

# fieldguides®

B I R D I N G T O U R S W O R L D W I D E

## Amazonian Riches-Iquitos, Peru: Canopy Walkways & Ancient Forests

by Dave Stejskal

Impressive roots on tropical tree in Iquitos [Photo by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]

**M**onitoring upstream in an aluminum speedboat from the river city of Iquitos, Peru on the huge Amazon, we've got some time to consider where we are and what makes this place and this tour so special. Looking to either side of the river—a considerable distance from our boat's position in the middle of the river—we see a towering green wall of vegetation. Every so often we pass an island or two, some no more than mud and grass while others look as though a chunk of that towering green wall had broken off and drifted into the water. That green wall looks to be pretty uniform, but we know that's deceiving.

*Continued on page 6*

## Our New Website

by Jan Pierson

Have you been online with us lately? If not, there are some big changes. We're excited about our completely re-designed website, which we launched in mid-December.

What are some of its new features? First and foremost, we know you've wanted unfettered access online to our itineraries, and now you have it. Go to any tour page, click on the "ITINERARIES [PDF]" link in the right sidebar, and you'll open another window where you can download a current or previous itinerary for virtually any of our tours.

*Continued on page 7*

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 **GuideLines**
- 2 **Last Spaces**
- 3 **Fresh From the Field**
- 9 **Birding from the Canopy**
- 10 **Upcoming Tours**
- 11 **Spring Forward**
- 12 **Bird Buzz**

## Why I Love Pelagic Birding

by Alvaro Jaramillo

**A**fter birding for a while, you begin to realize there are different "birding personalities." Some of us enjoy birds mainly for their beauty and are content sitting by a feeder watching Northern Cardinals; others are attracted to the excitement of a new bird, perhaps one we've seen in books for years and have dreamed of seeing in life. But for most of us it's a combination of the two that makes birding so appealing. I remember a few years ago being at Los Andes reserve in Guatemala where I saw

my first male Resplendent Quetzal, a gorgeous bird I'd seen in books, magazines, TV shows—even on the Guatemalan currency—but seeing the real thing was absolutely fantastic. Returning from the trail, I was humming a happy tune (probably Roll Out the Barrel, as this is what tends to be playing in my head) thinking—"Oh my goodness, I just saw a quetzal. The Quetzal!"

For all the birding I've done, though, I must admit that pelagic trips are the most thrilling. It's partly because of the realm of possibilities. In northern California

The gorgeous Chatham Albatross is critically endangered. [Photo by guide George Armistead]



where I live, we routinely see some wonderful seabirds ranging from Rhinoceros Auklets and Buller's Shearwaters to South Polar Skuas and Black-footed Albatross, but chat on the boat always turns to the *big bird stories*. "Remember that Bodega trip when the Light Mantled Sooty Albatross showed up! Oh man."

Or, "How about Great-winged Petrel or

*Continued on page 8*



# GuideLines

with Mitch Lysinger

## Picking Ecuador's 'Tanager-ines'

**G**rowing up as a kid birder in South Florida, I often felt disadvantaged...but not because there weren't enough birds to see. Why then? Well, sure, I got to see a nice sampling of all of those neat migrants from the north, but I felt like I still deserved to know them better and soak in things like nesting (and singing!) cuckoos, warblers, orioles, and sparrows; summer was a birding bore for the most part—all the birds were breeding up north—so butterflying became the best natural history show in town.

About the time I had gained some experience and was feeling like a big gun in my neck of the woods (still not knowing any of the northern songs!), a wave of Caribbean rarities started showing up more regularly, things that I'd only read and dreamed about, things I'd heard stories about from old timers I'd rubbed shoulders with. Visions of Key West Quail-Dove, Thick-billed Vireo, Bananaquit, and Stripe-headed Tanager danced in my head. I saw many of them over long drives to the Keys as Jimmy Buffett sang tales of Calipso poets on the radio. Suddenly, birding south of the border seemed a lot more enticing.

I knew nothing of the island birding just south of my stomping grounds and still haven't had the chance to bird there aside from a quick five-day stint in Jamaica. The deep Neotropics waiting just another hop further were even more of a mystery. A weekend

birding jaunt to Sanibel Island on the west coast of Florida helped change this when I convinced my dad to buy me a copy of Ridgely's *Birds of Panama* I saw on the shelf of a small bookstore; little did he know what he was getting himself into. All of a sudden, names like Bay-headed, Emerald, and Scarlet-browed tanagers were leaping off the pages, as if beckoning me. I studied them relentlessly and knew that somehow I had to see them. A couple of trips to Ecuador and Venezuela in my late teens had me hooked...this could indeed be a way of life, and now is.

I've since "evolved" into a lover of antbirds, tyrannids, and anything else confusing, but I have to confess that it was the tanager plates that stole my heart in the beginning, and even still the sight of a radiant Vermilion or Flame-faced Tanager (this one pecks at my San Isidro bedroom window every morning at 6:00 a.m. sharp—better than a rooster)—still makes me feel lucky...no matter how many times I see them. In montane Ecuador, where frenzied tanager flocks swirl by and follow the misty clouds like a dream, our tours regularly pull down numbers upwards of 60 species, from colorful mountain-tanagers to the duller hemispingus. It's never too late to pursue those 'tanager-ine' dreams, because they are still there, ripe for the picking.

*Mitch has lived in Ecuador since 1992. He and his family divide their time between Quito and Cabanas San Isidro, their cloudforest lodge on the East slope of the Andes. Join Mitch for one of our upcoming MONTANE ECUADOR trips, where diverse Neotropical bird families—like tanagers and hummers—make for one of the greatest shows on Earth. Dates are June 12-21 and July 30-August 8. Call our office or check our website for a complete itinerary.*



The tanagers are a large and largely tropical American family of birds. Along with hummingbirds, they are among the prettiest and most colorful of the New World's birds, and Ecuador is a paradise for this family. From left to right, these gems are: Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Golden Tanager, Golden-naped Tanager, and Bay-headed Tanager. [Photos by participant Alan Wight (Black-chinned and Golden-naped) and guide George Armistead]



## Tour Updates

With strong interest in both our Arizona Nightbirds & More and Louisiana: Red Beans & Yellow Rails tours for 2009, we have added an extra departure for each to our schedule. Dates for all four departures are now:

### Arizona Nightbirds & More

May 1-5, 2009 with Dave Stejskal & second guide  
May 7-11, 2009 with Dave Stejskal & Dan Lane

### Louisiana: Red Beans & Yellow Rails

Nov 5-9, 2009 with Dan Lane  
Nov 12-16, 2009 with Dan Lane

And we've added a second departure for our popular **Arizona's Second Spring** tour. Dates for it are August 7-16, 2009 and it will be guided by John Coons.

