



The Puerto Rican Screech-Owl with its rather long and bare legs is endemic to Puerto Rico. [Photo by guide George Armistead]

THE WEST INDIES: Birding James Bond's Islands

by George Armistead

If you are a birder living in Philadelphia, you know there is really only one James Bond. I will not debate whether Roger Moore was most dashing, or Sean Connery more sly, or whether Pierce Brosnan most debonair. I will only state, unequivocally, that there was but one James Bond and his name was, well...James Bond. Many of you reading this who are of the old school remember well a book that originally debuted in 1947, titled *The Birds of the West Indies* by none other than James Bond. It brought to life birds that before then had only been dreamt of, and the magic of the todies, the lizard-cuckoos, the bullfinches, and some very fancy hummingbirds spilled onto the pages. That book was, for the better part of seven decades, the bible for birders visiting the region. You see, James Bond was not a spy at all, but in fact an ornithologist. He lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, an area I love to refer to as "the cradle of ornithology."

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The Field Guides "Vacation"

Okay, stop right there. No, this is not some kind of weird birding re-make of National Lampoon's *Vacation* movie from 1983. I must be more direct: There is one week each year when our Field Guides tour schedule...has nothing scheduled. Considering we operate about 120 tours or more each year, that's quite remarkable—the rest of our year, there's hardly a day where we don't have one or more groups and guides out traveling the world. And we have you to thank for signing up with us, allowing us to take you birding to some truly amazing places. We never forget how fortunate we are. But I digress. We've created that blank week. Why?

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14 June 2008: "Day of the Jaguar"

by Bret Whitney

Every tour has its outstanding moments, producing memories that stay with you long after you're home. We do our best to help them happen with extensive guiding experience, careful itinerary planning, selection of the best seasons for weather and birding in general, and other logistical details that position us advantageously. In fact, most of the great events that happen on tours are, for well-seasoned guides, expected (though often not predictable) peaks on the daily chart of activities. For example, Gray-bellied Goshawk (*Accipiter poliogaster*) is a bloody rarely seen bird. It

occurs almost everywhere across Amazonia and we operate tours to lots of places in its range, but I'd guess we've seen it on Field Guides tours only about a half-a-dozen times in 20+ years. Thus, it was a tremendous highlight to see it well (and for so long) on this year's RAINFOR-EST & SAVANNA tour to Alta Floresta and the Northern Pantanal. But it wasn't surprising to me, because we "did it right" by getting up on the tower quite early when this raptor fairly regularly perches conspicuously on treetops and vocalizes. So, there it was. Excellent!

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No, this was not taken at a zoo! This is the very same Jaguar that Bret writes about in this article. [Photo by guide Bret Whitney]

GuideLines *with Terry Stevenson*

Thirty years of birding in Kenya and Africa—another world

In June of 1974 I took a plane from London to Nairobi and literally stepped into another world. Wearing a 'safari jacket' that I'd bought in an army-navy store (with a special large field-guide-sized pocket sewn on the inside by my mother), I walked and hitch-hiked across a good chunk of Kenya. I visited the high slopes of Mt. Kenya, where Tacazze Sunbird was particularly memorable; the desert-lands at Samburu, with exotic-looking local people; the lakes of the Great Rift Valley, where I saw millions of Lesser Flamingos at Nakuru; the grassy plains of Masai Mara for Lion, Cheetah, and huge herds of Wildebeest; and, finally, the coast for the Sokoke Forest endemics and Crab Plover. Little did I realize at the time that I'd return to live there in 1977—and still be there 31 years later!

In the years since my first visit, I've traveled and guided tours widely across Africa, helping to develop the broad array of tours we offer (beyond our ever-popular Kenya tours) across the continent at Field Guides. Want to combine my home base of Kenya with Tanzania? I'll be guiding an East Africa Sampler running March 1-21 next year. Want to explore the amazing variety of birds and landscapes of South Africa? Local expert Rod Cassidy will co-lead with me in October of 2009. Looking elsewhere? We have some fabulous itineraries to Zambia & Malawi (Apr-May), Namibia & Botswana (May), Uganda (May-Jun), and Morocco (Sep) as well...all featuring those amazing African landscapes, fantastic birds, and other wildlife that so captivated me on my first visit to the continent. Join us on any one of these great adventures!



These are some of the wonderful creatures that have fascinated Terry for years. The colorful Malachite Kingfisher is a widespread species in Africa; the African Lion, well...he is the king; the Rockrunner or Damara Rockjumper is endemic to Southwest Africa; and finally, Terry on tour at Stanley's Camp in the Okavango Delta. [Photos by participant Paul Thomas]



A few scenes from our 2008 annual meeting against the Arizona backdrop, from left: a late afternoon porch chat at the cantina; Chris and George discuss the finer points of birds and birding, while Alvaro may consider arbitrating; Dan gives an aside as Bret and Alvaro ponder; a morning coffee circle with a few folks in the yard—Jan, Rose Ann, Bret, John Coons (partly hidden), and Dan.

The Field Guides "Vacation"

Continued from page 1

We could close the office, turn on the answering machine, put the email on auto-reply, hang out under some palm trees—yahoo! And goodness knows, those palm trees are tempting. Instead, however, we plan a "vacation" of a different sort—this year our departure points included Nairobi, Toronto, Portland, Charleston, Austin, Baton Rouge, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Charlottesville, Flagstaff, Tucson, Portal, and London. In that recent blank week in late August, all the folks leaving those points converged on a location just south of the famous roadside rest in Patagonia, Arizona.

