

Break the Ice, Bird in Brazil!

Bret Whitney

I grew up in central Indiana and Ohio, places where the seasons are well delineated. Especially that part of the year when the Earth turns its face from the sun and we freeze up. Straight out of college I started to travel as a professional tour leader, and I gained an appreciation of how nice it is to bird someplace in the middle of winter under sunny skies and starry nights with warm tropical breezes. This really sank in when I lived for a couple of years in Rio de Janeiro.

But, ah, how I missed the northern hemisphere autumn! It's so cool and refreshing and invigorating, change is in the air: the colors are inspiring, the birds are winging (if not singing), and Jack Frost comes crisp to the doorstep. Shortly after Jack's first knocks, however, things start slipping downhill and the good times are reduced to transient appreciations of "winter wonderlands" and gorgeous icicles on silent nights. Before you know it, the Temperate Zone becomes an inhospitable place for a warm-blooded animal, and it costs some serious money to keep your enclosed space warm enough for comfortable metabolic process. For most in North America and Europe, the winter lasts only about a third or so of the year. That's a seemingly interminable *one-third* of the year. There *are* things to do, of course, mostly indoors, like laying on energy reserves for the winter, with peaks around the abundant holidays. It's only human. And there are a few birds to be looked for, mainly at havens like feeders and below the warm-water outflow from the power plant. So it's not all bad.

The fantastic Brazilian specialty, a Hooded Visorbearer! [Photo by guide Jan Pierson]

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Baia Branca Hotel, where you leave winter far behind. [Photo by guide Bret Whitney]

NORTHERN INDIA

Terry Stevenson

Since my first visit in January 2003, I've just loved leading our Northern India tour, which visits all the major habitats in the region. Whether watching hundreds of Bar-headed Geese at Bharatpur, Kalij Pheasant in the undergrowth at Corbett, or Indian Courser on the open plains at Sultanpur Jheel, every day brings new and exciting highlights. In addition to the abundant birdlife, there are over 20 species of mammals—including the magnificent Tiger—which to date we've seen on every trip!

We also visit the fabulous Taj Mahal and the palaces of Akbar the Great, benefit from the knowledge and assistance of some really good local guides, and experience the widest variety of travel of any tour I've ever done—bus, train, boat, bicycle-rickshaw, and elephant-back—while watch-

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The Indian Roller is a study of the color blue. [Photo by participant Paul Thomas]

My lifer Peter Burke

Birding is as much about people as it is about birds, don't you think? Birding with your friends, birding with your spouse, birding with your kids, showing birds to folks you meet in the field—these are all key parts of our experience and, in fact, what make it so rewarding. Now, there are loads of birds whose names we know but which we have yet to see. And so it is with birders, too. In September several of us Field Guides attended a classic intersection of birds and people: the newly reinvigorated Midwest Birding Symposium in Lakeside, Ohio. It was a fun event, punctuated by the wild Friday excitement of a migrant Kirtland's Warbler showing up just minutes from the festival venue. Hundreds of folks got their lifer Kirtland's there, to their great delight. And I got my lifer Peter Burke.

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GuideLines with Jay VanderGaast

How did you get interested in birds? How did you start leading birding tours? These are two questions we as guides often get asked, and at least for me, the answer to both is the same: I blame my dad.

It was he who first introduced me to birds as a young boy, taking my siblings and me into the woods to track down warblers or to the local sewage ponds in early spring to see if the Tundra Swans (Whistling Swans as we knew them then) had arrived yet. As we got older, my brother's and sisters' interest in birds waned, while I wanted to learn more and more about them. By the time we'd moved out west, it was just me and my dad on our early morning birding forays, and I grew to treasure those times together with him; they're still among my fondest memories of growing up.

It was also my dad who instigated my career in guiding, not overtly, but through a simple suggestion: "We should go birding together in Costa Rica some time." Costa Rica? I had no interest in going there. My mind was set on Africa, and I was planning on a two-year trip to explore that continent. But thinking back to those cherished times with my father, I thought, "Why not?" and that winter the two of us flew to Costa Rica for a few weeks. And that's all it took. By the time we left, I'd fallen in love with Neotropical birds, and I'd been offered a job as a birding guide at Rancho Naturalista Lodge.

A few months later I returned to start my new job, and for the next six years I spent almost every single day out in the forest, adding to my knowledge of Costa Rica's bird life, and in the process establishing myself as one of the country's top guides. It was this that brought me to the attention of Field

Guides and eventually led to their offer of a full-time guiding position, and ten years later, here I am still leading tours. And it all started with my dad's suggestion of a father-son birding trip.

My father passed away a few years ago, and those father-son birding excursions are now just memories. But each year, I return to Costa Rica to lead another tour or two, and sometimes, when we come across one of his favorite birds—a stunning Flame-throated Warbler, a tiny Snowcap hummingbird, or a perky little Torrent Tyrannulet (or Torrent Tarantula as he liked to call it)—my mind wanders back to that wonderful, exciting month of birding that he and I shared there. With a tear in my eye and a smile on my face, I think to myself, "Yes, it's all my dad's fault." Thanks, Dad.

