

BELIZE:
CHAN CHICH NEW YEAR
DECEMBER 28, 2009 – JANUARY 3, 2010



Ornate Hawk-Eagle

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Simply put, Chan Chich has it all—delightful cabins set in a small clearing on a Mayan archaeological site, a wonderful variety of gourmet dishes to choose from for our daily meals, and, most importantly, almost unlimited access to a vast expanse of subtropical moist forest. Hunting has been prohibited on this huge private reserve for decades now, and amidst this forest can be found almost all of the indicator species of true Central American wilderness, the large birds and animals that are gone in so many other places.

We spent this wonderful week exploring the richness of life here and each day brought special sightings. The one thing that we did not have was “perfect” weather. (Is there such a thing?) This year the rainy season continued longer than expected and our days were cloudy and cool, with occasional light showers, while substantial rain fell during the night several times. It was only after our return home that we learned that a massive winter storm was sweeping much of North America and clearly affecting the weather this far south. As I write this at home in East Texas, we are due to go down to the mid-teens F. for the third night in a row, the coldest temperatures we’ve had in 14 years!

One of the signature species of Chan Chich is the spectacular Ocellated Turkey. This is a bird of very limited world range that has been heavily hunted almost everywhere that it occurs, but here they are a common daily sight. In fact, we spotted our first flock not five minutes from the Gallon Jug airstrip! Then, just before entering the lodge clearing, we found a troop of Mexican black howler monkeys in a large fruiting fig over the road. Actually, we could hardly have missed them as they loudly and vigorously protested with their bone-chilling roars. This too is a declining regional endemic dependent upon large areas of forest. On other days we were to become acquainted with numerous Great Curassows (with a maximum of 11 in one morning), several troops of delightful Central American spider monkeys, and we were even lucky enough to get a quick look at a red brocket deer! All of these species have been widely extirpated from other parts of northern Central America.

The smaller creatures kept us busy too, from the pair of Chestnut-colored Woodpeckers and aggressive male Green Honeycreepers at the flowering African tulip tree to the lizards scurrying around the bushes and butterflies visiting the flowering *Poinsettias*. Delightful lunches outdoors on the porch were regularly interrupted by wintering wood warblers bathing at the water feature and a male White-collared Manakin that sat motionless in the fruiting *Hamelia* bushes. Nearby, clusters of palm fruit not 10 feet away regularly attracted Collared Aracaris, Black-headed Saltators, and Olive-backed Euphonias that were almost close enough to touch. Forest trails yielded lessons on woodcreeper and ant-tanager identification, though the gorgeous Rufous-tailed Jacamars, trogons, and Keel-billed Toucans in the trees overhead were

perhaps more spectacular. Our single most memorable sighting came our last morning afield, at an impromptu roadside stop, when our local guide spotted an adult Ornate Hawk-Eagle perched in the subcanopy not 30 yards away. This spectacular bird was so intent on hunting that it seemed oblivious to our presence and allowed scope views for over 15 minutes (after which a Black-headed Trogon distracted us, but not the hawk-eagle)!

A final evening's night-drive produced a surprise Yucatan Nightjar, a lifer for the leaders that required some serious study, and a very close Northern Potoo, and then all too soon it was time to say goodbye to this special place.

Itinerary:

December 28, 2009: group gathers at the Belize City Airport for our charter flight to Gallon Jug, arriving there about 4:10 p.m.

December 29, 2009: AM: after birding around the lodge we walked to the suspension bridge and back through the forest along the Logger's Trail; PM: birding around the lodge clearing (between light rainshowers).

December 30, 2009: AM: morning excursion to Gallon Jug and Laguna Seca; PM: birding near the lodge and along the road to the suspension bridge.

December 31, 2009: we participated in the 19th Gallon Jug Christmas Bird Count by covering areas near the lodge and along the Sylvester Road; in the late afternoon we drove to Laguna Verde for a sunset celebration of the coming New Year. None of us made it till midnight to ring in the New Year, but we were rested and eager to be afield again early the next morning.

