

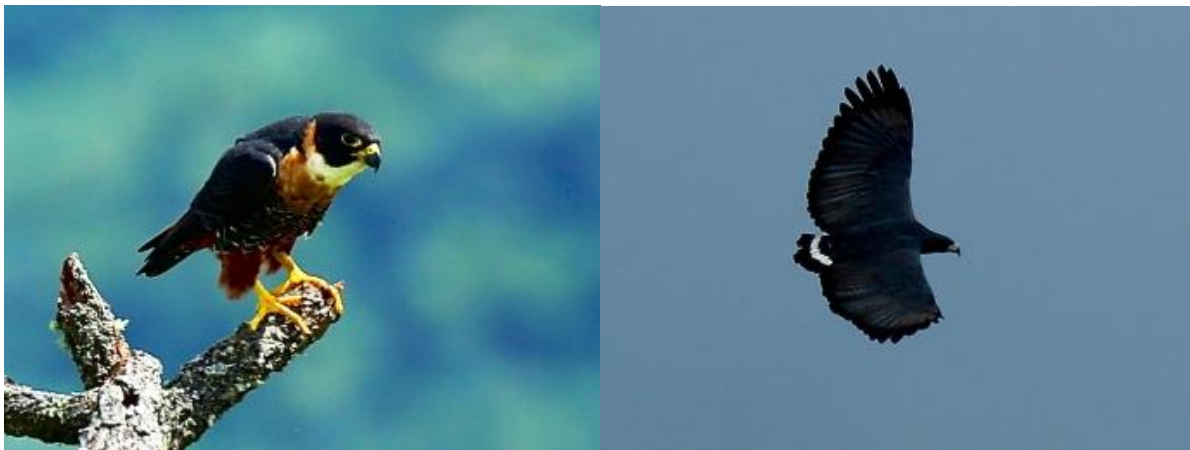
TRIP REPORT: BELIZE with a bit of Yucatan, Mexico 10-24February, 2016

**Belize – Central American Gem with small distances & long species lists
From Mayan Tropical Forests up to Mountain Pine Ridge**



This **16-day-long holiday** was a **private tour** what we organized for Rob & Janet, a very kind couple from Lancashire, UK whom we greeted as **returning friends** since they have been on several tours with us before in Eastern Europe. Since they knew that each year from November till April for **more than a decade by now we live and organize tours in Yucatan & Latin America** as well they trusted us to put together a special **combination of Yucatan, Mexico**, which is our home patch with the neighbouring small **Caribbean country, Belize**.

During this tour we had seen a long list of **Yucatan endemic birds**, various **rare mammals such as Jaguarundi, Tayra and even wild Bottle-nosed Dolphins**, clouds of colourful **butterflies** and several hard to see or **rare bird species**. We had several incredible moments during the tour. If we just mention that we witnessed **Crested Eagle hunting in front of us or a male Orange-breasted Falcon flew 3 feet above our head or we photographed a circling Solitary Eagle from above** then you will know what we mean! ☺



Belize has all the potential to become **one of the emerging birding, butterfly & wildlife destinations in Central America**. The country was formerly known as British Honduras, has a population of just 0.3 million people and a huge portion of its land covered by lush forests. There are several National Parks and other protected areas, plus some prime Mayan Archeological sites which makes the country **a perfect Birding, Wildlife & Culture destination**. Add to this **the World's second largest Coral Reef** with about thousand cays which offer great relaxation with some snorkelling.

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Fact File

- 15 days tour visiting famous Mayan sites and biosphere reserves
- start and finish in Cancun, Mexico
- using several accommodations to maximize visited places & possible species

Highlights

- birding along the Caribbean shores, Puerto Morelos Area, Mexico
- birding at the Biosphere Maya at and around La Milpa
- boat tour in the mangroves at Crooked Tree, Belize
- primary and secondary forests at Pooks Hill
- visit Tapir Mountain & Mountain Pine Ridge reserves
- Caribbean seashore
- Bacalar Bay, Mexico
- Shian Kaan Biosphere Reserve, Mexico
- wide variety mammals, reptiles, butterflies and habitats
- plenty of interesting bird species including several great endemics

Accommodation

2 nights at **Puerto Morelos**
3 nights at **Chan Chich Lodge**
2 nights at or close to **Crooked Tree**,
3 nights at **Tapir Mountain & Mountain Pine Ridge reserves**
2 nights at the Caribbean seashore nearby **Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Forest Reserve**
1 night **FCP/Tulum, Mexico**
1 night **Puerto Morelos, Mexico**



Activity level Generally easy to moderate walks; some long drives, but mainly on good roads, except at Mountain Pine Ridge road
Some areas are humid; hot temperatures and rain is possible



Itinerary

Day1 10th February, 2016

Start from **London**, Gatwick, arrive to **Cancun** 16.50, short **transfer to Puerto Morelos**

Rob and Janet arrived in the late afternoon, so after it we had a short transfer from the Cancun airport to the lovely small fishing village of **Puerto Morelos**, but by that time it was already

dark. Where we had the accommodation is a nice hacienda style hotel at the Caribbean see shore. We had a bit of time to get prepared for our first nice Mexican dinner and in meantime we also discussed next day's program.

Day2 11thFebruary, 2016 birding around Puerto Morelos, look for **Yucatan endemics**

We decided not to start too early, since the day before Rob and Janet had a long-long day of traveling and they were also jet-legged.

So after breakfast at about 8.30 we started to go out in the area.

Gabor and Andrea suggested to spend the whole day at their favourite trails close to PM. At the very first stop we had a nice mix of different species, including: **Bronzed Cowbird, Olive Sparrow, Plain Chachalaca, Clay-coloured Thrush, Melodious Blackbird**. We heard and seen the first very loud **Brown Jay**, but also the much rarer

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and colourful **Green Jay**. The first woodpecker in the tour was the **Lineated Woodpecker** and we also had the aptly named **Roadside Hawk** patrolling the road. :-)

Gabor called in a **Ferruginous Pigmy Owl**, which attracted several excited songbird, such as also local endemic: **Rose-throated Tanager** and others like **Scrub Euphonia, Hooded Oriole, Lesser Greenlet. Warblers** were represented by **Black-throated Green and Magnolia**, while vireos included **Yellow-throated and White-eyed**.

