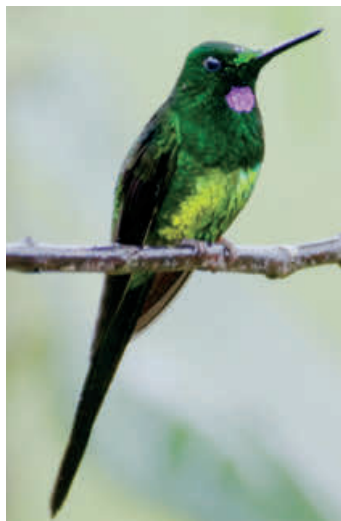




View of the Rio Jurueña from **Brazil's Remote Rio Tapajos** tour (Bret Whitney)



Empress Brilliant in Colombia
(Fred Dalbey)



Flame-faced Tanager in Ecuador
(Willy Perez)

New Tours

Field Guides is planning 17 new itineraries for 2017 and 2018: **Pennsylvania's Warblers & More** for fabulous spring birding; **Florida** for its many must-see species; **Owlberta** for winter owls and other specialties in Alberta; a revamped **Belize: Tropical Birding Short & Sweet** tour; **Brazil's Remote Rio Tapajos**, another fabulous wilderness adventure developed by Bret Whitney; two short, birdy trips in Colombia—**Medellin Escape** and **Cali Escape**; **Cloudforests of Ecuador** for the best mainstream birding in the NW; **Southeast Ecuador: Orange-throated Tanager & Foothill Specialties** and **Ecuador's Deep Northwest Lowlands**, each for hard-to-find specialties; **Amazonian Ecuador: Napo Wildlife Center**, a fresh view of the eastern lowlands; **Antarctica, the Falklands & South Georgia** with seabird aficionado Tom Johnson; **Israel: Spring Migration Spectacle** with Doug Gochfeld; **Kenya Tented Camps**, to get us right in the middle of the birds and wildlife; **Mongolia: The Gobi Desert, Steppe & Taiga**; **Northeast India** (including Eaglenest); and **Papua New Guinea & New Britain in Style**.

Continued on page 2

On the inside pages we've included short descriptions to 9 of the above tours scheduled for 2017; we'll cover our new 2018 tours in the next issue. Please check our website for more information.

Inside you'll also find a tribute from our annual business meeting to two Field Guides founders on their retirement from full-time guiding. We'll feature some of the new guides who will be joining us in the coming year in our next issue.

And from all of us at Field Guides, good birding!



These photos offer a glimpse of our new 2017 tours: Cerro Tatama from Cerro Montezuma, Colombia (Richard Webster), Blue-necked Tanager in Colombia (Greg Griffith), Snowy Owl (Peter Relson), Blackburnian and Golden-winged warblers in Pennsylvania (Tom Johnson), Willy Perez in Ecuador's paramo (Robert Sprague and Amy Levengood), one of Ecuador's fabulous hummingbirds, Velvet-purple Coronet (Peter Relson), Victoria Crowned-Pigeon from Papua New Guinea (Phil Gregory), a little Siberian Rubythroat in Mongolia (Dave Stejskal), Keel-billed Toucan in Belize (David and Susan Disher), and Amur Falcon in Mongolia (S. Gombobataar)



New Tours for 2017

Colombia

Trying to come up with fresh adjectives to describe the birding in the country with the world's longest list is not easy, nor is capturing it in itineraries that will be perfect for everyone. What we have done is take our 17-day survey of the Cauca Valley and the Western and Central Andes and divide it into two shorter tours, visiting many of the same places while adding a few new ones. These shorter itineraries take advantage of direct flights from the US to Colombia, a short flight across the Caribbean. Both tours should encounter a stunning set of tropical birds, including many endemics as well as loads of hummingbirds and tanagers.

Colombia: Medellin Escape—Andes & Valleys, February 4-13 with Richard Webster

Colombia: Cali Escape—Cloudforests of the Central & Western Andes, November 18-27 with Richard Webster



Owlberta: Alberta's Owls & More, February 18-24 with Jay VanderGaast. The Canadian Province of Alberta is an excellent place to bird in winter, with specialties like Great Gray, Snowy, and Northern Hawk owls as well as other winter visitors.

