



Sleepless on the Pribilofs

George Armistead

I cherish my sleep, so I really don't know how I got into birding. There are times, however, when I don't mind, and even relish, being ripped from precious REMs. On St. Paul Island on the Pribilofs if you are awakened at night, it can only mean that somebody's found a "good bird." Such was the case late one June evening in 2008.

"George! George!" I heard my name being called, and in one fluid and uncharacteristically graceful movement I was out of bed, opening the door, and ready to receive information. "Rufous-tailed Robin" came the call from down the hall. Megan Crewe, my co-leader on the tour, and I gave each other a knowing look and then whipped into action. In a matter of minutes we and our group were assembled atop famed Hutchinson Hill, which was hosting yet another amazing vagrant. After some effort, each of us had laid eyes upon the little brown creature that remains one of only a couple ever seen on North American soil. It was unforgettable and thrilling. St. Paul always is.

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Above, birding the seabird cliffs on St. Paul on a foggy day, and the charming Least Auklet. Below, Horned Puffin. [Photos by guide George Armistead]

Alaska—What's My Favorite Place?

Chris Benesh

It seems like a simple enough question. Nome, of course, is the answer. No other place on the trip combines such stunning vistas with a true wilderness experience. Driving down the Kougarak Road is like driving back in time. Beyond the first few miles, the landscape is almost entirely uncluttered. We're talking about the land of Bluethroats, Eastern Yellow-Wagtails, Northern Wheatears, Gyrfalcons, and Arctic Warblers. A slice of the Old World tucked away in Alaska. It is also home to one of the world's rarest shorebirds, the Bristle-thighed Curlew. But it is so much more, too. Moose and Brown Bears are frequent sights, as are the prehistoric looking Muskoxen. Things in

Continued on page 11



Psssst....

Did you know we read every post-tour evaluation we receive and act on any issues that come up? Yes, it's true. We love to hear feedback from participants on our tours...input about your experience helps us to correct any problems encountered, fine-tune our itineraries, adjust policies as need be, and keep our ear to the ground about Field Guides tour experiences in general. And yes, of course, it feels good to hear you've had a great time with us in the field, which is a very common response (thank you!). Good data inbound from you helps us continue to offer great tours outbound to destinations worldwide! —Jan Pierson

GuideLines *with Dan Lane*

Peru's Avian El Dorado...or How I Became a Modern-day Treasure Hunter

Honestly, I don't know how old I was when I first felt the magnetic tug of the Neotropics...I was already a birder by the time I was ten, and I drooled over books such as the classic *Birds of Venezuela*, poring over the plates of colorful tanagers, myriads of hummingbirds, drab (but captivating) furnariids, and tyrant flycatchers and antbirds with bizarre names like "thistletails," "canasteros," "doraditos," "fire-eyes," or "recurvibills."

I was already trapped in the web of Neotropical bird-worship (having never been there) when, at the age of 12, I inherited a stack of old *Audubon* magazines. In one I discovered an article that gave my life purpose. It was not a feature article but a regular column called (I believe) "Birdland." In this particular issue the column focused on the work of two field ornithologists who, despite being unknown to me, were already legends: John O'Neill and Ted Parker, III. What grabbed my attention was an illustration by O'Neill of two dingy brownish birds called "Parduscos." The birds themselves were perhaps less than memorable, but they had been painted into a scene that held my gaze hypnotically: moss, bromeliads, greenery. A second O'Neill illustration also caught my eye: a small, unfamiliar owl (again, not colorful, but fully captivating!) perched in a mossy, green scene, complete with exotic orchid.

I've always loved the feeling of vibrant life, and these scenes with their abundant vegetation said to me, "Go on, read this article...you'll like it." I liked it so much I suddenly knew what it was I wanted to do with my life: I wanted to go to Peru and become part of that group of present-day explorers who ventured into the wilds of South America and returned with treasures...not those of pre-Columbian gold and jewels but bird species previously unknown to humans! I decided right then and there that I wanted to be a member of the LSU program.

Fast forward a decade: by 1995 I had become a new grad student at LSU (but faced with the sad reality that I'd missed my chance to meet Ted Parker, who was tragically killed two years earlier), when I had been invited to join an O'Neill expedition to Peru. My dream had come true! I reread Don Stap's *A Parrot Without a Name* as I flew down to Lima in June 1996, my



first visit to South America, suddenly asking myself if I was ready for this kind of fieldwork. But it was too late and I had worked too hard to turn back now!