Jay will return to Costa Rica in 2010 for our tours, March 13-28 and July 31-August 15. And, if you're thinking about a holiday visit to Jay's old stomping grounds, our Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista with Jesse Fagan might be just the thing. Dates for those tours are December 19-27, 2009 and December 30, 2009-January 7, 2010.

Jay's other 2009-2010 tours include Spectacular Southeast Brazil, Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics, Point Pelee & Algonquin Provincial Park, Yukon to the Arctic Ocean, Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge, South Africa, and Madagascar. Visit www.fieldguides.com for Jay's complete tour schedule.



Jay and a New Guinea tribesman—Jay is the guy who is dressed funny. [Photo by guide Phil Gregory]

My lifer Peter Burke *Continued from cover*

I'd seen a virtual version of Peter (in photos, his name on the covers of some of my bird books) and read about him (in glowing Field Guides post-tour evaluations, in emails from Bret about some of Peter's beautiful plates for the Brazil guides) and even emailed back and forth with Peter and talked with him on the phone. But at the MBS I saw the real deal: I got to listen and watch, hear and learn, smile and laugh as Peter made his way easily among old friends and new acquaintances. The merging of "great birder" with the quality of easy leadership in someone you identify immediately as "good people" is a rare gift. And just when you think it's all there already, he pulls out his pad and wows the surrounding crowd with an insta-sketch of the Kirtland's Warbler they've just seen (all that talent...it's just not fair, is it?). Peter the dad and artist doesn't yet have much time in his busy schedule for many tours (we can hope that'll change). Let me suggest unabashedly, though, that it would be very, very cool (not to mention very, very fun) to travel with him to his familiar haunts in Chile (he was, after all, artist to the field guide you'll be using) in late January and to watch a fabulous Moustached Turca or handsome Crag Chilia, then see him sketch it. And since his tours are yet rare, it would be a shame to miss it. You'll see some great lifer birds, and a great lifer person.

—Jan Pierson

*Peter will be in Chile for our **Heart & Sole of Chile** tour, January 30-February 13. Please visit www.fieldguides.com for a complete tour description, itinerary, and past triplists.*



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To download an itinerary, go to the tour page and click on ITINERARIES in the right-hand column.

Last Spaces

Spectacular Southeast Brazil: North of the Tropic, October 30-November 15 with Bret Whitney & Megan Crewe

Northern Peru: Endemics Galore, November 8-27 with Rose Ann Rowlett & Richard Webster

Spectacular Southeast Brazil: South of the Capricorn, November 13-27 with Bret Whitney & Jay VanderGaast

Guatemala Thanksgiving & Temples of Tikal, November 21-30 with Jesse Fagan

Arizona Winter Specialties, November 28-December 5 and December 26-January 2 with Dave Stejskal

Oaxaca & the Pacific Coast, December 27-January 7 with Chris Benesh & Wayne Petersen

Panama's Canopy Lodge, December 27-January 3 with John Coons

Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista, December 30-January 7 with Jesse Fagan & local guide

Which is the fairest of them all? In Peru, that is...

Rose Ann Rowlett

What does Jeffery Watson know that we seem to have trouble getting our clients to accept (and act upon)? That Huascarán National Park—where he hiked all day in a glacier-carved valley flanked by dramatic snow-capped peaks and sprinkled with glacial lakes, and where he wandered along rushing rivers through some of the tallest *Polylepis* trees on the continent—is stunningly beautiful. Okay, Jeffery is the 23-year-old son of our Business Manager, Peggy Watson; so you might still have some doubts. But his delight in Huascarán mirrors that of most Peruvians; proud Peruvians throughout consider Huascarán, in the Cordillera Blanca of the central Peruvian Andes, the most beautiful place in their huge and scenic country.

Jeffery's parents not having brain-washed him into being a birdwatcher (he is young; he could still come around on his own), he sent back photographs, not bird lists. But we will supply those! (And they'll be packed with endemics.) Our tours in this region have been intermittent because, for some reason we can't fathom, we have a hard time selling them, creating a disconnect, because this is one of the most beautiful places in the world and the birding is fabulous and more people *ought* to be enjoying this fabulous slice of

Central Peru. We're stubborn and we love this place, so we are offering this tour again, inviting you to join Dan Lane and me and a maximum of ten participants next May—at a prime time for finding some of the rarest endemics.

Huascarán is a really big, Andean version of the Swiss Alps, though the flora and fauna are, of course, almost completely different. From our comfortable hotel at a mere 10,000 feet we make day-trips into the park to visit the grand *Polylepis* groves, which are the best place to see the endemic White-cheeked Cotinga and are also home to Giant Conebill, Stripe-headed Antpitta, Rusty-crowned and Tawny tit-spinetails, Striated Earthcreeper, Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant, Rufous-backed Inca-Finch, Rufous-eared Brush-Finch, and Plain-tailed Warbling-Finch, while the nearby *Gnoxys* shrubs are the primary habitat of Tit-like Dacnis.