Belize: Tropical Birding, Short & Sweet, April 1-8 with Megan Edwards Crewe. We'll visit two great birding lodges—Lamanai Outpost and Hidden Valley Inn—for a diversity of species in a rich assortment of habitats in this revamp of our longer tour.

Pennsylvania's Warblers & More: From Cerulean Warbler to Henslow's Sparrow, May 23-28 with Tom Johnson & Doug Gochfeld. We'll visit as many of Pennsylvania's varied habitats as possible in a short week in pursuit of a big list of breeding season specialties. In addition to flycatchers, vireos, orioles, tanagers, and more, we stand an excellent chance of finding over 25 species of wood-warblers, including such gems as Cerulean, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Golden-winged, and Prothonotary.

"An excellent experience. The guides demonstrated both the expertise to locate and identify birds and the ability to handle the many details of moving guests around and assuring our comfort. All done with grace and patience. Bravo to the office staff! Quick to respond, kept each other informed of my various questions and needs, pleasant...I was talking to real people who really knew what they were doing and understood their guests...after my first trip with Field Guides, I feel I can travel anywhere with you folks." N.N., FRANCE: CAMARGUE & PYRENEES 2016



Mongolia: The Gobi Desert, Steppe & Taiga, June 1-18 with Phil Gregory. With 2.9 million humans, Mongolia is the most sparsely-populated country in the world, though it is home to a variety of other mammals and a vast array of birds—Saker and Amur falcons, Upland Buzzard, Pallas's Fish-Eagle, Siberian Rubythroat, Black-billed Capercaillie, Mongolian (Henderson's) Ground-Jay, Altai Snowcock, and Swan Goose—and these will be joined by a number of Palearctic migrants during the time of our visit.

Cloudforests of Ecuador: All the Best of the Wild Northwest, June 29-July 9 with Willy Perez. This new itinerary will explore the lush habitats of northwestern Ecuador in search of a fantastic array of birds and wildlife, including a variety of hummingbirds, antpittas, and tanagers, the amazing Long-wattled Umbrellabird, and a good chance at seeing Spectacled Bear.

Papua New Guinea & New Britain in Style, September 14-30 with Phil Gregory. Our new itinerary features the endemic birds and specialties of New Britain in addition to numerous highlights on the main island of New Guinea itself, while based at some wonderful sites, from the main island's Rondon Ridge, Ambua, Karawari, and Lake Murray lodges (this last in the Fly River area) to Walindi Resort on offshore New Britain.

Brazil's Remote Rio Tapajos, September 30-October 11. Bret Whitney and John Coons will take you adventure-birding in a beautiful, pristine region on the upper reaches of a major tributary of the Amazon based on a luxurious floating hotel.



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



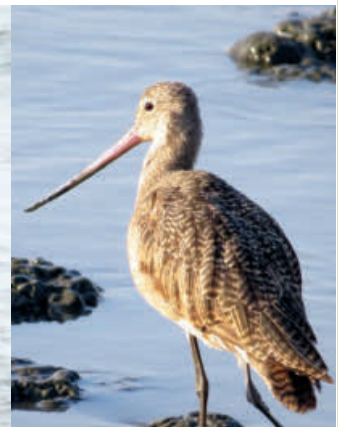
After almost five years of planning, guides Bret Whitney and Marcelo Padua's **Brazil's Mouth of the Amazon: Mexiana Island, The Lower Xingu & Carajas** tour became a reality this August. That's Marcelo out on the boardwalk at Mexiana Island taking a look around, and it's where the group saw this stunning Crimson-hooded Manakin at far right. The majestic Harpy Eagle was seen for a leisurely fifteen minutes in Carajas, and the Golden Parakeets, a beautiful macaw-like parrot endemic to lower Amazonia, along the lower Xingu. Needless to say, it was a super highlight of the tour. And check our Facebook page for Bret's live feed of the group waiting for roosting Scarlet Ibis on the last couple of days of the tour. (Photos by guide Marcelo Padua and participants Valerie Gebert & Larry Peavler)



