

Southern India: Western Ghats Endemics

Terry Stevenson

Southern India is wild and colorful, with masses of birds and mammals. For a small taste of the treasures in store on our upcoming November tour, imagine strolling through a rural village with Spot-billed Pelicans nesting right above the farm buildings and Red-naped Ibis feeding in the rice fields. Brahminy Kites and River Terns fly along the lakeshore, and flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets are everywhere around us. Blue-tailed Bee-eaters perch on the roadside wires, and patches of woodland hold colorful Black-rumped Flamebacks, several (of a dozen possible) migrant warblers, Oriental Paradise-Flycatcher, and Pale-billed



Black-rumped Flameback (above left), a woodpecker we should see on our first day out, and a colorful Indian Roller, both photographed by participants David & Judy Smith.

Flowerpecker. Close inspection of fruiting trees might reveal an endemic White-cheeked Barbet, while flowering shrubs attract both Purple and Purple-rumped sunbirds—and this is just the first day of our tour.

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A Birding Workout: Observation Calibration

Bret Whitney

In the intervals between exciting birds on tours, participants often notice that I'm looking through my binoculars at, apparently, nothing, and ask, "What are you looking at?" If we're not near a Brazilian beach, the answer is often something like, "This Rufous-collared Sparrow here" or "That Roadside Hawk perched out there." They usually drop it at this point, probably wishing I'd found something exciting for everyone to see, but I usually add that I love looking at birds in general, whatever happens to be around, and I explain that I'm in training, on the "birding treadmill." That idea usually leads to more questions. So when the Sungrebe, Abbie Rowlett, who is forever mated with the noble Rufous-browed Peppershrike (aka John Rowlett), asked me to write something short for this newsletter, I thought I'd take the opportunity to pass on a bit

of technique that has served me well during a lifetime of die-hard birding in hopes that it will help you get even more enjoyment out of this fabulous sport than you already do.

I remember learning, as a bird-crazy kid about 8 years old, what an "accidental" was: a bird so rare in North America, or so unexpected outside its normal range as to almost never be found under such circumstances and, if so, identified only by the experts. All birders love seeing rare birds, and thousands of us regularly flock to distant points for the chance of seeing a single individual of a species far out of range. But how does some small subset of birders become expert enough to *recognize and identify* "accidentals," or rare birds in general?

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2014 ~ Our 30th Year of Birding Tours

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A Birding Workout: Observation Calibration

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After all, there must be very few of these individual birds around, and even birders active for many years probably will not have seen such great rarities or vagrants many times. Is it mostly being blessed with sharp eyes and ears, is there some quality or skill-set that sustains development of the “expert birder”?

The answer is, mostly, in the second part of that sentence: the “best” birders are always the products of due diligence, which translates to a huge number of hours spent actively listening to and looking at birds, both through binoculars and, very importantly, also naked-eye, which is where visual acuity plays a major role in birding. But we’ve already established that most birders will have only limited field experience with the vast majority of rarities out there—and this is where the key element of “due diligence” comes in. You’ll notice that the overwhelming majority, perhaps *all* “expert birders” (we all know who they are, at both local and international scales) actively look at all birds around them, all the time. Naturally, this means they must be looking at common species almost all the time. If they’re so sharp, why would they bother focusing on an obviously common bird, no identification problem at all? In a word, it’s all about “calibration,” whether they realize it’s going on or not. In effect, they’re on a constant treadmill whereby a hundred variables crisscross in recording a sighting of a bird into their brain, and it boils down to the fact that every sighting of every bird is unique. In looking at common birds in your area, imagine how variations in lighting, distance, age of the bird, stage of feather wear, wet vs. dry feathering, behavioral context, perched vs. in flight, solitary vs. in the company of other birds, etc. will produce quite different end-products in your memory. It all becomes part of the “Rufous-collared Sparrow file,” for instance, and the bigger and deeper that file becomes—through repeated sightings and active or passive study—the less likely it is to cause confusion when you are looking at something different, or, to put it another way, the more likely you will be able to recognize unusual species that merit close scrutiny because you have effectively maintained your observational toolset via frequent calibration with the most common birds in your area.

Another invaluable quality of the best expert birders (another, yet smaller subset!) also stems from experience, but not field experience so much as “birding experience.” These guys and gals realize, and always bear in mind, that every bird they look at in their patch is overwhelmingly likely to be one of their common amigos that frequents the place or regularly passes through. Rarities really are *rarities*, not expected to show up, and when these birders are confronted with a bird that is not immediately identifiable, they default to “odds are this is a common bird that looks strange” well before getting to “Wow, no way this is X or Y [most similar expected species]!” For many birders, including highly skilled observers, this is a difficult perspective to develop, one that requires, or is helped along by, having a healthy



A very common, very handsome Rufous-collared Sparrow. Photo by participant Richard Stilwell.

(as opposed to abrasive) sense of skepticism, but it will stand you in good stead and is always highly appreciated by one’s birding peers.

I’ll end with a training exercise that I developed as a kid (for some reason, I don’t know why) and still use today. It certainly helped me develop my birding skills early on, before I had any idea of what I was doing. Look at something in front of you, any object or just a bunch of things on a tabletop, whatever. Look at it for five seconds or so, then close your eyes and allow your memory to reproduce what you saw.