While Huascarán may be the tour's centerpiece, the Carpish Mountains across the Rio Marañon offer birding along the famous Paty Trail (complete with three endemic antpittas!) and at lovely Bosque Unchog, where we camp in a bog at 11,000 feet. Here we sleep to the haunting hooting of Rufous-banded Owls and awaken to the pre-dawn displaying of Andean Snipe overhead. (While I delight in saying that we camp in a bog at 11,000 feet, of course we aren't out with the snipe in the soggy part, just in the comfortably



Lake Junin (above, right) is home to many high-Andean waterbirds, foremost among them the endangered Junin Grebe, flightless and endemic to the lake. The endemic White-bellied Cinclodes is one of the largest and most local of the furnariids. Above, one of many high-elevation "picnics with a view," this one on the upper East Slope of Huascarán where Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant can be found. (Photos by guides Rose Ann Rowlett & Richard Webster)



soft uplands around the edge! And, while I can fathom that camping can be a turnoff for some, I have enjoyed camping with many of you in far less wonderful places; so think about it. You'll have hot coffee or tea and a bowl of hot water for a face wash delivered right to your tent at wakeup time.) We are camping in a wild area in order to search for an incomparable assortment of recently-discovered species, including the stunning Golden-backed Mountain-Tanager,

the unique Pardusco that remains an evolutionary stand-alone, the attractive-but-sneaky Rufous-browed Hemispingus, and the very local Bay-vented Cotinga, all endemic to Peru.

But wait, there is more. Much more! In order to start acclimating, we will begin our birding on the arid slopes above Lima, seeking Great Inca-Finch, Oasis Hummingbird, Bronze-tailed Comet, Peruvian Sheartail, Black-necked Woodpecker, Thick-billed Miner, Rusty-bellied Brush-Finch, and Rufous-breasted Warbling-Finch. And toward tour's end, when we're thoroughly accustomed to the high elevations, our finale will take us from huge Lake Junin, with its Black-breasted Hillstars and its thousands of waterbirds (including the flightless Junin Grebe), to the stark beauty of Tielcio Pass and Marcapomacocha, where the mineral-rich puna bogs are habitat for the very local White-bellied Cinclodes and the exquisite Diademed Sandpiper-Plover. Those seeking these high-elevation specialties rarely have such an opportunity to condition to the altitude.

If you've been wanting a trip on which you can hike a lot in some dramatically beautiful montane settings, all the while seeing scores of endemic birds, this could be the tour for you. The last time we guided it was in 2003, and who knows when we'll offer it again? Not even Jeffery knows.

Our CENTRAL PERUVIAN ENDEMICS: THE HIGH ANDES tour is scheduled for May 14-31, 2010. It's limited to just ten participants with two guides; you can read more details about the tour and download a past triplist at our website link: <http://www.fieldguides.com/tours.html?area=tour&code=cpe> And you can see a slideshow of great images from the tour by clicking on the mosaic of photos in the left sidebar.

FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Reports from Recent Tours
compiled by Alvaro Jaramillo and Abbie Rowlett



Lore is that the weather is seldom clear enough to see all of Denali (Mt. McKinley). However, we seem to have amazing looks at this mass of 20,000 feet of gorgeous rock and snow on our ALASKA tours. At left, one of our recent Alaska tour groups enjoys the scenery and the birds—Hawk Owls, Bohemian Waxwings, and more—on the Denali Highway. And here's a bird that really makes you say WOW, a surprise red Ruff putting on a show at Barrow. Bird meets vaudeville. [Photos by guide George Armistead]



At left, two birds from the coastal lowlands of Peru seen on the recent MACHU PICCHU & ABRA MALAGA tour. Yellowish Pipit (top), a widespread species in southern South America. But wait...this coastal Peruvian version has a rather different song and look and is probably a different species—let's call it Peruvian Pipit, why don't we? And a Snowy Plover (bottom) at Ventanilla Beach; recent work shows the Snowy Plovers (New World) may deserve to be separated from the Old World Kentish Plover. Perhaps these southern Snowy Plovers from Chile and Peru are also a different species; we'll have to wait for further DNA analysis to tackle this question. At right, Dan Lane and local guides with the group at the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. [Photos by guide Dan Lane]





The POINT PELEE & ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK tour is really two tours in one, though it's usually the Point Pelee part that gets the press. What birders sometimes don't realize is what a gem Algonquin Park is, not only for birds but for scenery. The lake above is typical of the areas where we'll be birding. Northern species, like this surreal-looking female Evening Grosbeak (top left) really put on a show here, and Algonquin holds the southernmost population of Gray Jay (in this part of the world) along with Boreal Chickadee and Spruce Grouse. [Photos by participant Imre Sziebert]



The focus of the *Birding Plus* NORTH CAROLINA: PETRELS & THE DEEP BLUE SEA tour is, of course, seabirds and the Gulf Stream. But we also visit nearby sites for some fantastic landlubber birding. At top, a Prothonotary Warbler, a common bird of the southern swamps formerly called the Golden Swamp Warbler. Above left, one of a pair of American Oystercatchers found nesting on the beach. And to its right, a Fea's Petrel, a species that was nearly unknown to the continent until Brian Patteson and Ned Brinkley began thoroughly exploring the Gulf Stream waters off North Carolina in the early 1990s. Now we know where to find these birds! [Photos by guide George Armistead]



