

ITINERARY
BELIZE: Tropical Birding, Short and Sweet
April 1-8, 2017



*The Keel-billed Toucan is the National Bird of Belize. These colorful, outlandish-looking birds are quintessential tropical residents.
Photo by participants David and Susan Disher.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2017 Belize tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

For those birders who've never before ventured south of the US border, or for those who prefer their tropical experiences to be short and super sweet, the small Central American country of Belize offers an ideal birding destination. With a diversity of species that includes many in families associated with the New World tropics, a rich assortment of habitats in which to search for them, plus minimal time spent traveling – four nights at one lodge, three at the other, with a short charter flight between the two – our revamped Belize tour offers a truly engaging tropical experience.

We'll begin the tour at the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, which has a simple, yet elegant, main building and comfortable thatched cabañas perched on the shores of Crab-catcher Lagoon, part of the largest body of freshwater in Belize. In the early morning, troops of chachalacas, toucans, aracarís, and parrots roam through the trees on the grounds, while the

roaring calls of Yucatan Howler Monkeys echo from the nearby forest. The lodge sits less than a mile from the Mayan ruins of Lamanai, an extensive, largely unexcavated site that sprawls along the western shore of the lagoon. Trails lead from the lodge into the ruins, where there is a rich assortment of birds typically found in the tropical hardwood forests of western Belize and the Petén region of Guatemala. The village of Indian Church lies just down the road from the lodge. Here, open *milpas* (agricultural fields) and second-growth scrub are home to an assortment of birds not found in the forest, including the attractive Black-throated (Yucatan) Bobwhite. Interspersed among these other habitats are tracts of pine savanna with a different set of interesting birds, including seldom-encountered Yellow-headed Parrots, White-tailed Hawk, Buff-bellied and Azure-crowned hummingbirds, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay, Gray-throated Chat, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Botteri's Sparrow, and the impressive Jabiru. And, of course, the lagoon and its tributaries are home to another suite of birds, including Limpkin, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Sungrebe, and Black Catbird.

Our trip takes on a whole new flavor when we transfer to our next base: Hidden Valley Inn on the Mountain Pine Ridge in south-central Belize. Here, dry Caribbean Pine forest dominates, with more humid, tropical vegetation restricted to river courses and draws. The pine forest is home to a group of birds perhaps unexpected in Belize—Rusty Sparrow, Grace's Warbler, Plain Wren, and Acorn Woodpecker, to name a few. From viewpoints high above the adjacent countryside (including the overlook for the evocatively named Thousand Foot Falls), we'll scan cliffs for King Vulture and the rare Orange-breasted Falcon. The humid valley forests host a high diversity of species, many already mentioned above, but including tinamous, curassows, forest-falcons, trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, Tody Motmot, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, many flycatchers, Black-faced (Mayan) Antthrush, Dusky Antbird, Gray-collared Becard, and more. Hidden Valley Inn is located in a very strategic spot to take advantage of these habitats—we can see a large number of these species right on the grounds, but we can just as easily take a quick ride to nearby sites that will offer us more chances for great birding! The inn itself is quaint and comfortable, and the grounds always seem to have something to see just outside our rooms. On one of our days here, we'll venture further afield to the Mayan ruins of Caracol, which sit in an extensive belt of good forest right near the Guatemalan border. The site is home to hundreds of species, many of which are also found around Lamanai, but some of which are found only in more intact forests like the one around Caracol.



*We will try to get a good look at the rare and beautiful Orange-breasted Falcon while we are in central Belize.
Photo by guide Peter Burke.*

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: The habitats we visit on this trip are so rich that it really pays off to be out early and beat the midday heat. With that in mind, we start around 6:00 a.m. each day (earlier on a few days) and bird right through until lunch. On most days we'll take a longer break after lunch, then head back out for the late afternoon. With few exceptions, we'll be walking on excellent packed dirt trails. Generally there isn't much elevation change, but there are a few walks on the Mountain Pine Ridge that require going up and down a steep grade for a short distance. While the distance will vary from day to day, we will typically walk several miles in the morning and usually shorter trails in the afternoon. Our boat rides at Lamani will last for approximately 2-3 hours, depending on the trip. Throughout the tour, it will be important to keep yourself well hydrated, and to carry electrolytes – even on those days that we're out of the direct sun. If you would like extra rest, it is often possible to stay back, particularly at Lamanai, and enjoy the many birds that frequent the grounds. We'll use a small plane to transfer between lodges, to avoid having to spend most of a day on the road.