## Last Spaces

- Philippines: Mar 7-29 with Dave Stejskal & Tim Fisher (2 spaces)
- Costa Rica: Mar 7-22 with Megan Crewe & Jay VanderGaast (2 spaces)
- Hawaii: Mar 14-24 with George Armistead & John Coons (4 spaces)
- Spring in South Texas: Mar 28-Apr 5 with Chris Benesh (4 spaces)
- Bahamas: Birds & Butterflies: Mar 29-Apr 3 with Jesse Fagan (3 spaces)
- Puerto Rico: Mar 29-Apr 4 with George Armistead & Dan Lane (1 space)

*"Mitch Lysinger is phenomenal—give him a raise. He is not only an excellent bird guide, but a personable travel companion as well. Very good group experience."  
Jeff Wert, Ecuador Rainforest & Andes 2008*

# FRESH FROM THE FIELD

*Reports from Recent Tours*



Costa Rica is a prime destination for those who want to immerse themselves in a tropical country that is both small, tourist friendly, and incredibly diverse. With a mix of very different Pacific and Caribbean slopes, the highlands, and even arid dry forest areas, it has a great many different habitats and birds to offer. During the holidays we offer a shorter tour focused on the very rich highland habitats, **Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista**. Our guide Jesse Fagan's experience and love for Central American birding is well known, but usually he is found guiding farther to the north in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, so it was great for him to guide a very successful holiday in Costa Rica tour this season. These are some of his photos from that trip. At top, Ivan Ace, our driver Champu, and local guide Cali during a break at La Mina trail near Rancho Naturalista. Above left, the grounds at Hotel Bougainvillea in San Jose. Finally, a view from the crater at Volcan Irazu—Costa Rica has some striking volcanos.



We offer two different tours to Chile, our shorter **Heart and Sole** trip in February, and the longer and more complete tour we just finished in December. It was another spectacular trip full of great scenery, some outstanding birds, and great camaraderie. To the left is a photo of spectacular Lago Grey in Torres del Paine National Park [photo by participant Jim Hayes].

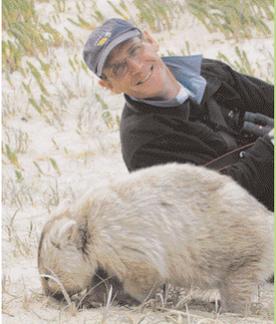
Here the highlight was a superb view of a Puma! The subspecies in this part of the world is the largest of any, giving the name Mountain Lion real meaning. Above, a male Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, called the Siete-Colores (seven colors) locally, but our eye sees more than merely seven colors there. Below, the Commerson's Dolphin resembles the northern hemisphere Dall's Porpoise, but the two are not closely related. One of the ferry crossings we take from Tierra del Fuego to the mainland is one of the best places to see this local and endearing cetacean. [Photos by guide Alvaro Jaramillo]



# FRESH FROM THE FIELD



At top, a fantastic photo of a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck shows its feature blackish underwings and white upperwings. Like all whistling-ducks it has broad and relatively rounded wings, a very long neck, and long legs. This is a widespread species in the New World tropics, this one photographed on our recent Trinidad & Tobago tour, a trip that is widely thought of as a fascinating introduction to Neotropical birding. Above left, two Crested Oropendolas a large icterid (blackbird) that builds long hanging nests. The word oropendola is appropriately the European Spanish name for Old World orioles! This tour is famous for its various birding sites, such as ASA Wright, where one can obtain awesome close-up views of tropical birds at feeding stations. Above right, one of the common and spectacular species which comes to these bird buffets is the Purple Honeycreeper. [Photos by participant Daphne Gemmill]