The TEXAS HILL COUNTRY is a tour to one of the most scenic parts of Texas that also happens to be a great place to bird. But one of the highlights of the tour, one that you have to see to believe, is non-avian—the nightly exit of millions of Brazilian Free-tailed Bats at the Frio Cave (top left). It was bunting city in the Hill Country this year; to wit, a gorgeous male Painted Bunting (top right) and above, an amazing congregation of three bunting species—Indigo, Lazuli, and Painted! Or east meets west meets south! At right, the local type of Western Scrub-Jay, which will likely be separated soon as Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay. [Photos by participant Francesco Veronesi]

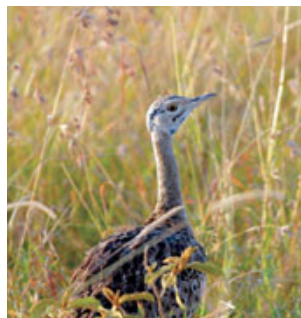


We have four AMAZONIAN ECUADOR: SACHA LODGE tours on the schedule for 2010, for good reason. This comfortable and accessible part of the Amazon Basin is one of the most diverse and birdy places on Earth! Even back-to-back tours see many different species because there are so many there to see. At top are Oriole Blackbirds, oddball blackbirds with an oriole look and hence the name. The Hoatzin (upper left) not only looks odd but behaves oddly as well; it eats leaves, an unusual food choice for a bird. The female Black-tailed Tityra (lower left) is a member of a group of birds related to the flycatchers that have only recently been put into their own family, the Tityridae! [Photos by guides Dave Stejskal and Dan Lane]

FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Our 2009 PAPUA NEW GUINEA tour group with Huli Tribesmen. [Photo by participant Phyllis Wilburn]



Kenya never disappoints; it is the home of wonderful birds, amazing concentrations of large mammals, and of guide Terry Stevenson, the foremost authority on East African birds, “the guy who wrote the book!” and who guides all our KENYA tours. At left, a Black-bellied-Bustard peers through the grass, while two Reticulated Giraffes (bottom left) stand at attention. The very exotic-sounding Papyrus Gonolek, lower right, is also a very pretty bird. [Photos by participant Daphne Gemmill]



It's with good reason that Montana is known as Big Sky Country—the vistas are amazing in this wide open and sparsely populated state. Views range from open country (at top), to mountain grandeur, and that's not to mention the birds, such as these fittingly named Harlequin Ducks. [Photos by participant Bill Denton]



We offer three departures to the GALAPAGOS, all in the summer when seabird numbers are highest and Waved Albatrosses are at their colonies. Our tour is an enchanting and cozy (does anyone have a group size smaller than ours?) way to see these magical islands. And while there, you may find a Short-eared Owl (top left); the Galapagos birds are darker than those in North America and may deserve consideration as a separate and endemic species. Top right, the head of a female Great Frigatebird on Genovesa Island. And finally, what better image of the magic of a Galapagos visit where birds are so close at hand; here a participant on one of our 2009 tours enjoys a group of confiding Española Mockingbirds. [Photos by guide George Armistead]

UPCOMING TOURS

If you would like details on any trip or trips, please call our office or check our website, where you may download a tour itinerary.

January-February 2010

Oman & The UAE	Jan 7-23	George Armistead & local guide
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge I	Jan 14-23	Dan Lane & local guide
Panama's Canopy Tower I	Jan 16-23	Chris Benesh & local guide
Colima & Jalisco	Jan 16-24	Megan Crewe
Yellowstone in Winter	Jan 16-24	Terry McEaney & second guide
Venezuela	Jan 16-30	John Coons
Colombia: Bogota, The Magdalena Valley & Santa Marta	Jan 16-Feb 1	Richard Webster
Thailand	Jan 16-Feb 6	Dave Stejskal & Uthai Treesucon
Northeast Brazil: Long Live the Lear's	Jan 17-Feb 6	Bret Whitney & second guide
Jewels of Ecuador I	Jan 23-Feb 9	Mitch Lysinger
Northern India	Jan 23-Feb 14	Terry Stevenson
Oaxaca	Jan 24-31	Megan Crewe
Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics	Jan 29-Feb 7	Jay VanderGaast
The Heart & Sole of Chile	Jan 30-Feb 13	Peter Burke & Ricardo Matus
Panama's Canopy Lodge	Jan 31-Feb 7	John Rowlett
Winter Japan: Cranes & Sea-Eagles	Feb 5-20	Phil Gregory
Western Mexico: San Blas & Sinaloa	Feb 10-20	Jesse Fagan & David Mackay
Panama's Wild Darien	Feb 11-20	John Rowlett
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge II	Feb 12-21	Dan Lane & local guide
Cambodia	Feb 18-Mar 2	Phil Gregory & local guide
Venezuela's Llanos & Photography	Feb 19-Mar 1	George Armistead
Panama's Canopy Tower II	Feb 20-27	John Coons & local guide
Jewels of Ecuador II	Feb 20-Mar 9	Rose Ann Rowlett
Southwestern Ecuador Specialties	Feb 21-Mar 7	Mitch Lysinger
Guatemala: Shade-Grown Birding	Feb 24-Mar 6	Jesse Fagan
Panama's Canopy Tower III	Feb 27-Mar 6	Chris Benesh & local guide
Trinidad & Tobago	Feb 27-Mar 8	Megan Crewe & local guide

