

**BELIZE:**  
**RELAXED & EASY**

**MARCH 21 – 28, 2010**

**LEADER:**  
**MICHAEL O'BRIEN**

**COMPILED BY: MICHAEL O'BRIEN**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.**  
**2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003**  
**AUSTIN, TX 78746**  
**WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

TOUR REPORT  
BELIZE: Relaxed & Easy  
March 21 - 28, 2010

By Michael O'Brien

A new tour this year, our first Belize: Relaxed & Easy tour was not only relaxed and easy, but it was also really birdy! We were based in two lodges: Bird's Eye View in Crooked Tree, and Lamanai Outpost Lodge near the famous Lamanai ruins. Each had its own special charm and creature comforts, and each its own set of birds. Before heading to either of these lodges, we detoured to check out the impressive Mayan ruins of Altun Ha. Being our first birding stop, we were dazzled by many new birds there, and at nearby Mayan Wells. One African tulip tree, in particular, captured our attention for a long time as it was visited by a host of birds, from the resident Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Red-legged Honeycreeper to several migrant species. It was a real pleasure on this tour seeing not only a wide array of resident Belizean birds, but also excellent numbers of North American migrants as they gathered on the Yucatan Peninsula in preparation to cross the Gulf of Mexico. Our warbler list of 22 species, including such beauties as Golden-winged, Magnolia, Prothonotary, and Hooded, rivaled that of a trip focused on that group alone!

On the afternoon of our first day, we arrived at Crooked Tree and were greeted by jaw-dropping numbers of birds in the lagoon. I had heard that water levels were low, which can be good for a buildup of wading birds, but I had no idea just how many birds we would see—more than I have seen in a decade of visits to this site. We spent our first afternoon at Bird's Eye View Lodge on the deck, sipping cocktails and sorting through literally thousands of birds in Crooked Tree Lagoon before us. The 45 or so Jabirus and many Limpkins, Roseate Spoonbills, Snail Kites, and Northern Jacanas were highlights, but equally impressive were some 5,000 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, 3,000 Blue-winged Teal, 3,000 Great Egrets, and 2,000 Wood Storks. It's hard to imagine such concentrations! Our boat trip the next day brought us even closer to these birds, and also to such special birds as Great Black-Hawk, Green and American Pygmy kingfishers, and a nice selection of shorebirds, many of which are seldom seen there.

But there was more to Crooked Tree than just the lagoon. Exploring the cashew orchards, pine savannah, and logwood groves, we found Yellow-headed Parrot, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Barred Antshrike, Yucatan Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rufous-breasted Spinetail, and Gray-throated Chat. Watching a group of Acorn Woodpeckers, it was interesting to see them stashing acorns in a fence post or dead tree, so that they could have a meal on another day. It was also fun to watch a group of Black Vultures "circling" around a dog—on foot!—to try and snatch its meal. The dog won. And to watch a brood of Northern Jacanas dash out of sight when a Merlin zoomed by. Right by the lodge, among our many "yard birds" we particularly enjoyed the beautiful Vermilion Flycatchers, as well as the Yellow-throated Warbler that joined us for

cocktails on the porch. And right outside the lodge one evening, we enjoyed beautiful views of a Common Pauraque feeding under a streetlight.

The second phase of our trip began with a boat ride down the New River, heading toward Lamanai. A little rainsquall didn't dampen our spirits at all, especially when we stopped to see Boat-billed Herons and Black-collared Hawks! Lamanai was just wonderful, with its beautiful forest, lush gardens, interesting ruins, and extremely friendly staff. Our local guide, Ruben, took us on a fascinating tour of the ruins and museum, and on several great walks and boat trips. Forest birding can always be a challenge, but is rewarding whenever a flock is encountered. We had marvelous encounters with such birds as Black-headed, Violaceous, and Slaty-tailed trogons; Smoky-brown Woodpecker; Plain Xenops; Ivory-billed Woodcreeper; Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet; and Royal Flycatcher, to name a few. The gardens and forest edge surrounding the lodge consistently provided some of the most pleasant birding, with sightings of Long-billed Hermit, Blue-crowned Motmot, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, White-collared Manakin, Spot-breasted Wren, Blue and Painted buntings, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed orioles, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. Also, the local howler monkeys frequently entertained us (and occasionally woke us up at night!) right by the cabanas.

