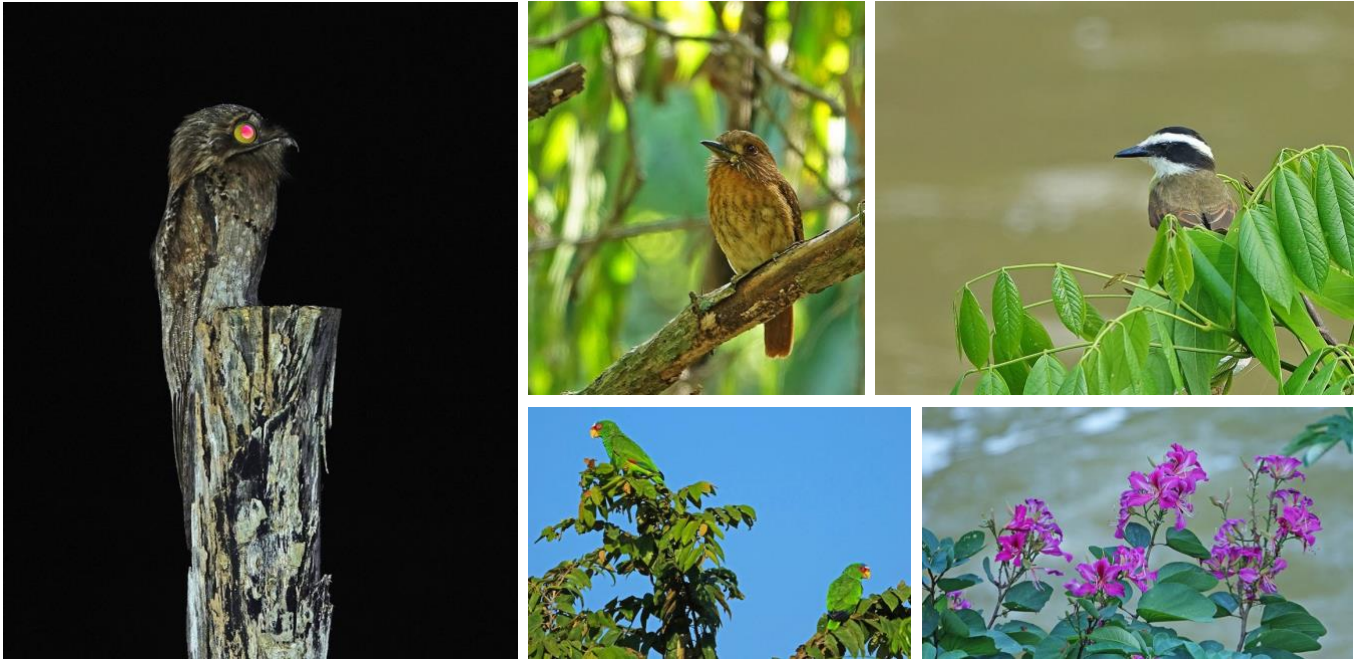
After breakfast, we drove the Black Rock Road, stopping for Groove-billed Ani, Ruddy Ground Doves, an American Kestrel and an indigo snake, as we traveled to the Belize Botanical Garden. We enjoyed a tour led by Rudy, the garden's Education Director, who had just returned from receiving an award in Australia. He was so patient with us since we were often distracted by the fabulous bird species that we found throughout the garden.! A Slaty-tailed Trogon was feeding on its favorite food, Governor's plum. Black-cowled Orioles, Keel-billed Toucans, Gartered Trogon, Yellow-billed Cacique and Black-headed Saltators were also attracted to the fruiting trees. A Russet-naped Wood-Rail and a Rufous-tailed Jacamar were spotted around the pond. Rudy introduced us to a few of the hundreds of orchids that grow in Belize's tropical forests. Isaías heard a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl vocalizing, and we found it in a near-by tree for great scope views. What a delightful visit to this beautiful garden with native plants and such a large variety of birds!