Rio Negro Paradise: Manaus is another of our popular Brazil river tours. Both trips this year, one with Marcelo Padua and Dave Stejskal and another with Bret Whitney and Pepe Rojas, enjoyed their time cruising up the great Rio Negro from the point at which it joins the Amazon at Manaus. A very few of the birds seen among the groups shown here include the Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, above, a bird that is hard to resist and, as a result, frequently graces these pages; next to the cock, a Ferruginous-backed Antbird, a Guianan Shield endemic and one of the most beautiful of its genus; a Purple-breasted Cotinga at right for one tour; and the endemic Brazilian Bare-face Tamarin. (Photos by guides Marcelo Padua & Bret Whitney and participants Thomas Collins & Sherry Collins)



Our **Slice of California** tours—one with Tom Johnson and the other with Chris Benesh—enjoyed a super pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay this year, with views of Blue Whale, a dozen Black-footed Albatrosses (one below left), Pacific White-sided Dolphins, and much more. An evening watching the spectacle of thousands of Vaux's Swifts coming in to roost was also a highlight. The tour visits a great diversity of habitats in northern California and a few of the California birds the groups saw included from top left: Yellow-billed Magpie and White-headed Woodpecker, as well as a Marbled Godwit. (Photos by participant Don Faulkner)



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It's not quite a lion, but the Secretary-bird, below, is certainly one of Kenya's iconic species, and Terry Stevenson's **Kenya Safari Spectacular** tour this fall enjoyed several memorable encounters with this great African bird. A few of the other characteristic birds the group encountered on its journey through much of the southern half of the country are pictured here and include: Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, one of nine hornbill species, at Samburu; a very pretty Gray-headed Kingfisher at Tsavo; and a little Pearl-spotted Owlet at Baringo. (Photos by participant Randy Siebert)



"We wrapped up our **Serra dos Tucanos, Brazil** tour with about 120 taxa endemic to the Atlantic Forest," guide Marcelo Padua writes of his recent tour there. Tucanos is a short tour loaded with great birds with the added bonus of staying at a single location. Four of those 120 endemics enjoyed this year are pictured here, clockwise from top: Itatiaia Spinetail, Pin-tailed Manakin, White-collared Foliage-gleaner gleaning upside down, and Slaty Bristlefront. Those modified feathers you see on the bristlefront's head are there to protect its eyes as it forages in leaf litter. (Photos by guide Marcelo Padua)



Like Kenya, **Galapagos** is a place every one of us would love to visit—we might even feel a little envious of Willy Perez and his recent Galapagos tour group pictured here, relaxing or seawatching aboard their cruising hotel. Many of the islands' birds and mammals can be seen nowhere else, like the Galapagos Hawk and Small Ground-Finch at left. The Waved Albatross gets around more, but nearly every one of them breeds on the island of Espanola, so that's definitely the best place to see them! (Photos by participants Byron Chin & Sid England)



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



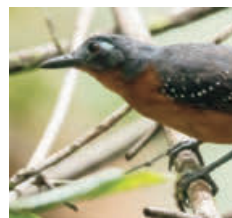
Terry Stevenson's **East Africa Highlights** tour combines the richest birding and mammal spots in Kenya and northern Tanzania, and this summer's tour group—with over 400 bird and 46 mammal species—enjoyed the many sights and sounds of East Africa, from a hippo bathing in a drying river on the Serengeti to African Openbills and Sacred Ibis feeding in a marsh at Tarangire. The tiny Pygmy Falcon, left, is Africa's smallest raptor; a delicate Double-banded Courser in the Serengeti grasslands blends nicely with its surroundings. (Photos by guide Terry Stevenson and participant Eugenia Caldwell)



The weather wasn't perfect for migration on our **Cape May Megan's Way II** tour this year, but this being Cape May, there was still plenty to see, especially when you're with Megan. Immature Broad-winged Hawks, like the one at left, are more common than adults at Cape May, as they're less likely to stick to the ridges and can wander during migration. Contrary to what you might expect, Cape May Warblers are not common in fall, so it was a treat to see this one. And Megan writes that the number of newly emerged Common Buckeyes was staggering, with as many as 60 individuals on a bush! (Photos by guide Cory Gregory)