A small group of **Aztec Parakeets** flew across and a bit later on a pair of **Yucatan Parrots or White-fronted Parrots**. Unfortunately they were too quick to let us identify them. We heard a strange squeaking noise of **Masked Tityras** and we also found by the noise a **Long-Billed Gnatwren**.

Spot-Breasted Wren was also very loud and a group of **Red-throated Ant Tanagers** moved across the road as well.

Our first hummingbird was a **White-bellied Emerald** and soon we had another **Ferruginous Pigmy Owl**. We spotted a **Short-tailed Hawk** circling above the forest and later on we found another regional endemic, **White-bellied Wren**. The next endemic was a **Yucatan Woodpecker**. And our first trogon was a recently renamed **Garthered Trogon**- (called formerly Violaceous Trogon)

As the temperature rose we had more and more fantastic colourful **butterflies** such as: **Orange Banner, Red Rim, Malachite, Zebra and Erato's Heliconian, Mexican Cycadian, Angled Sulphur, Ruddy Daggerwing, Pavon Emperor, Common Blue Morpho and Queen butterflies**. Perhaps the most interesting one was the **Boisduval's Leafwing**.

During the hottest time we retreated to a local restaurant to have our first typical light lunch: quesadillas with guacamole, black beans and salad.

After our lunch we went to the La selva area, which was full with birds again:

Tropical Mockingbird, Magnolia Warbler, White-eyed Vireo, a first Winter female **Tennessee Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler**, We heard **Rufous Peppershrike**, but this time we couldn't see it, instead we found a **Golden-fronted Woodpecker**. This was followed by plenty of different colourful species, such as: **Hooded and Baltimore Orioles, Squirrel Cuckoo, Black-headed Saltator and Green Jays**.

It was a bit harder to spot **Spot-breasted Wren, Hooded Warbler, Northern Parula** and a female **Canivet's Emerald**.

The 3rd Ferruginous Pigmy Owl of the day caused an alarm among the **Mangrove Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers and Cinnamon Hummingbird**.

Here the sky was patrolled by a **Grey Hawk**.

A few miles further we parked the car and walked a short distance. We found an ant-swarm, but unfortunately the birds had not discovered it yet at that time. Still we have managed to find a dashing-colored **Turquoise-browed Motmot**. Also we found a **Black-headed Trogon** and we spent a little time to id a **Couch's Kingbird**. This bird is almost identical to the more common Tropical Kingbird, basically you need to know the difference between the vocalizations. Here hummingbirds were represented by a male **Canivet's Emerald** and a female **White-bellied Emerald**.

We also saw a **White-eyed Vireo** and a **Northern Parula**.

Our last stop was alongside some fresh water wells, where we had **Red-throated Ant-tanagers** and **Spot-breasted Wren**.

Suddenly **Zone-tailed Hawk** flew with a prey in its talons and landed on a tree, so we all could have a very good view. After that we found again a beautiful local endemic bird, the **Blue Bunting**.

The flowery bushes were visited by several different hummingbird species, including: **Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Canivet's Emerald and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing**.

Another common bird was here the **Mangrove Vireo**.

Finally we have finished this superb day with a nice long list of birds and butterflies.

Our first dinner was at the stunning Caribbean beach side restaurant of the hotel with a nice breeze. :-)

Day3 12thFebruary, 2016 full day travel with some birding stops down to Belize

After a goodnight sleep and a substantial breakfast road 8.20 we started to travel from Puerto Morelos to South, toward Belize.

On the long way we stopped a few times shortly especially alongside the **Sian Kaan Biosfera Reserve**.

Before 10'clock we arrived to the spectacular Bacalar Bay, where right at the incredibly coloured bay we had our lunch at a beachside restaurant serving excellent food.

What is more, during waiting for our meals which were giant nachos, we could see several birds such as **Pied Grebes, Ringed-necked Ducks** and **Mangrove Swallows**. Another lovely experience was to witness **Snail Kites** hunting for their food.

From Bacalar we continued towards the **Belizean border** where we arrived about an hour and a half or 2hours later. Fortunately we were very well experienced how to cross the border, which went quite fast. It took just about 1hour, because still on the Mexican border we needed to do fumigation of the car, taking out our backs at the border, filling out papers, then Gabor could cross with the car and we could get in on the other side. but still we needed to do the Belizean car insurance, because it is obligatory..

So from here it was about a bit more then 2 hours to arrive to **La Milpa**, our accommodation, but before we had a few interesting birds on the way, such as: **Grey-necked Woodrail, Northern Cardinal, Wood Thrush**. But the best species were the **Crested Guan** and we also heard **Great Tinamu**.

The first mammal was a Grey Fox, but during the night we could enjoy the incredible sound of the **Howler Monkeys**.

Finally we arrived to our lovely base, which was surrounded by primary and secondary tropical forest.

After our arrival we still got a little chance to look around, but soon it got dark, so we went for a shower and then for a nice Belizean dinner.

Day4 13thFebruary, 2016 full day on site birding at the private protected area

We spent the whole day **birding at La Milpa area**. Before sunrise we heard **Collared Forest Falcon**. Our first seen birds were common species, such as **Clay-coloured Thrush, Great Kiskadee, Black-and-White & Magnolia Warbler**, and Hummingbirds were represented by **White-bellied Emerald** and **White-necked Jacobin**. But soon we started to see more colourful birds at some flowery trees, such as **Green & Red-legged Honeycreepers, Black-headed Saltator** and **Olive-backed Euphonia**. In the meantime we heard **Red-billed Pigeon, Spot-breasted Wren, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker** and **Slaty-tailed Trogon**.