If you are uncertain whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas



Lamanai Outpost Lodge—We'll divide our time at Lamanai among several distinct but productive habitats that exist side by side near the lodge. We'll spend most mornings birding the lowland forest around the nearby ruins. While we will often cover the same trails for part of the morning each day, the selection of birds seen from one day to the next typically varies considerably. If we locate an ant swarm, we'll be in for one of the greatest of Neotropical nature spectacles, as a multi-species bird flock typically forms at the swarm's leading edge, and birds scoop up insects ahead of the ants. On several occasions, we'll travel by boat along the New Lagoon and its smaller tributaries. Species to watch for on these nautical jaunts include Agami and Boat-billed herons, Black-collared Hawk, Great and Common black-hawks, Sungrebe, Muscovy Duck, Jabiru (possibly at a nest), and Gray-necked Wood-Rail. We'll also have the chance to see as many as five species of kingfishers! On one morning, we'll cross the New Lagoon and bird in the open pine savanna. This is a harsh habitat—flooded for part of the year, then baked dry for the rest, with frequent fires also part of the ecology. Here, we'll search for Gray-throated Chat and Black Catbird, as well as members of the Yucatan "group"—Jay, Woodpecker, and Flycatcher. Nights at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

Hidden Valley Inn—Dry Caribbean Pine forest dominates the Mountain Pine Ridge, where our second hotel sits, with more humid, tropical vegetation restricted to river courses and draws. From viewpoints high above the adjacent countryside, we'll scan the cliffs for King Vulture and the rare Orange-breasted Falcon. Our lodge's property is also home to a small population of Stygian Owl, and we have a reasonable chance of encountering this enigmatic species. Other bird species that we encounter with some regularity include King Vulture, Plain Chachalaca, White-fronted Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-whiskered Puffbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Black-headed, Gartered, and Slaty-tailed trogons, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Lineated and Pale-billed woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Bright-rumped Attila, White-collared Manakin, Piratic Flycatcher, Yellow-green Vireo, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Crimson-collared Tanager, Blue-black Grosbeak, Green-backed Sparrow, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Yellow-throated Euphonia.

Mountain Pine Ridge is an extensive region of central Belize covered in pine savanna, with surrounding scrub and tropical forest. Hidden Valley Inn is located within the Pine Ridge. We will focus on roadside and lookout birding where we could spot Swallow-tailed Kite, Black Hawk-Eagle, Acorn Woodpecker, Hepatic Tanager, Green Jay, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Grace's Warbler, Rusty Sparrow, Plain Wren, and White-collared Swift, along with an interesting local subspecies of Rufous-capped Warbler and resident Blue-headed Vireo. This region has nesting Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle, Solitary Eagle, and Orange-breasted Falcon, which—with a whole lot of luck—we hope to come across! We'll spend a morning visiting the Rio Frio Cave road, a humid forest site near our lodge that should provide some excellent tropical rainforest birding. All of the area along the road lies within the national forest, and nature trails fan off from the main road at regular intervals. We'll work our way slowly down the road, keeping our eyes and ears busy with the birding.

Caracol or "El Caracol" (which means "snail"), is a large Classic-period Mayan site located roughly two hours south of Hidden Valley Inn in the foothills of the Mayan Mountains near the Guatemalan border. The site is famous for its carved monuments, stelae, and large temples; in fact, its largest temple is still the tallest building in Belize! During its peak, the

city-state had a long rivalry that included several wars with the equally famous site of Tikal, located in the Peten region of northern Guatemala. Caracol is now surrounded by lush, lowland tropical forest and offers excellent birding on the grounds and along the entrance road leading to the site. Bat Falcons typically nest in some of the bigger structures, Ocellated Turkeys are often quite approachable here, and we'll keep our eyes peeled for signs of an ant swarm. Flocks of parrots, toucanets, toucans, jacamars, and more will be common as we search for one more very rare and special bird—the Keel-billed Motmot.

Itinerary For Belize

Day 1, Sat, 1 Apr. Flight to Belize City; transfer to Lamanai. You should plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City before 3:30 p.m. We will arrange for two group transfers to Lamanai Outpost Lodge – typically one in the early afternoon and the other in the late afternoon. If you want to go straight to the lodge and rest up, you can take the first shuttle. Megan will be accompanying our last transfer, and we'll do a bit of birding on our way in. Part of this journey may take place after dark, and we'll spotlight what we can on our way. (If you arrive early, feel free to go in to the restaurant which is upstairs by the waving gallery—take your binoculars as several interesting birds are sometimes seen around the airstrip, including Short-tailed Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. If you are hungry, the chicken and rice dish is great!) Once assembled, you'll be taken by bus and boat (weather and water levels permitting) to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, heading northwest out of Belize City along the Northern Highway. The drive from the airport to the boat launch typically takes about an hour, and it's another hour or so by boat down the New River—watching for the likes of Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and Jabiru along the way. Bring a windproof outer layer for the boat ride as it may be cooling off by the time you approach the lodge. Night at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.



A beautiful male Slaty-tailed Trogon. These trogons are found in tropical lowland forests, and we should see them on the tour. Photo by participant George Sims.

