

# fieldguides®

## Birding Tours



**A**utumn has arrived, and summer has vanished as quickly as it came. Our beach sandals are put away, swapped for slippers and sweaters (for many of us, at least!), as the holidays hasten toward us. The wonderful season of waterfowl migration, apples, pumpkins, cocoa, and longer do-lists is upon us.

Our annual business meeting in August has also come and gone, with many happy memories and some nifty news to report in the form of three new tours planned for 2021: **Great Rivers of the Amazon: Brazil's Rio Aripuanã – A Birds & Mammals Tour** (with Micah Riegner & Jesse Fagan), **China's Sichuan Province & Tibetan Plateau** (with Doug Gochfeld), and **Finland Spring: Wolverines, Owls, & Wild-Wild Grouse** (with Ned Brinkley). Months of scouting and planning go into these new itineraries, and local guides and helpers join us to smooth the way and help find some marvelous birds and mammals during the tour. We also have potential new tours in development for **Costa Rica** (with Megan Edwards Crewe), **Peru's Huallaga River** (with Dan Lane), and **Mexico's Sea of Cortez** (with Micah Riegner). Our monthly emailing will have all the details as soon as these tours are ready to launch!

But these departures are still more than a year away! If your wanderlust can't wait, we would love to have your company sooner, perhaps even this winter. Close to home, we still have a few spaces on our delightful **Puerto Rico** tour (Mar), on two wonderful **Costa Rica** tours (Dec, Mar), and on the lively



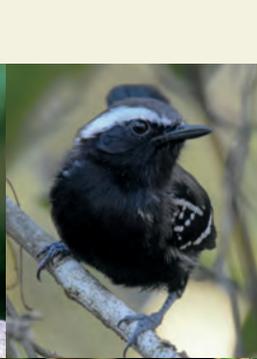
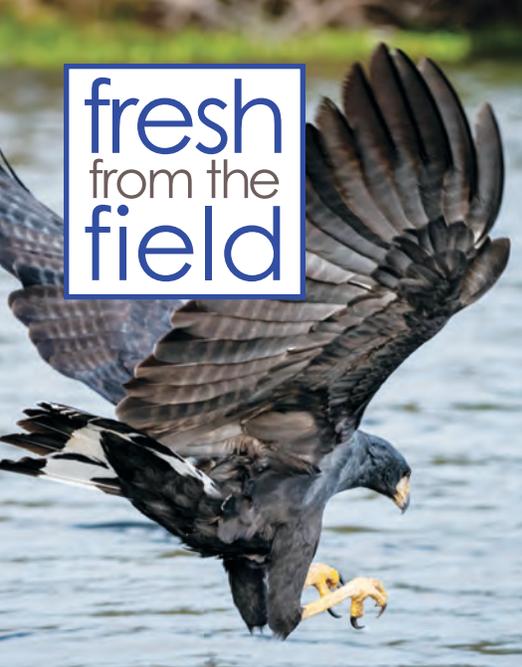
Panama tours—your choice of **Canopy Camp** (Dec), **Canopy Lodge** (Dec), or **Canopy Tower** (Feb). Farther south, Brazil and Guyana beckon, with our popular **Brazil Nutshell** (Mar), **Nowhere but Northeast Brazil!** (Jan), and **Guyana: Wilderness Paradise** (Mar) tours. In western South America, both **Southeast Ecuador** (Feb) and **Southwest Ecuador** (Mar) tours have space available, as does the well-named **Heart of Chile** tour. In Asia, **Winter Japan: Dancing Cranes & Spectacular Sea-Eagles** (Jan), **Cambodia: Angkor Temples & Vanishing Birds** (Feb), and **Myanmar: Birding Burma** (Feb) offer cultural and birding escapes that will be unforgettable. Check page 11 and our website for details (and of course, it's never too soon to start thinking about where you would like to experience migration in spring!).

This newsletter includes an **InFocus** feature on our 15 departures to Asia—Southeast Asia, East Asia, Southern Asia—to provide more of an “inside scoop” on these tours than our catalog and website include. Our expert team of guides in this part of the world includes Phil Gregory, Terry Stevenson, Doug Gochfeld, Megan Edwards Crewe, Jay VanderGaast, and Tom Johnson, and for our Asia tours, they team up with local guides who have expertise in birding, natural history, and often the history of the areas visited. We also include our Fresh From The Field series, with images from recently completed tours, and a tribute of thanks to our incredible Abbie Rowlett for her hard work on so many of our marketing efforts over the years. We hope you enjoy this little newsletter and hope to see you soon out in the field!