The trip, as it turned out, was a smashing success, and as improbable (even unfair!) as it seems, it was I who first encountered THE new bird of the trip: the Scarlet-banded Barbet (*Capito wallacei*)! I had been visited by a fortune I didn't deserve, but I also discovered that I was, indeed, in the right field. After four years as an LSU master's student, having participated on two expeditions to Peru and another two to Ecuador and Bolivia, I knew I wanted to continue doing field work, and I wanted to continue exploring this incredible country: Peru! I was learning what I could about its avifauna with much help from many folks, including researchers at LSU and other institutions and from seasoned field ornithologists such as my friend Bret Whitney (a name you may be familiar with!). I first met Bret when he visited the LSU Museum in 1995, and in part due to Bret's influence, I decided that tour leading might be for me.

In 2001 John O'Neill and Tom Schulenberg (authors of the resurrected *Birds of Peru* project) asked me to paint a few plates for the book. Over time I was asked to do more plates, to critique plates of other artists, and to assemble recordings for voice descriptions. In the end, I authored the book's voice descriptions as well as species accounts for several families (swifts, trogons, motmots, kingfishers, jacamars, puffbirds, barbets, and toucans)! It was yet another dream come true!

But even after all this I realize how little I actually know about the birds in Peru. With each trip to this fantastic country I learn another voice, another behavior, another locality for a species (or even, sometimes, another species!). It's hard not to fall in love with a country that still has so many mysteries to uncover, discoveries to make. I've thoroughly fallen in love with Peru—its birds, its cultures, and its as-yet-undiscovered treasures. Why not join me or my fellow Field Guides on a future tour's treasure hunt? Opportunities abound! *Dan's Peru schedule includes CENTRAL PERUVIAN ENDEMICS: THE HIGH ANDES, MACHU PICCHU & ABRA MALAGA, PERU, and MANU WILDLIFE CENTER. He'll also be guiding tours to Ecuador, Suriname, Bolivia, Colorado, and Louisiana. Visit our web page for his complete schedule.*



A study in contrasts from Peru: a magnificent male Andean Cock-of-the-rock and the rather plainer (!) Speckled Chachalacas, striking up a chorus. [Photos by participant Dan Guthrie and guide Dan Lane]



Celebrating the Diversity of Austin Birding

On Saturday, October 10th, the Austin Water Utility Center for Environmental Research and the Travis Audubon Society celebrated 50 years of birding at Hornsby Bend with an entire day devoted to birding, presentations, art, and an evening of storytelling about birds and birding adventures over the past five decades at the single best site to bird in central Texas. Tour Manager Maggie Burnett took part in the festivities and reported to our guides Rose Ann and John Rowlett, who, due to previous tour commitments, were unable to join in the celebration. John was unwilling to let pass the occasion without a tribute, so he has submitted the following in honor of the origins of a birding movement.



Tour managers Teresa Paschall (left) and Maggie Burnett donning their brand new T-shirts from the celebration.

A Tribute to Wastelands

G. Frank Oatman Jr.'s sensational discovery of the Platt sewage ponds *for birders* on November 26, 1959 not only constituted the single most exciting Travis County event in the lives of all Austin birders who had a pulse, but it quickly led to the accumulation of considerable inland avian data that had not previously existed. Frank, Rose Ann, and I (as well as many others) have notes that document its source of pleasure and importance during the 60s, and much of the data was incorporated into the maps and text of *The Bird Life of Texas* (1974). That data has been augmented greatly by further data collected over the past 40 years, generated by frequent observation and more systematic data collection efforts such as the valuable monthly surveys now being conducted (since 1999) at the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory, much of it archived and documented periodically in the ornithological literature.

Upon recognizing the value of stabilization ponds as crucial migrant stopovers, Texas birders soon began finding—and adapting to—a “new habitat” to bird in or near all the state’s cities and towns that saved their waste. Such filthy habitat is an artificial variant of the *wetland* that I would like to commemorate on this occasion of its 50th-year anniversary by designating it a “WASTELAND.” Reversing a platitude, human waste—when understood as valuable if properly treated through the water recycling process of anaerobic digestion—begat haste, as we waste-makers hurriedly began birding wastelands all over America. Even though most of us were birding for the unadulterated fun of it, careful records resulted in better understanding of the distribution and movements of migrating (and dispersing) species—especially groups of non-passerines like Sandpipers, Plovers, Gulls, Terns, Rallids, and waterfowl—throughout North America, as well as a lot of plain, irreverent fun. There even appeared, some thirty years later, *A Birders Guide to the Sewage Ponds of Oregon* (1990).

