

BHUTAN

by Richard Webster

When the birdbath turns to ice, my mind turns to spring. Rhododendrons and magnolias, singing redstarts and courting minivets—not just any spring, but spring in Bhutan! This is escapist thinking (and, in my case, attempted denial that I have moved to a place where ice forms), but it is not a fantasy: Bhutan's best birding is a vibrant possibility this April, a pleasure to be anticipated through a long winter.

Admittedly, spring in Bhutan is not always warm. Looking for pheasants and rosefinches at dawn at 12,000 feet (half the height of the nearby giants!) requires a couple of layers, and the buds on the willows are just starting to show. But only 2000 feet down the mountain, the rhododendrons and magnolias are fabulous, while in the foothills it is closer to early summer, the flowers are already fading, the trees are leafing out fully, and the barbets are in full chortle. A trip to Bhutan is up and down 10,000-foot Himalayan ridges over which spring has been crawling, and we see the full progression of the season.

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This Silver-eared Mesia was photographed below Zhemgang, Bhutan, by guide Richard Webster. The mesia is a member of the large babbler family, one comprised of some rather diverse and probably unrelated birds.

The Promise of a New Dawn

by Jan Pierson

On Monday I awoke at five. My alarm was set for five-thirty, but rather than roll over I thought I might as well get up. I turned off the white noise of the a/c in my room, opened the glass doors to my little balcony, and assessed the day outside. Though the surroundings were still pitch black, warm and slightly humid air wafted over me. Two rooms away, a narrow shaft of light escaped outside—a couple of the folks on my tour no doubt up early to have a little leisurely prep time before breakfast.

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Best Ways to Bird Peru

by Rose Ann Rowlett

Field Guides has been taking birders to Peru for almost 25 years, and some of our guides have been leading trips to Peru for almost 30 years...not that they are getting old! If anything, the fathomless richness of Peru's avifauna—and the sense of discovery that probing it instills—keeps them young. John Rowlett guided his first Peru trip back in 1979 and Rose Ann Rowlett in 1981. Given that Peru is huge and geographically complex, with more than 1800 species spread across it, one can spend a lifetime birding there and still be seeing new species now and then! Under the oversight of the Rowletts, we have developed a diverse Peru program that includes many of the richest parts of the country.

Our tours can be viewed biogeographically, dividing into Amazonian destinations, north and south of the Amazon; and Andean destinations, north, central, and southeastern.

The **Amazonian tours** are generally immersions in rainforest birding, principally based at one to three lodges right in great habitat, usually reached by an internal flight from Lima and then by boat along the

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This is a classic view of the Machu Picchu ruins in Peru, which are a highlight of our **Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga** tour. [Photo by guide Rose Ann Rowlett]



GuideLines

with John Rowlett

Western Panama

Thirty years ago, on my first tour to western Panama, few places existed where one could stay in the embrace of natural beauty. The rich variety of habitats in Chiriqui and Bocas del Toro made clear where we would be birding, but the two bases of our tours in those days were the Fiesta, an air-conditioned hotel in the hot lowlands of bustling David, the capital of Chiriqui, and a charming, colonial hotel called the Panamonte, in Boquete, the picturesque, Swiss-like village at 4000 feet in the foothills of Chiriqui. These hotels gave us a place to rest our bodies at the end of glorious, bird-filled days, but they were far from ideal for birders. This was long before ecotourism had caught hold in the American tropics, and we birders—given to dressing, let us say, “for the field” and getting up, let us say, “before dawn”—stayed in establishments designed for and peopled by cattlemen and businessmen (yes, they were men), and at best by general tourists. I have to admit, it was not always a felicitous mix.

What a change three decades—and a little bird buzz—makes! Today our Western Panama tour is based in two of the most comfortable and handsomely situated ecolodges in the country—



Lerida Lodge, nestled in a beautiful highland reserve and shade-grown coffee finca above 5000 feet;



The Lerida Lodge, above, is a fantastic spot for birders, with great habitat and superb comfort. We have come a long way since John Rowlett's first trip 30 years ago! [Photo by participant Marcy Clements] Two species of the highlands of western Panama are the Three-wattled Bellbird and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush. The odd bellbird, with its loud call, attractive plumage, and three worm-like facial wattles, is a special sight. [Photos by guide John Rowlett and participant Paul Thomas] At right, birding Western Panama at Cabin 2, Los Quetzales. [Photo by participant Marcy Clements]



and Los Quetzales, situated at 6300 feet just outside La Amistad International Park. We are no longer compelled to stay in the largest city in western Panama in order to explore the magnificent Fortuna Road, the wildest and most scenic road in the country, or in the touristy town of Boquete in order to see bellbirds and quetzals or to bird the flanks of Volcan Baru! Here field clothes, along with early rises, characterize daily routines. See for yourself why these two lodges have become the buzz of the buzz among birders, hospitable inns perched on birdy grounds, providing delicious cuisine and offering a good night's sleep—every birder's dream. Believe me, these moments out of time will continue to surprise, long after the embrace is...but a recollection imbued with longing.