Golden Parakeets (Tom Johnson), Crimson Sunbird (Thomas Olson), Swallow-tailed Gull (Barry Tillman), Port de Boucharo, France (Marcelo Padua)



fresh  
from the  
field



## JAGUAR SPOTTING

On a private tour organized by Ed Hagen and friends, guide Marcelo Barreiros reports that this classic Brazilian Amazon-and-Pantanal combination was a great success! To add to signature species at the Garden of the Amazon like Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Gould's Toucanet, and Point-tailed Palmcreeper, the group enjoyed the rare Cone-billed Tanager, scrub-loving Rufous Cachalote, **Red-crested Finch**, **Black-bellied Antwren**, Fiery-capped Manakin, and Hyacinth Macaw, along with more widespread Neotropical birds like **Great Black Hawk** and **Amazon Kingfisher**—and they didn't miss that **Jaguar!** Private tours are a great way to set the tour pace just right and focus on the species of greatest interest to your group. (Photos by participants Becky Hansen and John Longstreth.)

## ALTA FLORESTA & NORTHERN PANTANAL

This tour's official moniker, **Rainforest & Savanna**, tells it like it is: another superb pairing of these two great Brazilian habitats. Three days longer than Jaguar Spotting, this tour also visits the Pantanal between Porto Jofre and Cuiaba but, in place of Garden of the Amazon, enjoys the hospitality (and great dining) at the nearby rainforest lodges of Alta Floresta and Rio Cristalino. Brazil's Pantanal is tough to beat for scope views of big birds like **Greater Rhea**, **Southern Screamer**, and **Sunbittern**, but guides Marcelo Padua and Marcelo Barreiros write that the show in the Amazon was truly superlative, with bonuses of Harpy Eagle, Cryptic Forest-Falcon, and **Zigzag Heron!** Over 500 birds and two-dozen mammals (Jaguar and Brazilian Tapir among them)—not bad, guys. (Photos by participants Carol Trovall and Robin White and guide Marcelo Barreiros.)



## MOUTH OF THE MIGHTY AMAZON

There's nothing like birding the Amazon with her native son! Marcelo Padua grew up in Belem, at the mouth of the world's greatest river, and he loves hosting visitors from all over the world on his home patch. Here, Marcelo knows all the spots, yes, but also a great many people who make the tour extra-special, from researchers

to restauranteurs, and knows the history and biogeography of this place intimately. Selecting photos for this wonderful tour is difficult, but here are some final cuts: **Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth**, **Pavonine Cuckoo**, **Crimson-hooded Manakin**, **Scarlet Ibises**, and **Rufous Crab Hawk**. Apologies to the runners-up, Golden Parakeet, Little Wood-Rail, Silky-tailed Nightjar, White-winged Cotinga, and 23 parrot species! (Photos by participants David & Judy Smith.)





## ARCTIC NORWAY & SPITSBERGEN

What could be more thrilling than a voyage on the ultra-modern *M/V Hondius* into the Barents Sea and beyond, to Svalbard (Spitsbergen) and into the pack ice of the Arctic Ocean? Participants (and guides John Coons and Doug Gochfeld)

raved about the beauty of this boreal world, where their visit to the **Magdalenefjord Glacier** turned up Walruses, **Barnacle Geese**, Dovekies, jaegers, and eiders. At sea, white Belugas and blue Blue Whales delighted. And north of 80 degrees, at the ice edge, the Arctic gave up her treasures: Great Skuas, Harp Seals, a **Polar Bear** hunting Bearded Seals, and at last a pair of **Ivory Gulls** that circled the ship. Join us for this memorable voyage in 2021! (Photos by participants David & Judy Smith and Donna Pomeroy and guide Doug Gochfeld.)



## ALASKA

Although our burly Alaska tours require an extra measure of stamina from our guides, they look forward to these tours all year: the splendor of the scenery and the spectacle of wildlife are unmatched anywhere, they say—and their tour participants agree. This spring, Chris Benesh, Tom Johnson, Cory Gregory, and Doug Gochfeld penned triplists overflowing with wild creatures: **Bristle-thighed Curlew** near Nome, Snowy Owls and displaying **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** at Utqiagvik, **Grizzly Bears** at Denali, **Parakeet Auklets** aplenty on St. Paul Island, and back on the mainland, gems like Spruce Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, and **Black-backed Woodpecker**. The photo of the happy group at **Polovina Lake** says it all! (Photos by participants Eileen Wheeler and Holger Teichmann and guides Doug Gochfeld and Tom Johnson.)

