

Ireland: Birds, Traditional Music & Pubs

Abbie Rowlett

“Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?” It’s one of my favorite lines from Elizabeth Bishop’s “Questions of Travel” and I’ve found it to be fitting for my life. Since my husband is a guide who goes off frequently to wild and wonderful places, I do a lot of staying home and thinking about there.

Sometimes, though, I get to go there. I’ve spent time birding in Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Ecuador as well as in the mountains of Virginia—all places I love to be. But this fall I had the opportunity to accompany John, who was joining Terry and Karen McEaney, for the **Ireland in Fall** tour and it was one of the most memorable trips I’ve done.

It was my first time in Ireland, the place my great-grandfathers emigrated from, but because I grew up surrounded by Irish relatives, who, though they’d never been to Ireland themselves talked about it as though it were as familiar to them as Main Street in our small Nebraska town, the country had a familiar feel. The people looked a little like everyone I’d known growing up, and the countryside was not that different from Albemarle County in Virginia where I now live.

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Musicians like these playing at Tossie’s Cottage combined with the birds, whiskey, and Guinness to inspire an unsurpassable warmth and conviviality. In the background, the view from the Rock of Cashel. [Photos by guide John Rowlett]

African Wildlife Spectacular

Terry Stevenson

For the first time in many years, we are in a position to offer space on our June Kenya tour without your having to join the queue. The tour is limited, as always, to just six persons and Terry. If you’re interested in a space, please contact Sharon Mackie in the Field Guides office. Dates are June 25-July 23.

For many years the late Phoebe Snetsinger, renowned world birder and dear friend, traveled with me to some wild and remote spots in search of some of Africa’s most alluring birds. From time to time during these adventures she’d be asked which was her favorite birding area. With so many wonderful places to visit around the world, it’s pretty well impossible to pick just one. However, in response I usually heard Phoebe say, “If you only ever do one tour, go to Kenya.”

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Bucking broncos, ballads, brincadeiras, and birds

Jan Pierson

I’m a birder, and if you’re reading this, you’re likely a birder too. But what is birding, exactly? Is it just looking for birds, or looking at birds? Are your birding experiences really limited to birds? For that matter, what are birding tours? To some, perhaps birding and tours are indeed just looking for birds, and then briefly looking *at* those birds. But I suspect that for most birders the definition’s a bit or even much broader for both. Thus the title of this little piece, derived from some recent Field Guides experiences.

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Dwarf Bittern [Photo by participant Paul Thomas]

GuideLines *with Phil Gregory*

How did I become a birder?

Well, it all seems a long time ago—and in a galaxy far, far away—but I think I'd have to say it was the picture cards that came in packets of Brooke Bond tea. You could collect sets of 50 and they covered assorted themes, British mammals, British bird portraits, and endangered wildlife. The artist for bird portraits was the well-known Charles Tunnicliffe, so they were very well done and a free card album was part of the bargain. All good advertising, of course, but also remarkably ahead of their time in the environmental message they were sending way back then. The pictures were a great spur to try and see the birds they represented in real life—a seemingly impossible goal at the time, but how things change!

Once I was interested in seeing birds, which book to use was the question. I had a copy of *The Observers Book of British Birds*, a tiny hand-sized volume that had half the plates in color and half in black and white, a hangover from the austerity days of the Second World War. This book also had beautiful pictures, albeit the size of a postage stamp, and they were by Archibald Thorburn, a great bird artist from Edwardian times. It was great fun trying to see some of the birds pictured. I recall finding my first European Goldfinch perched atop a thistle, almost exactly like Thorburn's plate, and then in the hard winter of '63-'64 I found a Eurasian Woodcock and a Bearded Tit by a little stream on our local golf course. These discoveries made me want to see more.

When the Peterson/Mountfort/Hollom *Birds of Britain and Europe* came out, I was desperate for a copy, but I couldn't afford one. So instead I used the public library copy and hoped they didn't notice that I was also using the checklist in the front! During my teenage years there was the usual problem



of being a birder while trying to fit in with the other kids. It was great, though, to be old enough to hitchhike to far off sites to see rare birds. In December of 1970, following a freezing cold series of rides up to Newcastle, I had the great thrill of seeing first an Ivory Gull, a gorgeous bird, followed by Ross's Gull! It was a fantastic occasion that made all the travel hassles worthwhile—though I must say my binoculars, Regent 7x50's made in Russia, were a far cry from the wonderful optics of today, and I sometimes think I'd love to go back and see those birds again with my current pair.

By the time the lure of foreign travel set in, I was very fortunate to have an understanding partner in my wife, Sue (whom I had field tested with 3 weeks camping 'round Scandinavia followed by a further 3 weeks on Fair Isle in the Shetlands, a challenge for any relationship, but you might as well start as you mean to go on!). We ended up living, working, and even somehow raising two children under less than ideal conditions in Nigeria. After which it was on to wonderful Zambia, the Falkland Islands, Papua New Guinea, and finally, the Promised Land, Australia. Now we even make a living from writing about and showing birds to people, all a very far cry indeed from the days of tea card collecting. What a wonderful, strange, and complex trip it has been!

Phil will be guiding a number of Field Guides tours in 2010 and 2011, including trips to Uganda, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Outback Australia, New Guinea & Australia in combination, Madagascar, Oman & the UAE, and a new tour to Ghana. He considers Papua New Guinea, with its more than 400 endemics and all its brilliant birds-of-paradise, pigeons, and kingfishers, as one of his favorite places to bird, and you can check his wrap-up from his recent 2009 tour there on page 7.