After dinner, we went on a tremendously successful evening drive along Black Rock Road. We spotted at least five perched Northern Potoos, probably a night drive record! We heard Middle American Screech-Owl, saw a Gray Fox and a Common Opossum, and slowed down for tarantulas along the road. We also observed a Mottled Owl along the road as it was trying to catch one, what a surprise! But the highlight of the drive was finding a Fer de Lance as it was crossing the road not far from our lodge! We stopped to carefully take pictures of this very venomous snake, and as we returned to our rooms, everyone agreed that this was a very successful day!

Sat., Nov. 12

Black Rock Road | Spanish Lookout's Mennonite Beach Gravel Pit | Countryside Park

While enjoying our morning coffee, Red-legged Honeycreepers, a Tennessee Warbler and a Long-billed Hermit were seen at the feeders. A pair of Ornate Hawk-Eagles were spotted interacting across the river from the lodge.



We slowly drove along Black Rock Road and walked a section after spotting a flock of White-crowned Parrots, which we had great views of. We also found Gray-crowned Yellowthroats, Blue-black Grassquits, Orchard Orioles, Gray Catbirds and Red-lored Parrots.

Mennonites have established large, successful farms in Belize, and we visited one of their agricultural areas, the Rio Maya farm, in the town of Spanish Lookout. A large flowering tree attracted male and female Green-breasted Mangos that were actively feeding at the flowers. Vermilion Flycatchers were on the fence lines as were Fork-tailed and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. Each cow in the field had its own Cattle Egret. Different species were seen along the Belize River including some very large Green Iguanas, Spotted & Solitary Sandpipers, Barred Antshrikes, Streak-headed Woodcreepers, Blue-gray Tanagers and Dusky-capped Flycatchers. At another nearby location, the Gravel Pit, we had Northern Jacanas, Little Blue Heron and a Green Kingfisher, and we flushed a Lesser Nighthawk.

After lunch at the Sister's Mennonite Restaurant, we visited Countryside Park and found a pair of White-whiskered Puffbirds, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Plain Xenops and Northern Schiffornis in the forest. Along the lake, we saw Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, both Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers and Mangrove Swallows. On our return drive, we crossed the Belize River on a hand driven car ferry, something none of us had recently experienced! After another delicious dinner, we recorded our sightings and slept well to the soothing sound of the river.

Sun., Nov. 13 Caracol National Monument

Most of us traveled today to the Caracol National Monument, a famous Maya site within the Chiquibul National Park near the border with Guatemala. Part of our drive was on the newly constructed highway, and the remainder on a rutted dirt road that was thankfully passable. We stopped at the restrooms at the Forest Reserve Gate and enjoyed watching a pair of beautiful Golden-olive Woodpeckers.



It was Sunday and when we arrived at Caracol it was crowded. Right at the entrance we immediately spotted hummingbirds coming to a flowering tree including Violet and Wedge-tailed Sabrewings, Purple-crowned Fairies and White-bellied Emeralds. What an exciting start! In addition, a juvenile Great Black Hawk had been seen perched along the road during our drive and a large variety of butterflies on flowering bushes. Isaias gave us an informative tour of these impressive ruins as we spotted many woodpeckers, woodcreepers, flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulets, vireos, wrens, thrushes, and warblers. But the highlight of this walk was finding of a pair of Tody Motmots in the surrounding woods. This delightful morning culminated with a delicious picnic lunch.

Mon., Nov. 14 Mountain Pine Ridge | Hidden Valley | Green Hills Butterfly Ranch

Today we drove to Mountain Pine Ridge, a higher elevation plateau that holds extensive Caribbean pine stands and a new variety of bird species. Upon arrival to the area, we had time to walk the trail behind the forest reserve gate and found some of the most exciting species so far! White-collared and Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts were circling in the sky above us. We found two species that are seldom seen, a Rose-throated Tanager and the strikingly beautiful Gray-throated Chat, a Yucatan endemic.