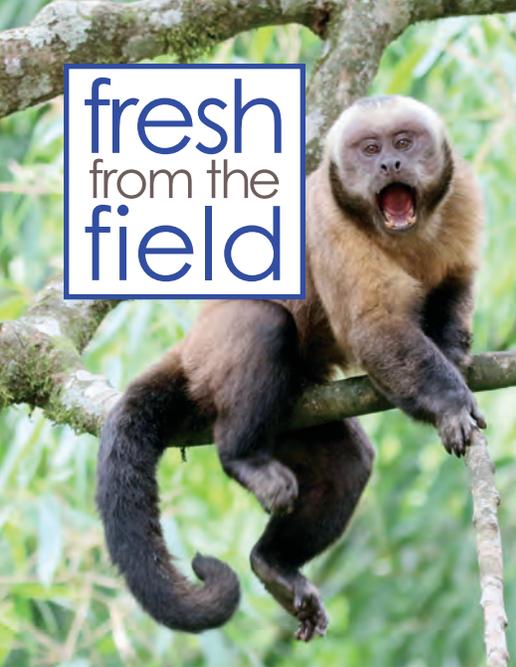


## ICELAND

We received many wonderful photos from Godfried Schreur's Iceland tours, including images of the participants enjoying Gyrfalcons, eiders, massive waterfalls, fresh seafood and wine, walks around Lake Myvatn—enough material to fill ten newsletters. The weather for both tours was pleasant, Godfried reports, and the wildflower show outstanding this year. Even after 20 years of Field Guides Iceland tours, Godfried and crew managed to add two new species for our list: Snow Goose and Brambling! The serenity of the northern Iceland landscape, shown here, the island's fascinating history and geology, and the opportunity to watch alcs such as **Atlantic Puffin** and **Common Murre** at their nesting cliffs at Látrabjarg make this tour a perennial favorite. (Photos by participant Carol Adair and guide Godfried Schreur.)



fresh  
from the  
field



## MOUNTAINS OF MANU, PERU

Manú—four letters that communicate so much to those who have been there or who dream of going. A national park, biosphere reserve, world heritage site, and so much more, Manú's 4.24 million acres permit birders to journey from stark Andean paramo gradually downslope to the Amazon Basin. As the tour's name suggests, guide Dan Lane and group stayed just above the Madre de Dios drainage and still managed to record nearly 400 species, among them Versicolored Barbet, the rare Buff-banded Tyrannulet, **Golden-collared Tanager**, Amazonian Antpitta, **Solitary Eagle**, Peruvian Recurvebill, Blue-banded Toucanet, Yellow-rumped Antwren, and **Blue-throated Piping-Guan**. And this **Brown Capuchin** suggests that we not forget to mention the mammal richness of the park! (Photos by participant Bill Byers and guide Dan Lane.)



## PERU'S MAGNETIC NORTH

The "Magnetic" in this tour's title refers to the powerful pull of birds like the Marvelous Spatuletail, Long-whiskered Owllet, and Painted Manakin on birders—and apparently also on guides, as these birds also drew veteran guide Dave Stejskal down to join Peru expert Dan Lane this year. Lovely hummers like **Amethyst Woodstar**, Koepcke's Hermit, and **Golden-tailed Sapphire** played second fiddle to the spatuletail, as did this day-roosting **Long-tailed Potoo**, the vibrant Fiery-throated Fruiteater and White-capped Tanager, and scarce **Ochre-fronted Antpitta** and Mishana Tyrannulet. And despite some rearranged plans, the Long-whiskered Owllet at last came through beautifully at the humble Owllet Lodge. A great tour to a gorgeous part of Peru! (Photos by participant Myles McNally.)



## CLOUDFORESTS OF ECUADOR

Ecuador's cloudforests offer dreamlike birding, with many mixed flocks of Andean birds including dozens of species, among them tanagers galore—**Glistening-green Tanagers** and **Rufous-throated Tanagers** here—along with flycatchers, antbirds, barbets, warblers, woodcreepers, foliage-gleaners, wrens, woodpeckers, and frugivores like this **Green-and-black Fruiteater**. These flocks were exhilarating to experience, guide Willy Perez writes, and adds that the group also enjoyed leisurely birding at fruiting trees and feeders, where antpittas, hummingbirds, Toucan Barbets, Golden-headed Quetzals, and Plate-billed Mountain-Toucans took top honors. A dozing Crested Owl and displaying Long-wattled Umbrellabird and Andean Cocks-of-the-rock rounded out the group's long list of favorites. (Photos by guide Willy Perez.)



## ARIZONA'S SECOND SPRING

During the height of southern Arizona's monsoon (rainy) season in midsummer, many birds commence singing and nesting, thus the name of this popular short tour. Guide Chris Benesh reports that although the monsoons were spotty this year, especially around **Cave Creek Canyon**, the birds all came through as hoped for. Pairs of Rose-throated Becards bickered along the Santa Cruz River, Five-striped Sparrows tuned up at Montosa Canyon, and higher up, **Canyon Wrens**, Elegant Trogons, a **Northern Pygmy-Owl**, Montezuma Quail, and migrant **Lazuli Buntings** added color and character to the list. Chris even pointed out a rare Abert's x Canyon Towhee hybrid. En route back to the airport, this last-minute **Zone-tailed Hawk** saved the tour for this scarce species! (Photos by participant Jen Wong and guide Chris Benesh.)