Phil and his wife, Sue, now operate Cassowary House, a birding and nature lodge situated in the rainforest of Kuranda, near Cairns, Australia, where Southern Cassowary is among their favorite yard birds.



Phil Gregory (top); Smoky Honeyeater (above left); Brehm's Tiger-Parrot (center); and Brown Sicklebill (right) [Photos by participant Colin Campbell]

fieldguides.com

'The Grebe' is heading to Hawaii!!

Schedule update! Rose Ann Rowlett will now be joining George Armistead to co-lead our upcoming Hawaii tour, March 21-31. Rose Ann and George fans, here's your

chance to enjoy a great birding visit to the Aloha State in the company of the powerhouse team of the 'Grebe' and the 'Owl.' Visit our Hawaii tour page for more information.



Rose Ann Rowlett



George Armistead

Last Spaces

Panama's Canopy Tower III, February 27-March 6 with Chris Benesh & local guide

Trinidad & Tobago, February 27-March 8 with Megan Crewe & local guide

Honduras: Land of the Emeralds, March 6-14 with Jesse Fagan & John Coons

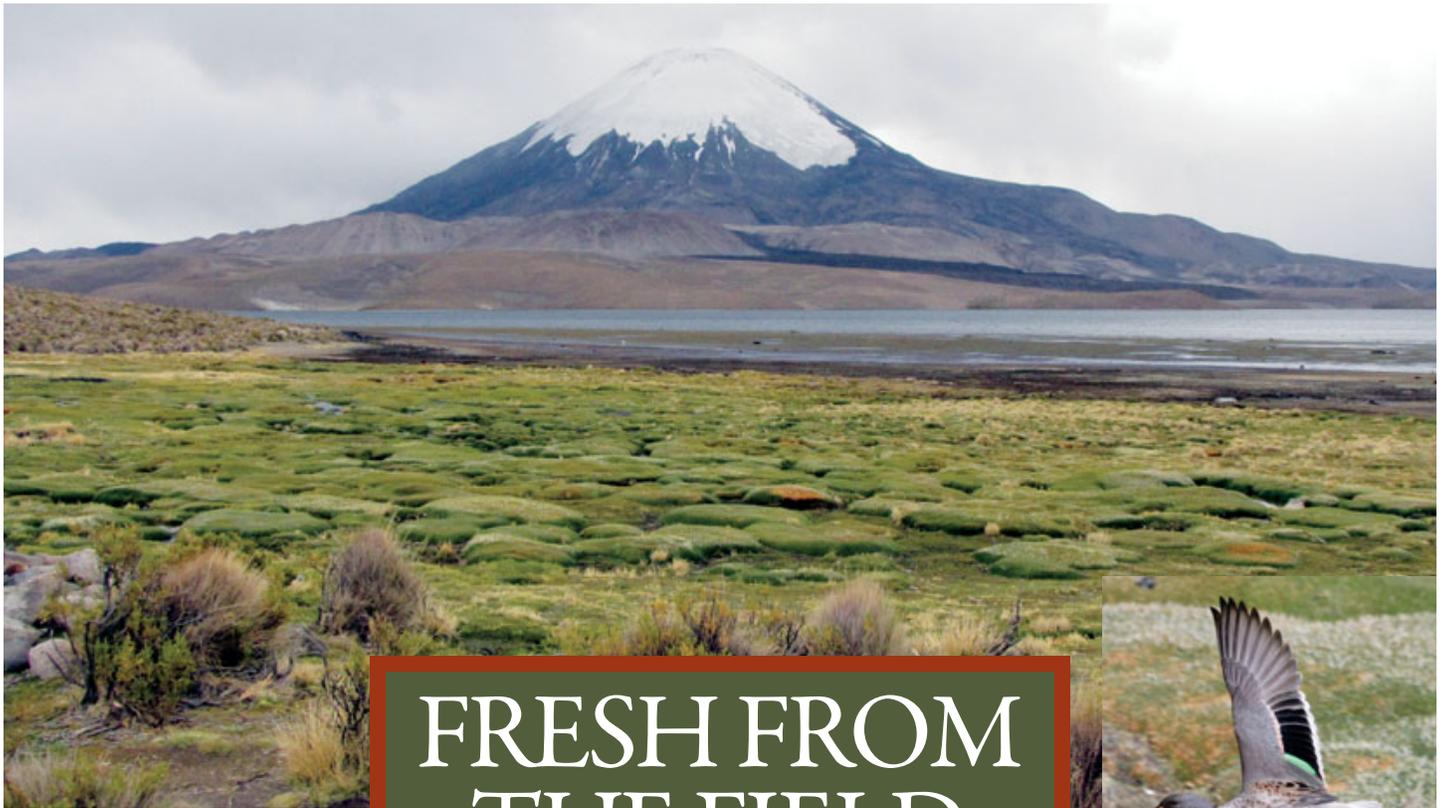
Western Panama, March 6-15 with Chris Benesh

Yucatan & Cozumel, March 19-28 with Megan Crewe & local guide

Panama's Canopy Tower IV, March 19-26 with John Coons & local guide

Hawaii, March 21-31 with George Armistead & Rose Ann Rowlett

Suriname, March 26-April 10 with Dave Stejskal



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Reports from Recent Tours

compiled by Alvaro Jaramillo and Abbie Rowlett

It's an old joke and one you've heard many times—"Is it chilly in Chile?" Truth is, it's usually chilly in the far south, but the rest of the country can be downright warm, even hot. Not this year! It wasn't chilly on our **Chile** tour, it was coooold. We saw snow falling on many occasions, blamed El Niño, worried about what birds we'd miss, and guess what? We ended up with a fantastic set of birds, more than in most years! Go figure. The scenery was spectacular as always, we had record numbers of ground-tyrants, Yellow-bridled Finches in the hundreds, super seabirds, and the country's first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher. Wow!