We walked the road at Hidden Valley and found Azure-crowned Hummingbird, White-browed Gnatcatchers, Spot-breasted Wren and six Rufous-capped Warblers. A male and female Hepatic Tanager perched atop pine trees for a nice comparison. After a slight delay because of car trouble, we continued to the Green Hills Butterfly Ranch where a delicious lunch buffet awaited us. Afterwards we enjoyed a guided tour of the butterfly house and watched their hummingbird feeders, spotting a new species for our trip: Scaly-breasted Hummingbird. We arrived at our next lodge, Pook's Hill, and bid farewell to Isaias, thanking him for the successful and enjoyable four days we spent with him at Black Rock Lodge.



Tue., Nov. 15

Pook's Hill Lodge | Private Reserve Birding

We gathered at sunrise to begin birding the area before breakfast. We had great success just walking the road with our new guide, Mike. Little Tinamou was heard on the edge of the forest as was a Lesson's Motmot, which gave us only quick glimpses. White-whiskered Puffbirds and Black-cheeked and Pale-billed Woodpeckers were seen easily as was a Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner and a Blue-black Grosbeak. Buff-throated and Black-headed Saltators were busy foraging in a palm tree, and two Crimson-collared Tanagers were breathtaking! We hated to stop for breakfast!

After a delicious meal, we walked into the forest following a calling Great Antshrike until all got good looks. A Blue Ground Dove was actively nest building, and Spot-breasted Wrens were vocalizing. A Slaty-tailed Trogon sat in the open providing great photo opportunities. After lunch, some rested while others swam in the nearby swimming hole on the rain-swollen river. Before dinner, we again walked the road noting Short-billed Pigeons and a Laughing Falcon as they flew over. Dot-winged Antwrens were foraging in the bushes, and we had great views of Red-throated Ant-Tanagers.

Before dinner, we met for Happy Hour and completed our checklist as bats were busy visiting the hummingbird feeders.

Wed., Nov. 16

Pook's Hill | Blue Hole National Park | Hopkins Beach & Wetlands | Lodge at Big Falls

Before breakfast, we walked the road again finding new species including Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Mealy Parrot, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-breasted Chat and many Morelet's Seedeaters. We bid farewell to the Pook's Hill staff and traveled the Hummingbird Highway to St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park. A short visit produced Black-headed Trogon, White-necked Puffbird and a Barred Antshrike. We spotted a Wood Stork and White Ibis on our drive through the Hopkins Wetland and enjoyed a delightful lunch on the beach at the Hopkins Bay Inn. It



was low tide, so Royal and Sandwich Terns sat on the dock along with Sanderlings, a Willet and Spotted Sandpipers. We said farewell to Mike and met Steve Choco, our guide for the remainder of the trip. He heard, and we got a quick glimpse of the Cinnamon Hummingbird that visits their flowering bushes. On our drive to the Lodge at Big Falls, we spotted a perched Laughing Falcon and Roadside Hawk.

We moved into our new rooms, completed our checklist, and enjoyed dinner in the lovely lodge, anxious to begin birding early the next morning.

Thur., Nov. 17 Lodge at Big Falls | Dump Rice Fields | Lagoon Pedre Perline's Restaurant

We enjoyed our first cup of coffee at dawn, keeping a watchful eye on the feeders and the yard where a family of Central American Agouti was seen daily. Both species of saltators and Baltimore Orioles were frequent visitors to the feeders, and a House Wren, White-breasted Wood-Wren and American Redstart were seen around the pool fence. Walking the trails, we were amazed at how many different species we saw including a Bare-crowned Antbird, Slate-headed and Common Tody-Flycatchers, Dusky Antbird and Thick-billed Seed-Finch. After breakfast, much to our delight, we saw the striking Orange-billed Sparrow and, finally, a Lineated Woodpecker along with a male White-collared Manakin! Rufous-breasted Spinetails were interacting and ignoring us. What a great morning!

After a short drive, we visited the Dump Rice Fields. A new habitat and many new species including a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Canivet's Hummingbird and a Least Bittern. A Sora was vocalizing, and several crakes skulked in the reeds. A Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, several Scarlet-rumped Tanagers and a White-tailed Kite were also noted. Yellow-headed Vultures circled above us, as did White-tailed Hawks. At the nearby lagoon, we had Boat-billed Herons on a nest and an Anhinga drying its wings.