We took a lovely trip one morning across the lagoon to a quiet creek and an undisturbed area of pine savannah where we found some really special birds including Black-throated Bobwhite, Agami Heron, Aplomado Falcon, Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan Jay, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and Botteri's Sparrow. A real highlight was our evening spotlight safari, a boat cruise after dinner where we had amazing spotlight views of Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Sungrebe, Yucatan Nightjar, and Northern Potoo, along with a bizarre variety of other roosting birds like Least Bittern, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Mangrove Vireo, Hooded Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat. We also saw other critters like Morelete's crocodile and fishing bat.

To cap things off, on our last evening we took a delightful cocktail cruise around a glassy calm New River Lagoon, complete with local rum and coke! We were accompanied by some feisty Mangrove Swallows who claimed their stake on the pontoon boat (they were nesting underneath!). Sipping our cocktails as we watched the sun set over High Temple couldn't have been a more fitting end to this tour.

**Day 1, 21 March:** Arrivals and 5:30 p.m. meeting at Biltmore Plaza Hotel; Night at Biltmore Plaza Hotel.

**Day 2, 22 March:** Altun Ha; Mayan Wells; Crooked Tree; Night at Bird's Eye View Lodge.

**Day 3, 23 March:** Crooked Tree to Trogon Trail; afternoon boat trip to Crooked Tree Lagoon with Michael; Night at Bird's Eye View Lodge.

**Day 4, 24 March:** Crooked Tree to Trogon Trail; boat trip down New River to Lamanai with Ruben; night at Lamanai.

**Day 5, 25 March:** Lamanai with Ruben: to Sugar Mill and ruins; evening Spotlight Safari; night at Lamanai.

**Day 6, 26 March:** Lamanai with Ruben: entrance road to ruins; air strip area; night at Lamanai.

**Day 7, 27 March:** Lamanai with Ruben: boat trip across lagoon to pine savannah; entrance road to ruins; cocktail cruise; night at Lamanai.

**Day 8, 28 March:** early walk at Lamanai; mid-morning departure for Belize City and flights home.

## **KEY TO SPECIES LISTS:**

CT=Crooked Tree

### **BIRDS**

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** – up to 5000 at CT – the most we've ever seen there

**Fulvous Whistling-Duck** – a few hundred among Black-bellies at CT

**Muscovy Duck** – 8 at CT

**Blue-winged Teal** – about 3000 at CT on March 22 but only 10 the next morning; obviously a major exodus that night

**Northern Shoveler** – 2 at CT

**Plain Chachalaca** – seen every day at Lamanai

**Black-throated Bobwhite** – 9 in savannah at Lamanai

**Pied-billed Grebe** – several at CT

**American White Pelican** – several at CT

**Neotropic Cormorant** – up to 2000 at CT

**Anhinga** – a few at CT and Lamanai

**Magnificent Frigatebird** – a few around Belize City

**Least Bittern** – 2 at Lamanai

**Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** – one seen briefly along the New River

**Great Blue Heron** – many at CT

**Great Egret** – abundant at CT

**Snowy Egret** – abundant at CT

**Little Blue Heron** – numerous at CT

**Tricolored Heron** – numerous at CT

**Cattle Egret** – seen every day

**Green Heron** – seen most days

**Agami Heron** – 1 at Lamanai

**Black-crowned Night-Heron** – several at CT and Lamanai

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** – a few at CT and Lamanai

**Boat-billed Heron** – a few along New River, Lamanai

**White Ibis** – up to 2000 at CT

**Roseate Spoonbill** – up to 300 CT

**Jabiru** – at least 45 at CT, feeding mostly on tilapia; a nest along the New River was not occupied when we checked

**Wood Stork** – up to 2000 at CT

**Black Vulture** – seen daily; At CT we discovered that Black Vultures not only circle in the air but also on the ground. There was this dog chewing on a large tasty tidbit, and the vultures wanted in, so they circled and nipped at the dog, but no luck.