I love the tours I guide, but I love this particular week of our annual Field Guides meeting of guides and office staff in a different way. I get

to hang out with and watch and be humbled by a bunch of talented Field Guides folks of whom I am very fond. There's talk of the past year's tours, of our successes, and of the things we would like to change or do better in the field or in the office (and there are always various of each). I listen in on amazing stories of birds and birding experiences. Or discover as yet unknown talents (did you know two Field Guides can do amazing "air" guitar and others are veritable pool sharks?). We get out in the field together—a surfeit of guides!—and this year made a jaunt nearby after that first-US-record Sinaloa Wren. And each year I have to apologize in advance to our very tolerant Red Cross CPR and First Aid instructor that our 'students' like to make everything we do fun. Fortunately, he understands.

Not everyone can make it to our get-together each year, but we try to gather as many Field Guides as possible. Terry Stevenson won the long-distance-migrant award this time around, coming all the way from the slopes of Mt. Kenya...it was really great to see him. Our meeting schedule includes serious things, fun things, boring things, silly things, productive things, and, of course, dishwashing. It sounds sort of like a family gathering. Come to think of it, I guess it is.

—Jan Pierson

Last Spaces

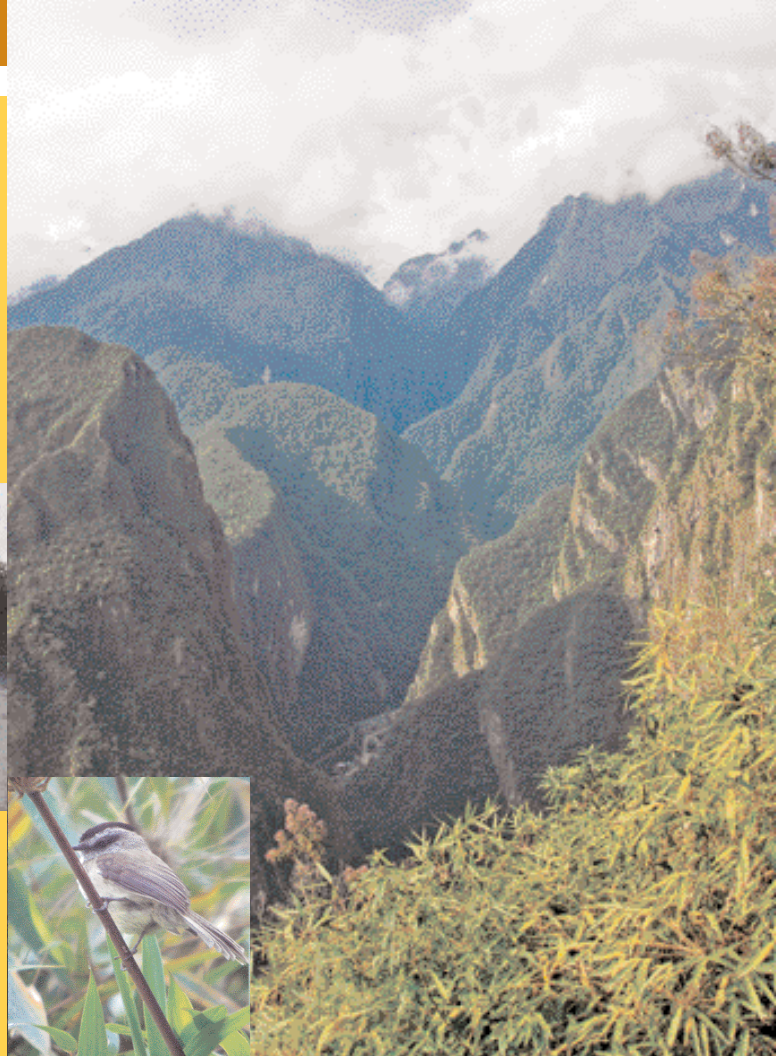
Northwestern Argentina, Oct 28-Nov 16 with Dave Stejskal & Jesse Fagan
Madagascar, Mauritius & Reunion, Nov 8-Dec 5 with Dan Lane & Megan Crewe
Southern Argentina, Nov 15-Dec 2 with George Armistead & Jesse Fagan
Southern India, Nov 16-Dec 7 with Terry Stevenson
Thanksgiving Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics, Nov 22-Dec 1 with Jay VanderGaast
New Zealand, Nov 23-Dec 11 with Phil Gregory
Trinidad & Tobago, Dec 27-Jan 5, 2009 with Megan Crewe
Wild Darien: Cana & Cerro Pirre, Dec 27-Jan 5, 2009 with Dave Stejskal

FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Reports from Recent Tours
compiled by Alvaro Jaramillo and Abbie Rowlett