You’ll see reasonably good detail in the

center of the scene, and not a whole lot more than that. Try it a couple of times. Now pick another subject, and, after looking at it for just a second or two, close and open your eyes rapidly one time, to see the subject, then close them and let your memory reproduce the scene. You will probably have recorded more detail, especially away from the center of the subject, in this snapshot than in the longer study of several seconds. Whether this worked out for you as described here or not, try doing it now and then as you look at birds through your binoculars and telescope; you will probably be surprised at not only how well your brain “took a snapshot” of the bird, but also—and this is important—how lasting that individual image is for you, even days later. Of course, if you really want a lasting image, just take a picture—but you get what I mean here ;)

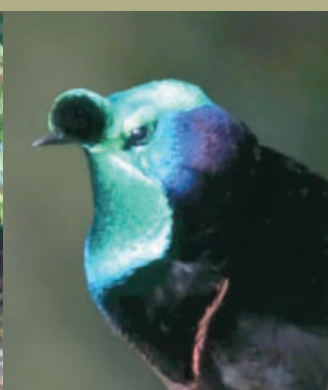
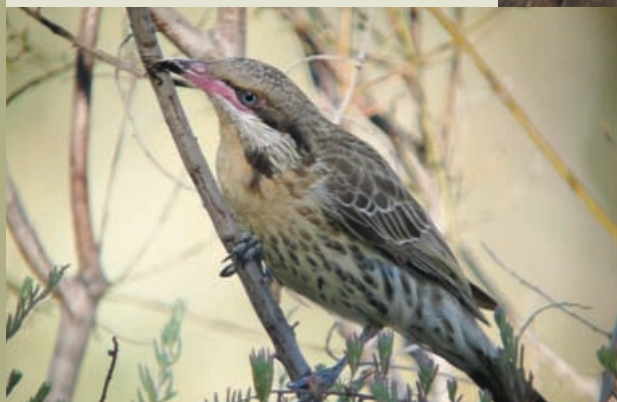
It’s not too late to make (another) New Year’s resolution as 2014 gets into gear: Get into better birding shape by stepping onto that treadmill, and have fun looking at the common birds around you—the rewards are great!



Bret with his group in Curitiba, Brazil. Photo by guide Marcelo Padua.

FRESH FROM THE FIELD

The “Land Down Under” offers everything from lush tropical forest to sun-drenched deserts. We encountered dazzling birds and a host of peculiar mammals and reptiles on three different itineraries dedicated to **Australia** last fall. This endemic male Golden Bowerbird (upper left) was a highlight of Part II. Guide Chris Benesh and participants had plenty to smile about during Part I (upper right). Southern Cassowary is a flightless species, but the juvenile sure can jump! Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (below), Laughing Kookaburra (at right), and Port Lincoln Parrot complete the spread. (Photos by guides Lena Senko & John Rowlett and participants Jan Shaw, Rob Colwell & Robert McNab)

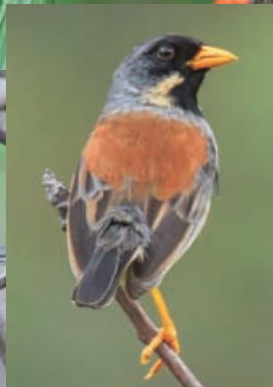
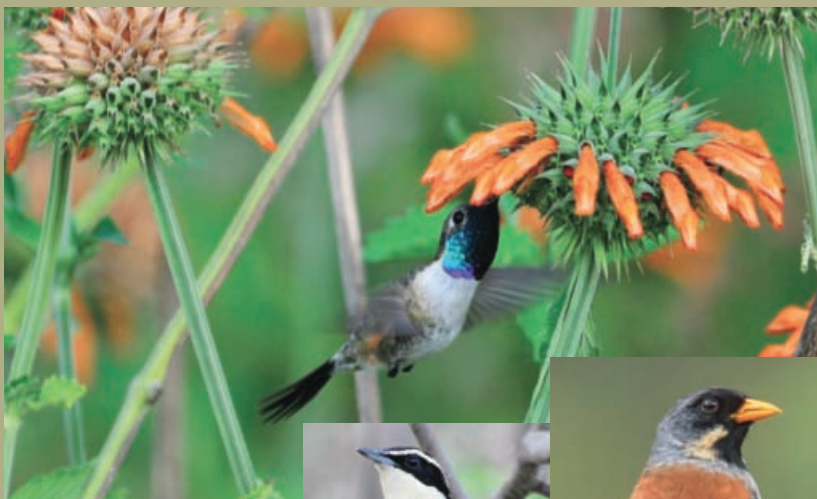


Our **New Guinea & Australia** tour targets a host of endemics at some of the best birding spots these two destinations have to offer—you couldn't ask for a better overview of Australasian bird life. Three standouts from our fall 2013 adventure were (left to right) a cooperative Albert's Lyrebird, the jaw-dropping Ribbon-tailed Astrapia, and this splendid Crested Berrypecker. (Photos by participants Merrill Lester & Tony Brake)

FRESH FROM THE FIELD



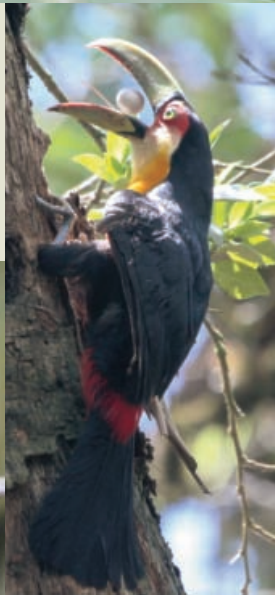
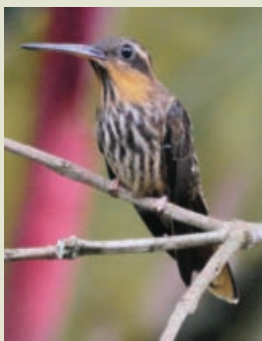
Chile stretches for more than 2600 miles, from the Atacama Desert in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south, with a rich diversity of landscapes in between. We cover an impressive cross-section of this dramatic country on our **Chile** tour. Participants Greg Griffith and George Sims shared some wonderful images from our fall tour including (clockwise): Guanacos, a soaring Andean Condor, the regal Magellanic Woodpecker, and our group getting a good scope view of Diademed Sandpiper-Plover—totally worth venturing out in a little snow.



