



## Belize & Tikal Trip Report (Jan 19 - 29, 2025)

[Link: Belize & Tikal Trip Report \(Jan 19 - 29, 2025\)](#)

---

The first of three Belize & Tikal tours this year took place from January 19-29, when seven birders from across the United States and South Africa joined Jared & Alex for a fun adventure in these beautiful (and “birdy”!) destinations. We explored amazing and diverse habitats, hiked beautiful mountain trails, strolled ancient Mayan cities, experienced nature at its best and shared a wealth of wonderful birds and other wildlife.



*Tikal 2025 © Alex Alvarado*

## January 19-20: Belize City & area

Meeting up in Belize City, our group met for dinner and took a few minutes to get to know each other before diving right into the birding. The neighbourhood near our hotel provided the perfect introduction to many birds that would become quite familiar throughout our travels - Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Morelet's Seedeater, Great-tailed Grackle and Tropical Kingbird just to name a few. We also encountered neotropical migrants that had recently journeyed south just like us - Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow-throated Warbler. We also enjoyed brief views of a Cinnamon Hummingbird - a species that is typically difficult to find one we leave the city behind. Before leaving the city, we stopped at the waterfront to see the famous "Belize" sign and look for some coastal species we might not see later in the tour. Laughing Gulls dotted piers and posts, Brown Pelicans soared low over the water and Sandwich Terns dove headfirst into the waves in search of breakfast. A Black-bellied Plover was a nice surprise, foraging along the seawall with Least and Spotted Sandpipers.



*Belize sign © Jared Clarke*



*Sandwich Tern © Jared Clarke*

A brief stop on our drive west produced a Bare-throated Tiger Heron, several Black-necked Stilts and stunning Fork-tailed Flycatchers along with other birds foraging in a wet pasture. A similar stop at the La Polvara wetlands offered up a diversity of species from Common Gallinule and Pied-billed Grebe to White Ibis and Ringed Kingfisher. Crossing the border into neighbouring Guatemala, we made our way to Tikal and our home for the next few days. We started birding that very night, enjoying as many as three Mottled Owls as they popped in to check us out right on the hotel grounds.



*Mottled Owl © Jared Clarke*

## January 21 - 23: Tikal National Park

Tikal National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, preserves one of the most important archaeological sites in the Americas — the ancient Mayan city and temples of Tikal. One of the largest cities of the Mayan Classical period, it was inhabited for nearly a millenium until its abandonment ~900AD and had a peak population of nearly 100,000 people.



*Mayan ritual in front of temple © Jared Clarke*

While it may be most famous for its ancient Mayan ruins, Tikal National Park also protects a huge swath of pristine rainforest and is one of the best birding destinations in Central America. Strolls along the park's many trails produced great looks at prized species such as Great Curassow, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Barred Forest-Falcon, Mealy Amazon, Brown-hooded Parrot, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Mayan Antthrush, Gray-collared Becard, Rose-throated Tanager and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager among *many* others. A Pheasant Cuckoo displaying quietly on the forest floor was an unexpected and very exciting surprise - even our guides were left speechless by such a rare encounter! Bizarrely beautiful birds, Ocellated Turkeys are a regional endemic that we found on several occasions roaming in and around the park. We even discovered a Northern Potoo roosting quietly in a large tree - incredibly camouflaged as part of the branch itself. Orange-breasted Falcon is one of the most anticipated birds of this trip, and Tikal is one of the best places in the world to spot it. We were thrilled to find a male sitting atop one of the ancient temples during two of our hikes- an iconic and very memorable encounter with such a special bird! We also enjoyed a fantastic archaeology tour with local guide Eulogio who regaled us with stories of Mayan history, culture and the incredible city through which we wandered.