I have always wanted to extend William Tice’s experiment with foul play by writing *A Birders Guide to America’s Wastelands*. There’s just nothing like it. Indeed, such is the case here in Charlottesville—there is, alas, nothing like it—and those like myself who have tasted its riches are left to waste away. So I miss, especially every fall, the Hornsby Wasteland, which is, so far as I can determine, “the original wasteland” where the appreciation of waste for birding became apparent, and I remain grateful for Poncho’s salutary discovery. As someone who has had his eyes opened by (and, I’m afraid, open under) wastewater of Austin, wasteland birding was never a waste of time. —John Rowlett

John will be returning this spring to Texas for his annual TEXAS HILL COUNTRY tour, April 19-24, and he hopes to visit the Austin sewage ponds post tour. You may contact our Austin office for details or download an itinerary from our website. Visit www.hornsbybend.org for more on the Austin ponds.

fieldguides.com

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To download an itinerary, go to the tour page and click on ITINERARIES in the right-hand column.

Last Spaces

Panama’s Canopy Tower I, January 16-23 with Chris Benesh & local guide

Yellowstone in Winter, January 16-24 with Terry McEneaney & second guide

Northeast Brazil: Long Live the Lear’s, January 17-February 6 with Bret Whitney & second guide

Northern India, January 23-February 14 with Terry Stevenson

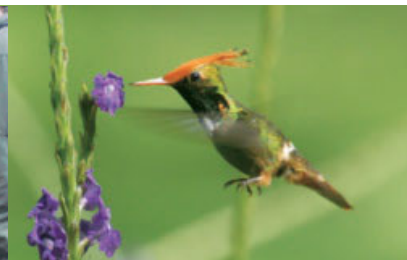
Oaxaca, January 24-31 with Megan Crewe

Venezuela: Tepuis Endemics, January 29-February 7 with Jay VanderGaast

The Heart & Sole of Chile, January 30-February 13 with Peter Burke & Ricardo Matus



From our BOLIVIA'S AVIAN RICHES tour, a view of the Andes of the Cordillera Real, north of La Paz, the highest capital in the Americas. You can just see Lake Titicaca in the distance. A bird of the montane cloud forests, the cute Cinnamon Flycatcher (top right) lives up to its name; however, the shade of cinnamon varies depending on where in the Andes the bird is found. The Speckled Teal (at right) of the high Andes is well differentiated from the lowland version. For some reason it's known as the "Sharp-winged" Teal, though all teal have sharp wings, this one no more than any others. One of the most sought-after birds in Bolivia is the "blue-beard" or Blue-throated Macaw (far right). This rare macaw lives only in Bolivia and was re-discovered just over a decade ago; it was previously known only from captivity. [Photos by guide Dan Lane]



Peru is, of course, one of the most fantastic of all birding nations with amazing habitats and species as well as a brand new field guide. Our own Dan Lane was a major part of this project, illustrating plates, working on maps, and discovering a new species or two in the process. At left, a high-land scene on our MACHU PICCHU & ABRA MALAGA tour of two youngsters whose scope technique could use some refining. Above left, this male Rufous-crested Coquette from our MOUNTAINS OF MANU Tour is gemlike, beautiful, and glowing. But even more eye-catching than its colors is its black-tipped rufous crest. Above right, a pair of Masked Crimson Tanagers, also in Manu. [Photos by guide Dan Lane and participant Dan Guthrie]

FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Reports from Recent Tours

compiled by *Alvaro Jaramillo and Abbie Rowlett*

The south of France is a wonderful backdrop against which to enjoy the birds of Europe. According to Megan Crewe, who guided this year's tour there (as she has done since we first offered it), "France has gorgeous scenery, ranging from the flat golden rice fields of the Camargue (surrounded by the blue Mediterranean and the white limestone hills of Les Alpilles) to the soaring, rugged peaks and grassy, boulder-strewn glacial valleys of the high Pyrenees. Excellent infrastructure leads to easy travel, while meandering back roads still lead through sleepy villages and rural landscapes largely unchanged by time. French food and wines are justly famous—heck, the croissants alone might be worth the trip! But chief among its attractions is the cross-section of European birds possible during this, the height of the continent's autumn migration. And, as usual, this year's tour turned up some quality sightings.