**Turkey Vulture** – seen daily but generally less abundant than Black Vulture  
**Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture** – numerous around CT  
**King Vulture** – 1 at Lamanai  
**Osprey** – numerous at CT  
**Snail Kite** – up to 60 at CT  
**Black-collared Hawk** – 1 at CT and 3 at New River  
**Common Black-Hawk** – one near Belize City  
**Great Black-Hawk** – 3 at CT  
**Roadside Hawk** – seen most days  
**Broad-winged Hawk** – 1 at Altun Ha  
**Gray Hawk** – heard at Mayan Wells and seen at CT  
**Short-tailed Hawk** – one at Altun Ha  
**Black Hawk-Eagle** – seen at Altun Ha and Lamanai  
**Ornate Hawk-Eagle** – one heard calling at Mayan Wells – very unusual for this location  
**Collared Forest-Falcon** – heard one at Lamanai  
**Laughing Falcon** – seen well numerous times  
**Merlin** – 1 at CT; it swooped in and scared the heck out of a family of Northern Jacanas!  
**Aplomado Falcon** – 1 in the savannah at Lamanai  
**Bat Falcon** – heard calling around the ruins at Lamanai  
**Ruddy Crane** – heard at Lamanai  
**Gray-necked Wood-Rail** – seen at CT and on the night cruise at Lamanai  
**Purple Gallinule** – a few at CT and Lamanai  
**Common Moorhen** – a few at CT and Lamanai  
**American Coot** – about 1500 at CT, mostly in several dense flocks  
**Sungrebe** – 1 on the night cruise at Lamanai  
**Limpkin** – seen every day; an amazing concentration at CT of up to 1200, feeding mostly on apple snails  
**Black-bellied Plover** – 60 at CT; unusual to see this many at an inland site  
**Semipalmated Plover** – 20 at CT  
**Killdeer** – 1 heard at CT  
**Black-necked Stilt** – up to 1500 at CT  
**Northern Jacana** – seen most days; at least 500 at CT, including a family with large chicks  
**Spotted Sandpiper** (aka, “Assup”) – a few along the shorelines at CT  
**Solitary Sandpiper** – a few at CT  
**Greater Yellowlegs** – up to 100 at CT  
**Lesser Yellowlegs** – up to 800 at CT  
**Western Sandpiper** – 1 at CT  
**Least Sandpiper** – at least 150 at CT (difficult to count because they disappear in the mud)  
**Pectoral Sandpiper** – up to 250 at CT  
**Stilt Sandpiper** – about 50 at CT  
**Long-billed Dowitcher** – 4 at CT  
**Laughing Gull** – 4 at CT  
**Gull-billed Tern** – up to 200 at CT  
**Caspian Tern** – up to 100 at CT  
**Rock Pigeon ( I )** – a few around Belize City, Shipyard, and Guinea Grass  
**Pale-vented Pigeon** – numerous around both CT and Lamanai  
**Red-billed Pigeon** – a few around Lamanai  
**Ruddy Ground-Dove** – seen daily, including a pair building a nest at Lamanai  
**Blue Ground-Dove** – a few quick fly-bys at Lamanai  
**White-tipped Dove** – heard and seen briefly at both CT and Lamanai  
**Olive-throated (Aztec) Parakeet** – seen daily