March-April 2010

Honduras: Land of the Emeralds	Mar 6-14	Jesse Fagan & John Coons
Western Panama	Mar 6-15	Chris Benesh
Costa Rica	Mar 13-28	Jay VanderGaast & local guide
Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes I	Mar 14-28	Mitch Lysinger
Panama's Canopy Tower IV	Mar 19-26	John Coons & local guide
Yucatan & Cozumel	Mar 19-28	Megan Crewe & local guide
Colombia: Santa Marta Escape	Mar 20-28	Richard Webster & local guide
Hawaii	Mar 21-31	George Armistead & second guide
Suriname	Mar 26-Apr 10	Dave Stejskal & Dan Lane
Spring in South Texas	Mar 27-Apr 4	Chris Benesh
Bahamas: Birds & Butterflies	Mar 30-Apr 4	Jesse Fagan
Puerto Rico	Apr 4-10	George Armistead & second guide
Namibia & Botswana	Apr 6-25	Terry Stevenson
Bhutan	Apr 9-29	Richard Webster
Lesser Antilles	Apr 10-24	Jesse Fagan & second guide
Colorado Grouse I	Apr 15-24	Terry McEaney
Colorado Grouse II	Apr 16-25	Dan Lane
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I	Apr 17-23	John Coons
Texas Hill Country	Apr 19-24	John Rowlett
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle II	Apr 24-30	John Coons
Dominican Republic	Apr 24-May 1	Jesse Fagan & local guide
Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country	Apr 24-May 3	Chris Benesh & second guide

HOLIDAY TOURS

If holiday birding with Field Guides is in your plans, we have a varied and tempting (we hope) range of tours. And don't forget, if you are planning to travel at this time of year, it's good to get flights booked early to assure the best options and fares.

Guatemala Thanksgiving & Temples of

Tikal, Antigua & Finca Las Nubes, November 21-30 with Jesse Fagan. A new holiday birding tour combining rich birding at lovely fincas in the highlands with the Mayan ruins of Tikal and the Peten lowlands.

Arizona Winter Specialties, November 28-December 5 and December 26-January 2, 2010 with Dave Stejskal. Exceptional winter birding on a tour with numerous specialties and potential rarities.

Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista, December 19-27 and December 30-January 7, 2010 with Jesse Fagan & local guide. One-site holiday birding based at the comfortable Rancho Naturalista Lodge, with excursions to other habitats on Costa Rica's bird-rich Caribbean slope.

Panama's Canopy Lodge: El Valle de Anton, December 27-January 3, 2010 with John Coons & local guide. A superb birding tour as an introduction to Neotropical birds or to complement your broader Middle American birding, all based at a charming lodge.

Holiday at San Isidro, Ecuador, December 27-January 5, 2010 with Mitch Lysinger. A bird-rich holiday tour, based primarily at the very comfortable San Isidro Lodge.

Trinidad & Tobago, December 27-January 5, 2010 with Megan Crewe. Wonderful introductory birding tour to South America's riches, including bellbirds, toucans, manakins, and motmots.

Oaxaca & the Pacific Coast, December 27-January 7, 2010 with Chris Benesh & Wayne Petersen. Superb birding with numerous Mexican endemics and fascinating ruing in lovely Oaxaca City, plus a visit to the Pacific Coast for additional specialties.

Break the Ice, Bird in Brazil!

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But what if I told you about a magical place, a place in South America, where it's just about all *Good?* A place with coconut palm-lined beaches, cobblestone streets, enticing aromas, delicious food, cute donkeys, and lots and lots of rare and beautiful birds waiting for you to appreciate them—in the middle of winter? A place where you feel like you could eat ice cream every day and—as January melts into February—your foot-gear oscillates between hiking shoes and flip-flops? A place where macaws are huge and bright-blue, the manakins orange, red, yellow, blue, black, and white, and tanagers show off a stunning “seven colors”?

Such a paradise really exists in the warm embrace of Brazil! In January and February 2010 I'll be guiding our traditional sojourn through the Northeast, from beautiful beaches to barren badlands for three weeks of fabulous birding. This year the group looks to be smaller than usual, which isn't so good for Field Guides but is a great deal for tour participants (and it's easi-



The very rare and endangered Lear's Macaw. [Photo by guide Bret Whitney]

er on the guide ;). You've been planning to come to Brazil sooner or later anyway and you might as well get started with the Northeast—it's the ultimate reprieve from the grip of winter! So I have a suggestion: Enjoy a fine autumn of birding around home or wherever the birds may take you, make your way through the Christmas Counts and holidays, then spend early January studying with excitement because you know that Brazil is coming and Old Man Winter will be on the way out by the time you get home. That's what I do every year, and

it's an excellent rhythm. You can fly non-stop on American Airlines from Miami to Recife (eight hours, overnight, same time zone) and straight back from Salvador for around \$800—that's another great reason to break the ice in Brazil. Turn down that thermostat on January 17 and migrate south!

Dates for Bret's NORTHEAST BRAZIL: LONG LIVE THE LEAR'S tour are January 17-February 6. Call our office or check our website (www.fieldguides.com/tours.html?area=tour&code=neb) for complete details.