"Best of show was the pair of Eurasian Eagle-Owls we found after wine, cheese, and hors d'oeuvres on a pre-supper outing. The male's cliff-top display (ear tufts flared, tail cocked, dancing enthusiastically in looping circles, looking for all the world like a giant prairie-chicken) when he caught sight of an arriving female will long remain in the memory banks! But there were other treats as well. A peach-hued adult Lammergeier preened on a rocky outcrop, giving us up-close-and-personal scope views of its dangling "beard" and yellow eye. Seven Pin-tailed Sandgrouse crept across the stony Crau steppe, and a trio of Eurasian Thick-knees snoozed in the sunshine later the same morning. Two Alpine Accentors demonstrated their camouflage—and their remarkably confiding nature—high in the Col du Tourmalet. A mob of Little Bustards traipsed through a lime-green clover field, then lifted into the autumn morning, revealing strikingly white wings. A flock of Citril Finches nibbled weed seeds in the immense Cirque de Gavarnie. Frosty-winged Mediterranean Gulls splashed enthusiastically amid a crowd of bathing gulls, and a Slender-billed Gull floated on a salt pan. A female Black Woodpecker tapped challenges, peering around as she clung to a hollow tree. And brightly colored Eurasian Bee-eaters and European Rollers proved that not all European birds are drab after all!"

Dates for 2010 are **September 4-14** with Megan and Jesse Fagan.



Above, the walled city of Carcassonne in southern France, and at right the amazing Red-necked Tanager, endemic to southeastern Brazil. [Photos by participants Marshall Dahl and Hop Hopkins]

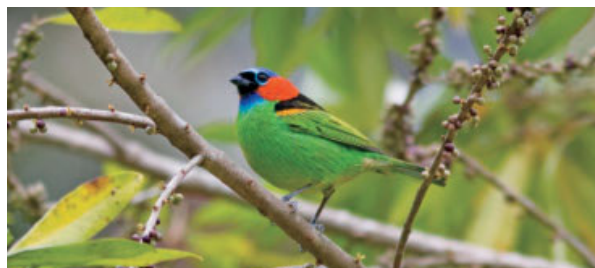
John Rowlett writes: "I would have to say this was one of the best birding tours I have ever done to **Serra dos Tucanos**, the lovely lodge that is our base for this tour of Brazil's Atlantic Forest. Stripped-down, eye-popping highlights included a whopping 107 Atlantic Forest endemics; a constant flurry of hummingbirds dashing about for breathtaking views; fine encounters with all "big five" antshrikes and all "little six" *Drymophila* antbirds; smashing views of the "big three" highland vocalists—Black-and-gold Cotinga, Hooded Berryeater, and Bare-throated Bellbird; perhaps the rarest bird of the trip in Gray-winged Cotinga; the bizarrely equipped Black-billed Scythebill; gaudy *Tangara* tanagers—surely the top bananas; getting the drop on Brazilian Anthrush and Variegated Antpitta from above; and sensational run-ins with other ground-dwellers like Slaty Bristlefront and Rufous-capped Anthrush.

"My personal favorites—Brazilian Laniisoma (Shrike-like Cotinga) and Brown Tanager, both of which sang beautifully, permitting dynamite recordings, and of course, the hands-down behavioral highlight of Blue Manakins dancing before us (and the female) for more than 10 minutes—awesome!