**White-crowned Parrot** – 2 at Lamanai  
**White-fronted Parrot** – seen daily  
**Yellow-lored Parrot** – a few at Lamanai including excellent scope views at the savannah  
**Red-lored Parrot** – a few at both CT and Lamanai  
**Yellow-headed Parrot** – nice views of 5 at CT  
**Squirrel Cuckoo** – seen a few times at CT and Lamanai  
**Groove-billed Ani** – seen daily  
**Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** – nice views of 1 at CT  
**Common Pauraque** – heard calling at both CT and Lamanai; we went out one night at CT and got excellent views of one feeding under a street light  
**Yucatan Nightjar** – beautiful close views of a female and a more distant male on the spotlight safari at Lamanai  
**Northern Potoo** – nice views of 2 on the spotlight safari at Lamanai  
**Vaux's Swift** – a few at Altun Ha and Lamanai  
**Long-billed Hermit** – finally got good views of this bird on our last morning at Lamanai  
**White-bellied Emerald** – one at Lamanai  
**Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** – seen daily  
**Cinnamon Hummingbird** – a few of us saw this species at the Biltmore Plaza Hotel  
**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** – seen most days; especially numerous at CT  
**Black-headed Trogon** – several at Lamanai  
**Violaceous Trogon** – seen at Altun Ha and Lamanai  
**Slaty-tailed Trogon** – seen at Lamanai  
**Blue-crowned Motmot** – seen right by the cabanas at Lamanai  
**Ringed Kingfisher** – seen daily; especially numerous at CT  
**Belted Kingfisher** – several around CT and near Belize City  
**Green Kingfisher** – several around CT and Lamanai  
**American Pygmy Kingfisher** – seen on 4 days at both CT and Lamanai, with a max of 5 in one day; this was the most we've ever seen this usually inconspicuous species!  
**Rufous-tailed Jacamar** – heard and seen briefly at Lamanai  
**Collared Aracari** – a few at CT  
**Keel-billed Toucan** – a few at CT  
**Acorn Woodpecker** – numerous in the pine woods at CT; we enjoyed watching one stash some acorns in a tree and another stashing in a fence post.  
**Yucatan Woodpecker** – had a quick view at CT and heard several in the savannah at Lamanai  
**Golden-fronted Woodpecker** – seen daily  
**Smoky-brown Woodpecker** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Golden-olive Woodpecker** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Chestnut-colored Woodpecker** – heard at Lamanai  
**Lineated Woodpecker** – 1 at Lamanai  
**Pale-billed Woodpecker** – heard at Lamanai  
**Rufous-breasted Spinetail** – 1 heard and briefly seen at CT  
**Plain Xenops** – a few seen well at Lamanai  
**Olivaceous Woodcreeper** – nice views of 1 at Altun Ha  
**Ivory-billed Woodcreeper** – seen daily at Lamanai  
**Streak-headed Woodcreeper** – 1 at Altun Ha  
**Barred Antshrike** – seen several times at CT and Lamanai  
**Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet** – heard them several times but had really nice views of two by the museum at Lamanai  
**Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet** – excellent views of one from the boat at Lamanai  
**Greenish Elaenia** – 1 at CT, several at Lamanai  
**Yellow-bellied Elaenia** – numerous around CT and Lamanai

