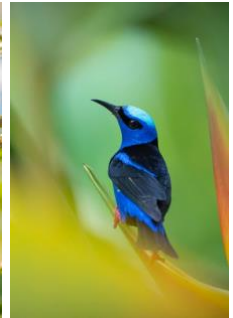


Belize Birding & Nature

Mar. 4 – 12, 2023 | by Bryan Calk



With Bryan Calk, expert local guides Eduardo and Levy, and participants Ann C., Ann G., Annie, Dan, Don, Gary, Janet, Sally, Susan and Tony



Sat., Mar. 4

Black Orchid

We gathered today at the Black Orchid Resort just outside of Belize City for a first afternoon of birding as a group. On our short walk around this small resort, we managed to find several great birds, including Common Tody Flycatcher, Hooded Oriole, a couple troops of Brown Jays, Groove-billed Ani, and perhaps the most exciting was a very nice comparison of Yucatán and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers. The differences between these two species can be quite subtle when viewed apart, but it was a treat to get to study them both at length, even observing their different feeding behaviors. We pulled down our binoculars for our welcome orientation over cocktails on the lawn, then headed into dinner which we enjoyed at the resort's restaurant. But before long we called it a night as we had a very early wake up the next morning for our first full day of birding...



Sun., Mar. 5

Crooked Tree | New River | Lamanai

We woke up and headed out at 5:30 this morning to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary where we arrived at the Birdseye View Lodge boat ramp. Here, we grabbed some coffee and got to watch some Gray-breasted Martins flying over the building and a couple of Vermilion Flycatchers which made up our welcoming committee. Soon enough we were underway onto two boats with our captains Robert and Rudy who led us out into the North Lagoon. As we cruised through the open water, and eventually the narrow channels of Spanish Creek, we had an incredible morning of tons of wildlife sightings, including four species of Kingfisher, an abundance of wading birds including Boat-billed Herons, Jabiru, and a nesting pair of Bare-throated Tiger-herons. Besides the birds, we encountered some of our first Yucatán Black Howler Monkeys and Green Iguanas roosting in the trees. We ate a brunch of breakfast burritos, fruit, and rolls on the boat before we finally had to make it back to the van for our next adventure.

We headed on to the Lamanai Eco Tours boat ramp area where we did a little bit of birding around the grounds which turned out to be exceptionally productive. Here we started by scoring a Canivet's Emerald and a Boat-billed Flycatcher before we encountered a very active mixed flock of mostly neo-tropical migrant species that we are familiar with from the United States, including 10 species of warbler, a couple vireos, and the star of the show, a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl! After eating lunch, we boarded up onto our second boat of the day, which took us down the New River to our home for the next three nights, the Lamanai Outpost Lodge. Along the way, we encountered a roosting Lesser Nighthawk and even a Laughing Falcon perched up on a nice snag, giving us incredible views. We finally made it to the lodge where we all got settled into our rooms and oriented to the property before running through our checklist and having a delicious house-made dinner and cocktails.

Mon., Mar. 6 Lamanai | Mayan Ruins | Spotlight Safari

We started early this morning with some birding through the jungle before breakfast. But before we really got to see any birds, the highlight was a spectacular sunrise over the New River from our higher vantage point at the lodge. Squirrel Cuckoos flew back-and-forth overhead, giving us spectacular views, Gartered and Black-headed trogons, orioles, warblers, and more spectacular birds kept us very entertained. Some leaf cutter ants Beasley



going back-and-forth across the road and a variety of beautiful plants like butterfly peas and Cecropia trees with several butterflies floating around us held our attention between each bird sighting, and all before breakfast! After eating a delicious meal, we headed down to the Lamanai Maya ruins site, where we got to see both the Jaguar and High Temples. Their museum, full of pottery and other exquisite artifacts from these amazing people, taught us much about the history of the Maya presence in this area and Spanish colonization. But of course, there were birds at the site too! A variety of warblers kept us entertained, as well as a stunning views of both Lineated and Golden-olive Woodpeckers right around the museum area, and further down the trail we got a couple of woodcreepers, a variety of tropical flycatchers like Eye-ringed Flatbill as well as a flyover Double-toothed Kite.

It was an incredibly successful morning, and we headed back to the lodge for lunch, followed by some downtime for the afternoon very enjoyed a nice breeze with a warm, tropical air blowing through the leaves of the trees and gardens around the lodge. A couple of us even wandered around and caught a glimpse of some Greater Sac-winged Bats hanging to the side of one of the cabins. We reconvened for our checklist and dinner before heading down to the boat ramp, this time for a spotlight safari. After dark, the river is alive anew, and our fantastic guides from the lodge found us some pretty amazing things like a baby and adult Morelet's Crocodile, three Yucatán Nightjars (including some incredibly close views), Northern Potoo, Green Kingfisher, some roosting Indigo Buntings in the reeds, and a gorgeous night, with a full moon and whole host of stars and constellations that Eduardo guided us through. A brushfire in the distance glowed on the horizon as we pulled back in for the night.