"And did I mention the lemon meringue pie? The caipirinhas? Our hosts and staff at Tucanos? It all makes me eager to return." And John will be back for more of those Atlantic Forest endemics and, presumably, more pie, **September 25-October 5, 2010.**

From Serra dos Tucanos John flew north and west to **Alta Floresta** and the Amazon sanctuary Cristalino Lodge. "This tour commenced with a bang," John writes, "not many birders get to see a young Harpy Eagle on their hotel grounds! And it ended with a whimper—the whimpering trill of a Small-billed Tinamou, member of a family not many birders get to see, period. And in between, we were the appreciative beneficiaries of a range of avian highlights, including (in phylogenetic order): extraordinarily good views of Zigzag Heron; three big cracids, most memorably a male Razor-billed Curassow booming as it walked along the bank of the Cristalino; many simply beautiful macaws, the Blue-and-yellows taking the prize; numerous puffbirds, the top three being scope views of Brown-banded, Striolated, and Rufous-necked; Black-girdled Barbets at a raiding army ant swarm; Red-necked and Curl-crested aracaris; a striking Ringed Woodpecker; two exceptionally fine encounters with Rufous-tailed Xenops; a natty Point-tailed Palmcreeper; 17 species of woodcreepers, featuring White-chinned, Spot-throated, Black-banded, Spix's, and Curve-billed Scythebill; numerous ant-things, most notably, Glossy Antshrike (tending a nest with two chicks), Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike, and the restricted-range Bare-eyed Antbird; lovely Chestnut-belted Gnateaters; a couple of sensational spadebills in Cinnamon-crested and White-crested (with a juv); those curious Tooth-billed Wrens; jolting Curl-crested Jays; and a handsome Rose-breasted Chat.

"Additional highlights came in many forms—from strange bugs to bizarre moths and countless butterflies, but perhaps most enjoyable were the monkeys, and especially the Sakis and the Spiders! I think the highlight of the trip for me was encountering the huge raiding army ant swarm, the largest I've seen in southern Amazonia, and the attendant birds that gobbled up any bioform—from roaches to scorpions—that escaped the assiduous ants!" Next year's dates are **October 4-15, 2010.**



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Borneo is a tropical paradise, with the oldest and tallest tropical rainforest in the world. It is made accessible by the canopy walkway at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge in the Danum Valley where we stay on our BORNEO tour. The family of broadbills, or *Eurylaimidae*, is small, with just over a dozen species characterized by their

stocky shapes, big heads, and rather big and broad bills. Their distribution ranges from Africa to Asia, but new evidence suggests that the Sapayoa, which we see in Panama, is part of this group, as are the Asities of Madagascar. Here is the Black-and-yellow Broadbill, found throughout Southeast Asia. Lastly, our happy Borneo birders. [Photos by participants David & Judy Smith]



The Southern Tamandua (above), from our RIO NEGRO PARADISE: MANAUS, BRAZIL tour, is an anteater, but unlike the well-known Giant Anteater, tamanduas are often arboreal. Tamandua is a native word in the Tupi language which translates simply to anteater. Above right, guide Bret Whitney stands and takes note. It's absolutely not true that guides can sleep in this position; he is hard at work finding great birds! At right, the *Victoria Amazonica*—that is a comfortable and stable boat! [Photos by our own Teresa Paschall]





It's not easy to blend in—either in the field or culturally—in MOROCCO, but that's half the fun of going there, to see its sand dunes and camels and all kinds of great larks, wheatears, and ibises that are bald! Here, some of our group at the outpost of Merzouga at the edge of the Sahara. In Morocco the Black-billed Magpie (top right) gets fancy with iridescent blue eye shadow. While still considered a subspecies, this one is different enough that scientists are considering elevating it to full species, the Maghreb Magpie. A Thekla Lark (lower right) on the Tagdilt Track. This lark is very similar to the Crested Lark, but with a shorter bill and a preference for rocky areas. [Photos by guide George Armistead]



The walled city of Avila (above) is a UNESCO world heritage site we visit on our SPAIN: LA MANCHA, COTO DONANA & EXTREMADURA tour. Built between the 12th and 14th centuries, it is an impressive example of Spanish medieval architecture. The Azure-winged Magpie (above right) has a population in SW Europe as well as in East Asia; it was once thought that Marco Polo brought the birds back to Europe in the 13th century. However, genetic work shows that these populations have been isolated for much longer than that and are in fact natural. The White-headed Duck (right) is a close relative of our Ruddy Duck. Ironically, introduced Ruddy Ducks are creating quite a few problems for this rare duck, whose stronghold is in Spain. Finally, at far right, a *molino*, or windmill, in Castilla-La Mancha. [Photos by guide Chris Benesh]



There's no place on the East Coast that speaks to bird migration like Cape May. In fall, songbirds pass through in droves, as do shorebirds and raptors. And there are also good concentrations of birds like these Black Skimmers (above) in flight and also resting on the beach against the backdrop of quaint Cape May (middle right). Fall hawk migration is one focus of our CAPE MAY: ORIENT YOURSELF tour. At lower right, a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk, identified by its short and stocky aspect. Another common fall migrant, the Palm Warbler at far right, is known for its habit of constantly wagging its tail and yellow undertail coverts. By the way, even in more tropical places this warbler shows no affinity for palms, though changing the name to Wagtail Warbler is probably out of the question. [Photos by guide George Armistead]



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.