*Collared Aracari © Jared Clarke*



*Slaty-tailed Trogon © Jared Clarke*



*Mayan Antthrush © Jared Clarke*



*Ocellated Turkey © Jared Clarke*

Late afternoon at a nearby pond was especially exciting as dozens of Boat-billed Herons squawked and squabbled in preparation for their nocturnal forays, an American Pygmy Kingfisher sat cooperatively on a low branch and a much anticipated Agami Heron swooped down from its perch to hunt along the muddy shoreline.



*Boat-billed Heron © Jared Clarke*



*American Pygmy Kingfisher © Jared Clarke*



*Agami Heron © Jared Clarke*



*Morelet's Crocodile © Jared Clarke*

Among the other wildlife of Tikal National Park, Central American Spider Monkeys were by far the most endearing. Troupes of these social critters were often spotted swinging through the trees and at times even dropping fruit on our heads. Other non-avian highlights included Morelet's Crocodile, Black Howler Monkeys, Gray Fox and White-nosed Coati.



*Central American Spider Monkey © Jared Clarke*



*White-nosed Coati © Jared Clarke*

## **January 24-26: Jade Jungle Lodge**

Back in Belize, our home for the next few days was Jade Jungle Lodge (formerly Pook's Hill) in the foothills of the Maya Mountains. The lodge, with traditional thatch-roof cabanas, is situated on a private reserve and surrounded by the lush rainforests of the Tapir Mountain Reserve - a perfect

place to explore and enjoy a diversity of birds and wildlife. Our time here was rewarded with banner birds like Northern Emerald Toucanet, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Lesson's Motmot, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Band-backed Wren, Black-faced Grosbeak, Crimson-collared Tanager and three species of trogon. Harder to spot, but just as exciting when we did, were forest-dwellers like White-winged Becard, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Dot-winged Antwren and Slate-headed Tody Flycatcher. White Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk and King Vulture were all spotted soaring overhead. Perhaps the stars of the show, though, were a pair of Spectacled Owl that liked to hang out near the lodge - heard every night, and seen extremely well on several occasions. Not to be outdone, we also spied a tiny Central American Pygmy Owl s it called from the canopy - a shy and rarely seen bird! Those who came out after dark to enjoy some night walks were thrilled to find critters such as Cat-eyed Snake, Red-rumped Tarantula and Vaillant's Frog among others. We also heard the range-restricted Middle American Screech Owl but were unable to spot it in the dark tangles where it likes hide.



*Birding in front of cabana © Jared Clarke*



*Black-headed Trogon* © Jared Clarke



*Dot-winged Antwren* © Jared Clarke



*Spectacled Owl © Jared Clarke*

A day trip to Mountain Pine Ridge was mostly rainy but provided a stark change of habitat, and with it some new and exciting birds. A morning visit to the Green Hills Butterfly Ranch where we found not only hundreds of colourful butterflies, but also eight species of hummingbird at their feeders! Highlights included Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Violet Sabrewing Scaly-breasted Hummingbird and White-bellied Emerald among others. We shared lunch at the Rio On Pools, where birding from the picnic shelter was surprisingly productive and included excellent looks at Cabanis's Wren, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Rusty Sparrow and Yellow-faced Grassquit among others. As the rain tapered off after lunch, we explored the Mennonite village of Spanish Lookout where we spied gems such as Eastern Meadowlark, Groove-billed Ani, Fork-tailed & Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on farm fences and American Kestrel hunting over the fields. Mangrove, Tree, Barn and Northern Rough-winged Swallows zipped through skies, a Black Phoebe hawked insects from its perch and our only Wood Stork of the week stalked a nearby stream. The highlight, however, was no doubt our stop at a local (and very well known) ice cream shop where we enjoyed exotic favours such a soursop and craboo.