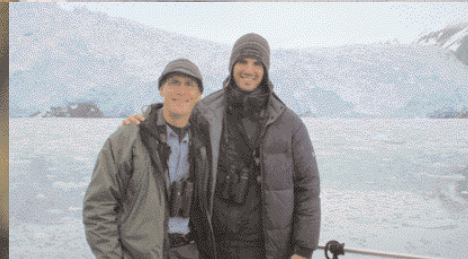
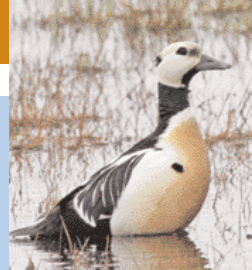
The folks on our second **Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga** tour this year enjoy a warm cup of, well, could it be coca tea? Not only does it keep your hands warm at high altitude, it also is said to help you feel better. Unstreaked Tit-Tyrant is a rather negative name for such a cute little bird. Found near tree line, this endemic flycatcher is very fond of *Chusquea* bamboo. At far right, the beauty of the Sacred Valley of the Incas is undeniable; it is said to have been the Inca's best maize- growing area—now, it's back to bird habitat. [Photos by guide Dan Lane]



Our newly re-designed **Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata** tour now spends part of its time at the wonderful Reserva Amazonica. These are the comfortable bungalows at the reserve (below left), where great birding is right outside your door! Below, the Rufous-headed Woodpecker is a rather scarce bamboo specialist and a beautiful bird. The canopy walkways are a wonderful highlight of this tour; at far right, participants Rita Dedeker and Barney Scollan enjoy the one at Reserva Amazonica. [Photos by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Alaska sure is in the news these days, as it should be—but for its world-class scenery and absolutely out-of-this-world birding. It is a state like no other. The Bering Sea is a center of endemism for seabirds, and the Pribilof Islands are a one-of-a-kind place to see these specialties. Barrow is as Arctic as you can get, with even the possibility of seeing a Polar Bear. There is so much to see in Alaska that is special, and there is certainly always the chance to find some rarity from Asia. One of our groups this year happened upon a Rufous-tailed Robin, a bird absolutely new to North America—Wow! Top row above, a stunning drake Steller's Eider in Barrow and two of the many Humpback Whales seen on our Kenai Fjords boat trip. Bottom row above, the peculiar bill structure of the Parakeet Auklet, here on the Pribilofs, is thought perhaps to be an adaptation for handling jellyfish. Guides Chris Benesh and Jesse Fagan take in the sights at Aialik Glacier. At left, this year's first Alaska group near Denali National Park. [Photos by guides George Armistead & Chris Benesh]

Newfoundland & Nova Scotia are culturally distinct in Canada. They are isolated from the rest of English-speaking Canada and historically rich with a great influence from Scottish and Irish settlers. Even the Vikings once made their home in Newfoundland, well before the Americas were "discovered!" Surely they marveled at the huge colonies of murres at Witless Bay, Newfoundland, where Common and Thick-billed murres can be seen side by side (top right). [Photo by participant Kay Niyo]

At right, a male Mourning Warbler stares us down on the trail to Benjie's Lake on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Below, the scenery that makes this part of Canada so special; here Tors Cove, south of St. John's, Newfoundland. From this spot, Chris Benesh and his group counted dozens of Humpback spouts, estimating some 50 whales present! [Photos by guide Chris Benesh]



Arizona is in some ways a little bit of Mexico right here in the US, at least in terms of its avifauna. One tropical denizen which reaches its northern outpost here is the tiny Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (above). It is beardless because it lacks bristles at the base of the bill; it doesn't need these sensory hairs as this flycatcher forages like a warbler. The male Black-headed Grosbeak (top right) is a widespread and fancy-looking species common in Arizona and throughout the west. Western Tanager is one of three colorful tanagers that we regularly find in Arizona. With four departures each year, we have this avian paradise well covered. [Photos by participant Nellie Hintz & guide Dave Stejskal]





Our **Zambia & Malawi** tour covers a rich and varied yet somewhat neglected part of Africa: the south-central region. Apart from the diversity of birds and visits to two rather different African nations, this tour visits the fantastic Victoria Falls or *Mosi-oa-Tunya* (the Smoke that Thunders). Victoria Falls is considered to be the largest sheet of falling water in the world, giving it the claim of largest waterfall in the world. Above, a sundowner cruise on the Zambezi River. The Yellow-bellied Greenbul (top right) is a member of a group of largely green and yellow species found in small noisy groups. The fantastic Saddle-billed Stork is a bird that makes an impression on you! That colorful bill really does look like it has a saddle on it. The Water Thick-knee at far right is a nocturnal shorebird, hence the large eyes. [Photos by participant Marge Barrett]



The superb view from one of our hotels on the **Greece** tour (top left), the town of Lithoro with Mount Olympus in the background. This is the mythical home of the Greek gods, who supposedly chose the spot because clouds often hid it from the view of mere mortals. The myth of storks bringing babies, of course, comes from this part of the world where White Storks often nest on roofs or near settlements (top right). At left is our group descending Mount Parnassus, located above Delphi. This was the home of Pegasus, but if we are lucky, we are much more likely to find a Rock Partridge here than a winged horse. Finally, above right are the ruins of the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi. This building was reconstructed between 1904-1906 like a giant jigsaw puzzle; the archeologists matched up the inscriptions which completely cover all the blocks to correctly reassemble it. [Photos by participant Bill Denton]