February 2010

Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge II
Winter Japan: Cranes & Sea-Eagles
Western Mexico: San Blas & Sinaloa
Panama's Wild Darien
Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge III
Venezuela's Llanos: Birding & Photography
Panama's Canopy Tower II
Cambodia
Jewels of Ecuador II
Southwestern Ecuador Specialties
Guatemala: Shade-Grown Birding
Panama's Canopy Tower III
Trinidad & Tobago

Feb 1-10
Feb 5-20
Feb 10-20
Feb 11-20
Feb 12-21
Feb 19-Mar 1
Feb 20-27
Feb 20-Mar 4
Feb 20-Mar 9
Feb 21-Mar 7
Feb 24-Mar 6
Feb 27-Mar 6
Feb 27-Mar 8

Rose Ann Rowlett & local guide
Phil Gregory
Jesse Fagan & David Mackay
John Rowlett
Dan Lane & local guide
George Armistead
John Coons & local guide
Phil Gregory & local guide
Rose Ann Rowlett
Mitch Lysinger
Jesse Fagan
Chris Benesh & local guide
Megan Crewe & local guide

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 I
Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I
Colorado Grouse II
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 & second guide
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
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
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
May 15-24
May 20-Jun 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)
Jun 10-20
Jun 11-20
Jun 15-25
Jun 18-Jul 3
Jun 18-Jul 4
Jun 19-29
Jun 25-Jul 4
Jun 25-Jul 23
Jun 29-Jul 9
Jun 29-Jul 8

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

Southern Manitoba
Churchill
Yukon to the Arctic Ocean
Alaska II

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



Yellowstone in Winter???

- In the first place, it's not as cold as you might think...or as it may sound. To be sure, Jack Frost is in evidence—without him we wouldn't have the amazing winter landscapes this tour enjoys—but you'll find that if you're prepared for him, he's not such a bad guy.
- Yellowstone in winter is a magical experience. The photos above by Jan Pierson and participant Jim Burns give just an inkling. And fewer people visit in winter so the summer crowds are missing.
- It is a paradise for wildlife—and wildlife watchers. Where else can you witness at such close range predator ecology in action?
- Because of the temperatures, the geothermal features are most pronounced in winter. You will never see it like this at any other time of year.
- And finally, and we think most importantly, Field Guides has in Terry McEneaney the most experienced—and the friendliest—Yellowstone guide you'll ever meet.

So think about it—if you haven't already. Consider joining Terry in the winter wonderland that is Yellowstone, **January 16-24**. Call our office or check our website for a complete tour itinerary.

Ten Islands— Birding the Lesser Antilles

Jesse Fagan

Ten islands, fourteen days, eighteen endemics. Birding the islands of the Lesser Antilles can be busy indeed, with almost-daily flights to a new destination with a novel warbler, or distinctive parrot, or other specialty. Bring a little stamina, then let's bring on the birds!

Consider these tropical isles. The Lesser Antilles comprise a chain in the eastern Caribbean stretching from Grenada in the north to Barbuda in the south and spanning nearly 500 miles. These landforms are younger geologically than the Greater Antilles and of different origin, as they are largely volcanic (remember those dramatic images of Montserrat a few years back?). Colonization by birds has been fairly recent (geologically speaking) and appears to have been largely from South America—Lesser Antillean species essentially equivalent to their South American counterparts include Rufous Nightjar, Black Swift, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Cocoa Thrush, and Yellow-bellied Seedeater. A recent genetic study of House Wrens seems to indicate that the House Wrens now found on the islands originated in northwestern South America rather than as strays or migrants from farther north.