## FLORIDA

Guides Doug Gochfeld and Jesse Fagan adored their long week in the Sunshine State, where the birds virtually lined up to be seen once again this spring. Migration of warblers and shorebirds was in full swing, evident everywhere, even out in the Gulf of Mexico at the Dry Tortugas, where both this **Blackpoll Warbler** and these uncommon **Bridled Terns** posed. The tour seeks out specialties such as **Florida Scrub-Jay**, White-crowned Pigeon, Masked Booby, Shiny Cowbird, Mangrove Cuckoo, Antillean Nighthawk, and Smooth-billed Ani and also takes in more widespread southeastern birds like Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Roseate Spoonbill, **King Rail**, and Swallow-tailed Kite. This year, the group got uber-lucky with a vagrant Key West Quail-Dove! (Photos by participants Carol Mead and Doug Clarke and guide Doug Gochfeld.)



## SPRING IN CAPE MAY

The mecca for birding in the American East, **Cape May** is a place of pilgrimage not just for its blizzards of autumn migrants but also for the subtler, perhaps sweeter spring migration, when birds like this **Bay-breasted Warbler** tarry and sing in their breeding plumages. Even the local **Tricolored Herons** are in their finest feather at this time of year. This spring's group with guide Tom Johnson enjoyed squadrons of shorebirds including fine-looking Red Knots along the Delaware Bay shore, while nearby **Belleplain State Forest** yielded up Kentucky, Hooded, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, and Prairie warblers. Tom was also able to find Saltmarsh and Nelson's sparrows for side-by-side comparison, a vagrant White-faced Ibis, and lingering Purple Sandpipers! (Photos by participant Nancy Herbert and guide Tom Johnson.)

**Asia might seem remote** from a North American vantage—mysterious, even exotic. Partly because of the flying times required, Asian tours are generally longer than most, and peoples, and wildlife are wonderfully varied, and a drive of even just a few miles can be a new experience. Here, we experience many other differences—in roads, trails, lodgings, forms of transportation, and climate. Comfort is a priority when constructing an itinerary, there are inevitably differences in both amenities and conditions. In most Asian countries, and awareness of conservation challenges is likewise increasing, along with growing numbers of tourists.

In the series of Frequently Asked Questions below, we answer the queries we get most often about Asian tours. Of course, based on your preferences, we hope this feature helps guide you to your ideal Asian getaways! As always, our office and guides



## How early will the birding day start?

Each tour is a bit different in terms of start times, but because birds rise early, we do as well, and we're often ready to bird about a half hour before sunrise. In southern Japan in May, the sun rises before 6:00, while in northern Japan in January, it rises after 7:00, so we have more morning leisure on our **Winter Japan** tour than our **Japan in Spring** tour. On the **Northern India** tour, there are just 10 hours of daylight or so, leaving plenty of time for rest. On some tours, we pack a picnic breakfast, enjoying the dawn chorus as we sip our coffee and tea in the field.

## How late does the birding day go? And how about breaks?

Each tour is different, but generally speaking, we take a post-lunch break of an hour or more in areas where heat and humidity are high—usually in the lowlands of places like **Sri Lanka**, **Vietnam**, **Cambodia**, and **Borneo**. On some days, we bird in the afternoon; on others, we travel to our next destination.

## I look forward to getting in some nice walks during vacations. Will there be good opportunities for longer walks?

On some tours, yes! Walking times and distances vary, but in general, it is good to plan to be walking for the better part of the day. On average, walking ranges from 2 to 3 miles per day at a slow pace. Both in very warm lowlands and at higher elevations, such as in the Himalayas of **Bhutan** or **India**, we walk for relatively short distances (a mile or less) at a time, generally on level or gradual downhill roadways. On the **Myanmar** tour, there is a wonderful day at Kalaw (rich in mid-elevation birds) where we might cover 5 or 6 miles at a slow pace over level ground. We stop often and stand quietly when birding. Because several of the national parks in **India** are home to large wild animals, we bird "safari-style" from the vehicles rather than walking.

## Do all Asia tours have muddy or steep trails?

By no means! **Cambodia** and **Myanmar**, for instance, have easy to moderate terrain with no steep climbs and just a few walks on uneven terrain. On **Thailand**, **Sri Lanka**, **Southern India**, and **Northern India** tours, the great majority of the walking is on level, wide paths or roads, with only a very few days with steeper trails, and similarly, **Mongolia** has just one optional walk that is uphill. The **Taiwan**, **Borneo**, and **Vietnam** tours have several more challenging hikes on steeper woodland trails that can have obstacles such as muddy places, tree roots, rocks, or logs.