THE WEST INDIES: Birding James Bond's Islands

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I admit my unabashed bias for my state, but PA has been home to many of the greats, from Peter Kalm, William Bartram, Audubon, Alexander Wilson, Spencer Fullerton Baird, and John Cassin to more contemporary names like Sutton, Witmer Stone, Ted Parker, Robert Ridgely, and Frank Gill. That is a hefty haul of some of our nearest and dearest in the ornithological realm. Bond was among them, living from 1900 to 1989. He was curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia—not the idle, toiling type, but a man of great accomplishment, winning many awards for his work including honors from the Wilderness Club, the AOU, the BOU, his employer the ANSP, and still others. It wasn't until 1953 that Ian Fleming, in the midst of penning *Casino Royale* and still in search of a name for his lead character, happened to look up at his bookshelf and made the name James Bond something else. Later he would write to the real Bond's wife, "It struck me that this brief, unromantic, Anglo-Saxon and yet very masculine name was just what I needed, and so a second James Bond was born." Indeed he was, and the Bonds' lives were forever changed. Though posing as a birdman might be an excellent cover for a spy (indeed some of my non-birding friends are

convinced that I work for the CIA, but I continue to offer no comment),

Bond had to settle for being an historic ornithologist.

Whenever I visit Puerto Rico's El Yunque National Park and gaze down on America's only tropical rainforest, admiring the Scaly-naped Pigeons darting back and forth as the rollicking calls of the Loggerhead Kingbirds wash through the valleys, it's hard not to think back to what it must have been like for Bond when he first visited the region. He was the first to suggest that birds here were actually not of South American origin, as others had long believed, but instead descendants of birds from North America. Fossils of the cartoon-like todies in places from Central America to Wyoming proved him right. Bond's discover-

The Puerto Rican Woodpecker, below left, is only found on this island and is reasonably easy to see. The St. Lucia Pewee is endemic to that Lesser Antilles island. [Photos by guides George Armistead & Alvaro Jaramillo]



ies were legion in the West Indies, but much still remains to be sorted out. I recall with great fondness the excitement Ned Brinkley and I felt when discovering Puerto Rico's first Cuban Martin. More exciting still and fascinating are the differences between the House Wrens that our Alvaro Jaramillo has noted in his visits to the Lesser Antilles. Typically, House Wrens, though not devoid of charm, are not especially inspirational characters, but what Al has noted is that the four "House" Wrens on Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, and St. Lucia all differ significantly in voice, in appearance, and often in behavior. These are clearly four different island-endemic species that have yet to be recognized as such, and not all of them are doing well. The St. Lucia House Wren deserves particular attention, as it is very much limited in habitat and population, while the "House" Wrens on Martinique and Guadeloupe appear likely extinct already.

Indeed, discoveries remain for those of us interested in visiting this rich region, and Bond's islands still brim with birds. Join us on one or more of our quests to see and study them. We visit Puerto Rico in late March in search of the 17 or so endemics there, including Puerto Rican Tanager, Elf-woods Warbler, and, we hope, Puerto Rican Nighthjar (rediscovered only in 1961). Puerto Rico may be combined with our Lesser Antilles tour, which follows in early April for tremblers, wrens, and some rare and gaudy parrots. Or you can opt instead for our new late-March offering to the Bahamas, where Jesse Fagan will share with you several rare or range-restricted warblers along with some very showy butterflies (Bahamas may also be combined with the Lesser Antilles). Till then I'll leave you with a favorite farewell of Bret Whitney's and Jesse's, who like to say simply, "Bird on!"

Our Puerto Rico tour, guided by George Armistead and Dan Lane, runs March 29-April 4, 2009. Bahamas: Birds & Butterflies with Jesse Fagan is scheduled for March 29-April 3, 2009. Lesser Antilles, also guided by Jesse and which may be combined with either of these tours, runs April 4-18, 2009.

14 June 2008: "Day of the Jaguar"

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But there are some events that mark you for life, events that are all about just being LUCKY to be in the right spot at the right moment. We had one of these ultra-rare events on this tour, a completely fortuitous surprise of the highest order, when Jorge, a guide for the Cristalino Jungle Lodge at Alta Floresta, burst into the dining room and hollered "BRET, BRET!!"

Jorge had just left a Jaguar on the riverbank a short distance downriver. We jumped up from lunch and were in that boat in about one minute. Ten minutes later we were gasping as we watched a big Jaguar loafing on a tree trunk leaning over the river.

The massive cat allowed us to glide by three times, finally to within about 15 feet—incredible!—calmly looking back at us, even dropping a hind leg over the trunk as it relaxed, barely even twitching its tail. Those were soul-stirring stares! There were several nervous comments from the boat, but I calmed everyone down: "Not to worry, there's no way he can get all of us." I've seen Jaguars well several times now, but I know that I am never going to see one this well again in my life; it just would not be possible... ok, maybe if it was mauling me (I'd be proud to sport some scars as long as I could manage to get away!).

We'll try to keep Bret away from the Jaguar's claws until next year, when his tour, ALTA FLORESTA & THE NORTHERN PANTANAL is scheduled for June 19-July 4. And John Rowlett will be returning to ALTA FLORESTA October 5-16.

UPCOMING TOURS

BELOW IS A PARTIAL LISTING OF UPCOMING TOURS.

If you would like details on any trip or trips, please call or email for a tour itinerary, either online or mailed to you.