John's Western Panama tour is scheduled for March 7-16, 2009.

“I chose this tour because of past good experiences with Field Guides and the multitude of tanagers and hummingbirds to see. It was an excellent overall experience. At San Isidro the food is as thrilling as the birding. Mexican Fiesta night cooked by Carmen had everyone calling for seconds...Bravo to Carmen!”
Amy Price, Montane Ecuador 2008

“I chose this tour because I like traveling with Field Guides, and Sacha sounded wonderful. I also liked the idea of spending significant time in one place. It was a wonderful experience. Best features were the boat rides and the cocha, the canopy towers, looking for ant swarms. I'd absolutely travel with Jay VanderGaast again. Office service was great.”
Sharon Dasho, Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge 2008

Last Spaces

Trinidad & Tobago, Dec 27-Jan 5, 2009 with Megan Crewe
Wild Darien: Cana & Cerro Pirre, Dec 27-Jan 5, 2009 with Dave Stejskal
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge, Jan 15-24 with Rose Ann Rowlett (1 space)
Yellowstone in Winter, Jan 16-24 with Terry McEneaney & second guide (1 space)
Colima & Jalisco, Jan 17-25 with Chris Benesh & Megan Crewe (2 spaces)
Venezuela, Jan 17-31 with John Coons (2 spaces)
Northeast Brazil: Long Live the Lear's! Jan 18-Feb 8 with Bret Whitney
Jewels of Ecuador, Jan 24-Feb 10 with Mitch Lysinger (2 spaces)
Wild Panama, Jan 24-Feb 2 with John Rowlett
Oaxaca, Jan 25-Feb 1 with Jesse Fagan & Dan Lane
Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics, Jan 30-Feb 8 with Jay VanderGaast

FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Reports from Recent Tours
compiled by Alvaro Jaramillo and Abbie Rowlett



Bolivia is the birdiest landlocked nation in the world. There are so many distinct habitats and such varied scenery that it seems like we are visiting several different countries on one tour! Above, a handsome male Swallow-tailed Hummingbird shows off for the group; this is a species found in the lowlands of the Northeast. The White-collared Jay, with its gorgeous plumage, gives a new meaning to “getting a dose of the blues.” At right, a view down the valley from the upper Coroico road, a wonderful access to the montane forests known as the Bolivian Yungas. [Photos by guide Dan Lane]



Many of our short tours are extraordinarily long on birds, and **Montane Ecuador** is no exception. Blessed with oh-so-many gorgeous birds and a wide assortment of bird-oriented lodges, Ecuador is—for its size—the richest country for birds in South America. Our Montane tour focuses on the highland forests and open country found along the Andes, on both the east and west slopes. One of the birding lodges we visit is Guango, where at left our tour finds itself birding the upper montane forests of the east slope. Hummingbirds are one of the groups that abound in the Andes; the other is tanagers. Tanagers in the tropics tend to be smaller than those in North America, and usually even more colorful. Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, above left at Mindo Loma, is part of a group restricted to the Andes. The Golden-naped Tanager at right is a member of the genus *Tangara*, whose small tanagers are among the brightest and most colorful. [Photos by participant Alan Wight]

FRESH FROM THE FIELD



The Urubamba Valley is the Sacred Valley of the Incas, where people have been farming the slopes for thousands of years. Its mix of grassy areas and shrub attracts many Peruvian Andean specialties. [Photo by participant Penelope Bowen] The Hoatzin, below, is well known for many reasons, including being the sole member of a unique family. It is wholly vegetarian and, like a cow, has a complex digestive system, necessary because of the difficulty of processing leaves as food. Due to its unusual look and presumed ancient lineage, it also serves as the model for illustrations of *Archaeopteryx*, the fossil “first bird.” Of course that fossil species may have been purple with a pink head for all we know! In any case, the Hoatzin is weird looking and weird acting and makes enough of a splash that it’s understandable why it would serve as a model for that first bird. [Photo by participant David Smith] Below, David and Judy Smith, Nancy Hay, and guide Rose Ann Rowlett share in the fun of birding the tower at Amazonia Lodge. [Photo by Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga participant Penelope Bowen] At bottom, the historic city of Cusco at night in a photo by participant David Smith.



