

ITINERARY

BELIZE: Tropical Birding, Short and Sweet

March 23 – 30, 2019



*The Keel-billed Toucan is a quintessential tropical bird, and one we'll see around the Mayan ruins of Lamanai.
Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2019 Belize tour:

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

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

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

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

We'll begin the tour at the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, which has a simple, yet elegant, main building and comfortable thatched cabañas perched on the shores of Crab-catcher Lagoon, part of the largest body of fresh water in Belize. The lodge sits less than a mile from the Mayan ruins of Lamanai, an extensive, largely unexcavated site that sprawls along the western shore of the lagoon; on several days, we'll take a quick boat trip along the lagoon to get to the site. The ruins house a rich assortment of birds typically found in the tropical hardwood forests of western Belize and the Petén region of Guatemala – Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Pale-billed, Chestnut-colored, and Golden-olive woodpeckers, Rufous-

tailed Jacamar, Slaty-tailed, Black-headed and Gartered trogons, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Black-cowled Oriole, Blue Bunting and the diminutive Tody Motmot are just a few of the many species we'll seek here. The village of Indian Church lies just down the road from the lodge. Here, open *milpas* (agricultural fields) and second-growth scrub are home to an assortment of birds not found in the forest, including (with some luck) the attractive Black-throated (Yucatan) Bobwhite. Interspersed among these other habitats are tracts of savanna with a different set of interesting birds, including seldom-encountered Yellow-headed Parrots, White-tailed Hawk, Buff-bellied and Azure-crowned hummingbirds, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay, Gray-throated Chat, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Botteri's and Grasshopper sparrows, and the impressive Jabiru. And, of course, the lagoon and its tributaries are home to another suite of birds, including Limpkin, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed and Agami herons, Sungrebe, and Black Catbird.

Our trip takes on a whole new flavor when we transfer to our next base: Hidden Valley Inn on the Mountain Pine Ridge in south-central Belize. Here, dry Caribbean Pine forest dominates, with more humid, tropical vegetation restricted to river courses and draws. The pine forest is home to a group of birds perhaps unexpected in Belize—Rusty Sparrow, Grace's Warbler, Cabanis's Wren, and Acorn Woodpecker, to name a few. From viewpoints high above the adjacent countryside (including the overlook for the evocatively named Thousand Foot Falls), we'll scan cliffs for King Vulture and the rare Orange-breasted Falcon. The humid valley forests host a high diversity of species, many already mentioned above, but including tinamous, forest-falcons, trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, many flycatchers, Black-faced (Mayan) Antthrush, Dusky Antbird, Gray-collared Becard, and more. Hidden Valley Inn is located in a very strategic spot to take advantage of these habitats—we can see a number of these species right on the grounds, but we can just as easily take a quick ride to nearby sites that will offer us more chances for great birding. The inn itself is comfortable and luxurious, and the grounds always seem to have something to see just outside our rooms.



This juvenile Bare-throated Tiger-Heron nicely illustrates why these birds are called "tiger-herons". These mid-sized herons are found in coastal areas from Mexico through Central America. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: The habitats we visit on this trip are so rich that it really pays off to be out early and beat the midday heat. With that in mind, we start at 6:00 a.m. most days (after coffee and muffins), come back for a late breakfast (between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. or so) and then bird again until lunch. On most days, we'll take a longer break after lunch, then head back out for the late afternoon. With few exceptions, we'll be walking on excellent packed dirt trails. Generally, there isn't much elevation change, but there are a few walks on the Mountain Pine Ridge that require going up and down a steep grade for a short distance. While the distance will vary from day to day, we will typically walk several miles in the morning and usually shorter trails in the afternoon. Our boat rides at Lamani will last for approximately 2-3 hours, depending on the trip. Throughout the tour, it will be important to keep yourself well hydrated, and to carry electrolytes – even on days when we're out of the direct sun. If you would like extra rest, it's possible to stay back for part or all of the day on all but our transfer days. We'll use a small plane to transfer between lodges, to avoid having to spend most of the day on the road. If you are uncertain whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas



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

Hidden Valley Inn—Dry Caribbean Pine forest dominates the Mountain Pine Ridge, where our second hotel sits, with

more humid, tropical vegetation restricted to river courses and draws. From viewpoints high above the adjacent countryside, we'll scan the cliffs for King Vulture and the rare Orange-breasted Falcon. Our lodge's extensive property is also home to a small population of Stygian Owl (though their numbers have declined precipitously following several recent fires), and we'll hope to find one of these poorly-known owls during our stay. Other bird species that we may encounter include Plain Chachalaca, White-fronted Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-whiskered Puffbird, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Lineated and Pale-billed woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, White-collared Manakin, Piratic Flycatcher, Yellow-green Vireo, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Crimson-collared Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-backed and Yellow-tailed orioles, and Yellow-throated Euphonia.

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

Itinerary For Belize

Day 1, Sat, 23 Mar. Flight to Belize City; transfer to Lamanai. You should plan to arrive at the international airport in Belize City before 3:30 p.m. We'll arrange for two group transfers to Lamanai Outpost Lodge – typically one in the early afternoon and the other in the late afternoon. If you arrive early, feel free to go in to the restaurant which is upstairs by the waving gallery—take your binoculars as several interesting birds are sometimes seen around the airstrip, including Cinnamon Hummingbird, Short-tailed Hawk and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. If you are hungry, the chicken and rice dish is great!

