



Belize & Tikal Trip Report (Jan 30 - Feb 9, 2025)

[Link: Belize & Tikal Trip Report \(Jan 30 - Feb 9, 2025\)](#)

Twelve excited birders took part in our second Belize & Tikal adventure this year, along with leaders Jared and Nick. Throughout our eleven days together (Jan 30 - Feb 9) 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.

January 30-31: Belize City & Area

Meeting in beautiful 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 quiet road beside our hotel provided the perfect introduction to many birds that would become as familiar as our new companions over the next few days - 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 - Yellow Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler along with Wood Thrush and Orchard Oriole. We also enjoyed brief views of Cinnamon Hummingbird - the only ones we would see during the trip. Before heading out of the city, we stopped at the Belize Welcome Sign and Baron Bliss Lighthouse to have our only look for ocean birds. We were rewarded with Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Sandwich Tern, Royal Tern, and oodles of Laughing Gulls.



Belize 2025

Before crossing the border into Guatemala, we stopped for lunch at Benny's Kitchen hosting great food. Crossing the border into Guatemala, we made a stop at La Polvora wetlands to check out a large wetland where we found Common Gallinule and Ringed Kingfisher along with other waterbirds. We then made our way to Tikal and our home for the next few days. We started birding that very night, enjoying a Mottled Owl as it popped in to check us out right on the hotel grounds, a bird we would see and hear each night.

February 1-3: 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 millennium until its abandonment ~900AD and had a peak population of nearly 100,000 people.



Tikal 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, Red-lored Parrot, Slaty-tailed Trogon, and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager among *many* others. A strange mix of bizarre and beautiful, Ocellated Turkeys are a regional endemic that is found quite easily in and around Tikal. We also discovered a Northern Potoo roosting quietly near our lodge - incredibly camouflaged as part of the tree itself. Orange-breasted Falcon is one of the most anticipated birds of this trip, and Tikal is among the most reliable places to find it. We were fortunate to spot a male and female sitting atop one of the ancient temples during our history tour with local guide Miguel - an iconic and very memorable encounter with such a special bird!



Slaty-tailed Trogon © Jared Clarke



Orange-breasted Falcon © Jared Clarke

We also took advantage of the beautiful evening weather to do some after-dark exploring. Dusk at a nearby pond was especially exciting as dozens of Boat-billed Herons squawked and squabbled in preparation for their nocturnal forays, and a much-anticipated Agami Heron appeared out of nowhere and sat for incredible views.



Boat-billed Heron © Jared Clarke



Agami Heron © 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. Other non-avian highlights included Morelet's Crocodile, Black Howler Monkeys, Kinkajou, and White-nosed Coati.



Central American Spider Monkey © Jared Clarke



Kinkajou © Jared Clarke

February 4-6: 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 lush rainforest - a perfect place to explore and enjoy a diversity

of birds and wildlife. Our time here was rewarded with banner birds like Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Band-backed Wren, Crimson-collared Tanager, Northern Emerald Toucanet and three species of trogon. On the first evening we were treated to what appeared to be a flock of Black Swift flying over the lodge; however, communication with the local eBird moderator informed us that Black Swift are not present in Belize and were likely, White-chinned Swift. A pair of White-whiskered Puffbirds were especially entertaining as they flew and sat cooperatively for us to enjoy. Perhaps the stars of the show, though, was a very energetic Central American Pygmy Owl that liked to hang out near the lodge.



Black-headed Trogon © Jared Clarke



Northern Emerald Toucanet © Jared Clarke

Those who came out after dark to enjoy some night walks were thrilled to find critters such as Red-rumped Tarantula, Central American Toad, and Common Pauraque.



Red-rumped Tarantula © Jared Clarke

A day trip to Mountain Pine Ridge provided a stark change of habitat, and with it some new and exciting birds. Our time scanning for raptors was not overly productive, although we did see Hook-billed Kite and Gray Hawk. The highlight of the walk to the overlook (and perhaps the trip) was stunning views of a male Lovely Cotinga, quietly calling from a tree near the trail. On our way to our

lunch spot, we made a short stop and had great views of Black-headed Siskin, Rusty Sparrow, and Azure-crowned Hummingbird. We shared lunch at the Rio On Pools, where we also lucked into a very cooperative Boat-billed Flycatcher, Grace's Warbler and Cabanis's Wren. After lunch we visited 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 Green-breasted Mango among others. Taking a break of sorts under the hot afternoon sun, we explored the Mennonite village of Spanish Lookout where we spied gems such as Eastern Meadowlark, Vermilion Flycatcher, Fork and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Gray-crowned Yellowthroat on farm fences. The highlight, however, was no doubt our stop at a locally famous ice cream shop (Western Daries).



