As we write this, a few weeks before you’ll read it, both you and we are recording FOYs (firsts-of-the-year!). It might be the phoebe that magically reappeared and starts calling insistently near last year’s nest. Or perhaps the peent of a nighthawk suddenly overhead as you step outside...or the first sighting of a flock of peeps just back from distant Tierra del Fuego. Back in early January, by custom, we celebrated the New Year. Yet we birders know that our year truly begins with the pulse of birds moving northward after a long winter. It never gets old and never ceases to delight, that unpredictable progression of visual and audio surprises after months of absence. Just yesterday, “our” local Merlin chattered from a distant treetop—and we had to smile.

Our Field Guides calendar of course runs through all months of the year, yet we too have a spring ritual: this issue featuring the full Field Guides schedule for next year. Yes, it has been online on our website for some time now, and we’ve let you know in advance about various new tours on offer. But our hard-working Scheduling Committee (thanks, Peggy, Dave, Megan, Ruth, and Doug!) has been tweaking all the details, adding some extra tours, and making sure our guides are in all the right places. And so, on pages 2-3, you’ll find a listing of our 150-plus 2020 tours. To what in particular might we draw your attention? Suriname (Jan) and Taiwan (Feb) and Southern India (Nov) are back in our schedule. Central Mexico & Baja (Birds, Whales & Butterflies) along with Myanmar (both Feb) appear for the first time. Roraima Adventure (Brazil) moves to April, while Michigan: Great Lakes Grandeur (May) fills in a long-hoped-for spot on the spring map. In the meantime, Southern Africa Spectacular (Jul) and South Africa: Birds, Wines & Wildflowers (late Aug) have drawn a lot of interest.

We’re reveling in spring, of course, on tours from Colorado, Texas, and Arizona to Florida, Cape May, and Alaska. Beyond that, we look forward to settling into our diverse schedule of more than 130 distinct itineraries spanning the globe. And we very much look forward to seeing you out in the field, some time, somewhere!
2020 looks to be a busy year for Field Guides, with 150-plus departures to destinations around the globe. For full details of individual tours, including complete itineraries and trip lists from past tours, visit our web site. And if you have any questions, please email us or call our Austin office. We look forward to hearing from you.
Celebrating Christmas on our **Holiday Costa Rica** tour is a great way to observe the season. The emblematic Snowcap (top left) is one of the stars of Costa Rican birding and certainly was on our two recent trips; our lodge for the tour is one of the best places to see them. Other welcome sights and sounds included more hummers (this Green-breasted Mango at near left among twenty-plus others); Black-faced Solitaire, middle above, a bird not always seen but whose haunting song is one of the joys of cloudforest birding; Ornate Hawk-Eagle, with the sun shining through its primaries; and at far left, an unexpected Blue-and-gold Tanager, a bird found only in Costa Rica and Panama. (Photos by guide Cory Gregory)

Our **Costa Rica: Birding the Edges** tour with Tom Johnson is split into two parts, The Deep South (I) and The Far North (II), the “edges” of this very birdy country. Shown here, our group from Part II watching for a bird of interest to emerge. At far right, also from the second tour, a stately Black Guan, a Chiriqui endemic restricted to the highlands of western Panama and Costa Rica. Tom notes in his report that the tour is a good one for hummingbirds, with thirty species on the first section alone, including such gems as this White-crested Coquette feeding on purple verbena. Another sight for Part I participants was a spotless White Hawk perched low in the forest. (Photos by participants Alison Van Keuren, Ron Majors, Jean Rigden, and Mary Trombley)

John Coons’s **Panama’s Canopy Tower & Lodge** tour in March combined stays at two rich sites, the lowlands of central Panama and the montane forests to the west. The handsome Semiplumbeous Hawk at right, nicely perched along Pipeline Road, is one of several raptor species we encountered at both locales, including a large group of migrating Broad-wings in the west. White-necked Jacobin, left of the hawk, was common at the Tower feeders and provided some excitement for the group, which watched as a Tiny Hawk swooped in and grabbed a Jacobin for lunch! We also saw Spotted Antbird, feeding in a mixed flock that included Bicolored Antbird among others, while we spotted Orange-bellied Trogon (a female here), a foothill species of limited range, near the Lodge. (Photos by participant Jody Gillespie)
Birding Panama’s western foothills with Chris Benesh on his *Panama’s Canopy Lodge* tour sounds like the perfect way to spend the New Year. Our holiday group—shown here with Chris (fourth from right) and local guide Tino Sanchez (at left)—enjoyed near-perfect weather and saw a wonderful assortment of birds. The outgoing Barred Antshrike, at right, and the Spectacled Owl next to it were the most popular birds of the trip. The little Tody Motmot to the right of the group is the smallest of the motmots and not always easy to see, though this year there were scope views for all. White-ruffed Manakin is a cloudforest species the group encountered several times in the mountains. (Photos by participant Robert McNab and guide Chris Benesh)

