

HONDURAS: THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO

FEBRUARY 14-21, 2010



LOVELY COTINGA: DAVID WOLF

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TOUR REPORT

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February 14–21, 2010

By David Wolf

There couldn't be a more fitting symbol for The Lodge at Pico Bonito than the Lovely Cotinga. As the name implies, this bird is extreme in its beauty. The adult male is iridescent turquoise-blue, complemented with violet-purple patches on the chin and abdomen, a color scheme that flashes brightly from a mile away. Yet for all of its brilliance it can be hard to detect, spending much of the day sitting quietly inside the forest, occasionally foraging for fruit in the canopy. Its distribution is limited to northern Central America, and even here it is localized and typically uncommon. The Lodge is much the same—uncommonly beautiful, yet quietly tucked away at the edge of the rainforest of scenic Pico Bonito National Park. It is elegant in its simplicity, yet has all of the amenities one could hope for, including excellent food. This was our headquarters for a productive week of birding Honduras, and near-daily sightings of the cotinga confirmed that the two are much alike—simply spectacular!

Our first day here dawned sunny and warm and we decided to “go for it.” That is, head to the nearby observation tower right away to watch for the mythical cotinga. We were not to be disappointed, as within the hour the first males showed up on the hillside opposite us, sitting on top of the canopy in a blaze of color before moving down the valley to forage, while a female-plumaged bird perched next to the tower to eye us before moving on. Such would be the pattern throughout the week, as we had near-daily sightings of the birds, sometimes on our walks down the road or right above the cabins, and once even disrupting our lunch when a male appeared at the back of the garden.

Throughout all of this cotinga-watching we found ourselves entertained by other interesting tropical birds around the grounds, from the large parrots, toucans, aracarís, and oropendolas to hummingbirds, look-alike flycatchers, wintering wood warblers, and several species of orioles. After such luck with the cotinga, that first afternoon the hikers in the group climbed “the hill” to seek the other extreme specialty of the region. It proved to be a slog up-slope through a quiet forest, but as we sat and rested at the top of the climb, it wasn't long before we heard the distant nasal honk of the fabled Keel-billed Motmot. Like magic, we soon had a pair sitting side by side, as we peered into the forest and positioned the scopes for better viewing through the layers of leaves. And then, as if to say “you've worked hard, now look at me more closely,” one of the birds flew right towards us and landed in the open not 25 feet away. Incredible!

Our luck shifted the next day, as a “norther” moved into the region, bringing heavy rain. Between showers we watched a fruiting fig tree that was attracting a parade of tanagers and other birds, and we studied woodcreepers and flycatchers from the shelter of the Lancetilla Visitor's Center, but by that evening we had all had enough rain. So, the next day we made our excursion to “the dry side,” in the rainshadow of the mountains in the Aguan Valley. Here the gray skies worked to our advantage, keeping temperatures cool in this semiarid zone. An

impromptu roadside stop produced so many birds, including Turquoise-browed Motmot, several kingfishers, and a swarm of small flycatchers and warblers, that we didn't reach the thorn-forest until mid-morning. This unique habitat is the home of the only bird endemic to Honduras, the Honduran Emerald, and with a little persistence we all had great looks at this unique hummingbird, known from only a few sites. After this the weather began to moderate, as we explored the coastal wetlands at the Cuero y Salado Reserve (wasn't the little train trip fun?), found soaring raptors and swarms of Neotropical migrants in the Rio Bonito area, and tracked down more of the forest birds around the lodge, including such goodies as four species of trogons, Chestnut-colored and Pale-billed woodpeckers, Red-capped Manakin, and last, but certainly not least, a brilliant pair of Blue-crowned Chlorophonias feeding in the mistletoe amidst three species of euphonias. All too soon it was time to leave this tropical paradise.

Itinerary:

February 14: the group gathers in San Pedro Sula and transfers to The Lodge at Pico Bonito.

February 15: around the grounds of The Lodge at Pico Bonito, including a late afternoon hike up the mountainside.

February 16: morning trip to Lancetilla Botanical Garden (rainy); lunch in Triunfo de la Cruz and then back to the Lodge at Pico Bonito (rainy).

February 17: all day trip to "the dry side" in the upper Aguan Valley.

February 18: morning trip to Cuero y Salado Reserve; afternoon at Pico Bonito.

February 19: morning along the Rio Bonito road; afternoon around Pico Bonito.

February 20: morning until mid-afternoon around Pico Bonito; drive to San Pedro Sula.

February 21: departure from San Pedro Sula for home or the Copan Extension.