There’s more to **France** than Paris; there are mountains, forests, and of course birds! But after a full day of birding, what a treat to return to our hotel for some fine French food and wine—not bad at all! In Gavarnie we may see the Eurasian Griffon Vulture, one of the true vultures, so called to differentiate them from New World vultures. The upright Northern Wheatear (at right) is a species that also breeds in North America but is restricted there to such far-northern sites that most of us have to go to Europe to see one...and then be forced to enjoy that good wine and food... hey, someone has to do it! [Photos by guide George Armistead]



The Islas Encantadas, or **Galapagos** Islands, don’t need an introduction. If you haven’t been there in person, you’ve probably seen the islands on various wildlife documentaries. A striking aspect when you visit is how harsh the habitats are—not lush and tropical at all but rocky and dry in the lowlands and persistently moist and cooler in the highlands. It is exactly these unforgiving habitats that have created such a diversity of beak sizes in finches. There are also only a few ‘friends’ from North America that have populations here, such as this American Oystercatcher (above left). But the oystercatcher (an endemic subspecies) has a wing pattern somewhat different from that of its North American cousin. Above right is one of those famous finches: a Large Cactus-Finch. At right, the Sally Lightfoot Crab really brightens up the lava rock! [Photos by guide George Armistead]





Papua New Guinea is a tour known for its diversity of endemic birds and of course its BOPs or Birds-of-Paradise—but also for its people and culture. There are more than 300 language types on this island, more than anywhere else on Earth! Its people are equally diverse, and entire cultures and languages are being lost faster than rare birds. In the photo above, a group of kids comes to visit us at Konmai Village. Meeting these people is one of the highlights of a PNG tour. At top right, a Masked Lapwing in flight. It is found from Indonesia to Australia and is the only lapwing in PNG; recent genetic evidence suggests that lapwings may not be all that closely related to the true plovers. The Orange-breasted Fig-Parrot (at right) is part of a small tribe of a half-dozen species of parrots restricted to Indonesia, New Guinea, the Philippines, and Australia. [Photos by guide Dave Stejskal]



The Tepuis, the oldest exposed rock formations on the planet, are isolated, flat-topped mountains similar to the mesas of the southwestern US but covered in verdant vegetation. It is now thought that the origin of many highland species in the Neotropics was in the tepuis region. This White Bellbird from our Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics tour (top left) is in the cotinga family; cotingas are suboscines, a group that, for the most part, do not learn their songs but come with a species-specific, "hard-wired" song. Bellbirds, however, unlike most of their relatives, seem to be able to learn songs! The Crimson Topaz hummingbird (top right) stands out in a family known for its gaudy plumages. It also "leks," or has a display area where males show off for females. The Red-banded Fruiteater (right) is a fancy endemic of the tepuis highlands. [Photos by guide Jay VanderGaast]



Uruguay is a small country with no endemic birds—so why are we going there? Well, it offers fantastic birding. Since it's small, we can visit most of the country and see a wide variety of habitats at a pleasant pace, which is what we plan for our inaugural **Uruguay: Birding the Land of the Gauchos** tour in 2009. These photos are from guide Alvaro Jaramillo's recent scouting trip for this tour. We'll be enjoying Uruguay while staying mostly in estancias (ranches) away from the cities where gauchos, Red-legged Seriemas, and Diademed Tanagers roam! Above, the Palm Savanna in the Castillos region of eastern Uruguay. There are a good assortment and often great abundance of waterbirds in the country such as the Roseate Spoonbills at right, as well as many marsh-loving species such as this Sulphur-bearded Spinetail, an ovenbird restricted to this part of South America. Come join us for reedhaunters, Giant Wood-Rails, rheas, and lamb barbecue on our tour of the undiscovered gem that is Uruguay.





Best Ways to Bird Peru

Continued from page 1

rivers. Most of our birding is by foot on established trails that are well maintained but can be muddy, uneven, or slightly hilly. The forest gives up its secrets slowly, and forest birding requires watching patiently and walking quietly in a warm, humid climate. These tours are designed for birders who love forest birding and find sorting through mixed-species flocks, viewing a shy tinamou or wood-quail, or finding a troop of monkeys gorging on fruit overhead to be ample reward for their patience. The specific rewards vary with each tour.