Shown here, from Bret Whitney and Marcelo Barreiros’s *Nowhere But Northeast Brazil* tour are some of the rarest birds in the world, as well as some very striking ones. First up, Indigo (Lear’s) Macaws, here flying past, but also seen well and at length at their nest holes by the tour group. It is estimated that about 450 pairs of these magnificent birds exist in the world, all of them nesting in the redrock canyon region of Brazil. A handsome Sao Francisco Sparrow peeks out at the group, and the poorly known White-collared Kite—its range restricted to just two Brazilian states—soars into view; below the kite, a lovely Striated Softtail, seen on the extension to Southern Bahia; and finally, WOW, the recently described Araripe Manakin, among the most distinctly plumaged of all the manakins—and that’s saying something to be sure. (Photos by participant Holger Teichmann)

Pictured here, a sampling of the many perennial Oaxaca favorites that Dan Lane and Cory Gregory and their tour group enjoyed seeing this February. It’s a colorful bunch, with perhaps Orange-breasted Bunting leading the pack; the bunting is a Mexican endemic that Dan Lane once described as looking like it had been “tie-died,” which is pretty accurate for a bird that seems to have color everywhere. Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo (at right), one of the most colorful of its group, and Golden-browed Warbler are studies of similar colors in different places. And bringing some restraint to the vignette, a pretty Blue Mockingbird, another Mexican endemic. (Photos by guides Dan Lane & Cory Gregory)
HIGHLANDS: TOUR TIPS
You’ve heard about the Andes forever, the rich diversity of birds (mixed flocks!), the breathtaking landscapes, unique and ancient cultures. Whether you’re a veteran visitor or ready to take that first plunge, we have a mountain tour and a guide to fit you.

• First-timers: You’ll really enjoy a tour based at a single lodge or perhaps two lodges, where you’ll have more leisure to get to know the birds well, without travel during the stay.

• Next up? Once you’ve gotten to know the families of birds pretty well, a survey tour that covers more ground will challenge and thrill you as you see the way changes in elevations and habitat drive bird speciation.

• Beyond the survey: If you want a sharp focus on specialties and endemics, we have several itineraries covering areas particularly rich in birds with limited distributions.

COLOMBIA: Cali Escape • Medellin Escape

ECUADOR: Holiday at San Isidro Lodge • Wildsumaco Lodge • Cloudforests of Ecuador • Jewels of Ecuador • Montane Ecuador • Southwestern Ecuador Specialties • Southeastern Ecuador Specialties

PERU: Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga • Peru’s Magnetic North • Mountains of Manu • Northern Peru: Endemics Galore • Central Peruvian Endemics

Clockwise highland images from upper left: Andean Cock-of-the-rock; Black-capped Tanager; Crimson-mantled Woodpecker; Torrent Duck; Lanceolated Monklet; Crowned Wood nymph; Sword-billed Hummingbird; Jocotoco Antpittas; Antisana Volcano; Chestnut-breasted Coronet; guide Willy Perez with one of our groups in Ecuador’s highlands; Toucan Barbet; ruins of Machu Picchu. Photos by our guides and by participants Benedict de Laender, Gregg Recer, Cathy Douglas, Doug Bailey, Kathy Brown, C.V. Vick, Paul Bisson, and Bob Speare.
LOWLANDS: TOUR TIPS
The Amazon drainage basin is the world’s largest, and the river is the world’s greatest by any measure. The name conjures visions of primeval forests, flocks of macaws, and great gangs of antbirds. In addition to our offerings in Guyana, Suriname, and the Brazilian Amazon, we have three tours that approach the Amazon from the west, two in Ecuador and one in Peru. Off the coast of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands are another alternative to mountain birding, and we tour here in an ultra-comfortable yacht.