Under the still sleepy, roosting **Turkey Vultures** Andrea found a male **Great Curassow**, followed by 2 females. **Olive-throated Parakeets** flew above our heads, while **Gray Catbird** and **Woodthrush** searched food nearby. First we heard and then we located a **Lineated Woodpecker**, also saw **Brown Jays** and then we continued our walk to a little pond. Here we found an **Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Northern Water-thrush** and a **Squirrel Cuckoo**.



We then heard the strange call of a **Northern Bentbill**, followed by **Red-throated Ant-tanager** and **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**. We quickly forgot to watch a female **Indigo Bunting** when a **Collared Aracari** arrived and 2 **White-crowned Parrots** flew across.

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We heard one of the songs of the **White-breasted Wood-wren's** long repertoire and some distant **Mealy Parrots**. At the flowers we still could find new birds such as a male **Black-cowled Oriole** and a **Northern Beardless Tyrannulet**.

Wow, what a colourful pre-breakfast walk! Just when we thought it is over the **Brown Jays** started to alarm and a raptor landed perfectly in an open branch: a beautiful immature **Double-toothed Kite!**

During eating our substantial breakfast we were entertained by another handful of birds such as **Least Flycatcher, Ovenbird**, a female **Red-capped Manakin, Yellow-olive and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher** and a beautiful male **Blue Bunting**. The feeders made sure that the air was full with hummingbirds such as **Green-breasted Mango, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird & Ruby-throated Hummingbird**. After breakfast just around the restaurant we saw an immature **Summer Tanager, Social Flycatcher** and a female **White-collared Manakin**. Rob has managed to take a photo of a new lifer for him: a striking **Yellow-breasted Chat**.

After all this no wonder we could start the morning drive-out a bit later than we planned, but we still found a very good activity at the nearby compost pit. The first bird was a male **White-whiskered Puffbird** which was followed by **Wood Thrush, Clay-coloured Thrush** and a whole group of **Red-throated Ant-tanagers**. First we heard, later we found a male **Collared Trogon** which finally posed perfectly above our head, so everybody could make an excellent photo, except Gabor who missed it with just a millisecond.



Gray-headed Tanager was new for the tour and we heard again **Dusky-capped Flycatcher. Lesser Greenlet, American Redstart, Magnolia Warbler and Squirrel Cuckoo** moved in the canopy. We found again **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher**, but **Sulphur-rumped** was a new one. We heard nearby a **Thrushlike Schiffornis** and also a **Black-throated Shrike-Tanager**, but we could not find them in the dense vegetation, so we continued our drive on the dirt-road.



Further we found a **Roadside Hawk**, but more interestingly our first **Slaty-tailed Trogon** as well. After taking photos of the posing male we continued the bus drive till the parking lot of the **La Milpa Archeological site**.

As soon as we got out of the bus we started to see several species, including **Greenish Eleania**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **female American Redstart** and **female Red-capped Manakin**. We had a glimpse of the **Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker** before we hiked up to the site. While our local guide told us the history of the Mayan site Gabor found us 2 **Worm-eating Warblers** and a **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**. A small group of **Short-billed Pigeons** were around, but everybody stared instead the arriving Collared



Aracaris which showed themselves very well. We heard a **Black-throated Shrike Tanager** above our heads, also the call of a **Black Hawk-Eagle**, but because of the dense canopy we could not see this raptor. But not long later we were compensated when Rob saw a movement in the top of the nearby forest edge: a large raptor landed and soon glided a bit further again landing on top of another tree. We checked first with bins and could not believe our eyes: it was an adult **Crested Eagle**! We could witness its interesting hunting behaviour and everybody managed to have a great scope view, Gabor even made an excellent photo of this enigmatic bird.

After this amazing experience we returned to our base to have an excellent lunch, followed by a little siesta time when the most active ones took excellent photos of an **American Pigmy Kingfisher** catching a fish, while others were enjoying the buzzing Hummingbirds or just simply relaxing till 4pm or even longer if skipped the afternoon walk. The short Mahogany trail was quiet, however at the beginning we have found a female **White-whiskered Puffbird**, also heard a distant **Keel-billed Toucan** and a very close, but eluding **Stub-tailed Spadebill**. Other excellent forest species here included the cheerfully whistling **Thrushlike Schiffornis** and **Royal Flycatcher**, we also heard **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**.

Later on we witnessed an interesting behaviour of **Red-throated Ant-tanager**. There was a large group of them feeding very high in the canopy, but from time to time one or another dropped itself, falling like a leaf or small rock, opening the wings and landing just before touching the ground. Here we heard **Spot-breasted Wren** and a few **Mealy Parrots** flew across as well. After finishing the trail we decided to go on the main dirt-road for a while, where **Boat-billed Flycatcher**, **Short-billed Pigeon**, **Grey Catbird** & **Road-side Hawk**. Suddenly an immature **King Vulture** glided over our head and the forest, just above the canopy. We also saw **Plain Chachalaca**, **Black-headed Trogon**, **Mealy Parrot**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** and female **Red-capped Manakin**. We also heard the elusive **Great Tinamu**, **Thrushlike Schiffornis** and **Collared Forest Falcon**.

Day5 14February, 2016 full day birding at *Lamanai, famous Mayan Ruins*

We started the day in dark with a fresh coffee and then a short walk in the forest to a compost pit. But before we reached that area we already had some surprises: first we saw a nice male **Great Curassow** chaperoning 2 females, later Gabor heard a **Stub-tailed Spadebill** and since it turned out that it would be a new bird for Rob, he tried to locate it. But suddenly Andrea and Bob caught a glimpse of a cat crossing the road, which after some discussions turned out to be a male **Jaguarundi**! Wow, what a start!

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We continued quite excitedly to the compost area which also provided plenty to see: **Red-throated & Red-crowned Ant-tanagers, Grey-hooded Tanager, Wood-thrush, Ovenbird, Hooded Warbler, Blue-crowned or Diademed Motmot, Ivory-billed & Northern Barred Woodcreeper**, *plus now we managed to see Stub-tailed Spadebill* as well. **White-crowned, Red-lore & Mealy Parrots** flew above our heads on the way back.