Tue., Mar. 7 Lamanai | Indian Church | Sunset Cruise

We started today with another pre-breakfast jungle dawn walk, but this time into the village of Indian Church, where we really only made it about a quarter of a mile down the road in two hours that we spent because there were constantly new creatures to admire. For instance, before we even left the grounds of the lodge, there were many birds sitting up in the tall trees like Yellow-winged Tanagers, Barred Antshrike, and a rare for the area Buff-throated Saltator. Once we actually made it into the village, the first bird was big, bold and beautiful, and the national bird of Belize: Keel-billed Toucan! Further down the road in a hedge of fire bush, we found both White-collared, and Red-capped Manakins, with plenty of Rufus-tailed hummingbirds buzzing around, three species of parrots flying over and in the trees, and a Green-backed Sparrow that hopped out for exceptional views of this



often shy species. It was soon time to head back for breakfast, which was once again a delicious spread of fresh food, before we embarked on a medicinal plant and a village life tour, where we got to experience some of the history, culture, and life of the people in this area. We learned about some of the native plants and cultivated varieties that serve as food, shelter, and medicine, and how both modern and ancient people would use them. As we wandered out back into the village again, we learned about the Mestizo people, how the village life runs each day, including their education, jobs, religion. The highlight for most of us though was a live cooking demonstration where we ground corn into a masa that was then cooked over an open fire into some fresh tortillas served with a chetal sauce as an appetizer. Finally, we learned how to pat out, fill and roll tamales in banana leaves. Then we were served a delicious traditional chicken soup with garnachas, chicken empanadas and fresh squeezed limeade, fresh from the kitchen of the women's cooperative restaurant.

With hearts and bellies full we headed back to the lodge for a little downtime before we embarked on a sunset "booze cruise" on the river, where we enjoyed company, conversation and excellent birds on a calm cool evening with the sun dipping down below the horizon. Piña coladas and Cuba libres were enjoyed with some fresh chips and salsa before we got back to the lodge for our evening checklist routine and a delicious dinner where we got to sample the tamales that we helped make in the kitchen earlier in the day! Needless to say, we ate well on this trip!

Wed., Mar. 8 Lamanai | Savanna Dawn | Chan Chich

Our last morning birding at Lamanai, we headed out down Dawson Creek, a tributary of the New River, towards some savanna habitat. It was a very different environment from the broadleaf evergreen forest that we had been in up to this point. We were now with scattered Pines and Oak mottes dotting an expansive shrubby grassland. Here we found a few Yucatán peninsula endemics like Black Catbird, Yucatán Jay, the Yucatán subspecies of Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Botteri's Sparrow, and Northern Tropical Pewee. It was interesting to be in this environment and hear the constant chatter of white fronted parrots, and just a general different species mix from where we had been up to this point.

We then headed back to the lodge for breakfast and got our things packed as we headed out after saying goodbye to Eduardo and the staff and Lamanai. Then it was onwards to our new accommodations at Chan



Chich. Our long ride out was a little rough, but when we finally made it, the accommodations were immediately worth all the trouble. We had a little downtime before our species checklist and dinner at the lodge restaurant.

Thu., Mar. 9 Chan Chich | Staff Homes | River Trail | Sac Be Trail

We woke up this morning in beautiful Chan Chich where we met our guide Levy who would be with us for the entirety of our stay here. We started with a walk down towards the lodge staff homes, stopping for some Central American Spider Monkeys. In the staff lodging area, there were a few custard apple trees with ripe fruit which were being devoured by a wide variety of birds. One of the first things we saw was a Crested Guan roosting up in the tree, not particularly interested in the fruit, surrounded by Yellow-throated, and Olive-backed Euphonia, Red-legged Honeycreepers, Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, and while the show is going on in front of us, a Slaty-tailed Trogon snuck in from behind to give us some spectacular views. Then we headed back for breakfast and set out for some pretty intense trail hiking through the beautiful tall forest here, dotted with large mahoganies, Cohune palms, and cabbage bark trees.

We had a flurry of activity at a pond which we dubbed "lettuce pond" since it was covered in water lettuce. A mixed flock of over ten species of birds was active here, including several of our migratory species, a pair of Russet-naped Wood-rails, and Rufus-tailed Jacamars. We finished our loop in time for lunch and some downtime before we headed back out for an early evening walk to a pool along Chan Chich creek where we sat quietly and patiently for the activity to come to us. And boy were we rewarded with an incredible show, starting with a Black-throated Shrike-tanager posing on a perfect perch for extended views, followed by a stunning Purple-crowned Fairy coming in to bathe right in front of us! The nearly constant show of warblers kept us entertained as the action came and went, and the last cherry on top was a point blank Northern Schiffornis. We made it back to the inn, passing some Ocellated Turkeys along the way, to run through our extensive checklist for the day and enjoy a great meal served by the staff at the lodge with all ingredients fresh from the property's gardens and farm.