January-February 2009

Thailand
Oman & The UAE
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge I
Yellowstone in Winter
Colima & Jalisco
Venezuela
Panama's Canopy Tower I
Northeast Brazil: Long Live the Lear's
Northern India
Jewels of Ecuador
Wild Panama
Oaxaca
Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics
The Heart & Sole of Chile
Southwestern Ecuador
Winter Japan: Cranes & Sea-Eagles
Trinidad & Tobago
Western Mexico: San Blas & Sinaloa
Wild Darien: Cana & Cerro Pirre
Suriname
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge II
Venezuela's Llanos & Photography
Panama's Canopy Tower II
Guatemala: Shade-Grown Birding I
Brazil: Itatiaia, Iguazu Falls & Pantanal
Panama's Canopy Tower III

Jan 10-31
Jan 10-24
Jan 15-24
Jan 16-24
Jan 17-25
Jan 17-31
Jan 17-24
Jan 18-Feb 8
Jan 24-Feb 15
Jan 24-Feb 10
Jan 24-Feb 2
Jan 25-Feb 1
Jan 30-Feb 8
Jan 31-Feb 14
Feb 1-15
Feb 7-20
Feb 7-16
Feb 11-21
Feb 12-21
Feb 13-28
Feb 19-28
Feb 20-Mar 2
Feb 21-28
Feb 25-Mar 7
Feb 28-Mar 15
Feb 28-Mar 7

Dave Stejskal & Uthai Treesucon
Phil Gregory & George Armistead
Rose Ann Rowlett
Terry McEneaney & second guide
Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe
John Coons
Jay VanderGaast & local guide
Bret Whitney
Terry Stevenson
Mitch Lysinger
John Rowlett
Jesse Fagan & Dan Lane
Jay VanderGaast
Alvaro Jaramillo & local guide
Rose Ann Rowlett
Phil Gregory & local guide
Megan Crewe
Jesse Fagan & David Mackay
John Coons
Dave Stejskal
Dan Lane
George Armistead
John Coons & local guide
Jesse Fagan
Louis Bevier & second guide
Chris Benesh & local guide

March-April 2009

East Africa: Kenya & Tanzania
Philippines
Costa Rica
Western Panama
Honduras: Land of the Emeralds
Taiwan
Yucatan & Cozumel
Hawaii
Guatemala: Shade-Grown Birding II
Spring in South Texas I
Panama's Canopy Tower IV
Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes I
Mexico's Copper Canyon
Spring in South Texas II
Puerto Rico
Bahamas: Birds & Butterflies
Bhutan
Lesser Antilles
Zambia & Malawi
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I & II

Mar 1-21
Mar 7-29
Mar 7-22
Mar 7-16
Mar 7-15
Mar 12-22
Mar 14-23
Mar 14-24
March 15-25
Mar 19-27
Mar 21-28
Mar 21-Apr 4
Mar 25-Apr 5
Mar 28-Apr 5
Mar 29-Apr 4
Mar 29-Apr 3
Apr 3-23
Apr 4-18
Apr 10-May 5
Apr 11-17
Apr 18-24
Apr 12-21
Apr 18-27
Apr 22-27
Apr 25-May 9

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

Terry McEneaney
Chris Benesh & second guide
John Rowlett
Megan Crewe & local guide

Colorado Grouse
Big Bend, the Davis Mountains & Hill Country
Texas Hill Country
Classical Greece

Microhabitats: The Specificity of Harpia and Xenornis in Panama

by John Rowlett

The breathtaking Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*) is a wide-ranging raptor of Neotropical forests, and the

bizarre Speckled Antshrike (*Xenornis setifrons*) is a Thamnophilid of very limited range. Both are monotypic—and both are monolithic in their appeal to Neotropical birders!

Harpia is Panama's national bird, *Xenornis* the name of Panama's national bird Blog. Throughout its range, generally speaking, the Harpy prospers in the canopy and subcanopy of

large tracts of intact lowland forest, a habitat disappearing wholesale at an alarming rate. And within the miniscule world range of *Xenornis*, generally speaking, low-density pairs rely on intact undergrowth of humid hill forest.

There is no better place to seek these two humdingers than eastern Panama. But that's just where the puzzle comes in. Eastern Panama is replete with both habitat types. Why is it that two or three Harpy nests are found by the Embara almost annually in coastal Darien? And why is *Xenornis* predictable at Burbayar near Nusagandi? Before we can answer those questions, we need to grasp the importance of habitats *specifically speaking*. That is, we need some understanding of their microenvironments, the suite of habitable conditions that renders specificity to any reliable explanation.

In the case of *Harpia* here are three factors that create ideal conditions for these birds to procreate in the hills behind Mogue, a small, indigenous community of Embara: lowland hills covered with mammoth Cuipo (*Bombax*) trees that provide multiple nesting sites for the eagles; a plentiful food supply of opossums and (principally) sloths that feed on the second-growth vegetation that has succeeded after the forest understory has been modified and recycled by the Embara for the planting of their crops—without clearing the Cuipo; and a remote area very few people visit, accessible for all practical purposes only by boat—yet accessible. These microenvironmental conditions are particular to this area.