The avifauna of northern Amazonian Peru north of the Amazon (e.g., at the lodges we use on our **Iquitos, Peru: Canopy Walkways & Ancient Forests** tour) differs substantially from that of southeastern Amazonian Peru, all of which is south of the Amazon, a significant biogeographic barrier. In fact, it overlaps far more with that of Amazonian Ecuador and its lodges along the Napo. But the lower Rio Napo near Iquitos hosts the greatest diversity of river island specialists anywhere, and the Iquitos area itself is distinguished by its ancient white-sand forests, which support a host of very range-restricted endemics. The famous ACTS canopy walkway offers access to one of the finest (for birds) canopy-viewing towers in all of Amazonia, offering eye-to-eye views of canopy denizens from Black-bellied Cuckoo to Dugand's Antwren. While the general area has more human inhabitants than farther south, the diversity of Amazonian habitats that are accessible near Iquitos is unsurpassed. There are indeed few accessible places where one can hope to see both Black-necked Red-Cotinga and the rare Nocturnal Curassow.

Our southeastern Amazonian tours are distinguished by their greater wilderness aspects, and thus a far greater number of big macaws, as well as a greater diversity of big mammals (like monkeys, tapirs, and cats) and big, tasty birds (like trumpeters and cracids). They are further distinguished by their tremendous diversity of bamboo specialties, of which there are several dozen! Here too are some of the finest oxbow lakes in Amazonia, complete with Giant Otters, Hoatzins, and other cocha specialties. The bird lists of our tours to **Manu Wildlife Center** and to **Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata** are substantially overlapping, but—since the big bamboo bloom, seeding, and dieoff that spread through the region starting in 2001—it seems to take visits to both areas now to complete the long list of species dependent

on *Guadua* bamboo. Highlights of both these southeastern tours invariably include watching the unbelievable spectacles of parrots and big macaws gathering in noisy, early-morning flocks to major clay licks (or ccollpas) by the hundreds. Our **Mountains of Manu** tours range down into the Amazonian rainforests as well, including a nice sampling of rainforest species that occur at (or prefer) 1500-1700 feet, but not the majority of the lowlanders. Each of these tours features canopy platforms, sometimes connected by walkways, and each canopy platform offers different opportunities, from being right in the midst of a slow-moving canopy flock with time to enjoy at close range such specialties as Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak and Sclater's and Chestnut-shouldered antwrens (at Manu Wildlife Center) to finding a perched Harpy Eagle (near Posada Amazonas on the Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata tour) to watching a troop of big woolly monkeys foraging all around you (at Amazonia Lodge on the Mountains of Manu tour). Read our catalog summaries and then request the detailed itineraries for help choosing among these tours.

Our **Andean** tours are transects or loops through a wide range of habitats, often rich in localized Peruvian endemics. So rugged and complex are the Andes in Peru that a large number of species have been isolated for a very long time, resulting in a high percentage of narrowly range-restricted species. For example, the genus *Incaspiza*, itself endemic to Peru, consists of five species of inca-finches, each restricted to a local section of Andean slopes and valleys in central or northern Peru. Each of our Andean tours encounters an impressive number of such specialties, as well as many of the widespread Andean classics, from Torrent Duck and White-capped Dipper to Golden-headed Quetzal and an amazing array of multi-colored tanagers, for which the east-slope forest is justifiably famous. And the settings for our birding are invariably magnificent, the climates pleasantly cool. If you prefer a cooler climate and are not bothered by high altitude, you may want to select one of these tours.

Our **Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru** tour combines a world-class archaeological site with some fabulous birding in the shadow



As Rose Ann makes clear in this article, there is a lot to see in Peru, and it's difficult to choose just a few photos to illustrate the most diverse avifauna in the world! So how about some colorful ones! At far left is a hummingbird with the great name of Rufous-crested Coquette—this one from Manu National Park. To its right, the multicolored Many-banded Aracari, which is of course a small toucan. Peru is one of the few Latin American nations to retain a vibrant native culture, with people who are proud of their heritage and dress in traditional and often gorgeous clothing. These women are from the town of Paucartambo. [Photos by participants Francesco Veronesi and Joe Fuhrman]

of a snow-capped peak and on southern Peru's humid east slope (complete with Masked Fruiteater, Inca Wren, Parodi's Hemispingus, and a handful of other endemics), all the while basing in relative luxury! Combined with its pre-tour Lima Extension: Pucusana, Lomas & Andean Foothills, which samples starkly contrasting habitats, from the Humboldt Current of the Pacific to barren coastal desert, fog-enshrouded hills (or lomas), and arid montane habitats on the west slope of the Andean massif above Lima, it's the perfect introduction to birding Peru.