• First-timers: Try our Ecuador tours based at Sacha Lodge or Shiripuno Lodge—or come on out to the Galapagos.

• Next up? You’ll be in heaven on Rainforests of the Tambopata, a survey tour that stays in three super-comfortable lodges.

HIGHLANDS & LOWLANDS
We currently offer three tours in Colombia that showcase marvelous mixtures of highland and lowland avifaunas, a remarkable cross-section of South American birds that’s perfect for those who prize diversity in the checklist.

Our short Santa Marta Escape takes you from the flamingo-studded Caribbean to the almost treeless high ridges of the Santa Marta Mountains and back again. For the more experienced, Bogota, Magdalena Valley & Santa Marta expands this itinerary to the south, while the Llanos & More tour gets into vast, beautiful wetlands, safari style. Also note that many tours can be combined to run consecutively—our website and office staff can fill you in on the details!
One of the features of our Cambodia: Angkor Temples & Vanishing Birds tour with Phil Gregory (handing off to Doug Goichfeld in 2020)—is the opportunity to see—along with the astonishing Angkor temples—a number of very rare waterbirds the likes of Giant and White-shouldered Ibis. This year’s group was fortunate to see the White-shouldered (at left) on the ground with two juveniles at the nest. Greater Flameback, one of about a dozen woodpeckers on the tour, is, with its electric yellow-orange back, true to its name. Our group saw Oriental Pied-Hornbills regularly. Babblers are not always easy to see, so it was nice to have this pretty Puff-throated out in the open. (Photos by participant Becky Hansen)

Borneo is known both for its strange and beautiful birds and charismatic mammals—Orangutans, Proboscis Monkeys, and Pygmy Elephants are a few of the mammals we see regularly, but there are others that are rarely encountered, like this Clouded Leopard that our recent tour was lucky enough to cross paths with. And as for the birds, there were some stunners, including three shown here—Black-and-red Broadbill (below the leopard), Whitehead’s Trogon (center), and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker at far right. The more delicately colored Striped Wren-Babbler is a pleasure to see so well. (Photos by participant Myles McNally)

A few of the sights from Phil Gregory’s Japan in Winter tour in Jan/Feb included, from top left: a close view of Steller’s Sea-Eagle, one of the largest raptors in the world—it’s a handsome brute; a Great Spotted Woodpecker that conveniently stopped by a feeder; a classic Red-crowned Crane dancing on snow at the crane reserve at Tsurui—a birding highlight; a red-faced Snow Monkey, a species endemic to Japan that on winter mornings comes in from the forest where they spend the night, to bathe in the warm waters of the onsens, or hot springs; and a pair of Ural Owls at a day roost. (Photos by participant Becky Hansen)
You can imagine some of the sights on Jay VanderGaast’s recent Thailand tour when Black-and-yellow Broadbill (top middle) comes in second for bird of the tour—Spoon-billed Sandpiper, an extremely rare wader with an unusual spatulate bill, was first. The brilliantly colored Scarlet-faced Liocichla, to the right of the broadbill, is seen in northern Thailand along the Myanmar border; the equally brilliant Hume’s Pheasant was kind to us—our group saw it out in the open displaying on the road. Finally, this Brahminy Kite got a little too close to the Great Egret trying to spear the troublemaker with its bill. (Photos by participant Benedict de Laender and guide Jay VanderGaast)

As your eyes land on this majestic Tiger, it’s clear these photos could be from nowhere else but Terry Stevenson’s Northern India tour. (Terry was joined on this year’s tour by Tom Johnson.) The Painted Spurfowl, left of the Tiger, is more often heard than seen and can only be seen in India. Greater Yellownape, at far left—there’s only one—is a striking woodpecker. The Orange-bellied Leafbird, which would make any day better, was seen outside Corbett NP on a day that according to Terry was filled with colorful sightings. And finally, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch showing its typical upside-down nuthatch position. (Photos by guide Tom Johnson)