You can be sure you're in a truly wild place when there are numbers of big bird species in evidence, birds like this fantastic Pale-winged Trumpeter at bottom right, seen often and well by our **Peruvian Rainforests** tour group this summer. And let's not forget the magnificent Harpy, above the trumpeter (what, another Harpy?), a species that requires large tracts of intact rainforest to survive. Manakins are another attraction of the rainforest, and that's a pretty Band-tailed above, one of the several manakin possibilities from this year's tour, and a female Plumbeous Antbird showing herself fleetingly. (Photos by participant Eric VanderWerf)





The unmistakable face of a Montezuma Quail suggests that we're somewhere in Mexico or the American Southwest, and we are, on one of our **Arizona's Second Spring** tours, timed to coincide with the late summer rains—excellent this year, according to guides John Coons and Doug Gochfeld. (Megan Edwards Crewe guided the first tour.) The Tufted Flycatcher, above the quail, was something of a surprise for both groups. A Mexican and Central American species, it's only been seen in the area for a couple of years now. Other, more predictable sights included Violet-crowned Hummingbird and the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in flight above. (Photos by participants James Lee & Daphne Tsui)



On the other side of the continent, Chris Benesh and Doug Gochfeld and their **Newfoundland & Nova Scotia** tour group enjoyed a close encounter with this Barred Owl, easily voted bird of the trip! The gannet colony at Cape St. Mary's with the birds sometimes at arm's length and courtship behavior and downy young at various stages is a great draw of the trip, as are the thousands of Atlantic Puffins on the breeding islands in Witless Bay. (Photos by guide Doug Gochfeld)



Machu Picchu is one of the most spectacular archaeological sites in the world, and the photo at far right, from a participant on Jesse Fagan's **Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru** tour this summer, provides a glimpse of the workmanship and the grandeur of the ruins. And at the risk of gilding the lily, the subtropical slopes below the ruins are very good for birds—this Andean Cock-of-the-rock, for instance—while birding the high pass at Abra Malaga brings a different set of birds. The endemic Rusty-fronted Canastero is just one of the many Peruvian endemics we might encounter. (Photos by participants Jeanne Ryan, Bonnie Schwartz & Pete Peterman)



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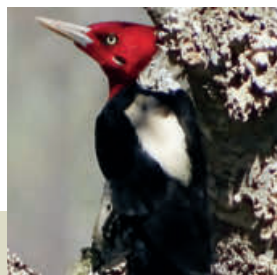
FRESH FROM THE FIELD



It's hard to go wrong on a tour that combines gourmet food, fine wine, spectacular scenery, and plenty of birds: our **France: Camargue & Pyrenees** tours, this year guided by Megan Edwards Crewe and Tom Johnson on the first departure, and Jay VanderGaast and Dave Stejskal on the second. Shown here: colorful Greater Flamingos taking flight over the lagoons of the Camargue, where they are the region's signature bird, and one of our groups birding the Camargue; Eurasian Kestrel, common in the Pyrenees, but wonderful to see this well; and the restored medieval city of Carcassonne, a great picnic stop on the way to the Pyrenees. (Photos by guide Tom Johnson and participant Gloria Turner)



Seeing a pair of handsome Cream-backed Woodpeckers—one here below—was one of the highlights for Dan Lane's **Bolivia's Avian Riches** tour this fall. Seeing four Blue-throated Macaws on the optional extension was wonderful, too, as was traveling through a country with such incredible vistas, as we can see from this photo of the Coroico Road, which winds through the Andes from La Paz down to the city of Coroico. The Red-legged Seriema is a bird of the lowlands near Santa Cruz and always a treat to see, especially standing still. (Photos by guide Dan Lane and participants Dorothy Copp & Brian Stech)



Manu Biosphere Reserve, which our **Mountains of Manu: Peru** tour transects, is one of the world's richest sites for biodiversity; it's estimated that the park itself contains about a 1000 bird species, which is more than are found on several continents! Pictured here is just a tiny selection from our recent tour: From left above, a Common Potoo, blending into his perch and almost invisible even in daylight; a nine-inch hummer; a **Crested** Quetzal showing off its wing coverts and its vibrant colors; and at left, a Grass-green Tanager, among dozens of beautiful tanager species the tour regularly encounters. (Photos by participant Rick Woodruff)

UPCOMING TOURS

For details, please contact our office or check our website.