NORTHERN INDIA

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ing not just so many great birds and mammals but also the kaleidoscope of India's vibrant people and cultures.

Over the past three years we've included a visit to the Chambal River, where we've had great success in finding the local and uncommon Indian Skimmer, Red-naped Ibis, Black-bellied Tern, Gharial, and the endangered Ganges Dolphin. And now, on our 2010 tour we'll include what should be another fabulous addition—Kanha National Park—one of the last strongholds of Tiger, the largest, most powerful, and beautiful of all cats.

Imagine an early walk at Bharatpur, with hundreds of ducks, geese, storks, and herons all around. Someone finds a skulking Black Bittern or our guide shows us a staked-out roosting Dusky Eagle-Owl. Along the Kosi River, while watching White-capped and Plumbeous redstarts, a Wallcreeper appears, or perhaps we find an Ibisbill feeding amongst the half submerged boulders. At Nainital, Lammergeiers and Himalayan Griffons soar overhead, Rufous Sibia, White-tailed Nuthatch, and Black-headed Jays inhabit the forested slopes, and flocks of White-throated and Rufous-chinned laughingthrushes move through the undergrowth. The numbers and variety of migrant passerines vary greatly from year to year (somewhat depending on the harshness of the weather further north), but a good selection of warblers, flycatchers, and thrushes should be present. Gray-winged Blackbird and Red-flanked Bluetail are two of the more common species, but Siberian Rubythroat, Golden Bush-Robin, and Black-and-yellow Grosbeak have also been seen.

North India, though, is more than rarities, and with Indian Peafowl, Rose-ringed Parakeet, and White-throated Kingfisher occurring in and around farmland, villages, and temples almost everywhere, it could really be called a birder's and photographer's paradise!

I hope you'll consider joining me this winter, **January 23-February 14, 2010.**

For further details or to download a tour itinerary or past triplist, check our website (www.fieldguides.com) or call our Austin office.



At top left, Scaly Thrush. Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler at right. Above, dromedaries, or “one humped” camels, drawing a cart. [Photos by guide Richard Webster & participant Ken Havard]

Heading South with the Birds

Alvaro Jaramillo

It may be in our nature to get the winter blues. In my case, it was particularly so when I lived in Canada and most birds left us for the winter. But it wasn't just the birds that had taken flight, there were no bugs to look at, no flowers to smell—it was as if nature had shut down. Hey, I don't blame her, she'd had a busy spring, summer, and fall and had done a great job of it. Still, the winter was a bit of a bummer, particularly with those short, cold days.

I have friends who love winter; it's part of the whole cycle, they say, and a great time of year—and of course it can

be. But, if you've ever gotten off a plane in the middle of winter in a tropical clime and felt that warm air wash over you, you'll know how I feel. Shoveling the driveway is no longer your problem; all you have to do now is enjoy some amazing birds. Some of these are old friends you saw just a few months ago back home, and it's nice to catch up between scheduled visits. Others are new and exotic and don't look like anything you'd ever see in your own backyard.

Now, you may not need a long time away. A short birding holiday, a week to two weeks, might be just the ticket. And a destination not too far from a Dallas or Miami connection would be great, too. You may want to stay in the Northern Hemisphere—you don't want to get too crazy—but you do want tropical. Fortunately (and of course you knew I'd say that), we have a number of Field Guides tours in Mexico (see page 11) and Central and northern South America—and why leave out Hawaii?—that fit this description.

In Central America there're trips to **Guatemala (Shade-Grown Birding)**, to **Honduras (Land of the Emeralds)**, and to **Panama (Canopy Tower, Canopy Lodge, Wild Darien, and Western Panama tours)**. Let's start with Panama because it is all the rage. Panama is the link between Central and South America, and—because its Pacific slope, Caribbean slope, and mountains are constricted to a rather narrow area of land—there is great diversity in a small place. Apart from great birding and a good sampling of southern Central American specialties, the Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge tours both stay at a single place. You can unpack your bag and settle in for a week in a comfortable room, making for a simple and relaxed trip.

Now if you are up for visiting a beautiful country that few have birded, think about Honduras. Guide Jesse Fagan, who this year will be joined by John Coons, pioneered our tour there, and Jesse knows the region better than anyone! We'll visit the Pacific Slope, Central Highlands, and Caribbean lowlands and see as many as 300 species of wonderful birds.

For an experience unlike any other in Central America, there's Guatemala, where, on our Shade-Grown Birding tour, we not only look for the northern



The 2009 Honduras tour group having just seen their first male Lovely Cotinga. [Photo by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]

Central American highland specialties, but also enjoy the living culture of the Maya and stay in eco-friendly, shade-grown coffee fincas. The sheer density of North American migrants like Tennessee Warbler and Western Tanager hobnobbing with such locals as Tody Motmot and the fantastic Pink-headed Warbler is pretty amazing.