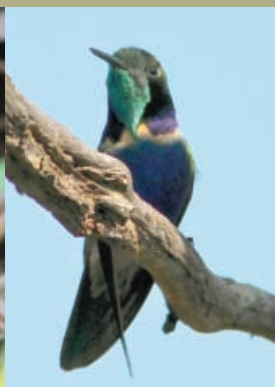
A male Marvelous Spatuletail (above) is one of the most remarkable and range-restricted birds in the world. If you want to see this wonder, our **Northern Peru: Endemics Galore** is the ticket. It's loaded with other stunning hummingbirds as well like the feeding Purple-collared Woodstar at upper left. Three more species that can be found nowhere else on Earth are Chestnut-backed Thornbird, Marañon Crescentchest, and Buff-bridled Inca-Finch. (Photos by participants Brian Stech & Kevin Heffernan)



Our **Spectacular Southeast Brazil** tour was once again, well... spectacular. Guide Chris Benesh snapped this unbelievable shot (right) at the precise moment a Red-breasted Toucan—depredating a Scaled Woodcreeper nest—sent the egg down the hatch. Southeast Brazil is rich in endemics as exemplified by the Crescent-chested Puffbird (nominate race—striata; above left), the Gray winged Cotinga (upper right), and the hefty Saw-billed Hermit, all restricted to portions of the Atlantic Forest. (Photos by guide Chris Benesh and participant Valerie Gebert)



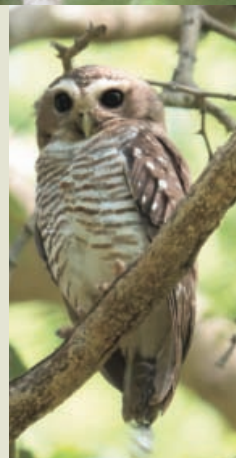
When all was said and done, we'd identified nearly 500 bird taxa and over 50 mammal species on the **South Africa** tour. No wonder everyone was smiling—including guide Terry Stevenson, fifth from right. The handsome Bateleur (below right) was one of about 20 we witnessed in the world-famous Kruger National Park. Participant John Catto shared this image as well as that of the Orange-throated Longclaw at lower left.



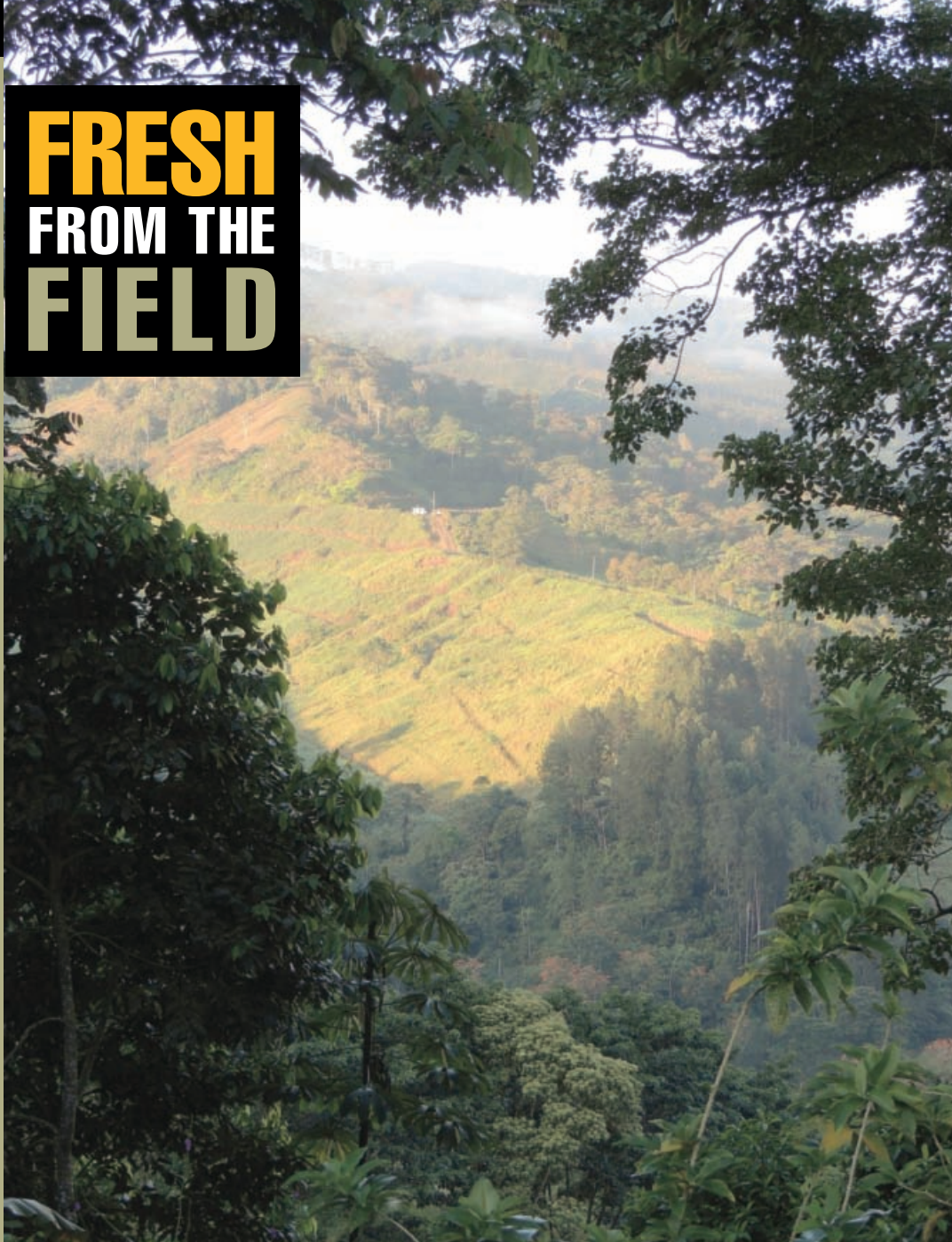
Getting a good look at Gray-breasted Crake (above left) is never easy, so when this bird moved through several openings on the **Safari Brazil: The Pantanal & More** tour, guide Marcelo Padua was as pleased as the participants. Two more stunning birds from the tour are the fabulously iridescent Hyacinth Visorbearer (upper right) and the dramatic Pale-crested Woodpecker.