Our **Mountains of Manu** tour also bases in comfort and enjoys a terrific range of habitats, from 1500 to almost 13,000 feet. From the arid intermontane Cusco valley, we climb (by bus) endemic-rich, scrubby slopes to the high puna zone and then descend from tree line, at the boundary of Manu National Park, through temperate and subtropical cloud forest down to the foothill zone at the eastern base of the Andes. While based at a comfortable lodge, we bird up and down one of the "birdiest" roads in the world, which ribbons its way through uncontained wilderness full of flagship east-slope species (like lekking Andean Cocks-of-the-rock!) and a handful of endemics and regional specialties. Then, after crossing the Alto Rio Madre de Dios, we have four full days of birding on trails in upper tropical rainforest while based at the lovely Amazonia Lodge, its gardens abuzz with a dozen species of hummingbirds. If you don't mind lighting your room with candles (at Cock-of-the-rock Lodge) or sharing some well-kept bathrooms down the way (at Amazonia Lodge), this tour would be a natural followup to Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga for extending your Andean birding.

Our **Northern Peru: Endemics Galore** tour transects the Andes from the coastal deserts and foothills in the west to the crest of the western cordillera, through arid intermontane valleys, including that of the great Rio Marañon; up over the eastern cordillera to the humid forests of the east slope that spill down to the foothills. While overlapping some with the avifauna of southern Ecuador (especially in Tumbesia), most of the birds are different, especially

south of the Marañon. The focus is on endemics and regional specialties, from White-winged Guan and Marvelous Spatuletail to some rather undistinguished-looking furnariids and difficult-to-see antpittas and tapaculos. It offers our most complete coverage of northern Peru, and, as a result, involves several basic hotels and two nights of (outfitted) camping.

Peru's Marvelous Abra Patricia & the Spatuletail tour is a short tour that concentrates on the extraordinary Abra Patricia area and Alto Mayo cloud forest visited by our Northern Peru tour with some additional birding in the Tarapoto/Moyobamba area. It requires no camping. Both northern tours use the new Owlet Lodge (this tour for five nights) as a base for birding the humid east slope, and both have excellent chances for an adult male Spatuletail and increasing chances for the legendary Long-whiskered Owlet (now that we've encountered it only a hundred meters from the lodge on our July 2008 tour!).

Our **Central Peru: Huascaran & Bosque Unchog** tour, which focuses on the many high-Andean endemics of central Peru amid extraordinarily scenic settings, including Huascaran National Park, Lake Junin (with its flightless grebe), and wilderness camping at an 11,000 foot bog, is offered every few years. It's 20 days long and climaxes with Diademed Sandpiper-Plover and White-bellied Cinclodes at 15,500 feet, after two weeks of acclimatization. It will be offered again May 15-June 3, 2010.

In 2009 we are offering the following nine tours for your consideration.

Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga I & II—June 25-July 4 with John Rowlett & Jesse Fagan or July 28-August 6 with Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan

Manu Wildlife Center—July 3-16 with John Rowlett & (returning to Field Guides Peru tours) Pepe Rojas

Peru's Marvelous Abra Patricia & the Spatuletail—July 15-26 with John Rowlett & Mitch Lysinger

Mountains of Manu I & II—July 25-August 9 with Rose Ann Rowlett or October 10-25 with Dan Lane

Iquitos, Peru: Canopy Walkways & Ancient Forests—August 11-22 with Dave Stejskal

Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata—September 28-October 11 with Rose Ann Rowlett

Northern Peru: Endemics Galore—November 7-28 with Rose Ann Rowlett & Richard Webster

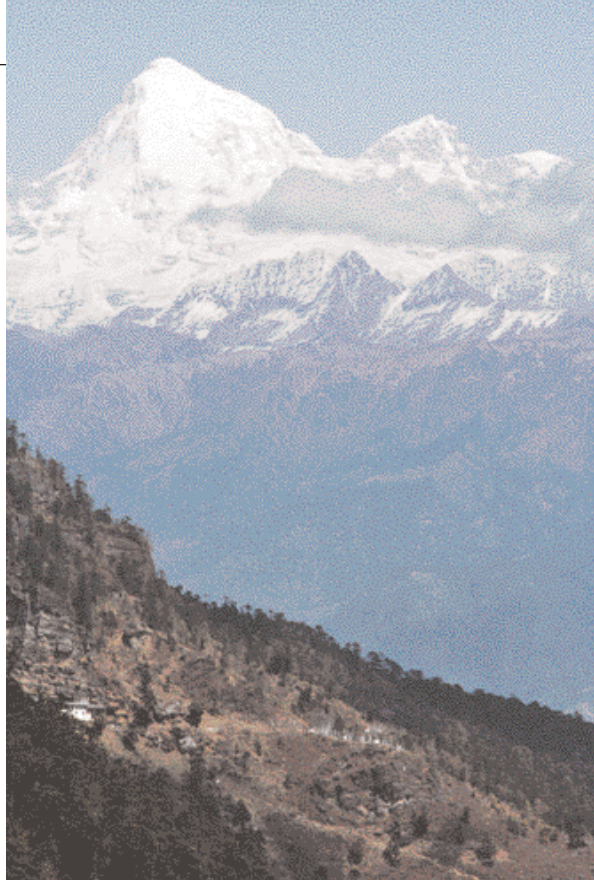
Many of these may be combined. For complete details please call or email.