Volcan Parinacota and Lago Chungara in Lauca National Park give you an idea of the scenery—mountains, volcanoes, and nice vistas! At left, our bundled up group at Lake Grey in Torres del Paine National Park. Above right, a Speckled Teal in flight; that little green strip on the wings suggests its close relationship to our Green-winged Teal. [Photos by participant Mike Bowen and guide Alvaro Jaramillo]



Our inaugural **Birding Plus: El Salvador & Banding** tour was a hit. Participants were able to enjoy great birds, learn some biology, and help out at two bird-banding stations. If you think seeing a quail-dove is cool, imagine being able to peer right into its eye! We also do some "regular" birding at several national parks, including the largest, El Imposible. The name itself is a misnomer—it's very "possible" to see a heck of a lot of good birds there. Some are old friends wintering in Central America such as this male Wilson's Warbler (above, left), while others are not so familiar, like this pair of Rufous-naped Wrens. The wren has an elaborate social structure and great song sung as a solo, a duet, and a chorus, and 'Rufous-naped' Wren is now thought to comprise three separate species. At right is our group with the SalvaNATURA banding team. [Photos by guide Jesse Fagan]



That ultimate natural history tour is back on our schedule—Antarctica in January, 2011. To be exact, the tour is **Antarctica: Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia & the Falklands**—because we would not miss the natural history highlight of South Georgia Island! In the photos here: a handsome Chinstrap Penguin, truly Antarctic; our 2009 group and guide George Armistead; an intimidating bull Southern Elephant Seal, the heaviest pinniped (reaching nearly 3 tons!); scenic Neko Harbour with Gentoos; and our ship at Deception Island. [Photos by guide George Armistead]





The only complaint we heard on our **Louisiana: Red Beans & Yellow Rails** trips was that there were not enough red beans. But there were plenty of Yellow Rails, as well as other birds—just look at them—to make up for the paucity of beans. And Dan Lane, who lives in Baton Rouge and guides the tour, guarantees more beans next time. Above, at an evening beach roost, birds pictured include White and Brown pelicans, Laughing Gulls, Black Skimmers, and various terns. At right, a close-up of the East Jetty roost. And at far right, a White Ibis and a young Roseate Spoonbill check out a recently cut field for any newly-exposed arthropods to eat. [Photos by guide Dan Lane]

FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Uruguay: Birding the Land of the Gauchos went where no birding tour has gone before, and we wonder why it took so long. The country is great fun to bird, with lots to see and do, and has such warmth that we felt welcome everywhere. It's an undiscovered birding gem. Traveling back to the ranch one day (really, we do stay in ranch houses) after some great birding, we had a chance to visit a rodeo (*criolla*). Bucking broncos were just one exciting addition to the birding fun. Above left, our dune truck that gets us to Cabo Polonio, an isolated coastal village where fur seals rule the roost. Above right, breaking birding tour etiquette, the gang gets in front of the guide—no, wait, that's a male Greater Rhea with his flock of chicks. At left, the Jose Ignacio lighthouse north of famed Punta del Este; at right, a gorgeous male Hooded Siskin. Hooded Siskins are widespread in the lowlands east of the Andes as well as in various Andean sites; surely there are several species involved here, such as the bright "magellanicus" shown here. [Photos by guide Alvaro Jaramillo]



FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Guatemala is a hot destination once again, and we now offer two different Guatemala tours. Our **Guatemala Thanksgiving: Temples of Tikal, Antigua & Finca Las Nubes** is a new holiday trip that visits the highlands as well as the famous Tikal archaeological site. We should add that the birding at Tikal is as spectacular as the Mayan ruins. At left, a curious Collared Aracari eating palm fruit at Tikal. At right, the fantastic Pink-headed Warbler, a specialty seen on both tours, looks like a puff of cotton candy! Singled out as tour favorite by many was the male Wine-throated Hummingbird below, dazzling as it displayed its intoxicating gorget. [Photos by guide Jesse Fagan]



Bucking broncos, ballads, *brincadeiras*, and birds *Continued from page 1*

Bucking broncos in birding? Well, Alvaro recently returned from our inaugural *Uruguay: Land of the Gauchos* tour, during which, as serendipity would have it, the group happened to drive by a *criolla* (rodeo) and decided, spur of the moment, to catch the action for about 30 minutes as they watched gauchos riding bucking broncos in a totally tourist-free and original cultural event. A distraction (or perhaps detractor) from the birding experience of Black-and-white Monjitas to Glaucous-blue Grosbeaks? Hardly. Instead, a complement to it, enriching the visit to a country few birders have visited.

Ballads, you ask—what have these to do with birding? Well, you haven't yet read Abbie's piece on page 1 and don't yet know about our very popular *Birding Plus: Ireland* tour? Have you never sung along with Eugene Byrne, our 'resident' musician on the bus, or participated in a *sessun* at Tossie's Cottage in between outings for dippers and wheatears and Whoopers and redshanks? You're missing out! Not to mention that there are 20 shades of green as a backdrop for our birding...