Participant Randy Siebert shared these memorable moments from our fall **Madagascar** tour: on a trip loaded with fascinating species, Schlegel's Asity (above), always makes it onto the favorites list—the male's facial skin is unforgettable; also check out the crown on the Malagasy Kingfisher (left) and the great looks we had at roosting Torotoroka Scops-Owl at Berenty (right).



FRESH FROM THE FIELD



Guide Megan Edwards Crewe sent us these photos from her **Holiday Costa Rica: Rancho Naturalista** tour over the New Year. The view from the balcony at the lodge is sublime—more than 200 species of birds have been sighted from there; one of the many hummingbirds that visits the Rancho feeders is the boldly patterned White-necked Jacobin (below); and our group found Northern Jacana (above) and a wide range of other species on outings from the lodge.

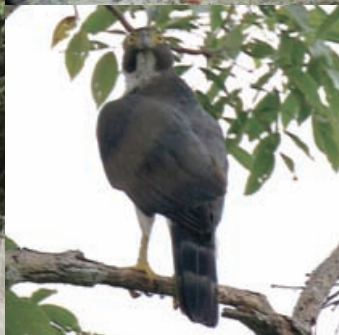


We chartered a boat out of Agadir for a pelagic day trip during the **Morocco** tour, and the birds, food, and weather added up to a fantastic outing. A North African endemic, the Moussier's Redstart (at near right), was voted fairest of them all when it came time to pick favorites. Red-rumped Wheatear wasn't too shabby either. (Photos by guide Jesse Fagan)





It's hard not to smile when rails are popping up all around you. Guides Dan Lane (left) and Jesse Fagan pause to enjoy the success of the **Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails** tour. Our Louisiana itinerary has been popular enough to have two departures each fall. We saw the object of our obsession, the elusive Yellow Rail, in the field, of course, but also in-hand on the first tour during a banding operation. A day dedicated to Kisatchie National Forest usually turns up southern pine specialists like this Red-cockaded Woodpecker as well. (Photos by participants Tony Quezon & Rick Woodruff and guide Lena Senko)



The Amazonian rainforest supports the greatest diversity of life on Earth, and our **Iquitos, Peru: Canopy Walkways & Ancient Forests** drops you right into the most species-rich region. The heralded walkway at ACTS (Amazon Conservatory of Tropical Studies) offers an unusual perspective. During the tour we enjoyed excellent views of one of the most wanted birds in the Neotropics—a Sunbittern (upper right). Gray-bellied Hawks are few and far between, and this perched one was a big hit with our group. (Photos by guide Dan Lane and participant Johnny Powell)



Northern Ecuador: Andes, Cloudforests & Otavalo Market

Willy Perez

With the dawning of the new year, I'm getting excited about my upcoming trips for 2014.

By the time you read this, I'll be in Ecuador guiding the *Jewels of Ecuador* tour, happily surrounded by gorgeous hummers and tanagers and secretive antpittas, or at Sacha Lodge, birding the lowland rainforest for all its treasures. I'll follow those tours with visits to Wildsumaco Lodge, the Galapagos, and several other great destinations. I'm looking forward to all of them, of course, but I'm particularly anticipating one other departure: my *Northern Ecuador: Andes, Cloudforests & Otavalo Market* tour.

It's a new tour, and new tours often involve some great surprises—and planning ahead for those surprises, I've left some empty spaces at the end of the checklist! As I was preparing the list, I found my mind wandering to the dry valley of Jerusalem Reserve where we'll be watching Giant Hummingbirds and Scrub Tanagers and chasing antpittas and mountain-tanagers while savouring otherworldly views of Andean lakes and paramo grassland. I pictured our visit to the not-to-be-missed Otavalo Market, the largest indigenous crafts market in South America, where we can find one-of-a-kind textiles woven by the Otavalo people. Descending from the highlands into the Intag valley in my mind, I began to imagine the warmth of the tropics infused with the calls of toucans, quetzals, and tanagers, followed by bright flashes of color whizzing by in the form of hummingbirds, all with a delicious cup of organic shade-grown coffee in hand—not a bad way to pass a morning's birding! My mind then flitted to the Mindo area with its varied and colorful fruiteaters, dacnises, and euphonias feeding in the rich forest around us. And I couldn't stop myself from considering some of the rarities of the trip, just three of these are the fantastic Oilbird, the beautiful Moss-backed Tanager, and the hard-to-find White-faced Nunbird (really!). There are a few spaces still open on this tour, so why not join me? There'll be so much for us to enjoy together and, if I have anything to say about it, lots of fun to be had along the way!