BHUTAN

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Some of the birds are “crawling” back up the mountains, too. Many characteristic Himalayan “residents,” ranging from Ibisbill to babblers such as laughingthrushes, fulvettas, yuhinas, and scimitar-babblers, are altitudinal migrants that keep their toes warmer by moving downslope 3,000 to 5,000 feet in winter. Others, such as most of the ten species of tit (in three families), move only a little, handling winter snow with relative ease. Still others, such as ten species of cuckoo, Blue-capped Rock-Thrushes, and a half-dozen leaf-warblers, are classic long-distance migrants that winter in the tropical warmth of India’s Western Ghats or Sri Lanka and are returning to their breeding grounds in Bhutan. Yet other species are headed far north to breed, such as ducks and shorebirds near the Arctic Circle and flycatchers and warblers in the taiga of Siberia.

Picking a time to visit Bhutan is like picking a time to visit Texas; one is always too early for some species and too late for others, but you can’t lose because it is always wonderful. (And the cultural delights of peaceful Bhutan are truly resident!) We have found April an excellent mid-point in the flow of migrants, a time that combines some of the best blooms with the onset of song from returning migrants, and it gets one home just in time for the best of our spring.



Jholmahari Peak at left is one of Bhutan's highest mountains. Some of the most incredible and most sought-after birds of the Himalayas are the pheasants—one look at this gorgeous Blood Pheasant, taken at Thrumsing La, will give you an idea why! [Photos by guide Richard Webster]

This year we’ve added an optional pre-trip to Kanha National Park in central India, where seeing a Tiger (hopefully Tigers) is at the top of our list. Originally a hunting reserve

for the privileged, the park was created in 1933 and has been expanded several times. In addition to Tigers, there are other cats to be seen in the park including Leopards and Jungle Cats. And of course, there is lots of Tiger food (Spotted Deer, Sambar, Swamp Deer, and Guar among others) and 300 species of birds. Because this is Richard’s first trip to the park, we are offering the pre-trip on an “at cost” basis.

Dates for next spring’s trip are April 3-23, and March 29-April 4 for the Kanha National Park pre-trip. For complete details, please call or email us.

The Promise of a New Dawn *Continued from page 1*

I stepped out of my room, walked down the hall and through the screen doors to the small pool deck. The water was warm, so I slid in, paddled a few laps, then floated on my back for a minute. Above me, nothing but the broad spray of a billion southern stars twinkling. I climbed out of the water, grabbed a pool towel, and sat on the bench edging the deck.

By now, the very first hint of dawn allowed the outlines of the surrounding savanna and its patchy woodland to appear. From the treetops a Laughing Falcon began a long series of calls lasting more than a minute. A Rufous-bellied Thrush and Yellow-billed Cardinal began their morning rituals of song. From somewhere on the ground amongst the nearest trees, an Undulated Tinamou gave its three-noted “Whooooo-are-yoooouuu,” rising at the end. A slightly metallic, loud, and two-parted wing-rattle from somewhere above the far canopy told of a Blue-throated Piping-Guan proclaiming its territory. From everywhere around came the chirps and peeps of a thousand frogs and insects.

The sun would shoot straight up soon enough, illuminating the day and what we hoped to see. The darkest hour transitioned into anticipation for the day ahead – perhaps we’d spot a Red-legged Seriema or that Undulated Tinamou, or a lovely Rusty-backed Antwren or vaguely reptilian Spot-backed Puffbird – so many choices here.

The loud *grrrrah-raaahhh grrrrah-raaahhh* of a Hyacinth Macaw broke the pantanal dawn. It was going to be a great day.

“We chose Field Guides because of a very positive impression we gained of staff and guides at an ABA meeting; we chose PUERTO RICO because of its intriguing selection of endemics on an island we wished to visit. It was an excellent tour overall. Congenial group experience—small size and cooperative spirit aimed at ensuring that all participants got a chance to see all the birds. Jesse Fagan was energetic, helpful, knowledgeable; we would definitely travel with him again and, in fact, look forward to doing so. Your office was always helpful in answering questions.” Barbara & Jerome Hoganson, Puerto Rico 2008

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.