Key:

PB = the Lodge at Pico Bonito and nearby, including the morning hike along the Rio Bonito.

LBG = Lancetilla Botanical Garden and nearby, including lunch on the beach in the Garifuna village of Triunfo de la Cruz.

AV = the upper Aguan Valley (west of Olanchito) in the dry interior rainshadow of the mountains.

CS = Cuero y Salado Reserve, including the train trip and boat excursion.

hd = heard

Bird List: a few rarities and highlights are underscored.

Great Tinamou (*Tinamus major*) – PB (heard only).

Little Tinamou (*Crypturellus soui*) – PB (heard only, though close at hand).

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) - CS

Muscovy Duck (*Cairina moschata*) – CS (one immature male; rare and declining).

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) - CS

Plain Chachalaca (*Ortalis vetula*) – LBG (actively feeding in a fruiting fig).

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – LBG (off the beach at Triunfo de la Cruz).

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – LBG, AV, CS

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) - CS

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) – LBG (over the beach)
 Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) – CS (from the train).
 Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – AV, CS
 Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – all areas (especially along the highways).
 Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) – LBG (along the road), AV, CS
 Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) – AV, CS
 Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) - CS
 Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – all areas (along the highways).
 Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – AV, CS
 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – CS (one immature).
Boat-billed Heron (*Cochlearius cochlearius*) – CS (a strange bird!).
 White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) - CS
Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) – CS (one beautiful adult in full breeding plumage was quite close to the train).
 Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) – AV, CS
 Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – all areas
 Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – all areas
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture (*Cathartes burrovianus*) – CS (2 perched on fenceposts very close to the train for a great study).
 King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*) – AV, PB
 Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) - CS
Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) – CS (one immature; unexpected here).
 Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*) - PB
White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*) – PB (a beautiful soaring pair).
 Common Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) - PB
 Great Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus urubitinga*) - AV
 Roadside Hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*) – AV, CS
 Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*) - AV
 Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) - AV
 Black Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*) - PB
 Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – LBG (along highway), AV, CS
Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*) – CS (perched in a tree amidst the marshes and pastures).
 American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) - AV
 Bat Falcon (*Falco rufigularis*) – CS (glimpsed in flight).
Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) - CS
 Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – LBG (beach at Triunfo de la Cruz).
 Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) - CS
Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) – LBG, CS (including a close bird with chicks).
 Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) – AV, CS
 Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) – AV, CS
 Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) - CS
 Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) – AV, CS
 Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maxima*) – LBG (over the beach at Triunfo de la Cruz).
 Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – cities and towns (introduced).

Red-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas flavirostris*) - PB
 White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) – LBG, AV, CS
 Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – LBG, AV, CS, PB
 Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerine*) – AV, CS
 Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) – PB, AV, CS
 Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga nana*) - PB
Brown-hooded Parrot (*Pyrilia haematotis*) – PB (hard to see in the forest canopy).
 White-crowned Parrot (*Pionus senilis*) – PB, CS
White-fronted Parrot (*Amazona albifrons*) – AV (close pair at their hole in a roadside telephone pole).
 Red-lore Parrot (*Amazona autumnalis*) – LBG, CS, PB
 Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*) – CS, PB
 Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) – AV, CS, PB
Vermiculated Screech-Owl (*Megascops guatemalae*) – PB (called up in the evening and then later seen at a day roost; this form is sometimes split as the ^AGuatemalan[@] Screech-Owl (*Megascops guatemalae*).
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) – AV, PB
 Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) - CS
Great Potoo (*Nyctibius grandis*) – PB (roosting high up in a tree).
Chestnut-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne rutila*) – AV (unexpected here, but forced down from the mountains by the weather).
 White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) - PB
 Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) – PB, AV
 Long-billed Hermit (*Phaethornis longirostris*) – PB (split from Long-tailed Hermit).
 Stripe-throated Hermit (*Phaethornis striigularis*) – PB (split from Little Hermit).
 Scaly-breasted Hummingbird (*Phaeochroa cuvieri*) - LBG
 Canivet's Emerald (*Chlorostilbon caniveti salvini*) – AV (we saw the ^ASalvin=s[@] Emerald, sometimes split as a separate species (*Chlorostilbon salvini*).
 Violet-crowned Woodnymph (*Thalurania colombica*) - PB
 White-bellied Emerald (*Amazilia candida*) - PB
Honduran Emerald (*Amazilia luciae*) – AV (the only species endemic to Honduras (found nowhere else); very localized in remnant patches of dry thorn forest).
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*) – PB, LBG, CS
 Cinnamon Hummingbird (*Amazilia rutila*) – PB, AV
 Purple-crowned Fairy (*Heliothryx barroti*) - PB
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – CS, PB
 Black-headed Trogon (*Trogon melanocephalus*) – LBG, CS
 Violaceous Trogon (*Trogon violaceus*) - PB
 Collared Trogon (*Trogon collaris*) - PB
Slaty-tailed Trogon (*Trogon Massena*) – PB (all of the trogons were beautiful and seen well; this is the largest species in the region).
 Blue-crowned Motmot (*Momotus momota*) - PB
Keel-billed Motmot (*Electron carinatum*) – PB (we had to work a little for this rare “near-mythical” bird of northern Central America, but in the end saw a pair side by side; one flew towards us and landed 25 ft away at eye level for fabulous looks).