As for *Xenornis*, the microhabitat preferred by this poorly known antshrike is very specific: to prosper this suboscine with the high-pitched

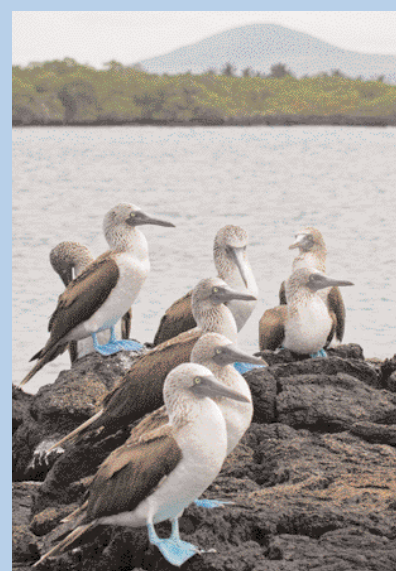
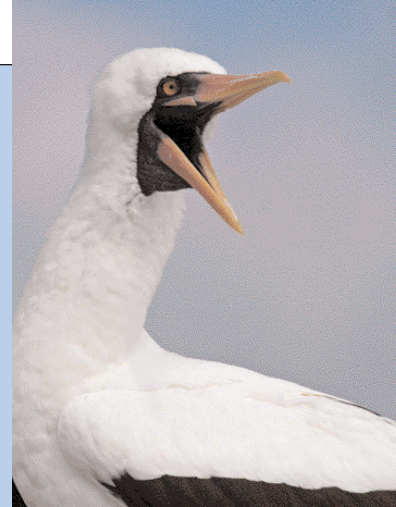
loudsong requires intact humid undergrowth located on steep slopes along and overlooking narrow streambeds. The up-and-down trails at Burbayar, our lodge on the border of Panama and Kuna Yala (formerly San Blas), traverse this microhabitat in ideal fashion. If a pair is not to be found on one of the territories where we have seen it on previous tours, these microhabitat guidelines permit us to locate yet another territory.

Although many exciting species are to be encountered along the way—maybe Sapayoa and Black-crowned Antpitta, Black Oropendola and Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo—it is no secret that **Wild Panama: Burbayar, Mogue & the Harpy Eagle** is designed around *Harpia* and *Xenornis* in a celebration of remote microhabitats in all their specificity.

Dates are January 24–February 2, 2009 (Canopy Lodge Extension to February 6).



A photo of the large expanses of forest Panama has to offer. The Harpy Eagle needs little introduction; it is absolutely the most majestic and powerful raptor on earth. If you'd like to argue that, you can take it up with Mr. Harpy himself! The Sapayoa is another one of Panama's oddball birds, like *Xenornis*. This bird's relationships have been debated for quite some time, and now it is clear that this is the only New World member of the Broadbills family! [Photos by guide John Rowlett]



The goosebumps are poking up as I write this. The boobies are perhaps the icons for the diversity of seabirds on Galapagos. At top, a laughing Nazca Booby is both elegant and showy, at least when it's not squawking at you. Participant Elizabeth Morey is surprised to have a Galapagos Mockingbird land on her hat, and this is not even the tamest species of mockingbird on these islands! The Blue-footed Boobies (above) make up for their relatively drab plumage with those feet, which they use in display in a peculiar slow-motion walk. We now think the "Galapagos" Vermilion Flycatcher (at right) is a separate and endemic species based on its rather different voice. Participants Susan Powell, Kathleen Sullivan, and Michelle Townsley enjoy a rest with Galapagos naturalist-guide Peter Freire (with camera) at Punta Cormorant on Floreana. [Photos by guides George Armistead & Alvaro Jaramillo]

Field Guides Galapagos – it's just not the same

by Alvaro Jaramillo

Ecuador's Galapagos Islands are one of the most awesome and absolutely enjoyable nature destinations anywhere on Earth. If you've never been, these islands are very likely on your list of places you'd like to visit, and for good reason. I have guided several of our Galapagos tours, and each time I first see the islands from the plane, I get shivers down my back, goose bumps, and just an overall feeling of joy. I love the place, the birds, the complexities of geographic variation you can see here, the islands' history, their diversity, their ocean...and the whole boat-living experience.

What gives me goose bumps about the Galapagos is the extraordinary lay of the land. There are large and small islands, flat and high islands, near and far islands. In essence it is a complex yet compact archipelago that is a speciation engine. Apart from that, the place has been incredibly well studied. It is absolutely fantastic to see geographic variation in bill size within single islands, and then between islands, and maybe even "in-between" birds (hybrids) here and there...all the bits and pieces that are finally allowing folks to truly understand how new species form. In addition, the Galapagos have shown how simple and elegant measurable change in bird populations can be in some cases, and how complex and messy it can be in others. Nowhere else I've traveled has allowed me to gain this level of appreciation of the mechanics of biodiversity—only Hawaii comes to mind as a contender.

But even if I forget my fascination with science for a bit, the birds are just so gorgeous, so fantastic: Blue-footed Boobies, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Waved Albatrosses, American Flamingos, Galapagos Petrels, Red-billed Tropicbirds, Galapagos Doves, Española Mockingbirds—the list goes on. Birds that look out of this world and are but an arm's length away. Birds that realize I mean them no harm, and that seem to think humans are just awkward, de-feathered birds and not to be feared. These birds are also full of personality, often displaying and generally putting on a show, so there is no room for boredom. The Galapagos are avian vaudeville, with marine iguanas and sea lions thrown onto the

stage. There is not a dull moment on the islands; something always captures your attention.