House Wrens provide ample evidence of why these islands are so interesting. Four of the islands have resident House Wrens: Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent, and Dominica (the population on Guadeloupe is thought to be extinct). I've co-led two LA tours with Alvaro Jaramillo, and Al opened my eyes to the amazing world of island House Wrens with a simple tool: playback of their vocalizations. The wrens can look somewhat different from one of these islands to the next, and more importantly they also *sound* different. Al posed a simple question: Would a House Wren on one island recognize the song of a House Wren on another? The answer is a resounding "No." A wren on St Lucia no more recognizes or responds to a St Vincent song than it would to a barnyard rooster or a donkey. Song is an important part of reproductive biology for many passerines, House Wrens included, and without recognition there's no procreation. So these populations appear to be reproductively isolated and distinct forms.

The same island-to-island differentiation has played out with Lesser Antillean Bullfinches, Carib Grackles, and Bananaquits. Depending on the island, each population has its distinct look and sound. The Lesser Antilles are also home to several species whose phylogenetic history is older and more complicated. Their outward appearance might roughly suggest a family of birds, but these particular species are so different in look and behavior that they seem far removed from any contemporary species on the continental mainland—i.e., divergence seems to have started much earlier. Two genera in



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, top, and Grenada House Wren [Photos by Alvaro Jaramillo]



Pointe des Chateaux, Guadeloupe [Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo]

the family Mimidae (thrashers and mockingbirds), *Cincloerthia* (the tremblers) and *Margarops* (Pearly-eyed Thrasher), are found only on Caribbean islands (the tremblers only on the LA's, and they are quite bizarre and really do tremble!). There are three species of *Loxigilla* bullfinches, another genus confined to the Caribbean, with a namesake Lesser Antillean Bullfinch for the LA's. The St Lucia Black Finch is endemic to just that island and in a genus all its own, *Melanospiza*—a cool-looking and very distinctive bird.

The distribution of birds across the islands is complex and fascinating. Why are some species found on certain islands and not others, why are they found on two or more widely separated islands but not those in between? Why is Rufous-throated Solitaire found on some islands in the Greater Antilles and then in the Lesser Antilles on Dominica, an island south of both Montserrat and Guadeloupe, where it doesn't occur? Was it present in the northern LA's but went extinct there? The more northerly Brown Trembler is found south to Dominica, then skips to St Vincent, replaced in between by Gray Trembler. And of course, there is the strange presence of Red-legged Thrush on Dominica. Recent genetic work shows that this population is nearly identical to the birds on Puerto Rico. The authors' conclusion? Red-legged Thrush was brought to the

island by humans, likely Carib Indians in dugout canoes just a few thousand years ago. Wow! Competition between ecological equivalents, island extinctions, pre-Columbian human introductions...now that's island birding!

There are numerous other attractive and interesting species on these islands, among them warblers and orioles. Both endemic orioles are rare; the Montserrat Oriole lives on the side of an active volcano, and much of its habitat was wiped out during the widely covered eruptions of the late 1990s. It now survives in just a few forest patches on the northern end of the island and is listed by BirdLife International as Critically Endangered. Its story, however, is one of hope and endurance, of love and respect, as the local people have embraced the oriole as one of their own. Just ask the folks studying the birds and with whom we spend time during our island visit why they protect the oriole. Their answer is simple: if the oriole goes, so do we.

I'll be heading back in April 2010 for an educational, eye-popping, and memorable island-hopping birding journey through the Lesser Antilles. Come on along! Dates are **April 10-24**.

For full details please call or email our office or visit our website at www.fieldguides.com where you may download an itinerary from the LESSER ANTILLES tour page.

Sleepless on the Pribilofs

Continued from page 1

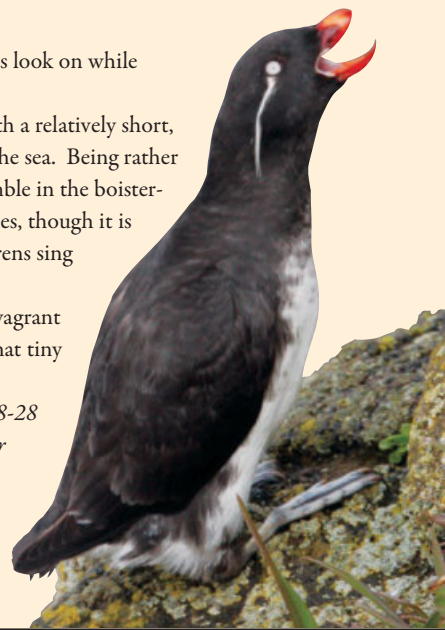
Vagrants on St. Paul are a bonus. They are even less predictable than the weather and you never know what to expect in terms of avifauna from across the Pacific. But spend a few days snooping around the tundra, rocky shores, and myriad of ponds, and the birding gods will shine upon you in one way or another. The alcid show is one incredible constant. In the Bering Sea, alcid diversity reaches its peak, and on virtually every day in June you can see an incredible spectacle that is as much a feast for the ears as for the eyes. Fussy and absurdly adorable, Least Auklets chatter alongside the two murre, which moan and laugh; dapper Horned and Tufted puffins look on while Parakeet Auklets whinny and Crested Auklets bark. On some days we see as many as ten species of alcid!