**Ochre-bellied Flycatcher** – a few at Lamanai  
**Northern Bentbill** – a few at Lamanai, mostly heard  
**Common Tody-Flycatcher** – several at CT  
**Eye-ringed Flatbill** – nice views of one at Lamanai near the sugar mill  
**Yellow-olive Flycatcher** – numerous at Lamanai  
**Royal Flycatcher** – nice views at Lamanai; didn't see the crest, though, so can't count this one ;)  
**Tropical Pewee** – seen at Altun Ha and CT  
**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** – a few at CT and Lamanai  
**Least Flycatcher** – several at Lamanai  
**Vermilion Flycatcher** – a delightfully common “yard bird” at CT  
**Bright-rumped Attila** – heard at Lamanai  
**Yucatan Flycatcher** – several at CT  
**Dusky-capped Flycatcher** – several at Lamanai and CT  
**Great Crested Flycatcher** – 1 at Lamanai  
**Brown-crested Flycatcher** – seen almost daily  
**Great Kiskadee** – seen daily  
**Boat-billed Flycatcher** – seen at Mayan Wells and Lamanai  
**Social Flycatcher** – seen daily (and lots of 'em)  
**Piratic Flycatcher** – seen at Altun Ha  
**Tropical Kingbird** – abundant everywhere in open country  
**Couch's Kingbird** – common, but less numerous than Tropical Kingbird; found mostly in forest-edge habitats  
**Eastern Kingbird** – a few at Altun Ha and Lamanai  
**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** – 1 on the boat trip at CT  
**Fork-tailed Flycatcher** – a few at CT and Lamanai  
**Rose-throated Becard** – nice views of 1 at CT (limited rose in the throat)  
**Masked Tityra** – several at Altun Ha and Lamanai  
**Black-crowned Tityra** – 1 at Lamanai  
**White-collared Manakin** – saw a nice little group of these beautiful birds near the lodge at Lamanai  
**White-eyed Vireo** – numerous at Lamanai  
**Mangrove Vireo** – numerous but seen mostly from boats at CT and Lamanai  
**Yellow-throated Vireo** – singles at Mayan Wells and Lamanai  
**Red-eyed Vireo** – 2 at Mayan Wells  
**Yellow-green Vireo** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Lesser Greenlet** (or is that Green Lesserlet, or Lesser Vireolet, or Least Greenfinch, or...?) – Whatever they're called, they were numerous at Lamanai!  
**Rufous-browed Peppershrike** – several at CT [As an aside, I polled some of the most knowledgeable folks and nobody seems to know where the term “peppershrike” comes from. The “shrike” part certainly comes from the shrike-like bill shape, but the “pepper” part is a mystery. One commented that they are regularly seen near pepper bushes, so maybe that's it. I'll keep digging. - MOB]  
**Brown Jay** – noisy and everywhere (and noisy)  
**Yucatan Jay** – 1 sneaky little guy at Lamanai  
**Purple Martin** – several at CT and Lamanai  
**Gray-breasted Martin** – seen daily  
**Tree Swallow** – a few seen most days  
**Mangrove Swallow** – numerous, and seen daily; on our sunset cruise at Lamanai we were joined, quite intimately, by a pair of these that seemed to be nesting under the pontoon boat we were using.  
**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** – especially numerous along the New River

**Barn Swallow** – seen most days  
**Spot-breasted Wren** – seen almost daily  
**Carolina (White-browed) Wren** – heard one from boat at Lamanai  
**(Southern) House Wren** – numerous at CT; these birds may well represent a different species from those in the U.S. – they are warmer brown and have simpler, lower-pitches songs.  
**White-breasted Wood-Wren** – heard a few at Lamanai  
**Long-billed Gnatwren** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** – numerous at CT; a few at Lamanai  
**Wood Thrush** – seen at Mayan Wells and Lamanai  
**Clay-colored Robin** – seen daily  
**Gray Catbird** – seen daily  
**Tropical Mockingbird** – seen daily, including a tailless bird on a nest at the Biltmore Plaza Hotel  
**Blue-winged Warbler** – a few at Lamanai  
**Golden-winged Warbler** – 2 (male and female) at Lamanai  
**Tennessee Warbler** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Northern Parula** – 1 or 2 seen most days  
**Yellow Warbler** – seen most days  
**Magnolia Warbler** – seen daily in good numbers; few places are as good as Belize for learning the odd, husky *zeef* call-note of this species; they don't do in much in the U.S.  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler** – 1 at CT  
**Black-throated Green Warbler** – 1 or 2 seen most days  
**Yellow-throated Warbler** – seen daily; one bird joined us for cocktails on the porch at CT – you never see them like that at home!  
**Grace's Warbler** – 1 at CT  
**Black-and-white Warbler** – seen most days  
**American Redstart** – seen daily (rivalled Magnolia for most numerous warbler)  
**Prothonotary Warbler** – seen almost daily; clearly a nice migratory push one day at CT  
**Worm-eating Warbler** – a few at Lamanai  
**Ovenbird** – a few at Lamanai  
**Northern Waterthrush** – seen daily  
**Louisiana Waterthrush** – nice views of 1 at CT; an earlier migrant than Northern, so most birds were already gone  
**Common Yellowthroat** – seen most days  
**Gray-crowned Yellowthroat** – 2 in savannah at Lamanai  
**Hooded Warbler** – seen almost daily, including a roosting female on the spotlight safari at Lamanai  
**Yellow-breasted Chat** – seen at CT and Lamanai; amazing views of a bird roosting in the reeds on the spotlight safari at Lamanai  
**Gray-throated Chat** – seen twice at CT  
**Black-throated Shrike-Tanager** – 2 seen at Lamanai  
**Blue-gray Tanager** – a few seen at CT and Lamanai  
**Yellow-winged Tanager** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Red-legged Honeycreeper** – a few at Mayan Wells and Lamanai  
**Blue-black Grassquit** – numerous in open areas near Lamanai  
**White-collared Seedeater** – seen daily in numbers  
**Green-backed Sparrow** – a few at Lamanai  
**Botteri's Sparrow** – several in the savannah at Lamanai  
**Chipping Sparrow** – a few at CT  
**Grayish Saltator** – several at Lamanai  
**Black-headed Saltator** – several at Lamanai