Brincadeiras? Well, do you like some fun, or perhaps a good joke well told? Do not only the birds and birding bring a smile to your face but your fellow birders as well? A *brincadeira* or *piada* will do it in Brazil, or we could be in France with a *blague*, or in any number of spots south of the border with a *broma* or *diversión* or, more simply, *alegría*. Not only does it enhance the group experience all along the way, but a little humor comes in

very handy when we hit the occasional travel snag somewhere out in the field (*never!*)—you gotta be able to laugh and smile! (And just ask Mitch about the 'fashion show' next time you see him...)

Birds? Well, of course, and bumper crops of them. Where would we be without barbets, batis, bazas, becards, bellbirds, berryeaters, bitterns, bowerbirds, boubous, brant, brilliants, bristleheads, brubrus, brush-turkeys, bush-shrikes, bustards, butcherbirds, buttonquail, and even buzzards—a cornucopia of fantastic creatures that draw us to amazing places around the planet, and we've only touched on one letter of the birding alphabet.

So, back to the question: What is birding and what are birding tours? We have a lot of internal company discourse on various topics amongst ourselves at Field Guides. A recurring question is how to project to a magazine reader or web visitor what we do, and what we know is most important to us as individuals and as a company. It might seem simple, but it's not. How do we represent the goal of an enriching experience of birds and people and places and fun and the attention to detail from our guides and office that makes it all possible? We get hung up on phrases, or even single words, in the process. But even if we're not clear exactly how to encapsulate it in just a word or short phrase, the goal is indeed simple: to discover, to learn, to revel in the novelty of birds, to share in the excitement of new places and cultures, to feel an easy smile, and to absorb the whole, returning home, as we do and wish you to, re-charged by the experience and wanting to do it all over again.

UPCOMING TOURS

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

March-April 2010

Honduras: Land of the Emeralds
Western Panama
Costa Rica
Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes I
Panama's Canopy Tower IV
Yucatan & Cozumel
Colombia: Santa Marta Escape
Hawaii
Suriname
Spring in South Texas
Bahamas: Birds & Butterflies
Puerto Rico
Namibia & Botswana
Bhutan
Lesser Antilles
Colorado Grouse
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I
Colorado Grouse
Texas Hill Country
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle II
Dominican Republic
Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country

Mar 6-14
Mar 6-15
Mar 13-28
Mar 14-28
Mar 19-26
Mar 19-28
Mar 20-28
Mar 21-31
Mar 26-Apr 10
Mar 27-Apr 4
Mar 30-Apr 4
Apr 4-10
Apr 6-25
Apr 9-29
Apr 10-24
Apr 16-25
Apr 17-23
Apr 18-27
Apr 19-24
Apr 24-30
Apr 24-May 1
Apr 24-May 3

Jesse Fagan & John Coons
Chris Benesh
Jay VanderGaast & local guide
Mitch Lysinger
John Coons & local guide
Megan Crewe & local guide
Richard Webster & local guide
George Armistead & Rose Ann Rowlett
Dave Stejskal & Dan Lane
Chris Benesh
Jesse Fagan
George Armistead & second guide
Terry Stevenson
Richard Webster
Jesse Fagan & second guide
Dan Lane
John Coons
Terry McEneaney
John Rowlett
John Coons
Jesse Fagan & local guide
Chris Benesh & second guide

May-June 2010

Classical Greece
Arizona Nightbirds & More
Birding Plus Ireland in Spring
Spain: La Mancha, Coto Donana & Extremadura
Point Pelee & Algonquin Provincial Park
Arizona: Birding the Border I
Central Peruvian Endemics: The High Andes
Arizona: Birding the Border II
Birding Plus North Carolina:
Petrels & the Deep Blue Sea
Uganda: Shoebill, Rift Endemics & Gorillas
Virginias' Warblers
Alaska I

May 2-16
May 6-10
May 6-16
May 7-19
May 8-17
May 14-23
May 14-31
May 15-24

Megan Crewe & local guide
Dave Stejskal & second guide
Terry McEneaney & John Rowlett
Chris Benesh & local guide
Jay VanderGaast
Dave Stejskal
Rose Ann Rowlett & Dan Lane
John Coons

Southern Manitoba
Churchill
Yukon to the Arctic Ocean
Alaska II

May 15-24
May 20-June 10
Jun 2-6
Jun 3-12 (Part I)
Jun 11-21 (Part II)
Jun 3-9
Jun 8-15
Jun 5-14
Jun 10-19 (Part I)
Jun 18-28 (Part II)

George Armistead & Jesse Fagan
Terry Stevenson & Phil Gregory
John Rowlett & second guide
Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe

Montana: Yellowstone to Glacier
Montane Ecuador
Baffin Island: Pond Inlet
Borneo
Alta Floresta & the Northern Pantanal, Brazil
Galapagos I
Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru
Kenya I
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge IV

Jun 10-20
Jun 11-20
Jun 15-24
Jun 17-Jul 4
Jun 18-Jul 3
Jun 19-29
Jun 25-Jul 4
Jun 25-Jul 23
Jun 29-Jul 8

John Coons & local guide
John Coons & local guide
Jay VanderGaast
Dave Stejskal & George Armistead
Terry McEneaney & Jesse Fagan
Mitch Lysinger
John Coons
Rose Ann Rowlett
Bret Whitney & Marcelo Padua
Mitch Lysinger & local guide
Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan
Terry Stevenson
Jay VanderGaast & local guide

July-August 2010

Newfoundland & Nova Scotia
Manu Wildlife Center, Peru
Papua New Guinea
Peru's Magnetic North
Galapagos
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge
New Caledonia
Mountains of Manu, Peru
Montane Ecuador
Arizona's Second Spring
Summer Costa Rica
Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru
Galapagos