It's a special place, no doubt, and this is why we have crafted the absolutely optimal and fun tour to see these islands. It has taken years of trips, many boats, various itineraries, and we now have it. The Galapagos are too wonderful a destination to see from a large ship, with 40 passengers plus crew. The islands are meant to be seen in a more personal way. If your entire group can't fit in one dinghy to be transported from the boat to shore, the trip is too big! Our tour is intimate, and during our week of travel on the boat, the small crew become friends; it's not an exaggeration to say that tears are shed nearly every tour when we leave our crew. They are fantastic, and we have worked with them for many tours now: they know our style and love to work with Field Guides. Peter Freire, our local guide, enjoys our trips more than any others he does. Our tour is different from the typical mainstream itinerary, taking us to some places others do not get to see. Many of these spots are places that Peter, a full time naturalist-guide on the islands, only sees when he is with us! Itineraries in the Galapagos are becoming more and more rigid, and to some extent many boat operators are going with the flow and doing weeklong itineraries that repeat week in and week out. Ours is different, as it aims to see the wide diversity of habitats and wildlife of the Galapagos. In the last few years, most of our tours have seen all of the endemic birds of the archipelago; this is impossible to do without a personalized itinerary. If you have never been to the Galapagos, it is difficult to know in advance which islands will make an impression and which are less distinct in their nature. But once you've been there, it is clear which ones are the stars. It is therefore a real shame that some birding itineraries leave out Genovesa (Tower) Island, a gem and birder's dream. It features the only huge colony of storm-petrels which is active in the daytime and that you can visit anywhere on Earth! There are oodles of boobies of three species here, as well as Sharp-beaked Ground Finch and Galapagos Fur Seals, and it's the only place that you can see the endemic form of Short-eared Owl hunting seabirds! It's fantastic: I dream of Genovesa, and once you've been there you will too.

Our boat, the *Nemo II*, is a stable and fast catamaran, a yacht really. Folks on my last trip remarked how much fun it was to have this comfortable, clean, fancy boat all to ourselves. They really felt pampered by the superb boat and its great crew for what is the perfect Galapagos trip.

Just writing about the Enchanted Isles has again given me goose bumps. Mitch Lysinger, George Armistead, and I feel privileged to guide you in one of the world's natural wonders. We love the islands and have great fun there, and we can't wait to get back and share the joy of Galapagos with you—we know you will get goose bumps too!

If you'd like to get those goose bumps as soon as possible, our 2009 schedule is:
June 20-30 with Mitch Lysinger
July 18-28 with George Armistead
August 8-18 with Alvaro Jaramillo



Yucatan & Cozumel

by John Coons

I have been traveling to the Yucatan Peninsula and Cozumel Island for 25 years to see the several endemics, many local specialties, exquisite Mayan ruin sites, and the flamingos. In that time I have seen a few changes that have made birding tours go more smoothly. The ubiquity of bottled water, cell phone coverage throughout the tour route, and the prevalence of gas stations (and accompanying wash rooms) in areas where we formerly had to stop at the only station in the area and queue up behind trucks, cars, and taxis for long spells are all results of modernity that have made traveling here easier. These conveniences have not burdened our ability to find the endemic and local specialties of the area. The forests have changed little during this time and I still have my "sites" for species such as Yucatan Wren, Gray-throated Chat, Orange Oriole, and Black-throated Bobwhite dating to my first trip here. However, just like birding in your own region, there is always something new to learn.

For the last few years my co-leader for this trip has been Alex Dzib, who has showed me new places to bird, taught me cultural items of the area, and taken me to overlooked restaurants. His birding skills, great sense of humor, easy nature with people, and love of laughter caused us to hit it off immediately, and I look forward to birding with him every year. A native of the small fishing town of Celestun, home of the well-known flamingo reserve, Alex is of Mayan ancestry and has been birding since he knew of little else. On all of my early birding trips to Celestun we would hire his father and uncles, known as "los tres Osos" (the Three Bears) to take us in their fishing boats to see the flamingos, American

Pygmy Kingfisher, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, and Rufous-necked Wood-Rail in the surrounding mangroves. As a youngster, Alex, fittingly named "Osito" (Little Bear), would accompany his family on these trips and got to know the area birds quite well. This led him to take a great interest in conservation, which directed him to



the flamingo banding project and, with his excellent English, to an affiliation with the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Partners in Flight, and bird guiding through the three states that comprise the Yucatan Peninsula. Alex was instrumental in starting a youth birding club in Celestun which has twice as many members as originally thought possible and includes his seven year-old twins.

On our tour, some of our birding is at the national parks that protect the fabulous Mayan ruin sites in the states of Yucatan and Quintana Roo. A licensed guide for the ruins as well, Alex often draws on depictions of parrots, raptors, and waterbird carvings in the ruins to illustrate aspects of the ancient Mayan culture.

This tour has long been a favorite for those just beginning to explore the New World tropics, seasoned birders with an eye for the endemics, cultural enthusiasts, and birders wanting to escape the winter cold of the north on a relatively short trip to a warm climate. Join Alex and me this **March 14-23** to see some great birds, learn of the ancient Maya, eat some wonderful Yucatecan food, and laugh through this distinct part of Mexico.