February 2017

Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge II—February 3-12, 2017 with Mitch Lysinger & local guide. One-site tour to one of the most comfortable lodges in western Amazonia with some of the birdiest canopy platforms anywhere.

NEW/Colombia: Medellin Escape: Andes & Valleys—February 4-13, 2017 with Richard Webster & local guide. Rich forests from the foothills to treetops are accessed from good country hotels and comfortable ecotourism lodges at some of Colombia's best private reserves. Many Colombian endemics expected, but the tour is primarily an opportunity to gorge on the birds of the Andes after a short flight across the Caribbean.

Birding Plus/Birds & Wines of Chile and Argentina—February 4-18, 2017 with Marcelo Padua & John Coons. A tour combining an exploration of the great birds and vineyards of these two wonderful countries!

Cambodia: Angkor Temples & Vanishing Birds—February 4-18, 2017 with Phil Gregory. A "last chance" destination for some of the large, rare Asian waterbirds now extinct in neighboring countries, plus additional regional specialties and world-famous Angkor Wat.

Panama's Canopy Tower—February 5-11, 2017 (Canopy Lodge Extension) with Chris Benesh & local guide. A towering introduction to Neotropical birds based entirely at a unique lodge; quick access to famous Pipeline Road.

Mexico: Oaxaca—February 11-18, 2017 with Dan Lane. Superb birding with two dozen Mexican endemics and fascinating ruins while based in lovely Oaxaca City.

Guatemala: Shade-grown Birding—February 11-19, 2017 (Temples of Tikal Extension) with Jesse Fagan. Resplendent Quetzal, a host of hummingbirds, and Azure-rumped Tanager set against a dramatic volcanic landscape and colorful Mayan culture.

Trinidad & Tobago—February 11-20, 2017 with Tom Johnson & local guide. Wonderful introductory tour to South America's riches, including bellbirds, toucans, manakins, and motmots.

NEW/Owlberta: Alberta's Owls & More—February 18-24, 2017 with Jay VanderGaast. A short tour targeting owls and other winter specialties in the boreal forests, prairies, and foothills of the Canadian province of Alberta.

Jamaica I & II—February 26-March 4, 2017 with Jesse Fagan & local guide and March 5-11, 2017 with Eric Hynes & local guide. A quick adventure in search of Jamaica's 27 endemics and numerous regional specialties at Green Castle Estate.

Borneo I—February 28-March 17, 2017 with Megan Edwards Crewe & local guide. Three prime areas in some of Earth's richest forests while based in comfort right in the wild.

March 2017

Colombia: Santa Marta Escape—March 4-12, 2017 with Richard Webster & local guide. An easier subset of "Bogota, the Magdalena Valley & Santa Marta," reached by a direct flight from Miami with a couple more days for a more leisurely approach.

Southwestern Ecuador Specialties: Jocotoco Foundation Reserves—March 4-18, 2017 with Mitch Lysinger. Focuses on the many specialties of the southwest, in particular the very local endemics of the humid foothills and mountains and Tumbesian specialties.

Brazil Nutshell: Intervalles, Iguazu Falls & the Pantanal I & II—March 4-18, 2017 and March 25-April 8, 2017 with Marcelo Padua. This medium-length tour hits three of Brazil's premier birding venues, staying several nights at each to ensure an unhurried pace as we rack up some 400 species of birds.

East Africa Highlights: Kenya & Tanzania—March 4-24, 2017 with Terry Stevenson. Combines the richest birding and mammal spots in Kenya and northern Tanzania: Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, Great Rift Valley, Kakamega Forest, and more. An impressive diversity of habitats, many with spectacular scenery.

Puerto Rico—March 11-17, 2017 with Tom Johnson. A week of respite to a very birdy and beautiful Caribbean island, a mix of North American and local culture and cuisine; 17 endemic birds and a number of other Caribbean specialties.