Jul 2-12
Jul 3-15
Jul 4-26
Jul 14-25
Jul 17-27
Jul 22-31
Jul 24-Aug 2
Jul 24-Aug 8
Jul 30-Aug 8
Jul 31-Aug 9
Jul 31-Aug 15
Aug 7-16
Aug 7-17

Chris Benesh
Dan Lane
Phil Gregory & Dave Stejskal
John Rowlett
Megan Crewe & local guide
Mitch Lysinger & local guide
Phil Gregory
Rose Ann Rowlett
Mitch Lysinger
John Coons
Jay VanderGaast
Dan Lane & second guide
George Armistead & local guide

September 2010

Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierras
France: Camargue & Pyrenees
East Africa Sampler: Kenya & Tanzania
China: Beidahe & The Tibetan Plateau
Rio Negro Paradise: Manaus, Brazil
Bolivia's Avian Riches
Outback Australia
Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes II
Australia (Part I)
Serra dos Tucanos, Brazil

Sep 4-13
Sep 4-14
Sep 4-24
Sep 10-28
Sep 11-24
Sep 11-26
Sep 11-Oct 2
Sep 12-26
Sep 24-Oct 14
Sep 25-Oct 5

Chris Benesh
Megan Crewe & Jesse Fagan
Terry Stevenson
Dave Stejskal & local guide
Bret Whitney & Marcelo Padua
Dan Lane & George Armistead
Phil Gregory
Mitch Lysinger
Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe
John Rowlett



Papua New Guinea tour participants with guides Phil Gregory and Jay VanderGaast and some Huli wigmen, and below them, a Brown Sicklebill. [Photos by participant Phyllis Wilburn and guide Phil Gregory]

New Guinea Birding Wrap-up

Phil Gregory

Our birding tour to Papua New Guinea this year was wet, but the rain yielded lovely, overcast conditions at Karawari, our comfortable lodge on the Sepik River, where it can otherwise be quite warm. We saw some great birds there, including a view for some of the world's largest pigeon, the spectacular Victoria Crowned Pigeon. At Kiunga, we had fabulous looks at the equally spectacular Southern Crowned Pigeon—definitely one of the best birds I've ever seen.

Our sighting of one of the great legendary New Guinea birds, Shovel-billed Kookaburra—at a nest no less, near Tabubil—has a nice PNG tale attached. The local guide who originally found the bird and knew the site was away upriver when he heard that we had arrived. He set off at 3:00 a.m. and after seven hours of travel met us at 10:00 and duly showed us a wonderful nest with the female in clear view—one of the advantages of having good relations with the locals. Interestingly, on my private trip two weeks later, we had no sight of the bird; it had moved round the back of the tree.

We also enjoyed the cultural interactions we had on the tour—taking a little time out in the middle of the day to visit the wigmen college and attending a dance performance with some wonderful costumes and bird-of-paradise plumes. It's a nice change of focus and provides fascinating insights into the Huli culture.

And in 2010 we're planning some exciting changes to the itinerary. We'll add a stay at Kumul Lodge in beautiful Enga Province where Brown Sicklebills and Ribbon-tailed Astrapias, along with Brehm's Tiger Parrots, visit the feeders, and where there is always the chance for a rarity like Archbold's Bowerbird, Crested Satinbird, or Chestnut Forest-Rail. And this year, on one of my other forays to PNG, New Guinea Woodcock was roding (displaying) in the forest below the lodge. I can hardly wait to return!

Read more about Phil on page 2 of this newsletter or visit our website for his full tour schedule.

Meet Marcelo Padua

Bret Whitney

Folks, we have a wonderful new guide we'd like you to meet. His name is Marcelo Padua and he's from Belém, Pará—that big Brazilian city at the mouth of the Amazon River. Marcelo has been leading his own birding tours in Brazil for a few years now and has gained a remarkable knowledge of not only the amazing bird life of Brazil, but also of what it takes to be a superb tour guide.

I've known Marcelo for four years, and last year he informally co-led parts of tours with me at Alta Floresta, Manaus, and Carajás. We had a great time on each of those trips and participants have had overwhelming praise for him. **Marcelo loves guiding tours and it shows!** Marcelo will join me for most of the Brazil tours I'll lead in 2010 and 2011, starting with **Northeast Brazil**; so you lucky folks already signed up for those trips are going to have two guides for the price of one! That's "*Beleza!*" with two big thumbs up! Indeed, many of our Brazil tours fill quite early, often going to waitlists, and we don't have enough staff to handle the flow. Marcelo will soon be guiding Field Guides tours on his own, and you'll have even greater opportunity to see beautiful Brazil and all of its rare birds.

Marcelo is already first rate around his home in Cuiabá, both in the Pantanal and cerrados and also the complex rainforests of Alta Floresta, and he's learning fast how to consistently show people the rarest endemics of the Atlantic Forest of eastern Brazil and the treasures of the northern and central Amazon. For the talented birder, the birds come with practice and patience. What doesn't always come naturally are the people and logistical skills that make for an outstanding tour guide, but Marcelo comes with the complete skill set, everything you expect of one of our Field Guides guides. He went to high school in Middletown, Pennsylvania, speaks English fluently, and even taught English in Brazil for a couple of years.