*Wedge-tailed Sabrewing* © Jared Clarke



*Scaly-breasted Hummingbird* © Jared Clarke



*Fork-tailed Flycatcher* © Jared Clarke

## **January 27-29: Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**

Heading east, we stopped to explore a small section of the Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. Strolling this quiet road we found several of our targets fairly quickly - Yellow-tailed Oriole, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator and the beautiful Scarlet-rumped Tanager. A Bat Falcon flew by overhead - our only sighting of this small but speedy raptor of the trip. Our afternoon drive was disrupted when we spotted two Jabiru feeding in a roadside marsh - an exciting encounter with one of the largest and most majestic storks in the world! Closer to the coast, we visited Captain Hook's shrimp farm where the manmade ponds hosted a variety of waders including from Great Yellowlegs to Tricolored, Green and Little Blue Herons. A locally rare Red-breasted Merganser was a surprise find and was attracting local birders by the time we left. The mangroves offered looks at several exciting birds including Green Kingfisher, Black Catbird, Mangrove Vireo and a cooperative Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. An American Crocodile lurked in the waters just metres from the trail.



*Jabiru © Jared Clarke*



*Baby American Crocodile © Jared Clarke*

Our next destination was the Birds Eye View Lodge in Crooked Tree, where we spent the last few days of our adventure. This lovely Creole community is surrounded by a large lagoon and expansive wetlands and simply abounding with birdlife. The lodge and surrounding grounds themselves provided lots of great birding and photography opportunities. Swarms of Mangrove Swallows and Gray-breasted Martins zipped around, four species of oriole (Hooded, Orchard, Baltimore and Black-

crowded) were visiting feeders and nearby flowers, brilliant Vermilion Flycatchers flitted along the fence line, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks dabbled in roadside pools and Russet-naped Wood-rails stalked lawns. Common Tody Flycatchers skulked in the hedges, Rufous-browed Peppershrike called from the trails and several mixed flocks provided plenty of entertainment as we worked to pick out a diversity of migrant warblers and resident songbirds. A Ferruginous Pygmy Owl showed amazingly, attracting the attention of not just us but also a mob of angry birds that included Yellow-throated Euphonia, Morelet's and Varibale Seed eaters and Summer Tanagers among others. Several Common Pauriques liked to hang out in the garden after dark, allowing us great looks on our way to and from dinner each night. The setting was also very tranquil, allowing plenty of opportunity to just sit and soak in the scenery - including some stellar sunrises.



*Vermillion Flycatcher © Jared Clarke*



*Ferruginous Pygmy Owl © Jared Clarke*



*Common Pauraque © Jared Clarke*



*Sunrise at Crooked Tree © Jared Clarke*

Boat tours of the lagoon and creeks are always a highlight here, and we enjoyed two! We spotted dozens of Northern Jacana, White Ibis, Limpkin, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga and ten species of heron as we meandered down the waterways. Ringed, Belted, Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers hunted along the water's edge, and we watched a pair of White-necked Puffbirds keeping watch over the canopy from their wide open perches. Black-collared Hawk, Snail Kite, Gray-headed Kite and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture were among the numerous raptors we encountered. Water levels were higher than average for this time of year, meaning that "some" birds were destined to elude us but we were also able to enjoy other species that wouldn't have been possible with lower water. The most exciting of these were Ruddy Crakes - a tiny and very secretive bird that allowed us some brief glimpses as they called from the tangly shrubs! Hikes through the nearby pine-oak savannah were also very productive, including regional specialties such as Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan Jay and Yucatan Woodpecker. Other highlights during our walks here included Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Gray-headed Tanager, Rose-throated Becard, and White-bellied Wren. What a wonderful place to clue up our visit!



*Bare-throated Tiger-Heron © Jared Clarke*



*White-necked Puffbird © Jared Clarke*



*Snail Kite © Jared Clarke*



*Yucatan Jay © Jared Clarke*



*Sunset from boat at Crooked Tree © Jared Clarke*

And with that, another fantastic Eagle-Eye Tours adventure wrapped up. Our group had an excellent time, finding ~280 species of birds and plenty of other wildlife along the way. Added to the mix were the incredible ruins at Tikal, great food, amazing scenery and lots of great people! [Belize & Tikal Birding Tour eBird list \(Jan 19 - 29, 2025\) \(pdf\)](#)