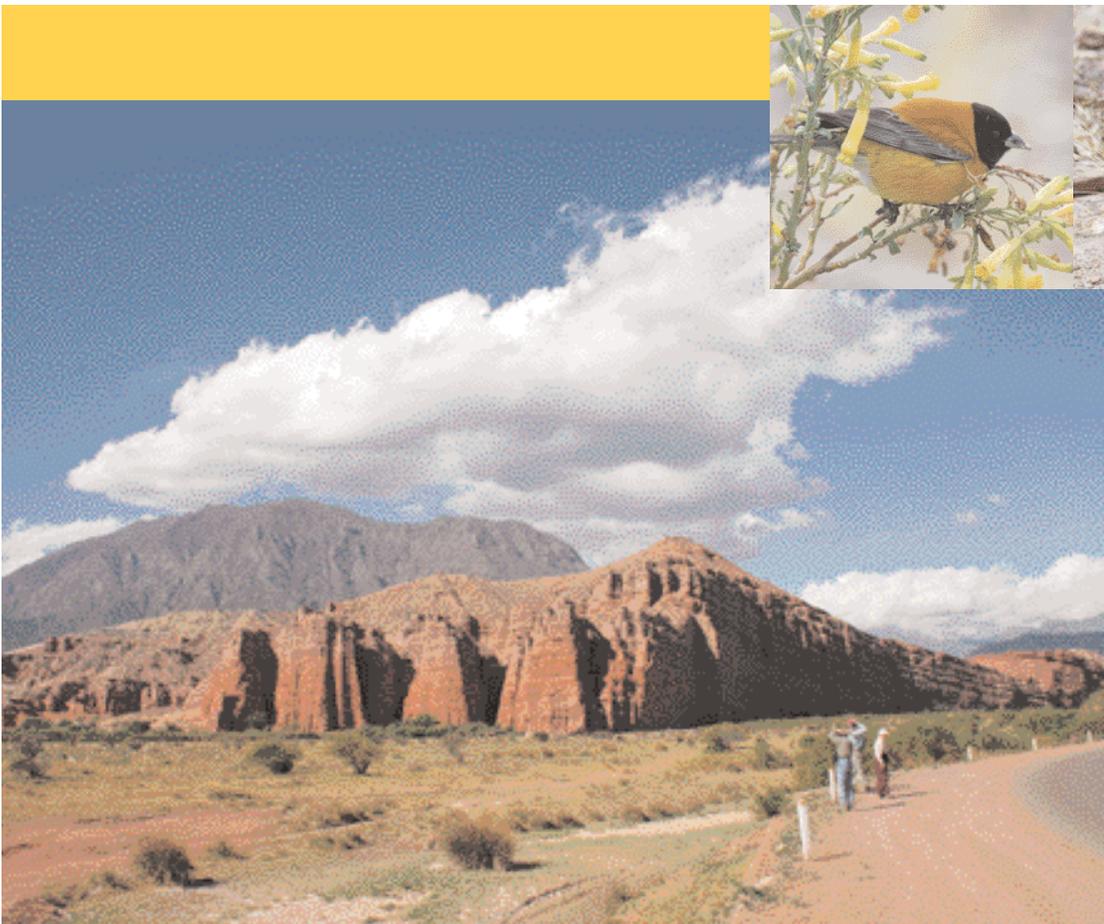


The island-continent of Australia is a bird-er's paradise. There are many families of birds or groups of birds here that are found nowhere else in the world; some are downright weird and wonderful. Others are of more widespread groups such as this Rainbow Bee-eater at



top right. Bee-eaters are found throughout the Old World and do specialize in eating bees and wasps. They are immune to the poisons but still take the trouble to beat their prey and remove the stinger before consuming.

The Splendid Fairy-wren at right is not only colorful in plumage but also behavior. The birds form stable pair bonds but are sexually promiscuous and may even assist in rearing the young of their "extra-marital" pairing. Friendly and approachable can be used to describe both this wombat and guide Chris Benesh! [All photos by guide Dave Stejskal]



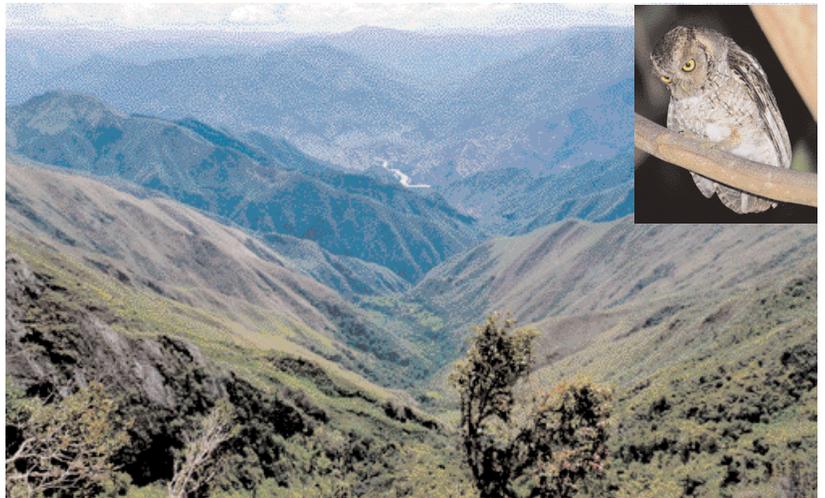
Above left, the Black-hooded Sierra-Finch is a colorful finch that now is known to be better placed in the tanager group. The **Northwestern Argentina** tour is famous for various aspects including the scenery and Argentine specialties, but it is also a tour that finds an astounding number of well-seen tinamou species. On this recent tour guide Dave Stejskal was able to find eight different tinamous for folks to enjoy! Above is a photo of an Ornate Tinamou in the highlands of Laguna Pozuelos. At left, the majestic formation of El Castillo, or "the castle" in the Quebrada de Cafayate. [Photos by guide Dave Stejskal]



Our brand new **Ireland: Birds, Traditional Music & Pubs** tour was an astounding success. Folks came back raving about what a special trip this was, and how the mix of birds and music just hit the right note. This is the aim of our new Birding Plus tours: it's great birding, as well as an additional focus, the plus. Ireland is of course a place of much history, some of it clearly visible in its buildings. Above is the Rock of Cashel, and ancient and important site in Ireland. The buildings currently there date to the 12th century. At top right, a Robin (the real Robin), photographed at John F Kennedy Arboretum. And yes, there was the music and the pubs! At right, two of the Merry Ploughboys enliven the evening with traditional Irish music. This is a tour not to be missed for those interested in birds and some colorful culture. [Photos by participant Anne Bergstrom]



Bananas on the grounds of **Serra dos Tucanos** provide constant attraction for colorful, frugivorous birds like Blue-naped Chlorophonia and Maroon-bellied Parakeet, while the carnivorous Giant Antshrike, sometimes with blood dripping from its massive bill, and Variegated Antpitta, sometimes appearing wattled—if caught carrying a prodigious load of earthworms to hungry young—haunt habitats nearby. All may be seen on our week-long birding tour centered at this comfortable, endemic-rich site no more than a pleasant conversation from Rio de Janeiro. [Photos by participant Hop Hopkins]



**Northern Peru's** other name is Endemics Galore, and it is truthful. There are many species restricted to this part of the country, or only peaking in to southernmost Ecuador. One of these is the Peruvian Screech-Owl (top right); this particular individual is of the *pacificus* subspecies, which may itself be a valid species and rather restricted in range. [Photo by guide Richard Webster].