## Will we sleep in tents on any Asia tours?

Yes, indeed! On our adventurous **Bhutan** and **Northeast India** tours, we spend several nights in tents, and on the **Mongolia** tour, we frequently overnight in ger camps. A ger is a domed canvas-and-felt structure that has a bed and a woodstove in it. Some ger camps even have en-suite bathrooms now.

## Will we tour some of the cultural sights on Asia tours?

Yes! In **Bhutan**, we visit a dzong (fortress-monastery) or two. On the **Northern India** tour, we tour the great Taj Mahal, on **Cambodia** the temples of Angkor Wat, and on **Sri Lanka** the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. On the **Thailand** and **Sichuan** tours, we bird on the grounds of several Buddhist temples, and on **Myanmar**, we visit the ruins of the ancient city of Bagan. General sightseeing on our tours is otherwise limited, and many participants add on a few days for a cultural or culinary adventure.



Breakfast above Latong La, Bhutan (Richard Webster), Khustai ger camp, Mongolia (Phil Gregory), search for Black-billed Capercaillie, Mongolia (Phil Gregory), Mae Chaem temple, Thailand (Greg Vassilopoulos)



otic. Geographically, Asia is remote, involving a flight of at least 10 hours (Seattle to Tokyo) to reach. Most North and Middle American tours, usually in the range of 2-3 weeks. Asian cultures, foods, and reveal dramatic differences in language and dress (and birdlife). Because we go where the birds is often a consideration when planning travel, both near and far from home. Although our guides ons in the field among our tours. Happily, the infrastructure for nature tourism is improving steadily rs of birders in many countries, all very welcome trends. course, one person's point of concern might be another's idea of a grand adventure, but whatever s stand ready to answer any questions you might have about Asian travel and avifaunas.



### Will we ride elephants or camels or rickshaws in some places?

Riding elephants in India's national parks is becoming a thing of the past. Our tours do not have occasion to ride elephants, or camels, but transport by bicycle-rickshaw is still likely on the **Northern India** tour! Our usual forms of transport are vans, small buses, safari trucks (with open tops), 4x4 Land Rover-style vehicles, and even a train, on the same Northern India tour.

### Do we visit observation towers or canopy walkways on any of the Asia tours?

Few places in Asia offer canopy walkways, more common in South America. One exception is **Borneo**, where two sites have extensive canopy towers and walkways. There is also a tower built for viewing an active stork nesting colony at Prek Toal, **Cambodia**. These are sturdy, safe structures.



### Are there any extreme climate conditions or high elevations on Asia tours?

Our tours in Asia encounter a wide range of temperatures and elevations, from sea level in many countries (where it can be quite hot) to 14,000 feet on our **Sichuan** and **Northeast India** tours. In **Bhutan**, our tours camp out in places as high as 10,000 feet, and on the Tibetan Plateau of **Sichuan** and in **Taiwan**, we visit elevations up to 11,000 feet. On the **Myanmar** tour, the birding at Mount Victoria can be up to 9000 feet, but the lodge is around 6500 feet. On most tours, including **Northern India**, **Thailand**, and **Sri Lanka**, we walk at elevations below 7500 feet. In the highest elevations, temperatures can be cold, even close to freezing, early in the day. On the **Winter Japan** tour, cold temperatures are the norm. Walks in cold weather, as at very high elevations, are relatively short and at a slow pace.



### Do we go birding at night?

Yes! On most of the tours, there are several opportunities to look for owls and nightjars in the evening. In some places, night drives by vehicle turn up different sorts of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, especially in **Borneo**. In **Taiwan**, we may watch for an endemic flying squirrel that emerges at nightfall.

### Do we travel by boat on any of the Asia tours?

Yes! All of the tours in Southeast Asia have riverine boat trips—three or four at least on **Myanmar** and **Borneo**, two on **Cambodia**, and one each on **Vietnam** and **Thailand**. These are pleasant outings by small craft, though there may be no seat cushions or sun canopies. Disembarking from these vessels might require the ability to clamber out of the bow onto a muddy bank, sandy beach, or shallow estuary wearing rubber boots. The **Japan in Spring** tour includes a ferry ride to the Izu Islands and a short boat ride on Hokkaido.