Birds that will definitely be on Willy's checklist, from top left, Collared Aracari, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Velvet-purple Coronet, and Orange-breasted Fruiteater. Photos by guide Richard Webster, participants Bob Sprague & Amy Levengood, and guide Dave Stejskal.

Dates for Willy's new Northern Ecuador tour are June 5-15, 2014. You may download an itinerary from our website, or contact our office and they will be happy to send you a copy.

UPCOMING TOURS

For details on any trip or trips, please call our office or check our web site, where you may download tour itineraries.



May-June

China: Manchuria & the Tibetan Plateau—May 5-26, 2014 with Dave Stejskal & Jesper Hornskov. A truly fabulous adventure—six possible crane species and a multitude of coveted waterbirds and scarce landbirds in Manchuria and the monotypic Przevalski's Rosefinch high in the mountains of the remote northeastern Tibetan Plateau.

Arizona: Birding the Border I & II—May 9-18, 2014 with John Coons and May 16-25, 2014 with Chris Benesh. One of the most exciting destinations in North America with a backdrop of spectacular mountain scenery.

Point Pelee Migration Spectacle—May 10-17, 2014 with Peter Burke. Exciting migration birding at several premier hotspots on the Lake Erie shore.

NEW/Spring in Cape May—May 18-24, 2014 with Megan Edwards Crewe & Lena Senko. Spring migration at one of the country's famed birding hotspots.

Uganda: Shoebill, Rift Endemics & Gorillas—May 22-June 12, 2014 with Phil Gregory & Jesse Fagan. The rare Shoebill and a wealth of other birds and many Central African specialties combined with opportunities to trek for Chimps and Mountain Gorillas.

Virginias' Warblers—May 28-June 1, 2014 with John Rowlett & Bret Whitney. Unsurpassed locale for breeding wood-warblers; cool, mountain climate in both beautiful states.

Alaska I & II—May 30-June 7, 2014 (Part I) and June 6-16, 2014 (Part II) with Chris Benesh & Pepe Rojas and June 6-14, 2014 (Part I) and June 13-23, 2014 (Part II) with Megan Edwards Crewe & Lena Senko. Survey in two parts: Part I to the Pribilofs and Denali; Part II to Nome, Seward, and Barrow.

Northern Arizona's Canyons & Condor—May 31-June 5, 2014 with John Coons. This tour features mountain and high-desert birds of the western US amidst stunning scenery with California Condors at the Grand

Canyon, all guided by our own Flagstaff-based resident expert, John Coons.

NEW/Maine: Birding Downeast—May 31-June 8, 2014 with Eric Hynes. A new summer birding tour for warblers, boreal specialties, puffins, "lobstah," and more.

NEW/Northern Ecuador: Andes, Cloudforest & Otavalo Market—June 5-15, 2014 with Willy Perez. New tour for stunning landscapes from the central Highlands of the Quichuas down through the cloudforests of the Intag and Mindo Valleys, full of unique dry-valley specialties and Choco endemics.

Montana: Yellowstone to Glacier—June 7-17, 2014 with Terry McEneaney. Great western birding and wildlife on this tour amidst the scenery of Big Sky country.

Borneo II—June 8-25, 2014 with Dave Stejskal. Three prime areas in some of Earth's richest forests while based in comfort right in the wild.

July-August

Kenya Highlights—July 2-20, 2014 with Terry Stevenson. Kenya's best birding and mammal viewing areas in less than 3 weeks.

Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, Peru I & II—July 4-13, 2014 with Dan Lane and August 7-16, 2014 with Jesse Fagan. Southern Peru's east-slope, temperate birding at its best, featuring several endemics and scenic Andean puna; also Machu Picchu and great subtropical birding on and near lovely hotel grounds.

Papua New Guinea—July 6-24, 2014 with Jay VanderGaast. Birds-of-paradise and bowerbirds are the crown jewels of one of the most remarkable bird faunas, set against a fascinating cultural backdrop far removed from our own.

Mountains of Manu, Peru—July 12-27, 2014 with Dan Lane. Our in-depth transect of the higher-elevation half of the Manu Biosphere Reserve.

Montane Ecuador: Cloudforests of the Andes—July 25-August 3, 2014 with Mitch Lysinger. Superb Andean subtropical birding on both East and West slopes.

Arizona's Second Spring I & II—July 26-August 4, 2014 with John Coons and August 2-11, 2012 with Chris Benesh. An ideal time for visiting one of the best birding regions in North America: great for local specialties and Mexican vagrants.

Peru's Magnetic North: Spatuletails, Owllet Lodge & More—July 31-August 11, 2014 with Dan Lane & Dave Stejskal. A 12-day taste of northern Peru's east-slope Andes! Five nights at Long-whiskered Owllet Lodge; much time in the field, yet no camping.

Jaguar Spotting: Pantanal & Garden of the Amazon—August 2-13, 2014 with Marcelo Padua. This short but action-packed Brazil tour features the Pantanal at its best, a nice taste of southern Amazonian birds, and excellent chances of seeing a Jaguar.

Kenya Safari Spectacular—August 29-September 25, 2014 with Terry Stevenson. Unsurpassed in its combined wealth of bird life and mammal spectacle; includes the coast. Timesaving internal flights.

September-October

New Caledonia, Fiji & Vanuatu—September 1-19, 2014 with Phil Gregory. Island endemics and tropical Pacific specialties abound on this tour to three highlight destinations.

Carajas: Lower Amazonian Brazil—September 6-15, 2014 with Marcelo Padua. Huge, remote forest reserve with excellent Amazonian forest access, lots of specialty birds, some unbelievably big dump trucks, and a fine hotel.