Group at Slate Creek Overlook © Nick Bartok



Lovely Cotinga © Jared Clarke



Wedge-tailed Sabrewing © Jared Clarke

February 7-9: Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

Heading northeast, we stopped at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary for walks along the dirt road, which was quite productive with specialties, such as: Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Hook-billed Kite, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator. Leaving Monkey Bay, we headed off in search of a

Jabiru along the Coastal Plains Highway, and we were successful. We had one more stop enroute to Crooked Tree, Captain Hook's Shrimp Farm where unfortunately the ponds did not have a lot of bird activity (they normally do). We were able to get a wonderful look at a perched Bat Falcon, Green Kingfisher, Mangrove Vireo, and a lone Pectoral Sandpiper.



Jabiru © Jared Clarke

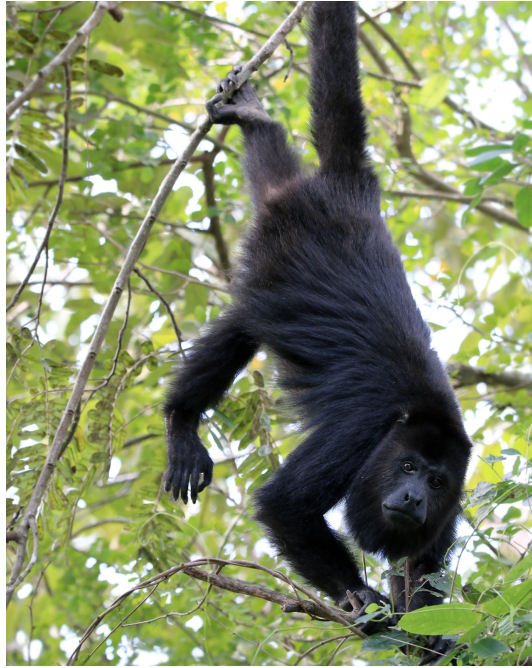
Our next destination was the Birds Eye View Lodge in Crooked Tree, where we spent the last few days of our adventure. This lovely Creole community is surrounded by a large lagoon and expansive wetlands and simply abounding with birdlife. The lodge and surrounding grounds themselves provided plenty of great birding and photography opportunities. Swarms of Mangrove Swallow and Gray-breasted Martin zipped around, four species of oriole (Hooded, Orchard, Baltimore and Black-cowled) were visiting flowering bushes, brilliant Vermilion Flycatchers flitted along the fencelines, and Ruddy Ground Dove strutted along the roadside. A Canivet's Emerald stood out among several species of hummingbirds, Common Tody Flycatchers skulked in the hedges, and several mixed flocks provided plenty of entertainment as we worked to pick out a diversity of migrant warblers and resident songbirds. Walking west into the pine savannah, we also found highlights, such as: Yucatan Jay (riding horseback), Yucatan Woodpecker, Red-billed Pigeon, and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl. There was never a dull moment - *unless* one wanted to sit and relax in this gorgeous setting, which there was also plenty of opportunity to do!



Yucatan Jay on horseback © Jared Clarke



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Jared Clarke



Black Howler Monkey © 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, Wood Stork, Limpkin, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga and nine species of heron as we meandered down the waterways. Ringed and Belted Kingfishers hunted along the water's edge, and we had a brief glimpse of Yellow-headed Parrot calling from a treetop. Black-collared Hawks and Snail Kites 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 would not have been possible with lower water. What a wonderful place to conclude our visit!



Group in boat © Nick Bartok



Limpkin © Jared Clarke



Black-collared Hawk © Jared Clarke

The sun set on another fantastic Eagle-Eye Tours adventure. Our group had an excellent time, finding 254 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 species list \(Jan 30 - Feb 9, 2025\)](#)