Spring in South Texas—March 11-19, 2017 with Chris Benesh. Magnificent Whooping Cranes, lots of South Texas specialties, and spring hawk migration on this exciting tour.

Panama's Canopy Tower & Lodge—March 12-19, 2017 with John Coons & local guide. Combining the best of both worlds into a great week—the Canopy Tower and Pipeline Road with the Canopy Lodge and the montane forest of El Valle de Anton.

Ecuador's Wildsumaco Lodge—March 12-22, 2017 with Willy Perez. Exploring the riches of the eastern Andean foothills of northern Ecuador for numerous specialties at Wildsumaco Lodge.

Western Panama: Chiriqui & Bocas del Toro—March 18-27, 2017 with Jesse Fagan. A new tour to two new Panamanian destinations located in the Chiriqui highlands and Caribbean lowlands at Bocas del Toro.

Costa Rica—March 19-April 3, 2017 with Jay VanderGaast. Resplendent Quetzals, Three-wattled Bellbirds, Scarlet Macaws in a beautiful country with easy travel.

Jewels of Ecuador: Hummers, Tanagers & Antpittas II—March 21-April 7, 2017 with Willy Perez. Survey of Andean Ecuador; diverse avifauna dominated by colorful hummers and tanagers and more subtle and haunting antpittas.

Hawaii—March 30-April 8, 2017 with Dan Lane. We'll visit three of the major islands—Oahu, Kauai, and Hawaii—giving us a chance to sample a great portion of the Hawaiian endemic birds and the seabird specialties.

Ghana: Window into West African Birding—March 30-April 18, 2017 with Phil Gregory & local guide. In search of numerous West African specialties as well as White-necked Rockfowl.

April 2017

Bahamas: Endemics & Kirtland's Warbler—April 1-7, 2017 with Jesse Fagan. Small-group tour for four Bahamian endemics, several Caribbean endemics, a few early migrants, Kirtland's Warbler, and a sampling of West Indian butterflies; fun, exciting birding at a relaxed pace.

NEW/Belize: Tropical Birding, Short & Sweet, April 1-8, 2017 with Megan Edwards Crewe. We'll visit two great birding lodges—Lamanai Outpost and Hidden Valley Inn—for a diversity of species in a rich assortment of habitats in this revamp of our longer tour.

Colorado Grouse I & II—April 1-11, 2017 with Chris Benesh & Dave Stejskal or April 9-19, 2017 with Tom Johnson. A short tour to seek out the state's prairie-chicken and grouse species.

Bhutan—April 8-27, 2017 with Richard Webster. Spellbinding birding amidst awe-inspiring landscapes on a journey through the lush forests and mountains of this culturally fascinating Himalayan kingdom.

Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I & II—April 15-21, 2017 or April 22-28, 2017 with John Coons. The migration mecca of High Island plus specialties of the Big Thicket and myriad waterbirds and shorebirds.

Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country—April 22-May 1, 2017 with Chris Benesh & Doug Gochfeld. Colima and Golden-cheeked

warblers, Montezuma Quail, and other southern borderland specialties in Texas's grand desert mountain landscapes.

Hungary & Romania: The Best of Eastern Europe—April 22-May 8, 2017 with Terry Stevenson & local guide. Fabulous birding in some of the most spectacular landscapes of Eastern Europe: the Danube Delta, Carpathian Mountains, Torda Gorge, Hortobagy, and Kiskunsag.

Do the Charleston!: Spring in South Carolina—April 23-29, 2017 with Jesse Fagan. Combines spring migration and a touch of the mountains with lovely and historic Charleston, South Carolina.

Arizona Nightbirds & More I & II—April 27-May 1, 2017 with Tom Johnson or May 4-8, 2017 with Dave Stejskal. A short tour focused on this area's many owl and nightjar specialties.

May 2017

Birding Plus/Irish Spring: Birds, Traditional Music & Pubs—May 4-14, 2017 with Terry McEneaney & Karen McEneaney. The birds, culture, music, and pubs of this beautiful country in spring.

Arizona: Birding the Border I & II—May 5-14, 2017 with John Coons or May 12-21, 2017 with Dave Stejskal. One of the most exciting destinations in North America with a backdrop of spectacular mountain scenery.