Days 2-4, Sun-Tue, 2-4 Apr. Lamanai Outpost Lodge. We'll divide our time at Lamanai between several distinct but productive habitats that exist side by side near the lodge. We'll spend most mornings birding the lowland forest around the nearby ruins. While we may cover the same trails for part of the morning each day, the selection of birds seen from one day to the next usually varies considerably. Should we locate an ant swarm, we'll be in for one of the great nature spectacles of the Neotropics, as a multi-species bird flock typically forms at the swarm's leading edge and birds scoop up insects ahead of the ants. On several occasions, we will travel by boat along the New Lagoon and some of the smaller rivers that drain into it. Species to watch for on those nautical jaunts include Agami and Boat-billed herons, Black-collared Hawk, Great and Common black-hawks, Sungrebe, Muscovy Duck, Jabiru (possibly at a nest), and Gray-necked Wood-Rail. We'll also have a chance to see as many as five species of kingfishers! On one morning, we'll cross the New Lagoon and bird in the open pine savanna. This is a harsh habitat—flooded for part of the year, then baked dry for the rest, with frequent fires also part of the ecology. Here, we'll search for Gray-throated Chat and Black Catbird, as well as members of the Yucatan "group"—Jay, Woodpecker, and Flycatcher. Nights at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

Day 5, Wed, 5 Apr. Lamanai to Hidden Valley Inn. After a final morning's birding at the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, we'll have lunch, then transfer by air to our next base at Hidden Valley Inn; the flight, on a small chartered plane, should take about 30 minutes. We'll arrive in time to have an afternoon walk on the extensive grounds of our hotel, where a host of new birds awaits. On at least one of the nights that we're here, we'll do some nightbirding in an attempt to connect with the rare Stygian Owl. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.



*Ocellated Turkeys are often quite approachable at Caracol.
Photo by guide Richard Webster.*

Day 6, Thu, 6 Apr. Hidden Valley Inn. After an early breakfast, we'll drive roughly 30 minutes to the Rio Frio Cave road, a dirt road that meanders gently downhill, cutting through some very birdy tropical forest on its way to its terminus at a pretty little river. We'll spend much of the morning here, then head to some more open spaces to watch for the region's special raptors as the day heats up and the thermals start rising. After lunch and a bit of a siesta at our lodge, we'll head out again later in the afternoon to visit some of the fantastic vistas of the Pine Ridge, such as Thousand Foot Falls, where a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons has long bred. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.

Day 7, Fri, 7 Apr. Caracol. We'll leave early in the morning for the drive to Caracol, one of the very few areas known for the rare Keel-billed Motmot, the bird we most hope to find today. The first portion of the drive is

through Caribbean Pine forest, but the scenery soon changes and the pine gives way fairly abruptly to moist tropical forest. Caracol is situated within this forest, and we'll spend a good portion of the day in this area. Upon our arrival, the ruins should already be hopping with bird activity. We'll bird the ruins all morning along main trails and several lesser-known trails, concentrating on species that we haven't seen elsewhere on the tour. We'll have a picnic lunch at the ruins, then bird our way back to our lodge along the fantastic Caracol Road. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.

Day 8, Sat, 8 Apr. Departure. Following a final early morning's birding around our lodge and a final breakfast together, we'll return to Belize City in time to connect with our flights home. **Please arrange for flights no earlier than 12:00 noon.**

About Your Guide

Megan Edwards Crewe has been birding since childhood, when she discovered she could have her father all to herself (rather than sharing him with her brothers and sisters) if she was willing to get up very early on Saturdays and tromp around the woods in search of birds. After graduating from Purdue University, she sampled an impressive variety of jobs before discovering Field Guides. Since joining the company nearly two decades ago, Megan—who brims with information and enthusiasm—has delighted in sharing the wonders and adventures of birding and the natural world with participants.

One unexpected bonus of the job has been meeting her British husband Mike, with whom she co-led a trip to France in 2000. They've bounced back and forth between the US and the UK during their marriage, and are now back on the edge of the historic market town of Aylsham in the east of England. There, they're busy exploring the 26-mile-long Marriott's Way (a long-distance footpath that passes within yards of their home) and reveling in the surrounding cultural history.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3950 from Belize City
DEPOSIT: \$400 per person
FINAL PAYMENT DUE: December 2, 2016
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$850
LIMIT: 8

*"Megan is a superb teacher and leader. She excels at getting everyone on a bird and her warmth and humor enhance the whole experience."
M.B., Classical Greece*

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Caroline Lewis. Caroline will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

DOCUMENTS: A current passport valid during the length of your stay is necessary for US citizens to enter Belize. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Belize consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City on Day 1 before 3:30 p.m. Please arrange for homeward flights on Day 8 no earlier than 12:00 noon.

Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please limit your luggage for this relatively short tour to one carry-on and one medium-sized suitcase or duffel. Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$3950 for one person in double occupancy from Belize City. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 8, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader. Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Belize, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$850. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$400** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by December 2, 2016. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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