Top, a view looking west to the Marañon valley from Abra Barro Negro. This valley is important in that it divides the Andean avifauna into a northern and a central series of species. Above, it is important to enjoy the birding, of course, and nothing hits the spot better than a great field lunch. It is even more enjoyable if it is a lunch right after a successful viewing of the rare White-winged Guans! [Photos by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]

# Amazonian Riches-Iquitos, Peru: Canopy Walkways & Ancient Forests

*Continued from page 1*

The Iquitos region in the warm Amazonian lowlands of north-eastern Peru is one of the most, if not *the* most, biologically diverse regions on Earth. That rich diversity of plant and animal life is due in no small part to the incredible wealth of microhabitats—small habitats within a larger one—found here. Though the forest may look uniform to the casual observer, as birders we see its small, yet significant, differences whenever walking a trail or quietly motoring along a forest stream. Some of these differences are quite profound, such as comparing low, seasonally flooded forest near a river's edge with a relatively low diversity of plants and birds (*varzea* forest) to the dry, never-been-flooded, rolling hilly forest with stunning plant diversity and a birdlist a mile long (*terra firme* forest). Or when comparing those islands in the river we just passed: the younger, less botanically diverse islands harbor an avifauna quite unlike the birdlife of the oldest islands, necessitating a visit to both types. Or comparing the forest floor of *terra firme* forest with the canopy of that same forest one hundred and twenty feet above our heads—a special habitat that we'll get to experience from the spectacular ACTS canopy walkway.

Other differences are more subtle and could be missed on first pass. One of the most notable examples of this is the Allpahuayo-Mishana Reserve that we'll bird the first two days of the tour. For many years, these forests, only a short distance from the city of Iquitos itself, went unexplored and unappreciated. It wasn't until Peruvian ornithologist Pepe Alvarez and Field Guide Bret Whitney took a closer look at this forest growing on nutrient-poor white sand soil that its many treasures were revealed, with no fewer than four new species to science being discovered and described!

Another important ingredient contributing to all of this diversity of

life in the Iquitos region is the stability of these habitats and microhabitats over many, many years. That's where the 'Ancient Forests' from the title of the tour comes into play. If these forests weren't ancient and stable, we probably wouldn't have gotten the speciation that drew us here in the first place.

**Iquitos offers birders an Amazonian experience like no other. Join Field Guide Dave Stejskal, August 11-22 (Machu Picchu pre-trip from August 6) to explore the unparalleled richness of life in northeastern Peru!**

*Three decades ago (when some of our guides first visited the country) Peru was widely considered one of the most exciting places on Earth for birds. Thanks to many LSU expeditions, new species were regularly being discovered (remember Walter Cronkite announcing them on the evening news?)...but there was no field guide and, in many locations, no accommodations. Visiting the Manu, for instance, meant long boat trips and camping. And though the habitat was outstanding, there were few trails, making it difficult to get into the forest.*

*Well, Peru remains one of the most exciting places on Earth for birds, but there are now an excellent field guide and excellent lodges with good forest trails and often canopy platforms in most of the places you'd want to visit. Take, for example:*

**Mountains of Manu**—Manu Biosphere Reserve is a vast, spell-binding wilderness (the size of Massachusetts!) in southeastern Peru, home of the Rio Madre de Dios, Mother of God, a major tributary of the Amazon. Replete with some of the richest flora and fauna to be found anywhere in South America, it offers the uncontained possibilities of an entire ecosystem, from golden grasslands of the puna zone down the eastern Andean slope through cloaking montane cloud forest to seemingly endless lowland rainforest. This tour offers a rich transect along the incredibly "birdy" road



The Hook-billed Kite (far left), a species found in Iquitos and in a great many areas in the Americas, is a rather odd raptor. It specializes on foraging for arboreal snails for one. It also has a dark and a pale morph, but unlike in other raptors these have very different tail patterns, which is highly unusual. [Photo by participant Johnny Powell]. The Cream-colored Woodpecker is well named, although if named today it probably would be more descriptive to call it the Latte-colored Woodpecker. [Photo by participant Nancy Boggess] Above, the comfortable and birdy Yanamono Lodge in Iquitos. [Photo by guide Bret Whitney]

from above Cusco down to the Alto Madre de Dios in the rich upper-tropical zone. July 25-August 9 with Rose Ann Rowlett or October 10-25 with Dan Lane.

**Manu Wildlife Center**—This short tour is designed to focus on the incredibly rich lowland rainforest of the Manu Biosphere Reserve. We have selected Manu Wildlife Center as our base for its comfort level, its ease of access, its marvelous network of trails, its canopy platform, and its strategic location. With a wonderful grid system of trails and with covered 40-foot boats for river transport, the lodge, situated on a high bank above the Rio Madre de Dios, offers us access to virtually all critical microhabitats within lowland Manu and hence to virtually all species regularly occurring in this rich lowland rainforest. July 2-15 with John Rowlett.

**Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga**—For some of us, there are no doubt too many “wonders of the world.” It’s an expression suffering from overuse, and yet, for those who have visited it, Machu Picchu is indeed one of those wonders. Set atop a high ridge surrounded by rugged, forested mountains, the Inca ruins tower above the rushing waters of the Rio Urubamba snaking its way a thousand feet below. We’ll spend two nights at the ruins as well as bird both slopes of the high Andes’ eastern cordillera for some of the most exciting birding in Peru. June 25-July 4 with John Rowlett & Jesse Fagan or July 28-August 6 with Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan.

**Peru’s Marvelous Abra Patricia & the Spatuletail**—Why do we call this short tour of the northern Andes Marvelous? Well, there’s the Marvelous Spatuletail, for one, a bird that simply must be seen to be believed. And there’s the new Owllet Lodge, overlooking Abra Patricia, which allows us to oversee and bird the many marvelous habitats of the Alto Mayo drainage, all the while tantalizing us with the outside chance of seeing the electrifying Long-whiskered Owllet. July 15-26 with John Rowlett & Mitch Lysinger.

We have two more tours scheduled later in the season. They are:  
**Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata**, September 28-October 11 with Rose Ann Rowlett  
**Northern Peru: Endemics Galore**, November 8-27 with Rose Ann Rowlett & Richard Webster

## Our New Website

Continued from page 1

We are also delighted about having maps available for nearly all our tours (we’re working on the last few)—there is nothing like a visual of your route to make everything clear! Maggie Burnett from our office has been working hard with our design guy, Bill Fall, to make them happen, and we’re jazzed about the results. A map’s thumbnail is in the upper left side of the tour page...click on it to open up a much larger version.

We’re creating an array of possibilities with our new blog, accessible any time via the “News” link in the navigation bar near the top of a page. We’ll post regularly on various topics, and the most recent two items in the Front Page News category are also displayed at lower left on our home page. Want to be informed automatically of new items posted to our blog? Just subscribe to our feed by clicking on the RSS Feed image at left on the blog page.