January 1, 2010: Happy New Year! We began 2010 with a wet walk to the bridge and Trish's Hill; PM: excursion to the open habitats in the Gallon Jug area.

January 2, 2010: AM: trip to the Escarpment and back; PM: archaeological tour near the lodge and after dinner a night drive with spot-lights.

January 3, 2010: after a little birding near the lodge we drove out to Gallon Jug to meet our charter flight to Belize City and connections onward.

Bird List: a few trip highlights and special sightings are **bolded**

Great Tinamou (*Tinamus major*) - heard only

Plain Chachalaca (*Ortalis vetula*)

Crested Guan (*Penelope purpurascens*) - quite calm here and seen daily.

Great Curassow (*Crax rubra*) - many sightings

Ocellated Turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) - spectacular regional endemic that is common here.

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) - 2 in high flight were a surprise here!

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) - sneaky, but several great looks, at both adults and an immature.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) - one on the night drive.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*) - from the plane after we took off to leave.

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*)

Black-collared Hawk (*Busarellus nigricollis*) - spectacular pair at Laguna Seca.

White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*)

Great Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus urubitinga*) - several lengthy studies of this species.

Roadside Hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*)

Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*)

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) - very distant bird seen by a few.

Black Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*)

Ornate Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus ornatus*) - the distant perched bird across the Laguna Seca was OK, but the adult perched close at hand for 15 minutes was truly spectacular!

Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*)

Bat Falcon (*Falco ruficularis*)

Ruddy Crake (*Laterallus ruber*) - heard only

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*)

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*)

Pale-vented Pigeon (*Patagioenas cayennensis*)

Red-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas flavirostris*)

Short-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas nigrirostris*)

Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*)

White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxii*) - flushed in front of the vehicle.

Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga nana*)

Brown-hooded Parrot (*Pyrilia haematotis*) - a flock of 5 of these snappy parrots came to the mistletoe in the lodge clearing daily.

White-crowned Parrot (*Pionus senilis*)

Red-lored Parrot (*Amazona autumnalis*)

Mealy Parrot (*Amazona farinosa*)

Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*)

Common Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis*)

Yucatan Nightjar (*Caprimulgus badius*) - a study of this rare find under the spotlight.

Northern Potoo (*Nyctibius jamaicensis*) - what a strange-looking creature!

White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*)

Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*)

Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift (*Panyptila cayennensis*)

Long-billed Hermit (*Phaethornis longirostris*)

Stripe-throated Hermit (*Phaethornis striigularis*)

Scaly-breasted Hummingbird (*Phaeochroa cuvierii*)
Wedge-tailed Sabrewing (*Campylopterus curvipennis*)
Green-breasted Mango (*Anthracothorax prevostii*)
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*)

Black-headed Trogon (*Trogon melanocephalus*)

Violaceous Trogon (*Trogon violaceus*)

Slaty-tailed Trogon (*Trogon massena*)

Ringed Kingfisher (*Megaceryle torquatus*)

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

Amazon Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle amazona*)

Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*)

White-whiskered Puffbird (*Malacoptila panamensis*) - surprisingly frequent here.

Rufous-tailed Jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*)

Collared Aracari (*Pteroglossus torquatus*) - so close you could almost touch them.

Keel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos sulfuratus*)

Black-cheeked Woodpecker (*Melanerpes pucherani*)

Chestnut-colored Woodpecker (*Celeus castaneus*) - among the first visitors to the African Tulip Tree in the early morning.

Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*)

Pale-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus guatemalensis*) - very showy

Plain Xenops (*Xenops minutus*)

Olivaceous Woodcreeper (*Sittasomus griseicapillus*)

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper (*Glyphorhynchus spirurus*)

Strong-billed Woodcreeper (*Xiphocolaptes promeropirhynchus*) - a rare good sighting of a pair of this large woodcreeper, in some of the tallest forest near the temple ruins.