Above right, the Adivino or Pyramid of the Magician in Uxmal, a Classic Mayan city which in alliance with Chichen-Itza dominated much of the northern Yucatan Peninsula at one time. Now, however, these areas are dominated by striking Blue-crowned Motmots (above) and noisy White-fronted Parrots (at right). And here's another view of Uxmal, this one the Nunnery Quadrangle. [Photos by guide John Coons]



SOUTH-BOUND DOWN TO MEXICO

by Jesse Fagan

Mexico. Meh-he-co. Yes, that just sounds so right. But what does it mean to you? What images does it create in your mind? Do you see rugged mountains of pine and oak? Valleys of columnar cactus and ancient pre-Columbian ruins? What about sandy beaches and a memorable sunset followed by the green flash? Do you hear Spanish or Mexteco (did you know there are Amerindian languages in use in Mexico)? Is dinner black mole or shrimp tacos (and what beer do we wash it all down with)? And, most importantly of all, where did you first see Long-tailed Wood-Partridge, Pileated Flycatcher, and Tufted Jay (or any of the other 97 or so endemics)?

Mexico has many great regions. One of the best has to be within the states of Sinaloa and San Blas—what we optimistically call “western” Mexico. I know, I know, there is a whole lot more to “western” Mexico, but hey, you have to start somewhere, and so our tour is **WESTERN MEXICO**. It’s a great two-site tour to the area, which means less time in vans and more time birding. A couple of nights find us along the Durango Highway in northeastern Sinaloa, where we’ll be birding in lowland dry-forest on up to the pine-oak at 7000 feet. Yep, you know it; we are talking about Tufted Jay, Green-striped and Rufous-capped brush-finches, Yellow Grosbeak (yes, they come in yellows, too), Citreoline Trogon,

Rose-throated Tanager, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Blue Mockingbird, Black-capped Vireo, Military Macaw...whew!

Ask any Field Guide who’s been there and I guarantee (though not my life, dog, or anything important) that the Hotel Garza Canela in the small fishing village of San Blas will make the list of his or her top tour hotels. The hospitality, food, and comfort are *cinco estrellas*. The birding here is five-stars as well. We will hit several sites nearby in subtropical dry and moist forest (Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Russet-crowned Motmot, and Rosy Thrush-Tanager), lowland marsh-savannah (White-throated Flycatcher and Mexican Parrotlet), pine-oak (Mexican Woodnymph, Elegant Quail, and Spotted Wren), and don’t forget a potentially very memorable evening mangrove boat ride for Rufous-necked Wood-Rail.

I want to invite you to experience Mexico. I want to show you why I love this part of the world. My home is in the United States, but my heart is in Mexico and northern Central America. *Vaya con nosotros!* And as my favorite singer, Tim Booth, would put it:

“One day I am going to break from my life,
To south-bound down to Mexico...”

Dates for the WESTERN MEXICO tour are February 11-21 with Jesse & David Mackay.

And if these dates don’t fit your schedule, we have several other Mexico tours. These include

COLIMA & JALISCO, January 17-25 with Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe
OAXACA, January 25-February 1 with Jesse Fagan & Dan Lane
YUCATAN & COZUMEL, March 14-23 with John Coons
MEXICO’S COPPER CANYON, March 25-April 5 with Terry McEaney



The outrageous-looking Tufted Jay is a specialty of the Durango Highway and endemic to western Mexico. The Colima Pygmy-Owl is not restricted to Colima but is a western specialty. [Photos by guide Chris Benesh] Much more widespread but not easy to see, let alone photograph, is the Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, a relative of our Veery and Hermit Thrush. [Photo by guide Dan Lane]

BIRD BUZZ

Spotted Rail

In our 2009 catalog, there is a fantastic full-page photo of the elusive and highly sought Spotted Rail (*Pardirallus maculatus*). The caption mentions that, though widespread throughout its range, the rail is seldom seen and very poorly known. However, in 2008 we managed to find this bird on three different tours (Panama's Canopy Tower, Honduras, and Yucatan & Cozumel)! We prefer satisfied and happy clients.

In Honduras, this species is known from only one location, Lake Yojoa, where we spend two nights. The lake levels in March of 2008 were the highest I had ever seen, swamping out most potential rail sites. Well, you can only try, right? Ned Brinkley (my co-leader) was working on the Spotted Rail and I was focused on finding Ruddy Crake, a common but difficult-to-see species on the lake. Just as we began to feel a little deflated (you know, the group shuffling around, kicking dirt, watching grackles), the rail (Spotted, that is) called nearby.

Ned: "Was that you, Helio?"

Jesse: "Uhh, nooo. I thought it was you?"

Soon after, a participant speaks the words that all guides dream about hearing: "I've got it."

Participant: "Hey, Jesse, I didn't know that Spotted Rail was so ruddy."

Jesse: "Huh, neither did I, where are you looking?"

Well, as often happens in this crazy thing called birding, we were in parallel universes: both the Ruddy Crake and the Spotted Rail had come out to investigate.



Do you see me? Spotted Rail at Lake Yojoa, Honduras, March 2008. [Photo by guide Ned Brinkley]

They were creeping along the lakeshore edge, just a few feet apart. Once we sorted out the confusion, everyone was able to enjoy both species in the same binocular view.

Definitely a Bird Buzz moment! *Jesse Fagan*

[If you're wondering who on earth Helio is, well it's sort of the Field Guides version of derivatives—we are wont to assign each other bird names, which end up being the default usage in a Field Guides conversation. So you have to make the leap from Jesse to Starthroat (his bird name) to Heliomaster (its genus) to just Helio—forgive us!]

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9433 Bee Cave Road / Building 1, Suite 150 / Austin, TX 78733
800-728-4953 / 512-263-7295 / fax: 512-263-0117
fieldguides@fieldguides.com / www.fieldguides.com

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