After breakfast we started a full day land tour to **Lamanai, the most famous Mayan Ruins in Northern Belize**. It was a busy city for more than 3000 years till the arrival of the Spanish.

During the way we already had Green **Kingfisher, Grey-necked Woodrail and Brown Jays**. after arriving to Indian church we birded the outside premises of the Archeological area which was very productive with some mixed flocks of **Greenish Eleania, Lesser Greenlet**, a long list of **Warblers & Vireos** such as **Worm-eating, Hooded and Black & White Warbler**, male **American Redstart, Mangrove & White-eyed Vireo**. We also found **White-bellied Emerald, Northern Bentbill, Plain Xenops** and **Eye-ringed Flatbill**. A **Spot-breasted Wren** miraculously set out on a branch and posed for photo and a pair of **Northern Barred Antshrike** also cooperated really well. We added **Northern Beardless Tyrannulet** and a **Limpkin** to the list. From the ruins of the XVIth century Spanish church we drove back to the similarly named village to have our lunch at a local restaurant which is a successful project of a local Women's Association.

We drove back to the parking lot, bought our entrance tickets and soon as we started our walk in the opposite direction how the general public went we found an amazing ant-swarm! It was incredible to find several individuals of 4 different species of Woodcreepers: **Tawny-winged, Ruddy, Ivory-billed & Northern Barred Woodcreeper**. Of course **Red-throated Ant-tanagers** and **Hooded Warblers** were around as well.

Close to the **Masked Temple** we heard the first Howler Monkey, but they were far enough not to see them. But soon we bumped into another large mixed flock with **Golden-olive, Chestnut-coloured and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Tawny-winged & Ivory-billed Woodcreepers, Plain Xenops, American Redstart**. We finally had a good view of a stunning **Black-throated Shrike-Tanager** as well.

We sat down and rested a bit at the **High Temple**, admiring its structure when a Bat Falcon arrived and landed close to the highest point of the building. Later on the female joined to it as well.

At the **Royal Complex** we finally had a really close view of **Howler Monkeys**, while in the air a **Short-tailed Hawk** circled. A pair of **White-fronted Parrots** had a chat in top of a huge tree. Still inside Andrea found 2 **Keel-billed Toucans** and later on during driving out we surprised a raptor which just caught a feathered prey. Luckily the bird was hungry and perched quite close, however bit hidden, so it took a while to ID it as a first Winter **White-tailed Hawk**.



After all these great sightings we started to drive back, but still found new and new species such as a wonderfully posing **Laughing Falcon** or a lonely **White-nosed Coati**. We managed to approach 2 perching **White-fronted Parrots** which flew just when we were really close. Alongside a channel we had 2 **Killdeers** and 2 **Greater Yellowlegs**, a fishing **Woodstork**, a **Great Egret**, **Snowy Egret** and **Little Blue Heron**.

After we reached the barrier on the road to La Milpa we slowed down to find some new birds and surprisingly we had a **Royal Flycatcher** from the car which later on we all could see properly. In the meantime we heard **Bright-rumped Attila** as well. Found a few **Great Curassows** and seen a few **Mealy Parrots** heading towards their night perch.

After a substantial dinner we discussed the day's list packed with great birds and turned into bed.

Day6 - 15February, 2016 half day onsite birding and travel to Crooked Tree

Sadly this was our last morning at **La Milpa**, so we tried to get the most out of it starting again 6.15 with a walk to the compost area. We were still talking about the yesterday's cat when we found some footprints, this time it was **Jaguar's**. In the meantime we heard **Great Tinamu** call.

The compost pit and its edge was teeming with birds, giving a good sight of several **Grey-headed Tanagers**, a few **Olive Sparrows**, **Wood-thrushes**, **Ovenbird**, **Clay-coloured Thrush**, **Grey Catbird**. We also heard **White-breasted Woodwren** and a few flying **Brown-hooded Parrots**. Above our head a beautiful male **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** hunted some insects. On the way back Rob and Janet had a great view of the **Stub-tailed Spadebill** which teased them during the previous days. **Northern Bentbill** was also seen.



During breakfast we saw **Plain Chachalaca**, **Grey Fox**, **Collared Seed-eater**, **Turkey Vultures** eating a huge toad, 2 **White-crowned Parrots** posing for photo, **Summer Tanager**, **Little Blue Heron**. We also heard **Red-lored Parrots** and feeders were visited by **White-necked Jacobin**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** and **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**.

After breakfast we went for a walk first in the garden, then alongside the main road and finally through the forest back to our lodge.

At flowery tree-tops we spotted **Green Honeycreeper**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Least Flycatcher**, **Black-headed Trogon** and **Black-headed Saltators**. We also heard **Blue-black Grosbeak**, **Ivory-billed Woodcreeper** and **Spot-breasted Wren**.

The surrounding giant trees offer food and perch for exotic species, such as **Collared Aracari**, **Keel-billed Toucan** and **Crested Guan**. On the big open road 2 beautifully masked adult **Grey Foxes** approached us so close that even with a pocket camera we could take some great pictures. All this in front of a female **Great Curassow** and under a **Road-side Hawk**. We spotted a **Long-billed Gnatwren** when 2 **Red-lored Parrots** crossed above our heads.

We heard 3 different calls of the **Northern Barred Antshrike** and also **Mexican** or **Black-faced Anthrush**.

Our next birds were **Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Greenish Eleania, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Spot-breasted Wren, Magnolia Warbler and Northern Bentbill**. We had a **White-bellied Emerald**, but a male **Purple-crowned Fairy** surely stole the show!