“Thousands upon thousands of Sandhill Cranes and geese lifting into the dawn sky, and rosy-finches swirling through the thin air at ten thousand feet,” is how Cory Gregory describes our inaugural New Mexico: Birding the Land of Enchantment tour he co-led in late January with Doug Gochfeld. Two cranes shown here at sunset. A visit to a rosy-finch banding station that allowed for up-close views of all three species of rosy-finch was another highlight. As you can see from the photo, tour participants were able to help release some of the birds—here participant Caryn Throop releases a Gray-crowned. A few of the other sights we enjoyed included good numbers of Ferruginous Hawks and this good-looking female Red-naped Sapsucker. (Photos by guides Doug Gochfeld and Cory Gregory)

Check our web site for 2020 dates!
A Bearded Bellbird, mouth wide open belting out its loud call (claimed by some to sound like a bell) is one of the characteristic sights and sounds of Trinidad that our groups and their guides, Dan Lane and Doug Gochfeld, enjoyed on our recent Trinidad & Tobago tours. Trogons, like the Guianan Trogon at right, are an accommodating group of birds because once spotted, they will often sit quietly so that they can be easily observed. Trinidad & Tobago have their share of small birds as well; Asa Wright Nature Centre, where we spend six nights, is famous for its gardens, which attract the likes of this frilly Tufted Coquette. Blue-backed Manakin is a welcome sight that can be had only on Tobago. (Photos by participant Duane Morse and guides Dan Lane & Doug Gochfeld)

Chris Benesh reports that one of the highlights of his January South Texas Rarities tour was seeing not just one, but two male Hook-billed Kites at Bentsen State Park. With only a few individuals present along the entire Rio Grande Valley corridor, the kites are often difficult to find—but not this year. Roseate Spoonbills are much easier on a guide and a delight to see. Our group pauses for a moment at a site overlooking the tranquil Rio Grande. Nearby, they spotted the Audubon’s Oriole at left. Primarily a coastal Mexican species, the oriole reaches the US only here in far southern Texas. (Photos by guide Chris Benesh)

Antarctica is the ultimate frontier for exploration and discovery on our planet. Doug Gochfeld’s recent tour there visited the Antarctic Peninsula as well as South Georgia and the Falklands, and along the way saw a diverse array of wildlife, including penguins of half-a-dozen species. It’s a glorious sight to watch Macaroni Penguins porpoising or “flying” across the deep blue ocean water; and this King Penguin certainly looks like royalty. A young, leucistic Antarctic Fur Seal offers its opinion of the photographer, or perhaps just wants to make a point about life in general. The group saw three or four of these pale ones, described by Doug as “one in ten thousand” seals. And some of our tour group took a break to commune with a nearby Snowy Sheathbill. (Photos by guide Doug Gochfeld)
A selection of upcoming 2019 tours with space available

JULY
2 Papua New Guinea with Jay VanderGaast
3 Alta Floresta & the Northern Pantanal, Brazil with Marcelo Padua & Marcelo Barreiros
13 Wild Kenya with Terry Stevenson
15 Coudforests of Ecuador with Willy Perez
16 Borneo II with Dave Stejskal
17 Arizona’s Second Spring with John Coons

AUGUST
2 Brazil: Parrots & Cotingas — The Mighty Mouth of the Amazon with Marcelo Padua
3 Arizona’s Second Spring with Chris Benesh

SEPTEMBER
4 France: Camargue & Pyrenees with Jay VanderGaast & Willy Perez
4 Oregon: From the Coast to the Cascades with Cory Gregory & Doug Gochfeld
5 Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierra with Tom Johnson & Micah Riegner
9 Maine in Fall with Eric Hynes
10 Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierra with Chris Benesh
21 Fall for Cape May with Cory Gregory & Micah Riegner
21 Safari Brazil: The Pantanal & More with Marcelo Padua & Dan Lane
29 Fall for Cape May with Tom Johnson

OCTOBER
5 Alaska Fall Goldmine: Part Two: Ross’s Gulls in Barrow with Doug Gochfeld
11 Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru with Dan Lane
12 Brazil’s Rio Roosevelt with Bret Whitney & Marcelo Barreiros
22 Australia, Part II with John Coons & Doug Gochfeld
23 Brazil: Roraima Adventure with Micah Riegner & Tom Johnson
24 Serra dos Tucanos, Brazil with Marcelo Padua

See our web site for complete information.
CONSERVATION Field Guides contributes to a number of conservation organizations, including most recently Rainforest Trust, to preserve habitat for Neotropical birds.