There are lots of other new things as well—mosaics of tour images, more slideshows on our Smugmug photo site, a “Search for Tours” page where you can find our tours by a variety of criteria or combinations thereof, Bird Buzz features linked to the large photo on our home page, and more.

Enjoy looking through the new site, and we look forward to your feedback. This is a work in progress so far as we are concerned, and you will only help us make it better. See you at [www.fieldguides.com](http://www.fieldguides.com)!

—Jan Pierson



## BIRD BUZZ

### Wherefore the LBJs?

One complaint I hear when leading tours in the Neotropics is “Why spend time trying to bring in the ‘little brown jobs?’” By way of explanation I’d suggest taking a look at any tropical bird guide—or any guide for that matter—and you’ll see that perhaps 70% of the region’s avifauna is brown, gray, olive, or some other muted color combination. It’s simply a fact of life—and, in my book, no reason to despair!

Often these “dull” birds can have impressive voices—be they the loud cry of a Screaming Piha or the incredible symphony of a Musician Wren. LBJs can be furtive, and thus getting a good look can be a real achievement—imagine the thrill of locking in on a Thrush-like Antpitta after spending tedious minutes playing it in and searching the understorey for its great dark eyes! LBJs often represent a high percentage of the regional endemics, so they are much sought...More importantly, many of these less-than-startlingly plumaged birds are poorly known, and current study is showing that there is more diversity among them than previously recognized—read: new species are being described even now (and several FGI folks are among those doing the describing). And finally, despite the hand they’re dealt off the color palette, LBJs can still be downright breathtaking—“differently colorful,” if you will: witness the plumage pattern of the “humble” Line-fronted Canastero.

So next time you’re on tour, say in the mountains of Peru, and one of us Field Guides announces, “Now, let’s try to see that vocalizing Unadorned Flycatcher,” rather than step aside to await the Ornate, focus in on nourishing an appreciation for those unsung gems of the bird world: the less-than-sparkling LBJs. For it is they who inconspicuously make up some two-thirds of that world! —Dan Lane



Line-fronted Canastero [Photo by guide John Rowlett]



In plumage, many of them are subdued and some are downright dull, but when I see them flying at breakneck speeds, using the waves and the air currents to do the impossible, how I wish I could be just like them!

There are many types of seabirding adventures; some can be enjoyed from shore, others from a boat. North America is a stand-out place for watching seabirds from shore. Field Guides **Alaska** trips are of course perfect for this, with the Pribilof Islands being a seabird extravaganza and the boat trip in Seward simply spectacular. Out east, our **Newfoundland & Nova Scotia** trip may reward with cliffs having more than half a million alcids!

For true pelagic trips in North America there's our new *Birding Plus* offering, **North Carolina: Petrels & the Deep Blue Sea**, of all our tours the most focused on seabirding and George Armistead's tour de force. George is a great guide anywhere but out at sea—in this case out in the Gulf Stream—he's among the world's best. On the West Coast, our **Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierras** includes a pelagic to the legendary Monterey Bay, the deepest underwater canyon on the continent and a pelagic and whale-watching "candy store." Of course the islands of **Hawaii** are superb for tropical seabirds, and there we can see Laysan Albatrosses at the nest and displaying Red-tailed and White-tailed tropicbirds from shore, but a pelagic trip into the deep water has rewarded us with birds like the fantastic Mottled Petrel.

If you asked a seabird nut like me where the best pelagics are, the nut would say Australia and New Zealand, Chile and South Africa—and guess what, Field Guides has it all covered. A Cape Town pelagic on our **South Africa** tour is sure to find incredible concentrations of birds...nothing like adding a bit of Yellow-nosed Albatross spice to your sugarbirds and scrub-robins! On our **Australia** tour we offer the pelagic as a pre-trip extension; a Providence Petrel or Fluttering Shearwater makes for good balance to those fairy-wrens and gaudy parrots! But the most diverse area in the world for seabirds is the ocean around **New Zealand**; our last tour there recorded six types of albatross, including both forms of Royal and the mighty Wandering, as well as three species of penguins. Both the **Chile** and **The Heart & Sole of Chile** tours include a pelagic from Valparaiso as well as a ferry crossing or two where other seabirds may be seen. If cinclodes and earthreeper identification gets you down, the cool wind of the Humboldt Current with its Pink-footed Shearwaters, Humboldt Penguins, Peruvian Boobies, and perhaps five species of albatross including the critically endangered Chatham, all mixed in with Juan Fernandez and Westland petrels and Chilean Skuas, may give you a lift. They certainly give me a lift, and I can't wait to get out there and see my old friends again, and maybe...you never know...return with my very own "big bird story" to tell.

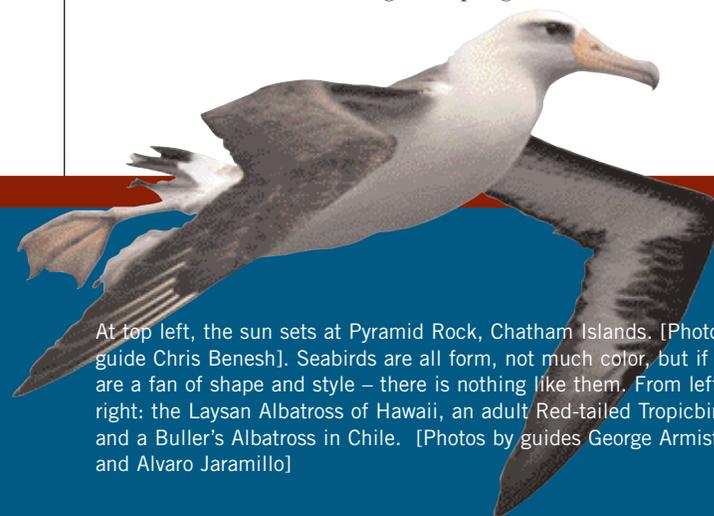
## Why I Love Pelagic Birding

*Continued from page 1*

Bulwer's Petrel? Another one could show up today." Being out at sea, scanning the waves, and suddenly seeing something truly astounding is one of the things that gets me going—but what's so odd about it is that I've never personally encountered one of those rarities on a pelagic. I guess that just the possibility, that chance at striking gold, is what excites me.