We decided to go back on a different road, this time using a trail through the forest coming out to the camp of the archaeologists. Immediately we bumped into a good mixed flock which produced even new species like **Sepia-capped Flycatcher**. Others noted as well like **Plain Xenops, Olive-backed Euphonia, Black and White Warbler, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and Worm-eating Warbler**. **2 Keel-billed Toucans** were calling each other and a few **Collared Aracaris** flew away. We heard **Thrushlike Schiffornis** again, **Red-throated Anttanagers and a White-tipped Dove**. Francisco spotted amazingly a juvenile **Double-toothed Kite** through the canopy. On the ground we also found a semi-buried skin of a **Squirrel Monkey** and not too far a Jaguar dropping with Paca hair. Obvious signs of a former presence of a **Jaguar**.

We returned to the ecolodge, had a final lunch, packed and started our travel back to Orange Walk and further South. On the way beside the usual birds we found a nice, up-close **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** as well.

We arrived to Crooked Tree with good light to enjoy perfect view from our bench of **Least, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Little Egret, Tricolored Heron, Northern Jacana, Killdeer, Great Egret, Turkey and Black Vultures** and stunningly close views of **Vermillion Flycatchers**.



Day7 - 16February, 2016 full day birding at Crooked Tree

Today early morning we had a coffee and soon started with the biggest attraction of the **Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, a 3-hours-long boat tour** at the best wetland birding area, a **Birders' Heaven**.

The birds came thick and fast starting with **Least Sandpiper, Mangrove Swallow, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Egret, Northern Jacana, Grey-necked Wood-rail, Wilson's Snipe, White Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Blue-winged Teal, Little Blue & Tricolored Herons, a female American Redstart, Black & White and Yellow Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**. We also heard a **Yellow-billed Cacique** and a **Bright-rumped Attila**. We regularly had **Green Heron and Mangrove Vireo**. It was nice to see **Snail Kite** hunting for Apple Snails.



Green Kingfisher, Pale-vented Pigeon and Melodious Blackbird were all at the same area. Suddenly we spotted 2 **Sungrebes** much for the

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joy of Rob, who was desperate to catch up with his son who had this birds on his life list earlier than his father. Later 2 **Red-ored Parrots** flew over and we had **Ringed Kingfisher** as well. We saw a **Striped Basilisk** which is also called **Jesus Christ lizard** since it can run across the water. Talking about reptiles, here everybody could learn that **Green Iguanas** are vegetarians, while the **Black Iguana** is a meat eater.

The next bird was a funny looking **Anhinga**, with its grotesque long neck.:-)

Right after that we spotted a beautiful **Black-Coloured Hawk, White-necked Puffbird** and **Protonotary Warbler** were new and also **Limpkin, Red-Winged Blackbird and Black-crowned Nightheron** managed to get on our list. We heard a **Spot-breasted Wren** and saw a **Purple Gallinule**, which was not too far from a hiding **Morelet's Crocodile**.



We have found some perched, funny-looking **Boat-billed Herons**, while an **Osprey** flew across in the sky. We also heard a **Rufous-breasted Spinetail**, but a much bigger surprise was to see 2 **Yellow-headed Parrots**, which is a highly endangered species.

Yellow-crowned Night-heron was common, plus we had a big group of **Muscovy Ducks** on a dead tree.

White-coloured Seedeaters were really common at grassy banks. We saw a few **Montezuma Oropendolas** and soon a **Yellow-billed Casique** flew across as well. It was also nice to see a baby crocodile and **Proboscus Bats**.

We had a **Black-headed Trogon, Brown Jays and Golden-fronted Woodpecker**.

A group of **Olive-throated or Aztec Parakeets** flew across and our last bird during the boat trip was a **Bare-throated Tiger-heron**.

By 9.30 we were back at our base and we had our well deserved full breakfast.:-)

After breakfast at around 10.30 we started to look around in the area and we found **Greyish Saltator**, 2 beautiful **Bat Falcons** and incredible amount of strongly coloured **Vermilion Flycatchers, Collared Seedeaters** and some **Smooth-billed Anis. Couch's Kingbird and Roadside Hawk** was present as well. And you could not miss the more than 50 **Black Vultures** just in the garden. Unfortunately soon it started to rain quite heavy and it has not stopped till lunch at 2.00p.m.:-)

During the afternoon we try to go out for a walk again, but pretty soon the rain started again, so after got wet a bit -but it is warm rain, so it is ok-, we decided to go back for the car and drive out and see if we can find something else without getting wetter.

After finding some **White and Glossy Ibises** and a few of those species, that we have seen before, we decided to give it up, the rain was too strong. Anyway, we had a great day with amazing number of birds and great species! So, we were really happy even with the rain!:-)

Day8 – 17th February, 2016 travel to Mountain Pine Ridge



We walked up early morning, had a fast coffee and looked around at the shore and in the garden. Beside the regular things, what we described the day before, we also found **Common Yellowthroat** and **Limpkin**.

Later on we had a full breakfast, packed and around 9.00 we left Crooked Tree. On the way we stopped at a rural petrol station and after feeling up the tank, we drove to Belmopan. Here we shortly visited a bank and in the

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parking lot we found a Keel-billed Toucan, but this time it was a beautifully carved one made out of wood, sold by the artist.

Half an hour later we reached a fork, where we decided to make a detour to one of our favorite places to Tapir Mountains. Since this area had torrential rain before, the road became extremely muddy, so it was too risky to go on even with a 4x4. So, we went back to the main road and drove further West higher up and started the journey on a rocky road up to the Pine Ridge area.

At a good roadside spot we stopped for having ur packed lunches made at Crooked Tree and in the meantime we looked for birds and butterflies as well.

We had some **Aztec Parakeets** and **Yellow-throated Euphonias**.



Early afternoon we arrived to our new base, which was at the lower part of the Mountain Pine Ridge. We met with our host and a local guide and then we occupied our rooms and soon got back to the partly open restaurant-bar area to watch the feeders. And we found these: **Olive-backed Euphonia**, **Black-headed Saltator**, **Yellow-winged Tanager**, **Blue-Grey Tanager**, **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and the stunning **Crimson-Collared Tanager**.