Ethiopia: Endemic Birds & Ethiopian Wolf—May 5-25, 2017 (Lalibela Extension) with Richard Webster. A remarkable journey through a remarkable land, from Rift Valley lakes to the Bale Mountains and south for Prince Ruspoli's Turaco and the strange Stresemann's Bush-Crow.

Point Pelee Migration Spectacle I & II—May 6-13, 2017 or May 13-20, 2017 with Jay VanderGaast. Exciting migration birding at several premier hotspots on the Lake Erie shore.

Spain: La Mancha, Coto Donana & Extremadura—May 6-18, 2017 with Chris Benesh & local guide. To La Mancha, famous Coto Donana, Extremadura, and the Gredos Mountains for some of Europe's best birding.

Spring in Cape May—May 14-20, 2017 with Tom Johnson & Doug Gochfeld. Spring migration at one of the country's famed birding hotspots.

NEW/Pennsylvania's Warblers & More: From Cerulean Warbler to Henslow's Sparrow—May 23-28, 2017 with Tom Johnson & Doug Gochfeld. A new tour at the peak of eastern spring birding, focusing on a delightful array of warblers as well as other songbirds.

Maine: Birding Downeast—May 27-June 4, 2017 with Eric Hynes. A late-spring tour for warblers, boreal specialties, puffins, "lobstah," and more.

This year marked the 32nd year of tours for Field Guides, and the retirement—after forty-plus years of guiding tours—of two of our much-loved founders and guides, the Grebe (Rose Ann Rowlett) and the Peppershrike (John Rowlett). Between them, they've guided hundreds of birding tours, mostly to the Neotropics but on all continents. Both are looking forward to spending more time at home but plan to continue to guide an occasional tour here and there.

At our annual business meeting in August, we marked their retirement with a celebration filled with laughter and tears. Many of us had stories to tell, but the highlight of the evening was listening to Bret recalling his first meeting and his first tours with Grebe and Pepper.

Grebe

Perhaps my strongest or most deeply engrained memory of Grebe is that of meeting her for the first

time. It was 10 April 1979, in Austin. I was scrubbing out some coolers in the front yard, and I remember that there was a mockingbird

singing its head off. A car pulled up to the curb and a tall, bespectacled, short-haired woman with an enormous, radiant smile got out and walked up to me, arms open, saying “*You must be Bret!*” I stood up and she gave me a big hug. I had no idea who she was or how important she would be in my life, but I sure did like her, immediately. I had never in my 23 years met a person completely out of nowhere who gave me a hug as if I’d known her forever.

The first of many tours I led with the Grebe was on the Texas coast, in April 1980. We pulled up to a plowed field, and she explained that we’d be seeing Attwater’s Prairie-Chickens displaying at a lek under the barbed-wire fence on the other side of the field—but the birds weren’t there. The Grebe was absolutely blown away, but assured everyone, “They’re here every day, keep watching.” But, for some reason, that morning they didn’t show up. As we were leaving, she whispered to me that it was simply unbelievable that those chickens had not been there, that they must have been flushed by a coyote or something.

It was great fun, and I was very impressed with the Grebe. She had a couple of Texas birds cassette tapes that she carried in a small pouch on her belt. The birds were listed on the back in her beautiful handwriting, and she explained that she had combined her own recordings and those from other



Tikal, Guatemala 1987



With Richard Webster in Brazil 2015

sources onto the cassettes. (Note to self: Do it the Grebe’s way!) And this sums up a great deal of what tour leading has been for me. Much of my development from a young birder into a professional tour leader was under the loving tutelage of the Grebe. She was always great with me about talking through the upcoming plans for that day, or the next, and explaining what we needed to do to make it all work smoothly. Though I was the new guide, I always felt like I was working with her, not for her. Maybe even more importantly, I learned a great deal about “people skills” from the Grebe. She was patient and kind to everyone, always. She went out of her way to engage tour participants, and she was such a great listener. I continue to deeply admire these qualities in Rose Ann. She and Pepper are among the kindest, most understanding people I have ever known.