Another aspect of pelagic birding that appeals to me is its simplicity. You get on a boat that someone controls and there are no specific directions other than to pay attention. A once-in-a-lifetime sighting could occur, and all you have to do is be watching. As a teenager in Ontario, I used to get a similar feeling from hawk-watching. You go to a good spot at the right time of year and just sit there and watch. No driving, no bird feeders, no song, no tapes, nothing except you, the birds, and time. There is something very Zen about this, the essence of birding. I remember counting Sharp-shinned Hawks going over a block from my house in the middle of Toronto. There were several House Sparrows foraging on a nearby soccer field when suddenly one of the hawks, just a speck it was so high in the sky, folded its wings and dove. It shot down, accelerating, dropping toward the ground at amazing speed and, before I knew it, the hawk had taken one of the sparrows. From more than a mile away that hawk had spotted its prey, and I was fortunate enough to be there to watch this unfold.

Of course, with pelagic birding there is also the romance of it all—the wind, the smells, the swell of the sea—that gives us some connection to the past, to those legendary explorers like Magellan and Cook and even the ornithological legend Rollo Beck. And then there are the birds—from the extreme flying machines that are the albatrosses to the flightless penguins....oh man, what birds!



At top left, the sun sets at Pyramid Rock, Chatham Islands. [Photo by guide Chris Benesh]. Seabirds are all form, not much color, but if you are a fan of shape and style – there is nothing like them. From left to right: the Laysan Albatross of Hawaii, an adult Red-tailed Tropicbird, and a Buller's Albatross in Chile. [Photos by guides George Armistead and Alvaro Jaramillo]

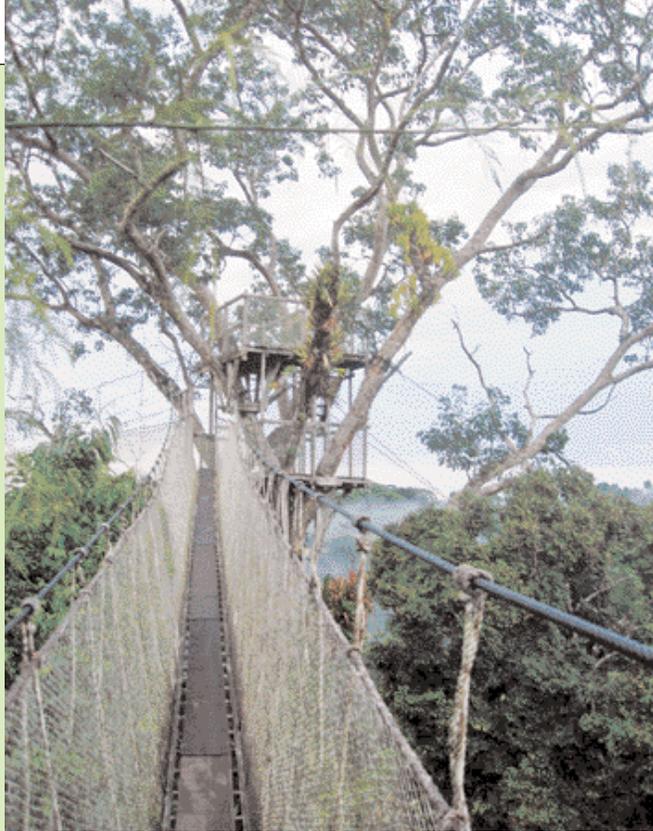
**T**he golden age of birding is upon us, with comfortable lodges in previously inaccessible places, flights to almost anywhere, and roads that lead

us down tracks where once only horses and campesinos dared to tread. What more could we ask? Well, the answer at many of the premier lodges south of the border is—canopy towers.

If any of you have ever suffered a case of warbler neck, you'll be sympathetic with the Neotropical version, known as toucan/tanager (TT) neck, a potentially much more serious and frustrating condition. For those who have struggled to see canopy birds from the forest floor on Central and South American birding trips, my message has probably already hit home: if there is an opportunity to see these canopy dwellers at eye-level, then by all means take it.

Even on an average morning the activity can be so overwhelming that there is little free time to scribble notes or thumb through field guides; you get distracted and that briefly perching Purple-throated Cotinga or buzzing Gould's Jewelfront just might slip away.

One such place, and personal favorite of mine, is Sacha Lodge, nestled on a blackwater lagoon in the lowland rainforest of eastern Ecuador. Here guests have access to not just one but two distinct spots (the wooden tower, wrapped around a large Kapok tree, and the newer breathtaking—literally!—metal canopy walkway) from which to set up the telescopes for a long morning (or afternoon) of glorious scenery and, of course, a parade of tree-top birds at (and even below) eye-level. A modern wonder of the birding world, the 275-meter-long canopy walkway, with three rock-solid metal observation towers



Canopy walkway Iquitos, Peru. [Photo by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]

# Birding From the Canopy

by Mitch Lysinger

and two connecting bridges, is your ticket to a realm over 30 meters above the forest floor. While there is a little sweat and oxygen debt to be paid over the course of the climb up the sturdy and ample stair, the adrenaline rush (brought on by what we all know is waiting in the branches above) makes gravity and humidity miniscule obstacles!

This is the good life...towers have evolved; in the past I've ventured up 'towers' (alone, I hasten to add) under much more primitive circumstances where the only access was via a flimsy rope ladder that twirled—more than a bit dicey with bins and a microphone and tape-recorder—as well as on counter-weighted pulley systems where harnesses mucked up the works! Episodes of the past.

And once at the top, a welcoming breeze may cool you down as you study a pair of Ivory-billed Aracaris in the scope, and over there, a foraging

Chestnut-winged Hookbill, a flock bird that is tough to see well from below. Oh, and check out the Purplish Jacamars sitting right on the support cable almost too close to focus! A regular start to the flurry, and on a cool and cloudy day, the waves of bird activity can seem endless. And should the mid-morning sun send birds scrambling for cover, there are some raptors on the venue, bigger prey like King and Greater Yellow-headed vultures, Slender-billed and Double-toothed kites, and Slate-colored and White hawks. Even Ornate and Black-and-white hawk-eagles and Crested Eagle aren't unusual.