Steve took us to his longtime friend Perline's restaurant for a lunch of Belizean dishes. What a delight! She has fruiting trees on her property attracting many birds including Spot-breasted Orioles! On our return, many in our group enjoyed a cooling swim in the lodge's pool.



Fri., Nov. 18

Lodge at Big Falls | Nim Li Punit Maya Site | Blue Creek Village

After coffee and a short drive, we arrived at the Nim Li Punit Maya site, a fascinating area to bird and learn about the Maya civilization. We followed a Mayan Antthrush without getting good looks but did see Bright-rumped Attila, Masked Tityra, Gray Hawk and Brown-crested Flycatcher.

After breakfast, we drove to Blue Creek Village and followed the creek seeing a Collared Trogon, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Green Kingfisher and Mistletoe Tyrannulet. We were all excited to see a White Morpho slowly flying along the bank of the creek, a life butterfly for most of us! A heavy rainstorm forced us to leave early, but on the Manfredi Village Road, as the rain stopped, we found a large flock of Black Vultures drying their wings and with them were six King Vultures! What luck!

We ate our picnic lunch at the lodge and many swam in the refreshing pool again. After dinner, we did a night drive and saw two Striped Owls on utility lines along the main road. On our return, Steve heard the resident Black-and-white Owl in the trees above the pool. What an ending to a very successful day!

Sat., Nov. 19

Tunich Ha Reserve & Ecological Center | Punta Gorda Ixcacao Maya Belizean Chocolate

Steve planned an exciting visit for us to the Tunich Ha Reserve for birding and a Belizean breakfast. His friends own the reserve and provide housing for the volunteer hawk watchers during migration. This year they had recorded a record number of Hook-billed Kites migrating over the Punta Gorda area. We had good looks at a Stripe-throated Hermit, our 14th hummingbird species, Olive-throated Parakeets, Northern Bentbill and Swainson's Thrush.

We visited the town of Punta Gorda and at the beach found Brown Pelicans, Laughing Gulls, Forester's Terns and a Magnificent Frigatebird. We visited the hawk watch group as they were observing a White-tailed Hawk soaring over town.

Lunch at the Ixcacao Maya Belizean Chocolate Factory was a real treat! Juan Cho and his son proudly explained the process of growing cacao and the history of their business. Juan's wife, Abelina, prepared a delicious



Belizean lunch, and for dessert we sampled the many different varieties of chocolate prepared by Ixcacao. Many purchased chocolate bars as gifts and souvenirs to take home with them. That evening, after our farewell checklist and dinner, we gathered around the pool and finally got good looks at the resident Black-and-white Owl.

Sun., Nov. 20 **Departures from Punta Gorda**

After breakfast, we thanked Steve for making our visit to Big Falls so successful. We departed in two groups in small planes from Punta Gorda to return to Belize City and our international flights. Farewell and thank you Belize, our three comfortable and unique lodges, and our three expert guides, for a wonderful and successful visit!

Group Photo (Pat Lueders - PL), Black-headed Trogon (Jack Rasmussen - JR), Black Howler Monkey (PL), Green Honeycreeper (Douglas Moore - DM), Upper Plaza Scene (DM), Green Iguana (JR), Macal River (DM), Taylor's Red-eyed Treefrog (DM), Howler Monkey (Callie Wronker - CW), Collared Aracari (PL), Black Iguana (CW), Northern Potoo (DM), White-whiskered Puffbird (DM), Great Kiskadee (DM), White-fronted Parrot (DM), Pink Orchid Tree (DM), Caana View of Maya Mountains (DM), White-necked Jacobin (CW), Morelet's Crocodile (DM), Birders (CW), Palm Roof (CW), Roadside Hawk (CW), Keel-billed Toucan (PL), Spotted Sandpiper (CW), King Vulture (PL), Black-and-white Owl (CW), Barred Antshrike (JR), Black Vulture (JR), Green Honeycreeper (JR), Red-capped Manakin (JR), Black-cowled Oriole (JR), White-collared Manakin (JR), Slaty-tailed Trogon (JR), Hooded Warbler (JR)