We encourage you to come birding in Brazil and to meet Marcelo on his home turf, either with the two of us as guides or on one of his new tours starting in 2011. A sneak-peek into Marcelo's future: a new, 12-day tour to the Pantanal and neighboring areas of Mato Grosso to maximize chances of spotting a Jaguar and the ultra-rare Cone-billed Tanager (on the books as *Conothraupis mesoleuca*). The tour will be scheduled for July/August of 2011 and the itinerary will be available in spring 2010. Oh yes, and when you're down there, ask Marcelo to tell you the full story of how he suddenly became a birder...and watch out when you see displaying manakins of any kind—he's got a weakness (or is it a strength?) there!



North meets South at the Meeting of the Waters: Bret Whitney (left) and Marcelo Padua co-led our recent Manaus tour and grinned for the cameras from the top deck of our boat as it glided along the dramatic confluence of two of the greatest rivers on Earth: the black-water Rio Negro, and the silt-laden Amazon. Markedly different densities and temperatures of the rivers keep them from mixing thoroughly for several miles downstream. Markedly similar loves of birds and tour guiding will keep Bret and Marcelo in tandem for many of our Brazil tours! [Photo by our Brazil tours manager Teresa Paschall]

The Enchanted Isles— The Galapagos

This year marks the 201st anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and the 151st anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, so isn't it about time to see the Galapagos for yourself?

Our tour of "Las Islas Encantadas"—The Enchanted Isles—is designed for birders who may only visit the islands once and would like to see as many of the endemic birds (and, naturally, the fascinating mammals, reptiles, and flora) as is reasonably possible. Because two key species, the Waved Albatross and Great Frigatebird, only nest on the islands from April to September, we have picked this season in which to visit. The climate is also quite comfortable at this time of year (it's the cooler *garua* season), and it generally remains dry and cool. Our itinerary takes in a fine mix of the most important islands—including a visit to the highlands of Santa Cruz, an important location for the Giant Tortoise, Galapagos Rail, Paint-billed Crake, and Large Tree-Finch—as well as several of the fascinating smaller islands, possibly including North Seymour and Santa Fe.

The trip is limited to 11 participants and there'll be nobody else on board but the friendly crew and us. Our vessel is a trans-oceanic catamaran built for 12 (you and your guide) passengers in six cabins, each with private bath. We'll fly to and from the Galapagos in order to have more time on the islands.

We think our tour is not only the ideal way to visit these fascinating islands, but a great value as well. Depending on your cabin, fees range from \$5175 to \$5775 (including round-trip air from Quito to Baltra) for our eleven-day tour, and each is accompanied by one of our incomparable Field Guides guides as well as a Galapagos naturalist-guide. There's probably not a better guide to participant ratio in the Galapagos.