Turquoise-browed Motmot (*Eumomota superciliosa*) – LBG (along highway), AV, PB

Ringed Kingfisher (*Megaceryle torquatus*) - CS

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) - AV

Amazon Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle amazona*) – AV (very close bird perched over a clear stream in the Aguan Valley).

Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle Americana*) – AV, CS

American Pygmy Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle aenea*) – CS (seen by some in one boat).

Collared Aracari (*Pteroglossus torquatus*) – PB, LBG

Keel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos sulphuratus*) – PB, LBG, CS (a favorite and quite common in this region).

Black-cheeked Woodpecker (*Melanerpes pucherani*) - PB

Golden-fronted Woodpecker (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) – all areas

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) - LBG

Chestnut-colored Woodpecker (*Cealeus castaneus*) – PB (great views of a close pair on our first day).

Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*) - PB

Pale-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus guatemalensis*) – PB (several close studies of this impressive bird).

Plain Xenops (*Xenops minutus*) - CS

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper (*Glyphorhynchus spirurus*) – PB, LBG

Ivory-billed Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus flavigaster*) – CS, PB

Streak-headed Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes souleyetii*) - LBG

Great Antshrike (*Taraba major*) – LBG (heard repeatedly at close range; glimpsed).

Barred Antshrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*) - PB

Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet (*Ornithion semiflavum*) – PB (this canopy sprite came down very low and close to us for a great study).

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher (*Mionectes oleagineus*) – AV, PB

Sepia-capped Flycatcher (*Leptopogon amaurocephalus*) – PB (heard only).

Common Tody-Flycatcher (*Todirostrum cinereum*) - AV

Yellow-olive Flycatcher (*Tolmomyias sulphurescens*) - AV

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*) – PB, LBG

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) - AV

Bright-rumped Attila (*Attila spadiceus*) - PB

Rufous Mourner (*Rhytipterna holerythra*) - PB

Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – PB (hd), AV, CS

Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – AV (mostly heard; glimpsed).

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – all areas

Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*) – PB, LBG

Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – PB, LBG, CS

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – AV, CS, PB

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savanna*) - AV

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – LBG, PB

Masked Tityra (*Tityra semifasciata*) – PB, LBG, CS

Black-crowned Tityra (*Tityra inquisitor*) - PB

Lovely Cotinga (*Cotinga amabilis*) – PB (many looks at this fabulous bird, THE

signature species of the Lodge at Pico Bonito).

White-collared Manakin (*Manacus candei*) – PB, LBG

Red-capped Manakin (*Pipra mentalis*) – PB (including a brilliant male at eye level).

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) - PB

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*) – PB, LBG, AV

Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) – PB (close study of a group of 4).

Lesser Greenlet (*Hylophilus minor*) – PB, CS (hd)

Brown Jay (*Cyanocorax morio*) – all areas (noisy and conspicuous).

Mangrove Swallow (*Tacnycineta albilinea*) - AV

Spot-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus maculipectus*) – PB, LBG (hd) (scope views!).

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – LBG, AV

White-bellied Wren (*Uropsila leucogastra*) – AV (an isolated population here).

White-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucosticta*) - PB

White-lored Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila albiloris*) - AV

Tropical Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila plumbea*) - PB

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) - PB

Clay-colored Thrush (*Turdus grayi*) – PB, LBG

White-throated Thrush (*Turdus assimilis*) – PB (seen by a few).

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – PB, LBG

Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) - AV

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – PB (a lifer for Herman and very uncommon and irregular this far south).

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*) – PB, AV

Northern Parula (*Parula Americana*) - PB

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) – PB, AV, CS

Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*) – PB, LBG

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) – all areas

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) - PB

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – PB, LBG, AV

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – PB, LBG, CS

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – PB, LBG

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) – LBG, AV, PB

Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*) – PB (seen by a few).

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) - AV

Gray-crowned Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis poliocephala*) – PB (an especially good look, in the field along the Rio Bonito).