Tours in northern South America that fit the bill include **Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics, Trinidad & Tobago, and Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge**, all very different trips. Trinidad & Tobago, or "Trini" as the locals call it, is a great introduction to the Neotropics

where you can see a sampling of parrots, motmots, bellbirds, spinetails, and antshrikes. The two places we stay during the tour host some of the best bird feeders anywhere; before breakfast you'll be eye-to-eye with honeycreepers. Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics is also an amazing trip to a fascinating area. The Tepuis (sometimes called the Galapagos of the mainland because they have so many endemic plants and animals) are the oldest rock formations in South America and, as such, appear to be the birthplace of highland birds on the continent. As you would expect, there are some relicts here, as well as some very specialized local birds that we will look for. If you're up for some extraordinary Neotropical species—including wacky ones like Capuchinbird and Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock—sign up today!

Sacha Lodge has the benefit of being a single-destination trip to the premier lodge in Ecuadorian Amazonia. If you decide that your short winter escape should take in the richest avifauna on the planet, then the Amazon Basin is it—and Sacha, with its rarities and specialties as well as good old flashy regulars like parrots and tanagers, will blow your socks off. And, when you show your photos of birding from a dugout canoe to your sun-starved friends back home, they will respond, "That looks fantastic!"—and it's true, shuttling back and forth between Sacha Lodge birding and Sacha Lodge comfort is absolutely fantastic!

Finally, there is lonely little **Hawaii**, out there in the middle of the ocean. It's the poster child for a perfect winter getaway—not only birdy but part of the US, so culture shock is minimal. Still, Hawaii is unlike any other state, with tropical birds that are found nowhere else on Earth. Some of the Hawaiian Honeycreepers are among the oddest birds in the world, and mix them up with albatrosses, boobies, tropicbirds, great food, and little drinks with umbrellas in them, and you won't even remember the winter blues. Sounds like a red hot idea to us—the birds are waiting.

You can read more about the tours mentioned and download itineraries and past triplists at our website. Or call our office for complete details.

A Relentless March North

Dave Stejskal



I'm a pretty lucky guy. There's a lot that I'm thankful for in my life, but, as a birder, I'm particularly fortunate to live where I do—in Southeast Arizona. There isn't a region in North America that has a more dynamic avifauna, and I've been fortunate to have been able to study and observe the birds here for more than forty years. We get birds from the north, birds from the east, a few from even farther west than our western border with California, and birds from the south. Let's face it, that latter group of birds is the reason why so many birders from around the country come to visit. The chance to see what are essentially 'Mexican' birds either established and breeding here, or, better yet, the ones that just stray across the border from time to time, is the real draw for so many and adds a real thrill to birding here. Seeing an out-of-place Kentucky Warbler or a Northern Shrike in Arizona is great fun, but that's not what a birder from Pennsylvania or Missouri or Washington really gets excited about when visiting. Berylline Hummingbird, Eared Quetzal, Rufous-capped Warbler, Inca Dove, Bronzed Cowbird, and Great-tailed Grackle—now those are birds to get excited about! Wait a second here—Inca Dove? Bronzed Cowbird?? Great-tailed Grackle??

Wonderful birds all. Remember how I characterized the avifauna here in



Arizona as dynamic? Well, it is and has been ever since the first ornithologists/naturalists visited the region back in the middle of the 19th century. Having grown up in Phoenix, it's pretty much unimaginable for me to think of Phoenix without dozens of Inca Doves at my feeders or on grassy lawns around town. They were just part of the default background when I was a kid first starting to bird in 1969 and must have always been there, right?

Well, according to the authors of the *The Birds of Arizona* (Phillips, Marshall, & Monson 1964), the Inca Dove was, "Probably absent from (the) state prior to 1870." After it was first detected in what is now Tucson, Inca Dove

spread across the southern one-half of the state over the next century. As birders in the Southwest now know, it's a resident bird in parts of California, southern Nevada, New Mexico, and West Texas as well as in every city, town, and ranch in southern Arizona.

As far as the Bronzed Cowbird is concerned, it's always been around since I was a kid, especially in the summer months. It's never really been that common, and, as with the Inca Dove, I had no reason to think it hadn't always been here. According to *The Birds of Arizona*, "The Red-eyed (Bronzed) Cowbird appeared suddenly in Arizona in 1909, or at least was discovered simultaneously that year at Tucson and Sacaton." Now, it's another one of



The impressive and birdy Cave Creek Canyon (facing page) in Southeast Arizona, and below it, a Burrowing Owl stares into space. This page above, two of the rarer species seen on our Arizona tours, Black-capped Gnatcatcher (left) and Rufous-capped Warbler. [Photos by guides Chris Benesh & Dave Stejskal]

those southern Arizona “standards” that you come to expect when birding the towns and agricultural areas here in the spring and summer months.

And Great-tailed Grackle? That bird’s absolutely everywhere in Arizona, even way up in northern Arizona and beyond. It’s been one of the biggest range-expansion stories in the West for the past few decades. It’s one of the most common sights and sounds around Tucson, Phoenix, and all through the settled regions of the state. Surely, it’s been here forever, right? Well, according to the same reference, grackles were unknown in Arizona before “the nearly simultaneous invasions of the state by two quite different races in the late 1930’s.”