Once assembled, you'll be taken by bus and boat (weather and water levels permitting) to Lamanai Outpost Lodge, heading northwest out of Belize City along the Northern Highway. The drive from the airport to the boat launch typically takes about an hour, and it's another hour or so by boat down the New River—watching for the likes of Boat-billed Heron, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Northern Jacana, Lesser Nighthawk, and Sungrebe along the way. Your guide will join each transfer for the river portion of the trip. Be sure to have a hat and sunscreen for the boat trip, as well as a windproof outer layer (it may be cooling off by the time you approach the lodge) and your binoculars. Night at Lamanai Outpost Lodge.

Days 2-4, Sun-Tue, 24-26 Mar. Lamani Outpost Lodge. We'll have three full days to explore the varied habitats around our lodge. Each morning, we'll depart the lodge about 6:00 a.m. (having first fortified ourselves with coffee and muffins) and spend several hours birding – either in second growth areas around Indian Church, some forested areas near the lodge, or the palm savanna on the other side of the lagoon. We'll return for a proper breakfast between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., then will head out for the remainder of the morning, either to the nearby ruins site, the flat open farmland of nearby "Mennonite country" or along one of the lagoon's tributaries. We'll return to the lodge as the day heats up, for lunch and a bit of a siesta. As the temperatures cool in the late afternoon, we'll venture out again, either checking forest and second growth areas around Indian Church, or heading out onto the waters of the New Lagoon. We'll take one "sunset cruise", enjoying cocktails and nibbles as we bird along the shores watching the sun sink towards the horizon, and we'll head out for one "spotlight safari" to see what we can find on the water after dark. We'll also offer at least one (and maybe more) land-based owling options.

Day 5, Wed, 27 Mar. Lamani to Hidden Valley Inn. After a final morning's birding around the Lamanai Outpost Lodge, we'll have lunch, then transfer by air to our next base at Hidden Valley Inn; the flight, on a small chartered plane, should take about 20 minutes. We'll arrive in time for an afternoon walk on the extensive grounds of our hotel, where a host of new birds awaits; Plain Chachalaca, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Grace's Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, Yellow-backed Oriole, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and Rusty Sparrow are a few of the species we'll be on the lookout for around our cabins. On at least one of the nights that we're here, we'll do some nightbirding in an attempt to connect with the rare Stygian Owl. There are likely to be small, biting black flies around, so be sure to have some repellent – and perhaps a long-sleeved shirt – with you! Night at Hidden Valley Inn.



We'll look for White-fronted Parrots near Hidden Valley Inn. Photograph by participant Johanne Charbonneau.

Day 6, Thu, 28 Mar. Rio Frio Caves/Thousand Foot Falls/King Vulture Falls. After an early breakfast, we'll drive roughly 40 minutes to the Rio Frio Cave road, a dirt track that meanders gently downhill, cutting through some very birdy tropical forest on its way to its terminus at a pretty little river. We'll spend the morning walking here, finishing with a short tour of the vast cave the river has carved through one of the area's hills. After lunch and a bit of a siesta at our lodge, we'll head out again later in the afternoon to visit some of the fantastic vistas of the Pine Ridge, such as Thousand Foot Falls and King Vulture Falls, where a pair of Orange-breasted Falcons has long bred and King Vultures gather to roost for the night. Night at Hidden Valley Inn.

Day 7, Fri, 29 Mar. Mountain Pine Ridge. After another early breakfast, we'll venture out to several areas within a half hour or so from our lodgings (some on the extensive grounds of the lodge itself). Feeders at a nearby butterfly ranch may bring as many as 13 species of hummingbirds (as well as a variety of other species) into view, and we'll make a stop at the Slate Creek overlook – a raptor watchpoint where we have another chance at some of the region's special raptors. Past trips have also found such treats at Lovely Cotinga here, so it's worth spending some time! Following lunch at the ranch and a bit of a break, we'll head out again to see what else we can find on the hotel's extensive grounds.

Day 8, Sat, 30 Mar. Departure. After a final early morning's birding around our lodge and a final breakfast together, we'll return to Belize City in time to connect with our flights home. **Please arrange for flights no earlier than 12:00 noon.**

About Your Guide

Dave Stejskal's love of birds and birding began at the age of nine near his childhood home in Phoenix. After teenage years consumed by birding and basketball, he went on to graduate with a degree in biology from the University of Arizona in Tucson, the desert city he and his wife, Julie Hecimovich, call home.

Dave was co-editor for the Southwest Region report in *American Birds/Audubon Field Notes* for nearly 12 years, has served for many years on the Arizona Bird Records Committee, and has a solid reputation as one of the outstanding field birders in the Southwest and elsewhere. He is particularly skilled at identifying birds by their songs and calls and is eager to share his knowledge with others. Since he guided his first professional birding tour with Field Guides in 1985, his nearly 300 tours have taken him north to arctic Alaska, south to Tierra del Fuego (guiding tours in nearly every country in between), to Madagascar, and across the Pacific to Thailand and Vietnam as well as Papua New Guinea and Australia, and his enthusiasm for finding and watching birds has proven to be contagious. Dave has been guiding tours throughout Southeast Asia, Borneo, and the Philippines for many years. He's guided seven prior Borneo tours for Field Guides and very much looks forward to getting back to Borneo every year!

*"Dave S. is a truly excellent guide. Given that birding tours are often like summer camp for adults, he is an outstanding camp counselor."
C. H., Borneo*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for Dave's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3975 from Belize City
DEPOSIT: \$400 per person
FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 23, 2018
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$900
LIMIT: 8

Other Things You Need to Know

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

DOCUMENTS: A current passport valid for the length of your stay is necessary for US citizens to enter Belize. We recommend that your passport be valid for at least 6 months beyond the dates of your visit, as regulations vary from country to country, and are subject to change. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Belize consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

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

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

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

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

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$3975 for one person in double occupancy from Belize City. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 8, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader. Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

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

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$900. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$400** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by November 23, 2018. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 Mar 18 – MEC
6/18 peg