Serra dos Tucanos, Brazil—September 6-16, 2014 with John Rowlett. A short but rich immersion in the avifauna of the Atlantic Forest based at one lovely site near Rio.

Bolivia's Avian Riches—September 6-21, 2014 (Blue-throated Macaw and More Extension) with Dan Lane & Pepe Rojas. Tour for the special bird life of the Bolivian Andes; wonderful mountain scenery.

Ecuador: Rainforest & Andes—September 7-21, 2014 with Rose Ann Rowlett & Lena Senko. Highlights of the best of Ecuador's

rainforest birding at Sacha Lodge combined with two exciting destinations in the Andes, the Mindo/Tandayapa area and San Isidro.

Morocco—September 8-25, 2014 with Jesse Fagan. Endemic, rare, and specialty birds from coastal wetlands and towering cliffs to the Atlas Mountains and the northwest corner of the Sahara.

Rio Negro Paradise: Manaus, Brazil—September 15-28, 2014 with Bret Whitney & Marcelo Padua. Bird the rainforests and rivers of the mighty Amazon and Rio Negro in an unforgettable mix of forest hikes and live-aboard luxury.

Ecuador's Shiripuno Lodge: Heartland of the Waorani—September 26-October 5, 2014 with Mitch Lysinger & Willy Perez. A new tour to Shiripuno Lodge, gateway to the Yasuni Biosphere Reserve in Ecuador's Amazon region.

Cape May Megan's Way—September 28-October 4, 2014 with Megan Edwards Crewe. See bird migration in action at one of the country's top migration hotspots.

New Guinea & Australia—October 2-20, 2014 with Jay VanderGaast. A rich and diverse sampler of the best birding of New Guinea and Australia.

Australia—October 2-23, 2014 with Chris Benesh & Lena Senko (Part I) and October 21-November 5, 2014 (Tasmania Extension) with John Coons & Eric Hynes (Part II). In two parts for those with limited time. Part I covers the environs of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, southwest Australia, and Alice Springs. Part II begins in Darwin and continues to Queensland (Cairns, Atherton Tableland, Outback Queensland, and O'Reilly's Guest House). Both parts combine for a complete birding tour of Australia.

Barrow, Alaska: Search for Ross's Gull—October 3-7, 2014 with Eric Hynes. A short sojourn to 71 degrees North latitude, the US's northernmost point, for the legendary Ross's Gull, loons, eiders, and possibly even Polar Bear and Ivory Gull.

Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata: Macaw Lick Extraordinaire—October 4-17, 2014 with Pepe Rojas. Three-site tour to the most species-rich rainforest on Earth.

Largest known macaw lick, canopy walkway and towers, eagles, and monkeys.

Safari Brazil: The Pantanal & More—October 4-19, 2014 (Brazilian Merganser Extension) with Marcelo Padua. The spectacular wetlands of the Pantanal, with Hyacinth Macaws and Jabirus, combine with the many specialties of Brazil's Planalto Central to make for the perfect first birding trip to Brazil.

South Africa—October 9-November 1, 2014 with Terry Stevenson & Joe Grosel. Endemic-rich birding, spectacular landscapes, and a unique flora are the highlights of our energetic survey tour of this beautiful country.

Northwestern Argentina: The Chaco, Cordoba & Northern Andes—October 15-November 2, 2014 (Rincon del Socorro Extension) with Dave Stejskal & Willy Perez. Comprehensive birding tour of the many habitats of the diverse northwest; many specialty birds.

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails—October 23-27, 2014 with Dan Lane. Late-

Galapagos: An Intimate Look at Darwin's Islands I, II, & III—June 14-24, 2014 with Willy Perez, July 5-15, 2014 with Megan Crewe, or August 2-12, 2014 with Eric Hynes. A must for any naturalist and birder; small-group, broad coverage of the islands with plenty of time for the birds, exploring, and photography.

Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge III—June 27-July 6, 2014 with Willy Perez. One-site tour to one of the most comfortable lodges in western Amazonia with some of the birdiest canopy platforms anywhere.

Newfoundland & Nova Scotia—June 27-July 7, 2014 with Chris Benesh & Lena Senko. Boreal specialties, seabird colonies, and numerous breeding landbirds in the beautiful Canadian Maritimes.

Spitsbergen & Svalbard Archipelago: A Cruise to the Norwegian Arctic—June 29-July 11, 2014 with John Coons. A high-arctic adventure aboard a comfortable vessel for fantastic seabirds, marine mammals including Walrus and Polar Bear, and fabulous scenery.

Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierra—August 30-September 8, 2014 with Chris Benesh. A diverse mix of West Coast specialties, montane species, and pelagics in rugged and scenic sites.

France: Camargue & Pyrenees—August 30-September 9, 2014 with Megan Edwards Crewe & Willy Perez. Two of Europe's finest birding destinations combined in this wonderful eleven-day tour, with varied highlights and some great French food.

autumn birding tour on the Gulf Coast targeting Yellow Rails and other migrants and wintering species of the region.

Chile—October 26-November 15, 2014 with Peter Burke & Ricardo Matus. Comprehensive survey tour of this visually spectacular and tourist-friendly country.

Spectacular Southeast Brazil—October 31-November 16, 2014 (Part I) with Bret Whitney & Jay VanderGaast and November 14-30, 2014 (Part II) with Bret Whitney & Marcelo Padua (Extension to December 4). Prepare to be blown away, two times over, in the center of avian endemism in eastern Brazil; particularly well endowed with hummingbirds, cotingas, antbirds, and beautiful scenery. Part I: *North of the Tropic*; Part II: *South of the Capricorn*. The Iguazu Falls Extension features an amazing landscape with additional great birding.