### Do any tours make good "introductions" to Asian birding?

Our guides and participants tell us that **Thailand** makes an excellent introduction to the pleasures of birding in Southeast Asia. For East Asia, **Japan in Spring** provides a fine sampling of Asian bird families without difficult walks. And for Southern Asia, **Northern India** takes in India's birds, wildlife, and culture at a relaxed to moderate pace. Several of our tours, such as **Northeast India** and **Mongolia**, might be considered "roughing it," at least for part of the tour, and these might be more suitable for adventurous and experienced travelers.



Rhinoceros Hornbill (Paul Bisson), bicycle-rickshaw (Ken Havard), Jogokudani Park, Japan (Phil Gregory), canopy walkway, Borneo (Susan McCarthy), boating at Prek Toal, Cambodia (Phil Gregory)



## WILD KENYA

"Birding with guide Terry Stevenson is like being at the best party you've ever been to," a recent participant commented (and co-workers concur!). And so it doesn't really matter where you go with Terry: you know it's going to be a great trip. A real jewel in the Field Guides crown is Wild Kenya: A Tented Camp Safari. Terry has very carefully built the itinerary to showcase the birds and wildlife of Kenya, his home since 1977, and by overnighting in (very comfy) tented camps, the group stays right in wilderness, among the animals, rather than at busy lodges. A few images from this year's journey scarcely hint at its bounty: **Reticulated Giraffes** at Samburu and a lovely local greeting at **Masai Mara**, where the group enjoyed **Lilac-breasted Rollers** and vast herds of **Wildebeest**, along with four-dozen more mammals! (Photos by guide Terry Stevenson.)



## BORNEO

Guide Dave Stejskal was happy to report from Borneo that handsome endemics such as these **Fruit-hunters** at Gunung Alab and this **Blue-headed Pitta** in the Danum Valley were cooperative and that the group also thrilled to Sundaland specialities like Great Argus, Helmeted Hornbill, and **Black-and-red Broadbill**. Along the **Kinabatangan River**, Dave writes that Bornean Pygmy Elephants, Storm's Stork, and Bornean Ground-Cuckoos were highlights, while in beautiful Kinabalu National Park, the "Whitehead's trio" of trogon, broadbill, and spiderhunter came through with flying colors. Memorable mammals included Orangutan, **Sunda Colugo**, Proboscis Monkey, **Horsfield's Tarsier**, Moon Rat, and the tiny Whitehead's Pygmy-Squirrel. (Photos by participants James Moore, Thomas Olson, and John Keith.)



## ETHIOPIA

Terry Stevenson looks forward to birding Ethiopia for its many special endemic creatures—like these **Ethiopian Wolves** on the Sanetti Plateau, these **Geladas** at Gemessa Gebel escarpment, this **Prince Ruspoli's Turaco** near Negele, and amorous **Stresemann's Bush-Crows** at Yabello—but also for the many surprises that turn up, including scarce species like White-breasted Cuckooshrike and migrants such as Upcher's Warbler, White-throated Robin, and Pied Wheatear this year. Terry reports that the group likewise enjoyed a splendid showing of antelope: Mountain Nyala, Menelick's Bushbuck, Greater Kudu, Salt's Dikdik, and Soemmering's Gazelle. On the tour's extension to Lalibela, the rock-hewn **St. George's Church** was most impressive! (Photos by participant Greg Griffith and guide Ned Brinkley.)





## FRANCE'S LOIRE VALLEY

The view out over the formal gardens at **Villandry** takes the breath away, writes guide Megan Edwards Crewe, who with wine maven Marcelo Padua hosted this week-plus tour through the middle of the Loire Valley, home to Villandry and also the stately chateaux of Chambord and Chenonceau, as well as many fine French birds. Combining birding with wine-tasting and castle visits might seem a stretch, but this year's group savored good looks at **Firecrest**, Red-legged Partridge, **Gray Wagtail**, Little Bustard, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, and these courting **Great Crested Grebes**, in between tastes of a little Chinon,



Vouvray, Pouilly-Fumé, Sancerre, and other memorable appellations, often with picnics that could have fed a much larger group! (Photos by participants Dave Harvey, Laura Wathen, and David Presotto and guide Megan Edwards Crewe.)

## ISRAEL

Trying to narrow down the high points on the Israel Migration Magic tour is tough, says guide Doug Gochfeld, who with local sidekick Eran Banker took the group on a tour de force through the southern parts of this coastal country during the height of spring migration. From the Judean Hills and Dead Sea canyons to the famous migrant traps of Eilat and the spectacular Negev Desert, the group nearly had birding-whiplash: huge migrations of Steppe Eagles and Steppe Buzzards, displaying MacQueen's Bustards, flocks of **Spotted Sandgrouse** and migrating **Eurasian Spoonbills**, and a host of special birds, from Sand Partridge to **Little Crane**, White-eyed Gull to **Cretzschmar's Bunting**. Next year's tour will include a few days in northern Israel as well, for birds like Western Rock Nuthatch and Syrian Serin. (Photos by guide Doug Gochfeld.)