—Bret Whitney

Pepper

It was several more years, though, before I led a tour with the Peppershrike. We finally teamed up to do Palenque and the Yucatan, and I was really happy to be going into the field with Rose Ann's brother, the Peppershrike, the guy who had found the first Rufous-capped Warbler in the US. Before the tour with Pepper, I think I was expecting some sort of mix of the experienced guy birders I knew and the Grebe, with quite a bit of beer. Except for the beer, that's not at all what happened. Pepper was totally, completely different from any other birder I had ever met. In fact he was very different from any other person I had met. Everything seemed to be more leisurely and relaxed, but we saw tons of birds, and I was tremendously impressed with his knowledge of bird sounds. I learned a lot of Mexican bird vocalizations on that first tour, and I was introduced to Peppershrike the Philosopher. One night at the lodge, Pepper and I stayed up late drinking beers, delving into all sorts of philosophical subjects, birding and non-birding. I really loved it. I was a bit hung-over the next morning, but Pepper was perfect, beaming broadly over a cup of coffee as he chatted with the folks on the tour.

Back in about 1993, I was co-leading a Churchill tour with Pepper. We were a few days into the tour, in southern Manitoba, at Riding Mountain National Park. There had been a recent burn, and we were slowly cruising through it, windows down, watching and listening for three-toed woodpeckers. As we came around a bend in the road, we spotted a Great Gray Owl. A few folks saw it pretty well, but it flew off quickly. We got out to see if we could find it again. After a few minutes of scanning with no luck, I said to Pepper, "Squeak him in, Pep!" For those of you who have never heard it, the Peppershrike's squeak is the



Alta Floresta, Brazil 1996



With local guide in Panama 2015

absolute standard, the best, most alluring squeak in the business. I had witnessed it bring birds to their tibiotarsi several times, whether a passel of passerines expecting to find a hapless rodent or lagomorph in the talons of a Goshawk, or the predator itself roaring in to take wounded prey. Pepper's squeak is, in a word, irresistible. He said, "AIII-RIIIIGH!" and put his left hand up to his mouth. Just a few squeaks later, I spotted the owl coming straight at us behind a bank of spruces. It stopped somewhere out of sight, but we got the group ready in case it came in further, everyone holding dead still. Pep squeaked a couple of more times, and that huge bird lifted over the trees and flew in 100 yards, gliding in the last 50, to land right in front of us. It sat there for a few seconds, staring yellowly, then flew back over the trees, out of sight. It was awesome, just blew everybody away. Like all of us, I've experienced hundreds—probably thousands—of fabulous moments on tours, but that one, Pepper squeaking that Great Gray up from hundreds of yards out, is definitely near the top for me.

—Bret Whitney



Field Guides 1991: Back row—Jan Pierson (Gannet), Dave Stejskal (Roadrunner), John Arvin (Tinamou), John Rowlett (Peppershrike). Front row—John Coons (Kingfisher), Bret Whitney (Kite), Chris Benesh (Solitaire), Rose Ann Rowlett (Grebe).

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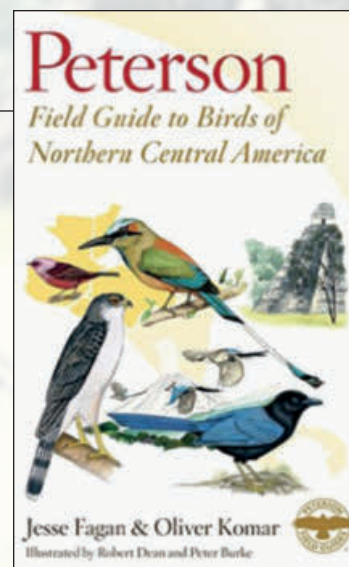
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Jesse's New Field Guide

It's out at last, the wonderful—and truly field-sized—*Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Northern Central America* by our own “Motmot,” Jesse Fagan. A big congrats to Jesse and his co-author Oliver Komar and illustrators Robert Dean and Peter Burke! And, of course, we look forward to putting it to use very soon in the field on our upcoming Field Guides *Guatemala: Shade-grown Birding* and *Belize: Tropical Birding Short & Sweet* tours in early 2017.



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