Sri Lanka—October 31-November 17, 2014 with Megan Edwards Crewe & local guide. A two-week introduction to Asia's birds, including more than two-dozen species endemic to the island, with one of the country's foremost birders as a co-leader.

Southern India: Western Ghats Endemics

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I'm eagerly anticipating this fall's trip. Beginning in Bangalore, we'll visit Mysore for a wealth of waterbirds followed by a three-night stay at the famous Nagarhole National Park. The birdlife here is amazing, with just a few of the highlights being Gray Junglefowl, Changeable (Crested) Hawk-Eagle, Green Imperial-Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Indian Roller, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Malabar Pied-Hornbill, White-bellied Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, Malabar Lark, Small Minivet, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Puff-throated Babbler, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Jerdon's Leafbird, and Forest Wagtail. It's also a fabulous area for mammals, with several hundred Indian Flying-Foxes right on the grounds of our lodge and herds of Spotted Deer, Sambar, Gaur (the world's largest bovine), Indian Elephant, and—if we're lucky—the rare Dhole (or Indian Wild Dog) in the deciduous woodlands or along the lakeshore. Bonnet Macaque and Common Langur are numerous and often very tame.

We'll continue to a chain of mountains collectively known as the Western Ghats, home to many of southwestern India's endemic birds. In the Nilgiri Hills we'll be particularly searching for Rufous-breasted Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Nilgiri Shortwing, Malabar Whistling-Thrush, Black-and-rufous Flycatcher, and Indian Blackbird. In the Anaimalai Mountains we'll encounter a whole range of species, from Red Spurfowl and Orange-headed Thrush in the leaf-litter to Mountain Imperial-Pigeon and Great Hornbill in the canopy, with Malabar Trogon, Ceylon Frogmouth, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Crimson-fronted (Malabar) Barbet, Malabar Woodshrike, White-bellied Treepie, Flame-throated and Yellow-browed bulbuls, Nilgiri Flowerpecker, and Crimson-backed Sunbird in between. We'll also be on the lookout for localized mammals here, including Dusky Palm Squirrel and Nilgiri Langur. Further to the southeast in the Cardamom Hills, our main targets will be Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon (one of the hardest endemics), Gray-breasted Laughingthrush, White-bellied Shortwing (a real super-skulker), and Nilgiri Pipit. We'll also visit the Eravikulam National Park to see the strange Nilgiri Tahr.

Leaving the Ghats behind, we'll visit the Periyar Reserve, a magnificent area of moist evergreen forest, open glades, farmland, and a lake. Target birds here include the gorgeous Black Baza, Rufous and Heart-spotted woodpeckers, the not-so-common Common Flameback, Wynaad Laughingthrush (another hard endemic), Rufous Babbler, and White-bellied Blue-Flycatcher.

Finally, on our way to Kochi and the coast where we'll end the tour, we'll stop along the way at an area known as "the Backwaters," a beautiful mix of canals, lagoons, rice fields, and dykes covered with coconut palms. Walking along the dykes and then cruising the canals—well supplied with cold drinks and wonderful Indian seafood—we should see a good selection of waterbirds including Cotton Pygmy-goose, Indian Cormorant, Black and Yellow bitterns, numerous herons, egrets and ibis, Watercock (rare), Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged jacanas, and Stork-billed Kingfisher. It's the perfect way to complete our well-honed route through this land of great birding and mammal-watching but also friendly people, with reasonable to excellent accommodations throughout.



Stork-billed Kingfisher, a bird of "the Backwaters" where we'll end the tour. Photo by participants David & Judy Smith.

Veteran Field Guide Terry Stevenson, who designed and has led all of our Southern India tours, will be joined next fall by local expert Sathyan Meppayur. You'll be in excellent hands!
Dates are November 16-December 7, 2014.

Success—A Great Team Effort in the World Birding Rally

Jesse Fagan

Guides Dan Lane and Jesse Fagan, together with Peruvian colleague Fernando Angulo, competed recently as Team Field Guides in Peru's World Birding Rally, and we're delighted to report that they captured first prize with 457 species! It was a real squeaker, with two other talented teams coming in tied for a very close second place. Besides all the birds and glory, of course, they were also hoping to raise some funds for a conservation project supporting the Marvelous Spatuletail, (check Fresh From The Field on page 4 for a picture of the Spatuletail) and thanks to some great contributions, they did, to the tune of almost \$1700. Jesse and Dan report that it was a lot of fun and that they enjoyed not only the great competition but the wonderful camaraderie and spirit of the various teams. Read Jesse's online post below.

Team Field Guides has won the greatest birding competition on the planet! The *World Birding Rally* took place December 3-10, 2013 in Peru, pitting five international birding companies against each other. The competing teams/companies represented the countries of South Africa, Colombia, England, and the United States. The grueling weeklong event took place at two different sites in southeastern Peru: along the Madre de Dios River in the Amazonian lowlands and at Machu Picchu, the famous Inca ruin site. Both represent two distinctly different elevations and habitat types which

include Amazonian rainforest and humid subtropical forest. This great event was sponsored by the Peruvian tourism board, PromPerú, and Inkaterra, a private company that runs a series of luxury ecolodges throughout Peru.

Our team included Field Guides leaders Jesse Fagan (yours truly) and Dan Lane, along with our friend Fernando Angulo, a Peruvian biologist and conservationist. In addition, at each location all the teams had a local guide to assist them. In our case, the local guides were Leon (Madre de Dios) and Cecy Cabrera (Machu Picchu). Both were excellent and they helped us immensely on our way to victory.