A bit further on the distance we found **White-crowned Parrot** and a circling adult **King Vulture**. **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** was

climbing up on a tree, while on another one a **Bat Falcon** set out. From behind the cabanas we heard **Bright-rumped Attila** and from a bigger distance **Keel-billed Toucan**.

At the botton of the flowery bushes, just beside the bar we found **Green-backed Sparrow**. **Tropical Pewee**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Clay-coloured Thrush** and **Ruddy Ground Dove** were really common. Actually the latter species had a nest just in front of us. Everybody really enjoyed, when a group of **Collared Aracaris** came down as well to the feeders to taste the fruits.

With a short walk we found **Red-billed Pigeon**, **Red-lored Parrot**, **Spot-breasted Wren** and **Thruslike Schiffornis**.

We enjoyed the beautiful sunset from behind the hills covered by primary and secondary forest.

After a nice shower in the romantic rooms with petroleum lights we went for the really tasty dinner.



Day9 – 18th February, 2016 full day birding at Mountain Pine Ridge



After the breakfast we went out with a local guide into the National Park first we visited a bit demanding trail, which offered a panormaic view of the whole area. First we saw, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Ovenbird**, later on a **Laughing Falcon** and plenty of **Red-lored Parrots** flew across.

Just behind us we discovered a **Red-capped Manakin** posing, we heard a typical call of a **Short-tailed Pigeon** and also a **Green Shrike-Vireo**. We found both **Green and Brown Jays** and **Black-faced Grosbeak** and **Keeled-billed**

Toucan. Hummingbirds were represented by **Wedge-tailed and Violet Sabrewing** plus **Spot-breasted Hummingbird**. The last birds at this area were **Grey Catbird, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher and Lineated Woodpecker**. Finally we drove back to the road and continued towards the 1000feet falls. On the way we have seen **Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, White-collared Seedeater and Acorn Woodpecker**.

At the **1000feet Falls** we walked down a few steps to a look-out point with the hope, that we will have a glimpse of the endangered **Orange-breasted Falcon**. Much to our surprise within a minute we spotted one coming from the beautiful falls directly toward of our heads. It seemed, that it wanted to attack us, flew with high speed just about 3feet above our heads. We turned back and watched where it went and it turned out this was a male display flying for the nearby female trying to get her interested. So silently and slowly we approached a bit the female and we all had incredible views of this stunning and rare bird. After that down in the Valley we spotted a 2 **White Hawks** circling. Their incredible white color stood out against the dark dense green forest. Much closer above our heads we found another new species a **Dusky-capped Warbler**. Within a



minute we had another huge surprise, as we were following at a distant raptor, which seemed to come closer and closer. First we were not sure whether it was a Great-Black Hawk or something else. Finally it turned out that it was a **Solitary Eagle**, which crossed

in front of us almost at eye level! Later on we realized, that there was another one and the 2 birds had a beautiful display flight as well! :-) We still had not run out of surprises, which arrived in a form of a **Hepatic Tanager** and an **Azure-crowned Hummingbird**, which was found by Andrea. We decided to have a lunch break and unfortunately during consuming our fantastic packed lunch a huge storm arrived, so we had to drive back to our lodge. Sitting out again at the feeders we witnessed some new species checking out the fruits, such as **Black-cowled and Baltimore Orioles, Golden-fronted**

Woodpecker, Black-headed Saltator. We again had **Collared Aracaris** and several **Red-throated Ant-tanagers** and finally the first **Red-legged Honeycreepers** and the usual, but beautiful **Euphonias**. When the rain stopped at around 4.00 o'clock, we decided to walk down and in this area we found **Shrub Euphonia, Black and White Warbler and White-eyed Vireo**. Two **Keel-billed Toucans** were up-close and we heard a **Thrushlike Schiffornis, Lineated Woodpecker** as well. We found a lovely couple of **White-Whiskered Puffbird** and a **Yellow-breasted Chat**. It was easy to see a **Grey Catbird, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher**, but it was a bit harder to find **Spot-breasted Wren** and a **Grey-crowned Yellowthroat**. The most colourful birds



were **Collared Aracaris** and **Keel-billed Toucans**. There was a raptor perched in a distance which caused quite a lot of confusion even after checking it by our scopes, but later on analysing the pictures we came up to the conclusion, that it was a **Bicolored Hawk**.

After this nice last bird we returned to the bar, watching a bit more of the feeder and then we went back to the rooms, had shower and then a nice dinner again.

This day was really amazing, we had some really amazing highlights!!:-)

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Day10 – 19th February, 2016 local birding

We had a pre-breakfast walk in the garden, where we first had **Lineated Woodpecker**, **Red-lored Parrots**, **Rose-throated Becard** and a new species **Band-backed Wren**. After that we found a fantastic fruity tree, which attracted half a dozen **Toucans** and even more **Aracaris**, **Garthered and Black-headed Trogons**, **Yellow-winged Tanager** and many of the previously mentioned birds. **Long-Billed Hermit** was new and we also had **Lesser Greenlet**, **Woodthrush**, **Red-billed Pigeon**, **Long-Billed Gnatwren**, **Wilson's and Magnolia Warbler**. Other new species were **Barred-Antshrike** and **Least Flycatcher**. We also have seen **Ivory-billed Wood-creeper**, **Black-and-White and Hooded Warblers**, **Melodious Blackbird** as well. Finally we went back to the restaurant for the full breakfast and since at 9.30 the sun started to shine we decided to drive to the La Vista hoping for some new exiting sightings..:-) This resulted a view of **Scaled Pigeons**, two **Great-black Hawks** and two adult **King Vultures**. Other raptors included **White Hawk and Bat Falcon**. We also saw a **Short-billed Pigeon**, **Grey Catbird** and heard **Stubtailed Spadebill**. Alongside the main road we saw a juvenile **Swainsson's Hawk**, **White-chinned Swift**, **Hook-billed Kite**.