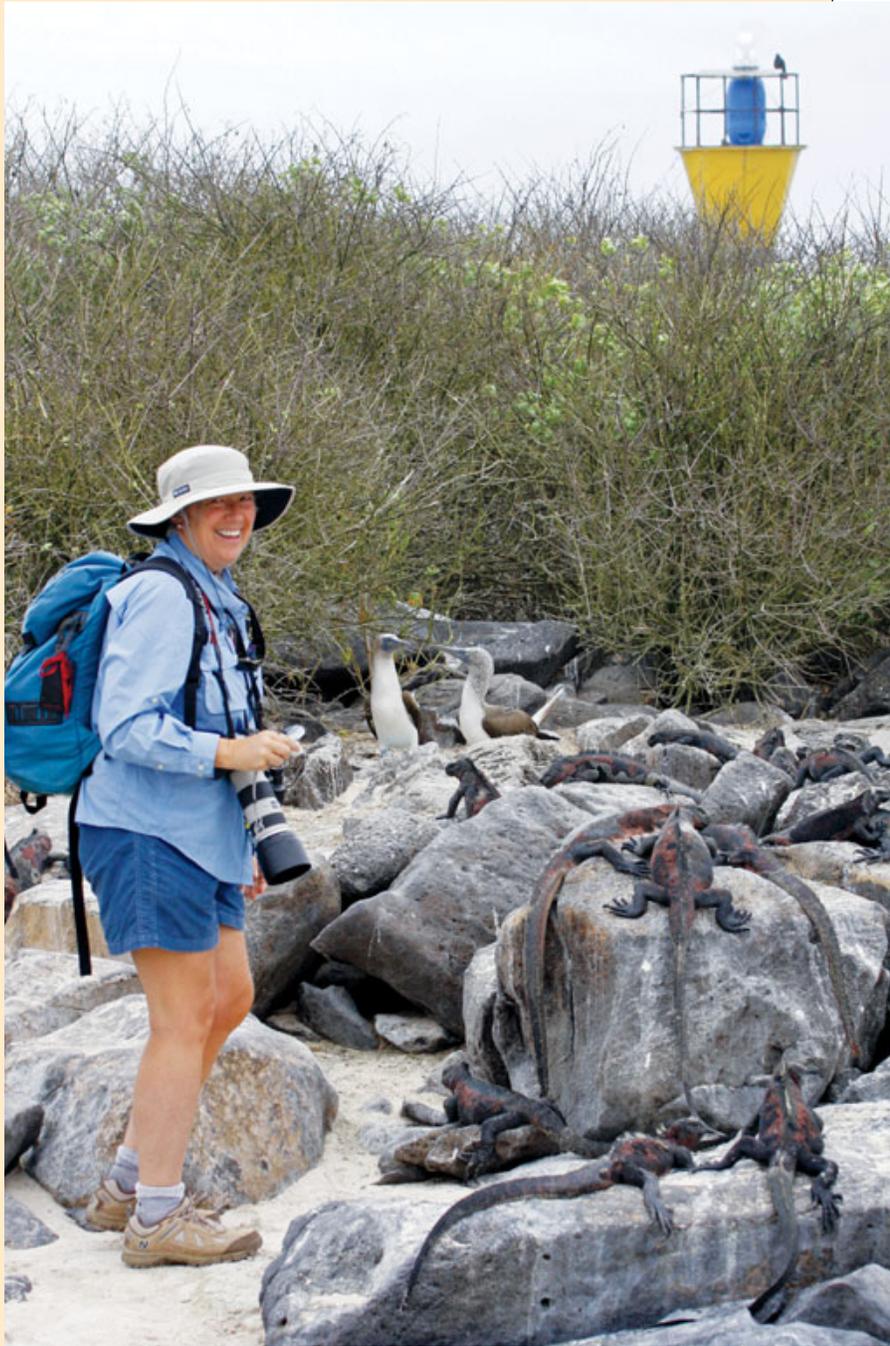
Dates for 2010 include

June 19-29 with Mitch Lysinger

July 17-27 with Megan Crewe

August 7-17 with George Armistead

Please contact us if you'd like further details.



At left, high tide on Española, where these Sally Lightfoot crabs have taken refuge behind some large boulders as the surf crashes around them. At top, tour participant Susan Gilliland being eyed by a pair of Blue-footed Boobies, a bevy of Marine Iguanas, and an ever watchful Galapagos Hawk, teed up on the tower. Above left, a young male Vermilion Flycatcher of the Galapagos population on the island of Isabela. Above right, a pair of Blue-footed Boobies doing their best to impress each other. [Photos by guide George Armistead]



African Wildlife Spectacular

Continued from page 1



Quite frankly, I agree with her and it's probably why I've lived in Kenya for thirty years. Where else can you easily see over 600 species of birds—and even more amazingly—60-70 large mammals? From Lions and Cheetahs on the plains of Masai Mara to secretive francolins and jewel-like sunbirds on Mt. Kenya...the Rift Valley lakes with over a million Lesser Flamingos...bustards, coursers, and sandgrouse in the arid country at Samburu...



At top, baobabs in the sunset and Reticulated Giraffes; at left, the colorful Malachite Kingfisher, and above, Lesser Flamingos, just a few of the 550,000 on Lake Nakuru. [Photos by guide Richard Webster and participants Daphne Gemmill and Paul Thomas]

turacos, hornbills, barbets, akalats, bushshrikes, and weavers in the forests at Kakamega...and the list goes on. Elephants, leopard, the herds of wildebeest, antelopes and gazelles, silent giraffes, grunting hippos—these are just some of the experiences we enjoy time and time again.

I've led Field Guides Kenya tours for over 20 years and the main problem we've encountered during that time is that because we limit the number of participants to just six, some folk have waited 2-3 years to get on the tour. Now you may ask, "Why then don't you increase the number of places on the tour?" Well, our experience has shown that a single guide with just six participants is undoubtedly the best way to enjoy this African Wildlife Spectacular. There's no following along driving in dust, no crowds on the forest trails, and a smaller group of like-minded people tend to interact better.

The *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (which I co-authored in 2002) helps visitors prepare in advance for *any* of the species we may encounter—all in an easy to use text-and-maps-opposite-plate format. For a taste of the mammals we may see, just look through any of the huge variety of books available, from field guides to large format photo-essays; we'll be happy to send you our recommended reference list.

We also understand that not all of you have the time to do our comprehensive 29-day Kenya tour, so we have brought back our **East Africa Sampler**, again limited to just six participants. In 21 days we'll visit a sampling of the very best parks in Kenya and Tanzania—the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater for a wealth of big game and savanna birds; the waterbird spectacle of Lake Nakuru; Kakamega Forest with its turacos, bushshrikes, and wattle-eyes; Lake Baringo, where over 500 species have been recorded; and the slopes of Mt. Kenya with their mix of high altitude forest birds and mammals. (*At the time of this writing, the Sampler is currently fully booked with a short waitlist for 2010.*)

So, whether you're interested in visiting all the major habitats of Kenya in 29 days or a variety of highlights in just 21 days, we have the East African experience you're looking for. We hope to see you in 2010.

Kenya Birding Wrap-up

Terry Stevenson

I've lived in Kenya for the better part of my adult life and have guided countless Kenya tours, but part of the enchantment of this land is that there's always something different, always something unexpected. Our September 2009 tour took place during one of the most severe droughts in many years. Of course (as on any tour) we missed a few species, but the dry conditions proved attractive to yet other birds—particularly those more normally associated with the northern desert lands.

For the first time we saw Scissor-tailed Kite at Samburu (well to the south of its usual range, perhaps a wanderer from the Lake Turkana region), and we had our best numbers ever of Vulturine Guinea-fowl (700+ at Samburu and 30 in Tsavo East). We saw all 5 bustards that were possible, Somali Courser, and we had good looks at White-headed Mousebird, Somali Bee-eater, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark, Pale Prinia, and Pringle's Puffback. The tour was also memorable for the Lesser Flamingo spectacle at Lake Nakuru, where rangers estimated there were 550,000 birds!

In addition to 40 species of raptors, 8 turacos, 7 owls (mostly in the day), 9 kingfishers, 8 bee-eaters, 11 hornbills, a displaying African Broadbill, and 22 greenbuls, we enjoyed amazing views of the critically endangered Taita Thrush in the Taita Hills, great looks at the stunning Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye at Kakamega, a Papyrus Gonolek that appeared at the edge of the papyrus at the last moment (yippee!), and one of Africa's most beautiful birds, the Golden-breasted Starling, which we saw in Samburu and Tsavo East.