And while we are at it, let's not limit ourselves to daytime tower-birding only—we often score awesome views of Black-banded Owl at dusk from one of the mid-level platforms...this just after a spectacular Amazonian, orange sunset.

In 2009 Field Guides is offering two summer tours to **SACHA LODGE**  
**June 30-July 9 with Dan Lane**

**July 22-31 with Dave Stejskal**

Other Ecuador tours visiting towers include

**ECUADOR: RAINFOREST & ANDES, September 5-19 with Mitch Lysinger**

And, as Mitch notes, there are lodges throughout the Neotropics with canopy towers. For starters, there's the aptly named **PANAMA'S CANOPY TOWER**, a unique lodge and canopy tower in one. Dates for tours there in 2010 are

**January 16-23, 2010 with Jay VanderGaast & local guide**

**February 20-27, 2010 with John Coons & local guide**

**February 27-March 6, 2010 with Chris Benesh & local guide**

**March 19-26, 2010 with John Coons & local guide**

In **BRAZIL**

**RIO NEGRO PARADISE: MANAUS, September 14-28 with Bret Whitney**

**ALTA FLORESTA & THE NORTHERN PANTANAL, June 17-July 2 with Bret Whitney**

**ALTA FLORESTA, October 5-16 with John Rowlett**

**POUSADA RIO ROOSEVELT, July 29-August 12 with Bret Whitney**

In **PERU**

**MANU WILDLIFE CENTER, July 3-16 with John Rowlett**

**MOUNTAINS OF MANU, July 25-August 9 with Rose Ann Rowlett or October 10-25 with Dan Lane**

**PERUVIAN RAINFORESTS: THE TAMBOPATA, September 28-October 11 with Rose Ann Rowlett**

# UPCOMING TOURS

BELOW IS A PARTIAL LISTING OF UPCOMING TOURS.

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

## April-May 2009

Bhutan	Apr 3-23	Richard Webster
Lesser Antilles	Apr 4-18	Jesse Fagan & Jay VanderGaast
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I & II	Apr 11-17	John Coons
	Apr 18-24	
Big Bend, the Davis Mountains & Hill Country	Apr 18-27	Chris Benesh & second guide
Colorado Grouse	Apr 18-26	Terry McEneaney
Texas Hill Country	Apr 22-27	John Rowlett
Classical Greece	Apr 25-May 9	Megan Crewe & local guide
Namibia & Botswana	May 2-21	Terry Stevenson
Southeast Arizona Nightbirds	May 1-5	Dave Stejskal & Dan Lane
	May 7-11	Dave Stejskal & second guide
Spain	May 8-20	Chris Benesh & Jesse Fagan
Point Pelee & Algonquin Provincial Park	May 10-19	Jay VanderGaast & Peter Burke
Southeast Arizona I: Birding the Border	May 15-24	John Coons
North Carolina: Petrels & the Deep Blue Sea	May 16-25	George Armistead
Southeast Arizona II: Birding the Border	May 16-25	Dave Stejskal
Uganda: Shoebill, Rift Endemics & Gorillas	May 21-Jun 11	Phil Gregory & second guide
Virginias' Warblers	May 29-Jun 2	John Rowlett & second guide

## June-July 2009

Alaska I	Jun 4-13 (Part I)	Chris Benesh & George Armistead
	Jun 12-22 (Part II)	
Churchill & Southern Manitoba	Jun 2-14	John Coons & local guide
Montana: Yellowstone to Glacier	Jun 11-21	Terry McEneaney
Alaska II	Jun 11-20 (Part I)	Dave Stejskal & Megan Crewe
	Jun 19-29 (Part II)	
Montane Ecuador	Jun 12-21	Mitch Lysinger
Canadian Rockies: Alberta	Jun 13-23	Jay VanderGaast
Alta Floresta & the Pantanal, Brazil	Jun 19-Jul 4	Bret Whitney
Borneo	Jun 19-Jul 5	Rose Ann Rowlett
Galapagos I	Jun 20-30	Mitch Lysinger
Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru	Jun 25-Jul 4	John Rowlett & Jesse Fagan
Kenya I	Jun 27-Jul 25	Terry Stevenson
Newfoundland & Nova Scotia	Jun 30-Jul 10	Chris Benesh
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge III	Jun 30-Jul 9	Dan Lane
Manu Wildlife Center, Peru	Jul 3-16	John Rowlett
Northern Australia	Jul 3-19	John Coons
Papua New Guinea	Jul 11-Aug 2	Phil Gregory & Jay VanderGaast
Peru's Marvelous Spatuletail	Jul 15-26	John Rowlett & Mitch Lysinger
Galapagos	Jul 18-28	George Armistead
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge	Jul 22-31	Dave Stejskal
Mountains of Manu, Peru	Jul 25-Aug 9	Rose Ann Rowlett
Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru	Jul 28-Aug 6	Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan
Pousada Rio Roosevelt, Brazil	Jul 29-Aug 12	Bret Whitney
Montane Ecuador	Jul 30-Aug 8	Mitch Lysinger
New Caledonia	Jul 31-Aug 9	Phil Gregory

## August-September 2009

Arizona's Second Spring	Aug 1-10	Chris Benesh
	Aug 7-16	John Coons
Galapagos	Aug 8-18	Alvaro Jaramillo
Iquitos, Peru	Aug 11-22	Dave Stejskal
Kenya	Aug 29-Sep 26	Terry Stevenson
Slice of California	Sep 4-13	Alvaro Jaramillo
Morocco	Sep 4-21	George Armistead
France: Camargue & Pyrenees	Sep 5-15	Megan Crewe & Jesse Fagan
Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes	Sep 5-19	Mitch Lysinger
Bolivia's Avian Riches	Sep 12-27	Dan Lane
China: Beidahe & the Tibetan Plateau	Sep 12-29	Jay VanderGaast
Rio Negro Paradise: Manaus, Brazil	Sep 21-Oct 4	Bret Whitney
Australia (Part I)	Sep 25-Oct 15	Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe
Serra dos Tucanos, Brazil	Sep 26-Oct 6	John Rowlett
Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata	Sep 28-Oct 11	Rose Ann Rowlett

# Spring Forward

By Alvaro Jaramillo

One of the things most of us appreciate about birding is how it keeps us in touch with the various cycles in nature. Spring migration is one of these cycles: it may speed up, it may slow down, and for some birds most of the movement will take place during the day, for others it will be at night—but it is always happening. Different species and individuals have varying strategies, but the basic element is clear—get up to the breeding grounds as quickly and safely as you can.