**Red-throated Ant-Tanager** – seen in the forest at Lamanai  
**Summer Tanager** – seen daily at Lamanai  
**Northern Cardinal** – several at CT and Lamanai  
**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** – a few at Lamanai  
**Blue Bunting** – several at Lamanai, including a male that liked hopping around the flowerbed  
**Blue Grosbeak** – numerous at CT and Lamanai  
**Indigo Bunting** – seen most days, often in good numbers  
**Painted Bunting** – we saw a beautiful male at Lamanai  
**Red-winged Blackbird** – a few on our boat trips at CT and Lamanai, and in the farm country near Shipyard  
**Eastern Meadowlark** – a few in the savanna at Lamanai and near Shipyard  
**Melodious Blackbird** (the one that has a song similar to a Cardinal's) – seen daily  
**Great-tailed Grackle** – seen daily  
**Bronzed Cowbird** – 1 at Lamanai  
**Giant Cowbird** – a few at Lamanai  
**Black-cowled Oriole** – seen on most days  
**Orchard Oriole** – seen daily  
**Hooded Oriole** – seen at CT and in Belize City  
**Yellow-backed Oriole** – heard in the savannah at Lamanai  
**Yellow-tailed Oriole** – 2 at Lamanai  
**Baltimore Oriole** – seen most days  
**Yellow-billed Cacique** – seen a few times at Lamanai; heard much more often  
**Montezuma Oropendola** – a few along Old Northern Highway near Altun Ha  
**Yellow-throated Euphonia** – numerous at Lamanai

#### **BUTTERFLIES**

**Thoas Swallowtail**  
**Florida White**  
**Orange-barred Sulphur**  
**Apricot Sulphur**  
**Large Orange Sulphur**  
**Cloudless Sulphur**  
**Mimosa Yellow**  
**Little Yellow**  
**Mexican Cycadian**  
**Ceraunus Blue**  
**Eastern Tailed-Blue**  
**Monarch**  
**Queen**  
**Gulf Fritillary**  
**Variable Cracker**  
**Banded Peacock**  
**White Peacock**  
**Common Morpho**  
**Gold-stained Satyr**  
**Carolina Satyr**  
**Two-barred Flasher**

**MAMMALS**

**Proboscus Bat**

**Fishing Bat**

**Yucatan Black Howler**

**Variegated Squirrel**

**Central American Agouti**

**AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES**

**Cane Toad**

**Rio Grande Leopard Frog**

**Morelet's Crocodile**

**Yucatan Slider**

**mud turtle sp. (Kinosternon sp.)**

**House Gecko ( 1 )**

**Black Iguana**

**Green Iguana**

**Brown Basilisk**

**Central American Amevia**