It was a tense competition, and we got off to a rocky start, finishing in fourth place on a rainy Day One. On Day Two, we fought our way to third, where we remained until Aguas Calientes/Machu Picchu. It wasn't until these final two days that we managed to inch ahead and gain the top position. Our final species count was 457 (team highlights included White-chested Swift, Curl-crested Aracari, Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet, and Cusco Brush-Finch). The next two teams tied for second place with 455 species recorded. Indeed, it was a very tight race throughout. All in all, it was a fabulous experience to bird and compete in one of the richest avian countries in the world. This competition is unrivaled in its length and number of species possible. The total species count for the





competition among all teams was an astounding 619, a significant percentage of the world's total species of birds!

Team Field Guides would like to thank all of the sponsors and teams for a very memorable time. The winning team trophy, a pewee Black-faced Cotinga, will be placed in the Field Guides office in Austin, so come by and take a look!

In addition, Team Field Guides was competing in the name of bird conservation. Prior to the start of the rally, we partnered with Birdlife International to help raise funds for a watershed conservation campaign benefitting the northern Peruvian communities of San Isidro de Maino and Levanto and further protecting critical habitat for the globally endangered Marvelous Spatuletail, one of the world's most spectacular hummingbirds. Birding unites countries, people, and our amazing biodiversity as few governing bodies or politicians are capable of doing. The commonality of seeing birds, and the enjoyment this brings us, breaks down many barriers and empowers people to look and think critically, to identify, to listen, to ask questions, to seek out, to travel and, most importantly, to discover. Birds and birding can help change the world.

We'd like to thank all of you who have contributed, and there's still time to help in this endeavor. If you're interested, please visit the following link to make a donation:
<http://www.birdlife.org/americas/news/rallying-birdlife-peru>

A few pics of Team Field Guides having a little fun as well as hard at work and reaping the rewards thereof. At top, birding the beautiful Inca Trail (is there an endemic Inca Wren calling down below?). And from far left on facing page, Dan Lane posing with the lovely ladies of PromPeru; Jesse enjoying a break (tapir!); nothing but smiles from the team after a successful run (Fernando, Dan, and Jesse, with Cecy Cabrera holding the trophy and Inkaterra's Jose Purisaca on the left); and Dan busy recording and watching something important while Fernando checks his equipment with Leon looking on.



FIELD GUIDES PERU TEAM

Is there some great experience on the Field Guides Peru team?

Well, let's see...**Dan Lane's** a co-author of the field guide you'll be using (*Birds of Peru*) and has been going to Peru on expeditions and tours since the 1990s; **Jesse Fagan's** been based in Peru for the past couple of years and is almost a *limeño*; **Pepe Rojas** grew up in Peru, where he's guided birders for many years and is now a keystone in our Peru program; and **Richard Webster's** been guiding our *Northern Peru: Endemics Galore* tour since 1997 (not to mention various other Peru itineraries). **Dave Stejskal**, who over the years has guided tours all over Peru, will join Dan this year for *Peru's Magnetic North*.



2014 PERU TOURS

Machu Picchu & Abra Malaga, July 4-13 with Dan Lane or August 7-16 with Jesse Fagan. Temperate birding at its best, with three days exploring southern Peru's east-slope and two nights at Machu Picchu with its great subtropical birding. (The first tour may be combined with *Mountains of Manu*.)

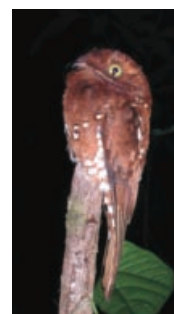
Mountains of Manu, Peru, July 12-27 with Dan Lane. The uncontained possibilities of an entire ecosystem, from golden grasslands of the puna zone down the eastern Andean slope through cloaking montane cloudforest to seemingly endless lowland rainforest.

Peru's Magnetic North: Spatuletails, Owlet Lodge & More, July 31-August 11 with Dan Lane & Dave Stejskal. A 12-day taste of northern Peru's east-slope Andes, with five nights at the Long-whiskered Owlet Lodge.

Peruvian Rainforests of the Tambopata, October 4-17 with Pepe Rojas. Three-site tour to the most species-rich rainforest on Earth with the largest known macaw lick, canopy walkway and towers, eagles and monkeys.

Northern Peru: Endemics Galore, November 2-22 with Richard Webster & Pepe Rojas. Targets geographic specialties as it surveys the rich and diverse habitats of northern Peru, including some remote and beautiful wild areas.

Holiday in Peru: Iquitos, December 20-31 with Pepe Rojas & Dan Lane. The most species-rich region of Amazonia, including the white-sand forests near Iquitos. River travel on the Amazon and Napo and canopy access via the famed walkway at ACTS (Amazon Conservatory of Tropical Studies).



Our Peru team from above: Jesse Fagan, Dan Lane, Richard Webster, Pepe Rojas. And no, the Andean Cock-of-the-rock and Rufous Potoo, also pictured, are not a permanent part of the team, but may join us on select tours.



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CONSERVATION Field Guides contributes to the following conservation organizations: The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, BirdLife International, Rainforest Trust, American Bird Conservancy



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BIRDING TOURS WORLDWIDE

Ever since Darwin, this island archipelago has been a showcase of evolution. Our small group tour—limited to just eleven—is designed to see as many of the endemics birds as possible (and, naturally, the fascinating mammals, reptiles, and flora). Based on board our comfortable vessel with excellent food, naturalists, and crew, we'll travel by night to maximize our enjoyment of these ruggedly beautiful islands.

June 14-24 with Willy Perez
July 5-15 with Megan Edwards Crewe
August 2-12 with Eric Hynes

Photos by participants Linda Rudolph and Bill Denton.