For many folks, gulls are not an especially inspiring group, but the Red-legged Kittiwake is not just any gull. With a relatively short, thick bill and large dark eyes, this bird is better suited to feed at night when it can yank squid and lanternfish from the sea. Being rather more robust and angular in shape than the Black-legged Kittiwake, it appears more seaworthy and perhaps more nimble in the boisterous winds of the Bering Sea, to which it is endemic. St. Paul is really the only place a birder can see this unique species, though it is surely not the only thing that is unique about the islands. The Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches are huge, the Winter Wrens sing from cliff edges, and an endemic form of Rock Sandpiper can be seen motoring around over all parts of the island.

Considering the amazing alcid spectacle, the Red-legged Kittiwakes, a chance for the odd McKay's Bunting, the vagrant potential, and the photo opportunities all these present, it is a wonder I ever thought I'd get any sleep at all out on that tiny speck of land.

George's 2010 Alaska tour, which he will co-lead with Dave Stejskal, is scheduled for June 10-19 (Part I) and June 18-28 (Part II). Part I includes the Pribilofs and Denali; Part II, Nome, Seward, and Barrow. Each can be taken separately or combined for a complete survey of the state.

Top right, guide Chris Benesh (l) and George Armistead on a beautiful day with Denali as backdrop; right, Parakeet Auklet whinnying; and below, wispy-haired Muskoxen and a graceful Bristle-thighed Curlew in flight at Nome. [Photos by guides George Armistead and Dave Stejskal]



Alaska—What's My Favorite Place?

Continued from page 1

Nome are also exciting along the coast. Here, it is possible to see five species of loons in a day. Impressive. With a bit of searching, one is almost certain to turn up an exciting shorebird, gull, or waterfowl. Yes, Nome must be *the* Alaska highlight...or is it?

While Nome is fantastic, my confidence in my answer crumbles slightly when I think of some of the fantastic days I've experienced out in the Kenai Fjords National Park. As we skim over glacier-fed waters, the bays are just teeming with life. Sea Otters appear within minutes of leaving the dock, if not sooner. Marbled Murrelets draw our attention early on as we head south out of Resurrection Bay. Enjoying the thrill of the chase, we turn our sights to tracking down the rare Kittitz's Murrelet, at home in the chilly water lying in front of the tidewater glaciers. Some years it's Aialik Glacier, some years Northwestern—both spectacular. Every year I marvel over how much these tiny murrelets resemble tiny bits of floating ice.

Once we've claimed that prize, we pause to enjoy the sights and sounds of the fjords and glaciers themselves. The scenery here is simply stunning. As we turn toward the Chiswell Islands, famous for the large assortment of seabirds breeding there, the number of birds picks up until vast stretches of ocean are carpeted by rafting birds. Murres, puffins, auklets, cormorants are all laid out in front of us. But there are distractions. There are the wide-



bodies, Humpback Whales feasting on the abundant krill found in these waters. And with luck, big-fins put in an appearance. These waters are home to several resident pods of Killer Whales. Seeing these can take your breath away. Even if the big-fins are no-shows, their smaller cousins, Dall's Porpoises, will provide some thrills. There is just so much! Yes, it must be the Seward segment. Again, I hesitate. Did I mention that I love eiders?

Lucky Chris will visit all his favorite places this year on his ALASKA tour, June 3-12 (Part I) and June 11-21 (Part II) with Chris and Megan Crewe. Part I includes the Pribilofs and Denali; Part II, Nome, Seward, and Barrow. Each can be taken separately or combined for a complete survey of the state.



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