Northern Barred-Woodcreeper (*Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae*)

Ivory-billed Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus flavigaster*)

Dot-winged Antwren (*Microrhoppias quixensis*)

Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet (*Ornithion semiflavum*)

Yellow-bellied Elaenia (*Elaenia flavogaster*)

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher (*Mionectes oleagineus*)

Northern Bentbill (*Oncostoma cinereigulare*)

Eye-ringed Flatbill (*Rhynchocyclus brevirostris*)

Yellow-olive Flycatcher (*Tolmomyias sulphureus*)

Stub-tailed Spadebill (*Platyrinchus cancrominus*)

Royal Flycatcher (*Onychorhynchus coronatus*) - out-in-the-open in the lodge clearing!

Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher (*Terentotriccus erythrurus*)

Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher (*Myiobius sulphureipygius*)

Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*)

Tropical Pewee (*Contopus cinereus*)

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*)

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*)

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)
Bright-rumped Attila (*Attila spadiceus*)
Rufous Mourner (*Rhytipterna holerythra*)
Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*)
Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)
Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*)
Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*)
Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)
Couch's Kingbird (*Tyrannus couchii*)
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)
Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*)
Thrush-like Schiffornis (*Schiffornis turdina*) - heard only
Cinnamon Becard (*Pachyramphus cinnamomeus*)
Masked Tityra (*Tityra semifasciata*)
White-collared Manakin (*Manacus candei*) - close at hand.
Red-capped Manakin (*Pipra mentalis*)
White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*)
Mangrove Vireo (*Vireo pallens*)
Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*)
Tawny-crowned Greenlet (*Hylophilus ochraceiceps*)
Lesser Greenlet (*Hylophilus decurtatus*)
Brown Jay (*Cyanocorax morio*)
Mangrove Swallow (*Tachycineta albilinea*)
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
Spot-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus maculipectus*)
Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)
House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*)
White-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucosticta*)
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*)
Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)
Clay-colored Thrush (*Turdus grayi*)
Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*)
Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)
Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*)
Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*)
Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*)
Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)
American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)
Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*)
Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*)
Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*)
Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)
Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*)
Golden-crowned Warbler (*Basileuterus culicivorus*)
Black-throated Shrike-Tanager (*Lanio aurantius*) - the leader of the flock.

Red-crowned Ant-Tanager (*Habia rubica*)
Red-throated Ant-Tanager (*Habia fuscicauda*)

Rose-throated Tanager (*Piranga roseogularis*) - nice looks at a female of this Yucatan endemic thanks to Brennan.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)
Blue-gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*)
Yellow-winged Tanager (*Thraupis abbas*)
Golden-hooded Tanager (*Tangara larvata*)
Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*)
Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*)
Black-headed Saltator (*Saltator atriceps*)
Blue Bunting (*Cyanocompsa parellina*)
Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)
Melodious Blackbird (*Dives dives*)
Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)
Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*)
Giant Cowbird *Molothrus oryzivorus*)

Black-cowled Oriole (*Icterus prothemelas*) - daily visitors around the clearing.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)
Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)

Montezuma Oropendola (*Psarocolius montezuma*) - the strange vocalizations and displays of the male made this one a favorite.

Yellow-throated Euphonia (*Euphonia hirundinacea*)

Olive-backed Euphonia (*Euphonia gouldi*) - swarms coming to the mistletoe in the tall trees in the lodge clearing.

Mammal List:

“big bats” - none could be identified to genus or species.

“little bats” - none could be identified to genus or species.

Yucatan (Mexican) Black Howler (*Alouatta pigra*)

Central American Spider Monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*)

Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) - seen on our night drive.

White-nosed Coati (*Nasua narica*) - a large male seen by the group; these solitary males are known as a “coatimundi”.

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Red Brocket (*Mazama americana*)

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Gulf Coast Toad (*Bufo valliceps*) - the smaller toad, with cranial crests, seen inside the forest several times during this rather wet week.

Cane (Marine) Toad (*Bufo marinus*) - the huge toad seen on the archaeological tour.

Brown (Striped) Basilisk (*Basiliscus vittatus*) - the common lizard around the clearing, but all but one were juveniles. They are more striped than the adults, but lack the wild casque.