After lunch we had a little rest and later in the afternoon we ventured out to the higher elevation of the Pine Ridge area. Beside the previously mentioned species the only new ones we found were **Black-headed Grosbeak** and **Rusty Sparrow**.

We also saw a nice **Grey Fox** crossing in front of us on the road.

After arriving back to the lodge again Janet had a lovely surprise crossing in front of her as she approached her room: it was most probably a nice **Tayra**.

Day11 – 20th February, 2016 onsite morning birding and travel to the Caribbean

This morning at 6 o'clock we decided to revisit the nearby fruiting tree in the garden. When we arrived there we witnessed at least 6-8 **Trogons**, mainly **Black-headed** ones flying and jumping to get some berries. A **Keel-billed Toucan** was loud on top of the tree and **Collared Aracaris** were very active as well. **Yellow-winged Tanager**, **Lesser Greenlet** and **Clay-coloured Thrush** were present as well. Perhaps the most interesting was to witness a courting **Lineated Woodpecker**, which at the end mated in front of us. We also found a **Band-backed Wren**. As we returned to the feeders we saw **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Crimson-backed Tanager** and different **Euphonias**.



After our last breakfast we had to say goodbye to our hosts and around 9.30 we started to drive towards the Caribbean coast. First we passed through Belmopan and later on continued at the foot of the Mayan mountains. On the way we had seen **Roadside and Grey Hawks**.

Upon arrival to our beach-side resort we got our rooms and started to discover the area. there were plenty of **Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigate birds**.

When we arrived to **Dangriga**, we had a lunch at our hotels restaurant-bar on the beach. We also saw **Royal Turn, Spotted Sandpiper, Ringed Kingfisher and Tropical Kingbird**.

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After lunch on the beach several **Sanderlings** and **Ruddy Turnstones** searched food plus we spotted a **Grey Plover** as well.

At a small airstrip we found **White-tailed Hawk**. The nearby bushy area was perfect for warblers, **Yellow-, Hooded-, Tennessee-, and Mangrove Warblers**. But this was also an area where we had **American Redstart, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Blue-Grey Tanager**. At a more open area we saw **Vermillion Flycatcher and White-winged Dove**.

In the evening we returned to our rooms and for a shower before going to the dinner.

Day12 – 21st February, 2016 full day birding at *Cockscomb Jaguar Reserve*



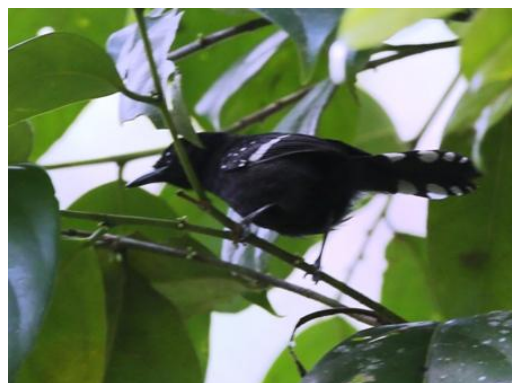
This morning as usual we had a very successful pre-breakfast birding. The first bird was a **Tropical Mockingbird** followed by 2 **Common Tody Flycatchers** and a **House Wren**. Both **White-winged Dove** and **Red-billed Pigeons** were present. There were several **White-collared Seedeaters, Great-tailed Grackles** and **Yellow-Warblers**. The sky was dotted by **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and incoming **Brown Pelicans**. Amazingly within short period of time we had seen 3 different species of **Vultures** with the Sun rising in the background: **Black, Turkey**

and **Lesser-Yellow-headed**. We have checked again the bushy area and beside **American Redstart** we found the following warblers: **Hooded, Mangrove, Yellow and Worm-eating Warblers**.

At the watery areas we found **Northern Waterthrush, Wimbrel, Willet** and **3 long-billed Curlews**. On the mangrove trees we located a **Brighth-rumped Attila** and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**. Finally we returned to have our breakfast, but still with the bins at hands, which was very useful, since we beside the **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** we found 2 great new species just waiting for our food: 2 **American Oystercatchers** and a lovely **Mangrove Cuckoo**.

After this successful breakfast around at 9 we started our short drive to the **Cockscomb Jaguar** reserve. Pretty soon after entering alongside the road we stopped for an up-close **Laughing Falcon** and a **Roadside Hawk**. Soon 2 **Montezuma Oropendolas** and a large group of **Collared Aracaris** have arrived. **Brown Jays** were alarming and we saw **White-nosed Coati** disappearing in the bushes. But suddenly we had seen 2 **Grey-headed Tayras** crossing the road in front of us. Since this interesting mammal has grayish head, local people call it the Old Man. This was quite a surprise, because it is very rare to witness this secretive animal, so we were really happy, because we could see 2 of them together. :-)) A **Squirrel Cuckoo** and some **Aztec Parakeets** were loud around us. We checked the roadside bushes and found **Olive Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Long-Billed Gnat-wren, White-eyed Vireo, Lesser Greenlet** and **Rufus-tailed Hummingbird**.

Later on we drove further into the reserve and stopped at a stream. Suddenly a **Collared-Forest Falcon** flew very close to us in a hunting mode. This was also a lekking site of **White-collared Manakins**. So we all had a good view of them. We heard **Spot-breasted Wren** and a couple of **Parrots** flew across as well. Beside another group of **Collared Aracaris** we found a nice group of **Montezuma Oropendolas**. As we checked them carefully, we realized, that apart from the 8 **Montezuma Oropendolas** there were 2 **Chestnut-headed** ones as well.



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Janet pointed out a male **Howler Monkey** on a tree. From the forest we heard a **Mexican Ant thrush** and also a **Liniated Woodpecker**. At the right hand side at the road there was a sign *JAGUAR XING*, but instead of beautiful and secretive mammal 2 **Brown-hooded Parrots** crossed over our heads. We also found here **Red-crowned Ant-tanager** and **Olivaceous Woodcreeper** and **Northern Bentbill**.