Fri., Mar. 10

Chan Chich | Gallon Jug | Bajo Trail | Night Safari

We started our very long day today with a ride out to the agricultural areas around Gallon Jug. Here they produce almost all the food that they serve for their meals, including vegetables, fruits, coffee, and livestock. In this quite different habitat, we found things like Fork-tailed Flycatchers and White-tailed Kites, and as we moved more into the wooded areas nearby, we caught up with a pair of gorgeous Gray-throated Chats that gave us several great views. Next we found a pair of Great Black Hawks that were busy making more Great Black Hawks, which were soon accosted by a pair of Plumbeous Kites, trying to get them out of their territory. It was quite an amazing spectacle of the natural world as we got to watch the story unfold before us!

Then we headed back to the main lodge for breakfast before heading out on a walk around the grounds again but to a new section of trail. Here we caught up with a mixed-species flock in the canopy, where highlights included Green Shrike-vireo, Dot-winged Antwrens, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, and White-browed Gnatcatcher. Back up at the lodge for a little downtime before lunch, we were entertained by Long-billed hermits and White-necked Jacobins are on the hummingbird feeders, as well as a pair of Yellow-winged Tanagers, and even a Golden-hooded Tanager coming in to eat some berries, just a few feet off the deck from where we were eating lunch. We took a few hours off for the afternoon before heading back out on the trail to head down to "lettuce pond." Here we found another mixed-species flock foraging low to the ground, including Dusky Antbird, Red-throated Shrike-tanager, a variety of warblers, and on the banks of the pond was a large Morelet's Crocodile. As we waited and watched, our main target for this spot finally revealed itself... A pair of Tody Motmots! We made it back in time for dinner and our checklist after which we loaded up into the open-top safari vehicle for a night ride around the property to similar areas that we went first thing this morning. The stars in the sky were absolutely spectacular with no moon to drown them out, and some of the highlights included a gray fox, Barn Owl, Northern Potoo, and even a very well hidden Yucatán Poorwill.



Sat., Mar. 11 Chan Chich | Escarpment

We started our day today with a short walk down to some of the staff housing area once again, right around the lodge, where we found a tree with lots of blooms where a good flock of Red-legged Honeycreepers were actively working, and we succeeded in pulling out a pair of Green Honeycreepers hiding in the mix. A male Ocellated Turkey was in full display with his tail fanned out, flapping its wings all over the place with a very unimpressed female. We headed back over for breakfast before loading up into the Safari vehicle again for a ride up to the escarpment, the highest point on the property. A long the way, we stopped for views of White-collared Puffbird, Rufus Piha, and Perched Double-toothed Kite. At the top, the star of the show by far was a Pheasant Cuckoo, an unexpected bonus bird which gave us decent looks. On the drive back down, we ran into a perched juvenile Ornate Hawk Eagle. During a little off-time, some of us enjoyed the pool and a few of us joined up for a walk around the grounds, where we were rewarded with amazing views of a Blue Bunting eating some seeds in the lawn, and a pair of King Vultures soaring overhead. We then gathered back at the dining area where we celebrated Annie's birthday with cake and Prosecco before a few of us loaded back up for a their turn at the night drive out to the farm land areas. Along the way, we spotted a roosting Roadside Hawk, Yucatán Nightjar, and Yucatán Poorwill, and even a beautiful black witch moth.

Sun., Mar. 12 Chan Chich | Gallon Jug Departures

On our departure day, we all took time in the morning to eat breakfast, pack bags, and be ready to head over to Gallon Jug for our short flight back to Belize City for our regular departures home. One final departing gift from this place came in the form of a pair of Central American Pygmy-owls that were hanging out in a tree right in the main lodge lawn area that we all finally got to see. And over in Gallon Jug, the Fork-tailed Flycatchers and Gray-breasted Martins were some of the last birds we saw before we headed out from this beautiful place.

Photos by Bryan Calk: Gartered Trogon, Ocellated Turkey, Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Red-capped Manakin, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Central American Pygmy Owls, Jabiru, Bat Falcon, Ringed Kingfisher, Bare-throated Tiger Heron (BC), Northern Jacana, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Montezuma Orodendola, Boat-billed Heron, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-fronted Parrot, Gartered Trogon, White-collared Manakin, Lineated Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, Greater Sac-winged Bat, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Great Black Hawk, Yucatan Nightjar, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Basilisk Lizard, Blue Bunting, Central American Spider Monkey, Black-throated Shrike-tanager, Double-toothed Kite,

Groove-billed Ani, Grasshopper nymphs, Long-billed Hermit, Deppe's Squirrel, Golden-hooded Tanager, Barn Owl, Gray-throated Chat, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Ornate Hawk-eagle juv., Social Flycatcher, Crested Guan, Ocellated Turkeys, King Vulture, Central American Pygmy Owl