Of course there is a trade-off between quickly and safely. It may be safer to make the long trip around the Gulf of Mexico rather than an over-water crossing, yet most species choose the crossing. Our TEXAS COAST MIGRATION SPECTACLE tours hope to intercept a fallout of these Gulf migrants—a fallout occurs when the weather turns sour for the birds, and instead of flying inland to richer and safer foraging grounds, they drop in right at the coast to rest and refuel. A good fallout can yield hundreds of individuals of various species of warblers, buntings, and tanagers and some exciting birding. A fallout is not ideal for the grounded birds, but most of them will regain their composure and soon be off to better foraging areas.

Fallouts don't occur only along the Gulf Coast; other large bodies of water also precipitate mass groundings and concentrations of avian travelers. Point Pelee, a triangular peninsula jutting into the western portion of Lake Erie, is one of the most famous sites for such events. Birds flying across the lake at night sometimes discover that the winds have shifted or that a front is on its way, and they drop out of the sky at the first place they see to rest: the Point. Our POINT PELEE & ALGONQUIN TOUR visits not only the well-known point but also the two less-famous migration hotspots of Rondeau and Long Point.

Where are the birds going and how do they get there? For hawks, routes are determined by the birds' hesitation to cross water and the likely presence of good thermals necessary to help the birds gain elevation and save energy on their travel. Hawks also follow visual landmarks. We often encounter good raptor movements on our SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS tour, timed to see the endangered Whooping Cranes before they head to Alberta as well as numbers of Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks as they return from the Neotropics.

How do songbirds find their way? As it turns out, by a myriad of different means. It has been known for some time that songbirds are fitted with an internal compass; but researchers have recently learned that songbirds' eyes have magnetic receptors that may in fact make it possible for them to "see" direction. Furthermore, they've found that birds watch where the sun sets and "reset" their internal compasses based on that information. These are not defenseless waifs, slaves to weather and predation, but finely tuned, highly sophisticated migration machines that are also beautiful and just plain fun to watch.

All of this internal gadgetry exists for one reason: to get the bird back to its breeding grounds. That is where the important stuff happens, the raising of the next generation. To see the beginning of this process there is no better tour than our VIRGINIAS' WARBLERS tour, from the southern bottomland types to more northerly species found on the ridgetops. And then there's the far north, the Boreal, the Arctic—ALASKA and CHURCHILL & SOUTHERN MANITOBA, where you'll see shorebirds like you've never seen them before, singing, displaying, and even dancing to their mates! You will be amazed at the vocal complexity of Whimbrel, Pectoral Sandpiper, and American Golden-Plover.

During migration we never know fully what to expect—anything can happen on any tour, and that's part of the excitement. What we do know is that we will see some wonderful birds and have a great time doing it. Get in touch with the pulse of migration this spring and catch the wave!

*Some of our upcoming Field Guides migration tours:*  
*Texas Coast Migration Spectacle, April 11-17 and April 18-24 with John Coons*  
*Point Pelee & Algonquin Provincial Park, May 10-19 with Jay VanderGaast*  
*Spring in South Texas, March 19-27 and March 28-April 5 with Chris Benesh*  
*Virginias' Warblers, May 29-June 2 with John Rowlett & second guide*  
*Churchill & Southern Manitoba, June 2-14 with John Coons*  
*Alaska I, June 4-13 (Part I) Chris Benesh & George Armistead*  
*June 12-22 (Part II)*  
*Alaska II, June 11-20 (Part I) Dave Stejskal & Megan Crewe*  
*June 19-29 (Part II)*



Migrants come in all shapes and sizes in the bird world. There are migrant hummingbirds, albatrosses, pelicans, and even owls and nightjars. Here are but a few attractive spring migrants, at far left a male Cape May Warbler, this one photographed by guide George Armistead on the Dry Tortugas. At left, a male Tennessee Warbler, more likely to be seen in Churchill as this one was than its name suggests. At right, the White-throated Sparrow is a short distance migrant which heralds the big push of spring migrants as it comes in earlier than the warblers, buntings, tanagers, and grosbeaks. Far right, a super-looking shorebird, the Long-billed Dowitcher, is one of the most common breeding birds around Barrow; to get there it crosses a large portion of our continent! [Photos by guide George Armistead]

# BIRD BUZZ

## Fish Tales

It was the “thwup thwup thwup” sound that first drew our attention: like the repetitious sound of giant helicopter blades. LOTS of giant helicopter blades! Intrigued, we hurried down to the track alongside Greece’s Lake Kerkini—and discovered a wildlife spectacle in the making. A fish ball had gotten trapped in one corner of the reservoir, and a multitude of birds were making them pay for their mistake. Thousands of Great Cormorants (and a handful of Pygmy Cormorants) skimmed across the water’s surface, their flailing wings making the distinctive whapping noise that had attracted us. Scores bobbed and dove, surfacing again with beaks full of shining fish. Great White and Dalmatian pelicans floated placidly amid the chaos, occasionally scooping up great pouchfuls of water and fish, or reaching out to mug a passing cormorant for its catch. Gray and Squacco herons, European Spoonbills, and Little Egrets stalked the sloping lakeside, waiting impatiently for a fish to miscalculate and venture too close. Two tiny, jewel-like Common Kingfishers flashed back and forth along the shoreline, searching for something small enough to eat. And above all the noise and confusion came the chortling sounds of Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, calling from surrounding bushes. —Megan Crewe, *CLASSICAL GREECE*



Great White and Dalmatian pelicans, along with Great Cormorants at Lake Kerkini, Greece [Photo by Mike Crewe]

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**BIRDING TOURS WORLDWIDE**

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

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