## MOROCCO & CANARY ISLANDS

Guide Jesse Fagan relishes his annual September caravan through Morocco, from the Atlantic shores through the great Atlas Mountains to the edge of the Sahara, here a thumbs-up at **Erg Chebbi**. This year, many also joined him for a pre-tour extension to the Canary Islands, part of Spain and home to seabirds and a fantastic collection of endemic doves, passerines (like this *ultramarinus* **African Blue Tit**), and the rare Canarian Houbara Bustard. Pressed for group favorites, Jesse mentioned **Marsh Owl**, Northern Bald Ibis, Eleonora's Falcon, Cream-colored Courser, and Moussier's Redstart but happily pointed out that they also "swept" all 13 larks, including **Bar-tailed Lark**, and all 8 wheatears, among them this pretty **White-crowned Wheatear**! (Photos by participant Ken Havard and guide Jesse Fagan.)



# Bird Buzz

The **Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata** tour this year started off with a serious bang. Deep in the *Guadua* bamboo thickets of southeastern Peru, we found a pleasant-looking rufous-brown flycatcher with a distinctive call and a very interesting history: *Cnipodectes superrufus*, Rufous Twistwing. Our encounter wasn't by chance: I had spent three days last year scouting locations in the area, machete in hand (because this bird likes dark, tangled places), and was lucky enough to find two territories!

Rufous Twistwing was first collected in the Manu region of Peru in 1990. It was initially misidentified, placed in a collection tray, and forgotten—that is, until our own Dan Lane noticed the specimen in 2002 and immediately thought it could be a new species. It was. Dan formally described the species in 2007, and since then, it has been found in adjacent Brazil and Bolivia. How many tour groups have seen this little-known bird? So we hadn't even arrived on the Tambopata River yet and had seen Rufous Twistwing, along with several other *Guadua* bamboo specialists! An auspicious start.

Not long after the twistwing, we traveled by boat from Posada Amazonas Lodge to the Tambopata Research Center, the most remote of the Tambopata lodges, completely surrounded by primary lowland Amazonian forest. We decided to take an afternoon boat ride upriver to look for jaguar or a tapir, both realistic possibilities here, especially in the dry season, when the river is at its lowest levels. The sun was nearing the horizon, the light glowing a soft orange—perfect conditions for photography. Suddenly, a dashing movement crossed the river in front of us, a football-shaped bird pursued by a raptor. It all happened so quickly, but the raptor caught up with the football, then a great collision, and both went crashing into the river near the north bank. The raptor surfaced and *swam* to the river's edge and *dragged* its prey item up onto the shore. It was at that moment that we got a better grasp of what had transpired: a Gray-bellied Hawk (*Accipiter poliogaster*) was in the process of killing an Undulated Tinamou (*Crypturellus undulatus*). Our expert boatman Juan scooted us up silently to within a few meters of the birds, and we spent the next 25 minutes watching the hawk deplume and feed on its difficult catch. We left as quietly as we had come, and when we passed by 45 minutes later, the hawk was still enjoying its meal. Gray-bellied Hawk is a rare South American *Accipiter* whose natural history is virtually unknown. It is still unclear if the bird breeds in Peru or if such individuals represent austral migrants from Brazil, or a combination of both.



However it came to be there, this encounter represented a momentous highlight for us all, one we'll not forget.

And it made what happened the next day seem impossibly lucky. We were out on the trails early and had already had a solid morning of antbirds and the star attraction on the Tambopata, the macaws. As we paused for a moment in the action, we heard a distinctive *clack—clack—clack* coming from just off the trail, very close. The eyes of our local guides, Jair and Fernando, widened in sudden surprise. These were bill snaps of a Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo (*Neomorphus geoffroyi*), a rare Neotropical species that spends most of its time being (awesomely) mythical. I had never seen one, never been close to one (that I knew of), and somehow, we just had to see this bird. We got the group together and tried to stay calm. Then for the next 5 minutes, the bird seemed to work circles around us, but a few saw something dark, maybe a head? And then, just like that, the bird decided to climb up into a tree, perch 8 feet off the ground, and utter a low, booming *whoooooooooooo*, a really cool vocalization. We managed to get the scope on it, and silent high-fives went all around. It was one of those moments that comes along every blue moon in birding, and here we were basking in a hat-trick of good fortune. So, as the tour was winding down and we were spending our last night together sipping a few pisco sours and recounting our fondest moments, I couldn't help but ask, "So, which is it? The *Cnipodectes*, the *Neomorphus*, or the *Accipiter*?"