It was also a fabulous tour for mammals with African Elephant, Lion, and Cheetah being favorites, as well as some less widespread species like Grevy's Zebra and Fringe-eared Oryx. And who could ever forget our long, close looks at the dainty Four-toed Elephant-Shrew feeding along a track in our vehicle headlights?

Ireland: Birds, Traditional Music & Pubs

Continued from page 1

It was the birds and the music that were new. Since I'd never birded in Europe, almost everything we saw was a lifer. There were scores of shorebirds and waterfowl, of course, migrants from further north wintering in the milder Irish clime. The sheer numbers were inspiring. But the individual encounters were what I recall most vividly, a Water Rail out in the open for several minutes while we sat in comfort (and warmth) in an enclosed hide; the White-throated Dipper that came out of nowhere and rested on a rock in mid-stream for all to get second and third looks through the scope; the confiding European Robin that posed for our photographs; or the elusive Eurasian Treecreeper—unencountered, at least by me—the downside of taking an afternoon off.

And then there was the music. Tommy Sands, one of the musicians who performed for us during our stay in Armagh, talks about the magic of music as it passes from the musician to his audience, and magical was what most of us felt about the music we heard. There were a number of individual musicians who stood out, Tommy for one, and Tom Sweeney, and our own Eugene Byrne. Eugene was our resident musician, along with us for the entire tour, and by the end of the trip we did indeed feel like he was our own.

But of all the wonderful musical sessions (or in Irish, *sessuns*), perhaps the most transcendent was our afternoon at a place called Tossie's Cottage. Tossie's is a traditional Irish session house where musicians from around the country gather to exchange songs and stories. It's located in Northern Ireland on the Makem farm outside Keady in County Armagh. The Makems, of course, are a kind of musical Irish royal family—Tommy Makem being the best-known among them; his mother, Sarah, collected and handed down hundreds of traditional Irish songs and is considered one of the most important figures in the revival of traditional Irish music, while Tommy spent much of his professional life in the US, playing with such musicians as the Clancy Brothers, Pete Seeger, and Bob Dylan.

We gathered in the late afternoon dusk in this out-of-the-way cottage with a warming whiskey and fire and listened to five musicians playing, as it seemed,

simply for the joy of it, and it was an experience that I don't think any of us will soon forget. Good music enjoyed in good company—what more can we ask?

There's a story that after Tommy Makem had been in America for several years, he came home to Keady with money jangling in his pocket.

"How much does it take to get to America?" a neighbor asked him.

"I suppose ninety pounds would buy a ticket," Tommy answered.

"Ah, for God's sake," said the neighbor, "sure if I had ninety pounds, I'd never want to go anywhere else."

By the end of the trip most of us felt the same about leaving Ireland.

Mightn't it be better to stay here and think about home?

John Rowlett will be joining Terry McEneaney again this May for the Spring in Ireland trip, May 6-16, which visits a different part of the island, and he and Terry plan to return again in December for a reprise of last year's fall tour.



Eugene Byrne, our "resident" musician on the Ireland tour.



Ireland in Fall route



Ireland in Spring route

BIRD BUZZ: Shrikes in Greece

Megan Crewe

Say "shrike" to most North American birders, and the picture that springs to mind is probably a rather small, somewhat ferocious predator feathered in subdued tones of black and white and gray. After all, both of our continent's "regular" shrikes are near carbon copies of each other, with only subtle differences (and size) to separate them. But those who venture to the eastern edge of Europe will likely return with a rather different vision—because the four species of shrike we find on our Greece tour are anything but inconspicuously colored!

The Woodchat Shrike is a striking black and white with a bold chestnut crown; they're everywhere in open country in Greece, swooping from scattered trees and orchards, singing from telephone wires, and dotting the tops of crumbling ruins. Red-backed Shrikes are smaller and seem to favor the hawthorns and dog rose tangles that line the country's roadsides and hedgerows. The brick red back, pinkish underparts, black and white tail, gray head, and black mask of the male contrast nicely with the boldly barred underparts of the browner female.

The closest to "our" shrikes is the Lesser Gray Shrike, a southern counterpart of the Northern Shrike (which also occurs in northern stretches of the Old World); however, this primarily Asian species flashes pinkish underparts as it pursues small prey from dried thistle heads and fence posts. And the real prize (for this tour anyway) is the diminutive Masked Shrike, a handsome mix of black and white and orange that frequents the olive groves and hedgerows of easternmost Greece. Most common along the eastern end of the Mediterranean, it is generally the rarest of the shrikes found on the tour—so discovering a pair building a nest, as we did last year, is a real treat.

With much of its northeastern farmland still cultivated in traditional ways, Greece holds many species that are declining or gone across other parts of Europe. Its four shrikes, happily, are among those still-common species. Come and see them for yourselves! Tour dates for 2010 are May 2-16. Call our office or check our web site for a detailed itinerary.



Masked Shrike (above) and Red-backed Shrike (right) [Photos by Mike Crewe]





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BIRDING TOURS WORLDWIDE

Barrow, Alaska—Our tour group couldn't have been more startled: this flamboyant Ruff was gallivanting across the tundra, overdressed to the max. Classic Ruffs aside, did you know there also exist female-plumaged males—female mimics called “faeders”—that visit leks with females and then stealthily mate with them? This bird's antics at Barrow, however, left no doubt he's an alpha!



—George Armistead

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