Further alongside the road we had **Lesser Greenlets**, **Magnolia Warblers**, **Grey Catbird** and 2 male **Red-capped Manakins**. Finally we arrived to the visitor centre, where we set down at a picnic table surrounded by dense bushes and trees.

During eating our tasty sandwiches we were surrounded by loads of birds. The most interesting ones were **Dot-winged Antwren**, **Red-throated Ant-tanager**, **Blue Grosbeak**, **Red-capped Manakin**, **Black-headed Trogon**, **Short-Billed Pigeon** and **Thrush-like Schiffornis**.



During the afternoon we decided to do a loop trail, which was less than a mile long. We had a nice set of birds during this walk including: **Grey-chested Dove**, **Yellow-billed Casique**, **Stub-tailed Spadebill**, **Thrush-like Schiffornis**. It was a bit hard to

find **Scaled Pigeon** in the dense canopy, but finally we succeed. We heard **Orange-billed Sparrow** and **White-breasted Woodwren** as well. We also witnessed a **Roadside Hawk** catching a large insect.

The last birds we saw before we decided to leave the reserve were **Least** and **Vermillion Flycatchers** and a **Laughing Falcon**. We arrived back to our beach-side base to have enough time to refresh ourselves before dinner.

After dinner we decided to walk a bit close to the airstrip and we found **Yellow-crowned Night-heron**, **Killdeer** and **Common Pauraque**.



Day13 – 22th February, 2016 travel back towards Mexico, lunch at the beautiful Bacalar Bay and arrive to the edge of Sian Kaan Reserve

This morning just Gabor and Bob went out before breakfast, the girls were still busy packing, since it was our last morning in Belize.

The boys were rewarded by another new species, this time a **Sora**.

Later on when we were again all together, we had an even bigger surprise some **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** were jumping in an out the sea and they were quite close to us, so we had a very good view of them. So, this was a really good start for our long journey to get back to Mexico.

First we drove alongside the Maya Mountains again. We broke the journey shortly in Belmopan again and we revisited the bank, but later on by continuous driving we arrived to Corozal by about 1o'clock. We had a great pizza at a beach-side restaurant. After that we soon crossed the border within about an hour, however we lost another one since in the state of Quintana Roo of Mexico has a different time zone. We worked our way North, passed the beautiful Bacalar Bay again and late afternoon we arrived to **Felipe Carillo Puerto**. From the car during the way we could id a few **Keel-billed Toucans**, **Grey Hawk** and **Hook-billed Kite**.

Our new small Mayan hotel was perfectly located just a few miles away from the entrance road to the famous **Sian Kaan Biosphere Reserve**.

At the hotel we had an amazingly good dinner, which was absolutely the best during the whole tour. Nothing fancy, nothing elegant, but very local and extremely tasty! :-)

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Day14 – 23rd February, birding at the Southern part of the **Sian Kaan Reserve**

After a long transfer day we decided to rest a bit, so we had breakfast just at 7.00 and by 8 o'clock we were at the beginning of the famous entrance road - **Vigia Chico**.

Our strategy was to stop wherever Gabor and Andrea knew a good birding area or when we had a good birding activity alongside the road. This road is so bumpy, that only local farmers are using the beginning of it and later on much more birds and other wildlife, than humans...:-)

At the very beginning we heard **Thicket Tinamu**, found **Barred Antshrike**, **Common Yellow-throat** and a beautiful **Yellow-tailed Oriole**. Above one of the milpas- local farm-, we saw **White-collared Swifts** and **Vaux Swifts** as well. From the smallest songbirds we spotted: **Olive Sparrow**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Spot-breasted Wren**, **Northern Cardinal**, **Long-billed Gnat-wren**, **Red-throated Ant-tanager**, **Blue-black Grosbeak**, **Ovenbird**. and as for **hummingbirds** we had **Green-breasted Mango**. We had some larger birds as well, like **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Yucatan Parrot**, **Yellow-billed Casique**, **Red-billed Pigeon**, **Black-headed Saltator** and **Masked Tityra**.



We found another Yucatan endemic, the **Yucatan Woodpecker**. We heard **Lineated Woodpecker** and seen **Garthered Trogon** and **Aztec Parakeets** as well. Another speciality was **White-bellied Wren**, **Stubtailed Spadebill** and another great species was **Diademed Motmot** or formally called **Blue-crowned Motmot**. **Canivet's or Fork-tailed Emerald** was seen and we also admired a **Blue Bunting** jumping around.

We also had during the afternoon **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Melodious Blackbird** and **Roadside Hawk**.

After leaving the Sian Kaan reserve we were driving further North passing Muxil and Tulum and the always very busy Playa del Carmen and finally we arrived back in the evening to where we started, **Puerto Morelos** to the same hotel as well.

Our last dinner we had again at the Caribbean sea-side and prepared for a finale morning birding.

Day15 – 24th February, 2016 travel back to Cancun airport, birding on the way

After breakfast we were again birding alongside the same road where we went the first day. The first bird we found was a very colorful **Green Jay** and later on a **Ferruginous Pigmy Owl**. Lot of small birds were really excited and we could ID **Long-Billed Gnatwren**, **Spot-breasted Wren**, **Olive Sparrow** and **Red-legged Honeycreeper**.

Later on we found **Rose-throated Becard** and **Northern Bentbill** as well. Hummingbirds were: **White-bellied Emerald** and **Cinnamon Hummingbird**. We had **Black-throated Green** and **Magnolia Warbler** as well. Above our heads we witnessed a **Roadside Hawk** displaying. We also found a **Rufous-browed Peppershrike** and heard a **Squirrel Cuckoo**, but the most exiting call originated from a **Royal Flycatcher**, which is very rare in the Northern part of the Yucatan.

Finally we sadly said goodbye to the Caribbean birds and the nice climate and we had to face the fact, that we have to go back to the Good Old Europe which waited for us with the last bit of Winter.



Depart from Cancun to London 18.30, overnight flight

Day16 25th February, 2016 arrival back to London

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