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*) – PB, LBG

Crimson-collared Tanager (*Ramphocelus sanguinolentus*) - LBG

Passerini's Tanager (*Ramphocelus passerinii*) – LBG (a real “WOW” bird, even in the rain).

Blue-gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*) – LBG, AV

Yellow-winged Tanager (*Thraupis abbas*) – PB, LBG

Golden-hooded Tanager (*Tangara larvata*) - PB

Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*) - PB

Shining Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes lucidus*) - PB
 Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator maximus*) - LBG
Black-headed Saltator (*Saltator atriceps*) – PB (noisy!).
 Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*) – AV, PB
 Variable Seedeater (*Sporophila Americana*) - CS
 White-collared Seedeater (*Sporophila torqueola*) – PB, AV, CS
 Yellow-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris olivaceus*) - PB
 Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) – PB, LBG, AV
 Red-throated Ant-Tanager (*Habia fuscicauda*) – PB, CS
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – PB, AV
 Blue-black Grosbeak (*Cyanocompsa cyanooides*) – PB (heard only).
 Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) - AV
 Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) - PB
Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) – PB (3 males along the Rio Bonito).
 Melodious Blackbird (*Dives dives*) – all areas
 Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – all areas
 Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) - CS
 Giant Cowbird (*Molothrus erythrorhynchus*) – CS (seen only in flight).
 Black-cowled Oriole (*Icterus prosthemelas*) – PB, LBG (daily visitors to the garden).
 Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – AV, PB
Spot-breasted Oriole (*Icterus pectoralis*) – CS, PB (a northern Central American specialty of localized distribution).
 Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*) - AV
 Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) – all areas
 Yellow-billed Cacique (*Amblycercus holosericeus*) - PB
 Chestnut-headed Oropendola (*Psarocolius wagleri*) – PB, LBG, CS
Montezuma Oropendola (*Psarocolius Montezuma*) – PB, LBG, CS (these interesting birds were common, conspicuous and nesting).
 Scrub Euphonia (*Euphonia affinis*) – PB, LBG
 Yellow-throated Euphonia (*Euphonia hirundinacea*) - LBG
 Olive-backed Euphonia (*Euphonia gouldi*) - PB
White-vented Euphonia (*Euphonia minuta*) – PB (nice looks at this uncommon species, in the mistletoe with other euphonias).
Blue-crowned Chlorophonia (*Chlorophonia occipitalis*) – PB (a pair of these brilliant birds in the mistletoe on our final walk).
 Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) - AV
 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – AV (introduced)

Mammal List: “A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico” by Fiona Reid is a good reference book for the mammals of this region.

Proboscis (Long-nosed) Bat (*Rhynchonycteris naso*)
 Mantled Howler (*Alouatta palliata*) – heard only (Cuero y Salado Reserve)
 Variegated Squirrel (*Sciurus variegatoides*)
 Central American Agouti (*Dasyprocta punctata*)

White-nosed Coati (*Nasua narica*)

Reptile & Amphibian List: “A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the Maya World” by Julian Lee is a good reference.

American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)
Mediterranean Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*)
Brown Basilisk (*Basiliscus vittatus*)
Green (Common) Iguana (*Iguana iguana*)

Butterfly List: here are some of the more readily recognized ones that I pointed out. “A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America” by Jeffrey Glassberg is the best reference book.

Polydamas Swallowtail (*Battus polydamas*)
Pink-checked Cattleheart (*Parides eurimedes*)
Great Southern White (*Ascia monuste*)
Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)
Apricot Sulphur (*Phoebis argante*)
Orange-barred Sulphur (*Phoebis philea*)
Sleepy Orange (*Eurema nicippe*)
Black-barred Cross-streak (*Panthiades phaleros*)
Red-bordered Pixie (*Melanis pixe*)
Common Lenmark (*Juditha caucana*)
Julia Heliconian (*Dryas julia*)
Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charithonia*)
Erato Heliconian (*Heliconius erato*)
White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*)
Banded Peacock (*Anartia fatima*)
Rusty-tipped Page (*Siproeta epaphus*)
Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*)
Sister sp? (*Adelpha sp?*)
Glaucous Cracker (*Hamadryas glauconome*)
Small Beauty (*Calobura dirce*)
Dappled Daggerwing (*Marpesia merops*)
Two-spotted Prepona (*Archaeoprepona demophoon*)
Tiger Leafwing (*Consul fabius*)
Common Morpho (*Morpho helenor*)
Owl-butterfly sp? (*Caligo sp?*)
Carolina Satyr (*Hermeuptychia sosybius*)
Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)