February 2009

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

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

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

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

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 18-27
Apr 18-26
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

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

May-June 2009

Namibia & Botswana
Southeast Arizona Nightbirds
Spain
Point Pelee & Algonquin Provincial Park
Southeast Arizona I: Birding the Border
North Carolina: Petrels & the Deep Blue Sea
Southeast Arizona II: Birding the Border
Uganda: Shoebill, Rift Endemics & Gorillas
Virginias' Warblers
Alaska I

Churchill & Southern Manitoba
Montana: Yellowstone to Glacier
Alaska II

Montane Ecuador
Canadian Rockies: Alberta
Alta Floresta & the Pantanal, Brazil
Borneo
Galapagos I
Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru
Kenya I
Newfoundland & Nova Scotia
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge III

May 2-21
May 7-11
May 8-20
May 10-19
May 15-24
May 16-25
May 16-25
May 21-Jun 11
May 29-Jun 2
Jun 4-13 (Part I)
Jun 12-22 (Part II)
Jun 2-14
Jun 11-21
Jun 11-20 (Part I)
Jun 19-29 (Part II)
Jun 12-21
Jun 13-23
Jun 19-Jul 4
Jun 19-Jul 5
Jun 20-30
Jun 25-Jul 4
Jun 27-Jul 25
Jun 30-Jul 10
Jun 30-Jul 9

Terry Stevenson
Dave Stejskal & Dan Lane
Chris Benesh & Jesse Fagan
Jay VanderGaast & Peter Burke
John Coons
George Armistead
Dave Stejskal
Phil Gregory & second guide
John Rowlett & second guide
Chris Benesh & George Armistead

John Coons & local guide
Terry McEneaney
Dave Stejskal & Megan Crewe

Mitch Lysinger
Jay VanderGaast
Bret Whitney
Rose Ann Rowlett
Mitch Lysinger
John Rowlett & Jesse Fagan
Terry Stevenson
Chris Benesh
Dan Lane

THE WILD, WILD WEST

by Megan Crewe

What is it about the wild western half of Texas, the silent stony deserts, the rumpled tree-clad mountain ranges, and the vast, limitless vistas that gets so deeply under the skin of anybody who's been there?



Why do guides who've "moved on" to more exotic locales—countries with enormous avifaunas and birds dripping from the trees—still throw their hats into the ring when it comes to determining the schedule for future Big Bend tours? I could name a whole host of things, ranging from the chance to explore a region that still qualifies as "frontier" to the chance of seeing birds found nowhere else in North America.

The park itself is a revelation. Larger than the state of Rhode Island, it encompasses more than 800,000 acres of desert and mountain grandeur. As we ascend into the Chisos Mountains the desert gives way to evergreen forests of pinyon pine and juniper. This mountain island surrounded by a desert sea serves as our base while in Big Bend. From the lovely Chisos Mountain Lodge, perched in the middle of the 'Basin' at an elevation of 5400 feet,

we sample several of the park's diverse habitats, each harboring some very special birds.

Most famous, of course, is the Colima Warbler, essentially a Mexican endemic that just edges over the border into the Chisos. But the warbler isn't the only species to enjoy on the mountain. Cordilleran Flycatchers haunt the forests at higher elevations, and Blue-throated Hummingbirds joust above the spring's tiny pools. Black-chinned and Rufous-crowned sparrows sing from path-side vegetation, and Hepatic Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks bejewel mountainside pines. A host of more widespread western species, including mooching Mexican Jays that follow in earnest hopefulness throughout the day, enlivens the hike to see the warbler.

While our time in the Chisos is definitely a highlight, the lower elevations of the park will provide captivating memories



At top, a morning view of Big Bend National Park. At far left, the comical looking Montezuma Quail, a bird we don't see at Big Bend itself but in the Davis Mountains. Difficult to find, it's never a guarantee, always a prize. The Black-throated Green Warbler is one of the many migrant warblers likely on the Texas Coast Migration trip. At right, one of our groups at Big Bend enjoying a Gray Vireo, a desert shrub specialist. [Photo by guides Chris Benesh and George Armistead and participant Ginger Goolsby]



as well. In the early morning sunlight just west of the mountains, with the flinty smell of desert in our noses, we'll walk the Blue Creek Wash, a dry creek bed through a scrubby canyon. This is Lucifer Hummingbird country, and while some past participants have joked that "Elusiver Hummingbird" might be more appropriate, we're often treated to spectacular views of the male's purple gorget when one perches trailside. Varied Bunting is another target here, and the male's rich warbling song may lead us straight to the perched singer. Gray Vireos flit through hillside vegetation, sometimes singing from treetops (hormones are a wonderful thing), and finding an in-the-open Crissal Thrasher, a song blasting from its massive curved bill, can truly put the cap on a fine morning.