So, what’s going on here? It looks like Arizona has been host to a number of birds, now commonplace and established here, that have expanded their mainly Mexican ranges northward across the border since the first naturalists ever visited the state in the middle of the 1800’s. It’s nothing new. There are others that have invaded the state in more recent decades that appear to be doing the very same thing. Thick-billed Kingbird, Gray Hawk, and Violet-crowned Hummingbird all come to mind, but it’s a little difficult to equate those birds with the dove, the cowbird, and the grackle. Yesterday’s vagrant is tomorrow’s commonplace nester, or so it would seem.

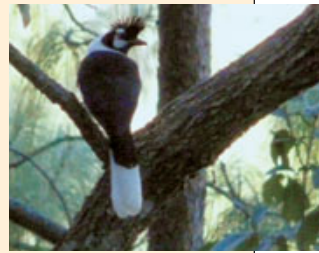
And still others are hot on their heels, or seemingly so. Are Short-tailed Hawk, Berylline Hummingbird, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Crescent-chested Warbler, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Ruddy Ground-Dove the next invaders that will become established and be viewed as ‘commonplace’ here in the decades to come? The trends are pretty suggestive. All six of the birds above have now bred in the state, and five have wintered here successfully. And what of more recent border breaches like Sinaloa Wren, Tufted Flycatcher, or Gray-collared Becard? I guess that only time will tell, but I sure am glad that I live, bird, and guide here and can be a part of that discovery process!

You can get a piece of this dynamic action and discovery in Arizona on any of our four Arizona tour itineraries: **Arizona Winter Specialties I & II** (November 28-December 5, 2009 or December 26, 2009-January 2, 2010, both with yours truly); **Arizona Nightbirds & More** (May 6-10 again, with yours truly); **Arizona: Birding the Border I & II** (May 14-23, 2010 with me, or May 15-24, 2010 with John Coons); or **Arizona’s Second Spring** (July 31-August 9, 2010 with Chris Benesh). Along with a host of other great birds, we always see something from south of the border. Who knows what it’ll be next trip?

You may visit our website to read more details about any of our Arizona tours; you may also download tour itineraries and past triplists for any trip.



Our WESTERN MEXICO tour combines both lowland and highland birding. Above, a boat trip into the mangroves around coastal San Blas and a specialty of the Durango Highway highlands, this fancy Tufted Jay. [Photos by participant Diane Henderson & guide David Mackay]



MEXICO

Mexico has always been a favorite destination of mine, and the WESTERN MEXICO: SAN BLAS & THE SINALOA HIGHLANDS tour in particular seems to bring out much of what I love about the country. We see some great birds, eat wonderful food, and experience a landscape full of mountain vistas, mangrove estuaries, thorn forest, and amazing beaches with even more amazing sunsets.

First, let’s start with the birds. No doubt about it, a group favorite is always the Tufted Jay. It is a fabulous bird (one of three *Cyanocorax* species we see on the tour) and on last year’s tour we enjoyed another memorable encounter. We had missed the jay at the traditional site earlier in the day, but driving back down the Durango Highway, Dave heard their distinctive calls. We stopped and everyone jumped out to watch the large flock moving through the pines and oaks above us. We followed them for 15 minutes or so before we let them go on their way. High-fives all around!

This trip is full of other Mexican endemics, too, and we saw 30 of them during our 9 days together. This isn’t including a couple of distinctive subspecies we observed that in the future could be elevated to full species (think Godman’s Euphonia or Grayson’s Thrush). We also had a nice collection of typically eastern passerines including Yellow-throated Vireo and Worm-eating and Yellow-throated warblers. In the end, however, I think it is the experience (maybe more than the birds? wow, did I just say that?) that makes the trip. *Jesse Fagan*

Jesse’s next **Western Mexico** tour is scheduled for February 10-20, 2010. And in the winter of 2010, Field Guides is offering three other short trips to the country. These will all be guided by Megan Crewe and they include:

Colima & Jalisco, January 16-24. “It’s pretty easy,” Chris Benesh says of this tour, “to get excited when you’re seeing Red-breasted Chats and Red Warblers, along with so many other colorful birds. Nightbirding can be some of the best with—on last year’s tour—spectacular views of Balsas Screech-Owl and Mottled Owl along with a silent but cooperative Buff-collared Nighthjar.”

Oaxaca, January 24-31. As guide Dan Lane put it after his Oaxaca tour, “What’s not to like? We stay in one hotel (and a very comfortable one at that!) the whole time, eat great food, experience an interesting culture...oh, and see some great birds.”

Yucatan & Cozumel, March 19-28. “Seeing Orange Orioles and Bat Falcons against a backdrop of the magnificent Mayan ruins is always a treat,” John Coons has said of this tour. “And then there’s the boat trip into the mangrove-lined Estero de Celestun for Caribbean Flamingos and Bare-throated Tiger-Herons, three Mayan ruin sites of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and Coba, and so much more.”



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CONSERVATION Field Guides contributes to the following conservation organizations: The Nature Conservancy, Birdlife International, Conservation International

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10/09

BORNEO

In the mood for some flashy birds (and mammals and insects and plants and amphibians)? Rose Ann Rowlett has posted a stunning slideshow of her Borneo trip this past summer—this preview should whet your appetite. To see more, go to the tour page on our website (www.fieldguides.com/tours.html?area=tour&code=bor) and click on slideshow in the left-hand column.