Thanks to our boatman, Juan, and our local guides, Jair and Fernando, for all their great work and expertise on this Tambopata tour. Join us next year for more great adventures on the river!

Jesse Fagan, a.k.a. the Motmot  
Lima, Peru

P.S. Huge thank-yous to Charlotte Byers, Bill Byers, Dorothy Paul, and Miles Paul for the photos that tell the story!



# Our Sungrebe

It's easy to miss a Sungrebe. It is more likely to be swimming quietly beneath the overhanging vegetation of a rainforest river or lagoon edge than floating brashly out in the open. So if we're not watching for small ripples on the surface or a furtive movement between water-dipped branches, we might not see one at all. Yet a Sungrebe is a quiet but constant presence in such places.

You may have been unaware of our own in-house Sungrebe, Abbie Rowlett. With only a rare personal byline, and hardly a photo save for appearances in our annual business meeting group shot, Abbie for 20 years has been central to the production and content of the Field Guides catalogs and newsletters that many of you have expressed such delight in receiving.

True, a Master's in English from the University of Virginia qualified her, but producing catalogs and in particular newsletters is a task requiring an unusual and uncommon set of skills. First, one must plan content, balancing the need to give a bit of the spotlight regularly to our more than 125 itineraries and 20 guides. Then, one must solicit writing from guides (we know how much you like to hear from them directly, and of course about them), but this is, shall we say, a gentle arm-twisting game (our guides are busy!). Content in hand, it's then time for some careful editing, lest the guide's voice be lost. And one must, too, be a skilled wordsmith to boot, as each newsletter or catalog always requires some additional new content. Last, one must be creative, for as soon as one issue goes to press it seems the next is already in the works!

Abbie brought all of her many and considerable skills to these efforts over these many years and thereby made our collaboration with her toward the creation of our newsletters and



*Abbie, the Sungrebe, seen here embracing Micah Riegner as Lynn Yeager, Tiara Westcott, and Peg Wallace present their pièce de résistance: a Sungrebe cake!*

catalogs an easy task. That is what an invaluable work colleague and partner does.

After creating her last Field Guides newsletter in spring, our Sungrebe has been enjoying her roost in Charlottesville, Virginia with her husband, the Peppershrike (John Rowlett, Field Guides co-founder), and both will be catching sunrises in some new destinations around the globe in the seasons ahead. Happily, Abbie and John joined us at the August annual meeting festivities in Arizona, as we hope they will for many years to come. We will very much miss working with her directly, but we shall not forget. Thank you, Abbie.

## A selection of upcoming 2019-20 tours with space available

### DECEMBER

- 21 **Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista I** with Dan Lane & local guide
- 27 **Panama's Canopy Camp: Lowland Darien** with John Coons & local guide
- 27 **Trinidad & Tobago** with Tom Johnson & local guide
- 28 **Arizona Winter Specialties** with Chris Benesh
- 28 **Panama's Canopy Lodge: El Valle de Anton** with Jesse Fagan & local guide
- 28 **Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista II** with Megan Edwards Crewe & local guide

### JANUARY

- 11 **Northern India: Birds, Tiger & the Taj Mahal** with Terry Stevenson & Tom Johnson
- 17 **Winter Japan: Dancing Cranes & Spectacular Sea-Eagles** with Phil Gregory & local guide
- 21 **Nowhere but Northeast Brazil!** with Bret Whitney & Marcelo Barreiros
- 25 **The Heart of Chile** with Marcelo Padua & local guide

### FEBRUARY

- 2 **Panama's Canopy Tower** with John Coons & local guide
- 8 **Trinidad & Tobago** with Tom Johnson & local guide
- 12 **Cambodia: Angkor Temples & Vanishing Birds** with Doug Gochfeld & local guide
- 15 **Owlberta: Alberta's Owls & More** with Jay VanderGaast
- 22 **Colombia: Santa Marta Escape** with Cory Gregory & local guide
- 22 **Southeast Ecuador: Orange-throated Tanager & Foothill Specialties** with Mitch Lysinger
- 23 **Jamaica** with Eric Hynes & local guide
- 27 **Myanmar: Birding Burma** with Doug Gochfeld & local guide

### MARCH

- 1 **Southwestern Ecuador Specialties: Jocotoco Foundation Reserves** with Willy Perez
- 7 **Spring in South Texas** with Chris Benesh
- 7 **Brazil Nutshell: Intervalles, Iguazu Falls & the Pantanal** with Marcelo Padua
- 10 **Classic Costa Rica** with Jay VanderGaast & local guide
- 15 **Puerto Rico** with Tom Johnson & Cory Gregory
- 28 **Guyana: Wilderness Paradise** with Marcelo Barreiros & local guide

*See our website for complete information.*

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