The riparian corridors along the Rio Grande offer still more attractions. Here, among leafy cottonwoods planted to shade the park's campgrounds, Gray Hawks and Common Black-Hawks have taken up residence. Zone-tailed Hawks sometimes patrol the skies

above, lurking among the omnipresent vultures. This is where migrants tend to show up, dropping into the green oases amid the vast stretches of surrounding desert. With the right weather conditions, a morning here can provide real spectacle, with an ever-changing cast of characters drawing our attention.

But for many it's the desert—the vast, often breezy desert, with its omnipresent spiky vegetation, to-the-horizon vistas, and singular lack of noise—that holds a particular fascination. There are birds even here: Elf Owls in scattered poles, Scaled Quail sprinting across the sands, Black-tailed Gnatcatchers chirring in scanty shrubs. It's the sheer size and scope of it, the knowledge that you can't see the other end of the park even though you can see mountains 100 miles away, that thrills the most.

Our BIG BEND, THE DAVIS MOUNTAINS & HILL COUNTRY tour is scheduled for April 18-27 with Chris Benesh and a second guide. Call or email for a complete itinerary.

TEXAS COAST MIGRATION SPECTACLE

by John Coons

It is amazing how many birds can be seen during spring migration in the relatively small area of the Upper Texas Coast and nearby Piney Woods of East Texas. April is when shorebirds, flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, grosbeaks, tanagers, and, of course, warblers are headed north across the Gulf of Mexico to reach nesting areas from local woodlands to distant tundras. During our week we will visit pine forests, freshwater and salt marshes, deciduous bottomland forests, and coastal prairies in addition to daily stops at the famous migration fallout locales at High Island and Sabine Pass as we seek these migrants and local breeding birds.

Good days for seeing lots of migrants are generally tied to the weather, so viewing such spectacles as spoonbill, heron, and egret rookeries, bitterns and rails, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Brown-headed Nuthatches, and thousands of shorebirds of many species loafing on the beach fill in the time between pulses of

migrants. Each day is different and rewarding and one never knows what new species will arrive—one of the most exciting aspects of birding in North America.

John will be on the Texas Coast next spring April 11-17 (Tour I) and April 18-24 (Tour II). Please let us know or check our website if you'd like details.



At left, another of our many migrant warblers, a male Northern Parula. The Willets at right look grayish when on the ground and then explode into a flurry of black and white patterns when they take wing. Current opinion suggests that the eastern and western populations might qualify as two separate species. Fortunately both are found in coastal Texas! [Photos by guides Alvaro Jaramillo and Chris Benesh]



BIRD BUZZ

White-tailed Kite

There are a lot of things going on now that can frankly make us a little crazy. But in the midst of this hundred-year-flood of news, what I found myself thinking of was birds! I remembered our last SLICE OF CALIFORNIA tour when I was able to take folks to a field maybe a mile from my house and show them an astounding hawk show. To begin with, there were oodles of White-tailed Kites. I counted over 70 at one point, and other birders in the region counted over 100. Now that is a bull market in White-tailed Kites! And along with the kites there were lots of Northern Harriers, many Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks, and a number of American Kestrels. The nightshift included a handful of Short-eared Owls, 15 Barn Owls at a time, and of course many Great Horned Owls. Good thing that these hawks are dovish in their behavior and don't mind company. In fact, they all roosted together every night.

Why the numbers? Well, the voles—small, short-tailed rodents—were having a “field day.” Many small mammals, and even larger ones like Snowshoe Hares, have what we might describe as boom and bust cycles. With the voles, the cycles are variable but tend to occur every three years. When predation is low because there are not enough voles to sustain a hawk population and so the hawks have departed, the voles start breeding...like rabbits. Their population grows and grows and eventually shoots way past the normal size. This is when the raptors come in from all over to feast.

Curiously, it seems that predation does little to slow the growth of the vole empire; the slowdown happens once the voles eat themselves out of house and home. Then there is a great crash—no food, no voles—and the hawks disappear until the whole cycle begins anew. This happens over and over in various places



A juvenile White-tailed Kite from Half Moon Bay, California.
[Photo by guide Alvaro Jaramillo]

throughout the continent. Lemmings make a real difference to our Alaska tours, for example, and my hawk show never fails to return every few years. Like the dawn, we may worry that it will not come, but it always does!

The contemplation of voles and kites gave me a different perspective on recent troubles. The kites no doubt feel stressed when the voles crash, but the peaks always come again. So when people say things like, “Tomorrow will be a brighter day” or “Our best days are ahead of us,” they aren't just spouting platitudes; better times are inevitable, predicted by past cycles. The kite has seen it all before and during lean times is looking forward to the next peak. Life is too precious to put on hold, so get out those binoculars and go look for some birds!

Alvaro Jaramillo

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