

GRAND BELIZE

PART I: CROOKED TREE & HIDDEN VALLEY

MARCH 1 – 5, 2011

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Twenty feet away from us, a stunning, breeding-plumaged Agami Heron stalked slowly along the riverbank. Wispy, powder-blue plumes adorned its chestnut-colored neck, but no one could take their eyes off the gigantic, dagger-like bill of this rarely seen tropical heron. As we watched, an American Pygmy Kingfisher dashed by, though hardly anyone noticed, as we had already studied that incredible species at leisure a short while earlier. The boat trip at Crooked Tree Lagoon is always my favorite part of our Grand Belize Part I tour. It combines several highly sought species with a sheer abundance of birds that are up-close and easy to study. Among other more common species, we tallied three magnificent Jabirus, numerous Black-collared Hawks, adult and immature Great Black-Hawk, two Laughing Falcons, several Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, a dozen or more Snail Kites, Roseate Spoonbills, Limpkins, Bare-throated Tiger-Herons, Boat-billed Herons, Muscovy Duck, nearly 20 Gray-necked Wood-Rails, three Sungrebes, too many Northern Jacanas to count, four species of kingfishers, and Rufous-breasted Spinetail! All that in just four hours!

Land birding in the pine/oak savanna near Crooked Tree was equally productive. A family group of the regionally endemic Yucatan Jay foraged within 20 feet of our group for over ten minutes. Bat Falcon; White-fronted, Red-lored, and Yellow-headed parrots; Canivet's Emerald; Yucatan Woodpecker; Streak-headed Woodcreeper; Rose-throated Becard; and simply ridiculous numbers of Vermilion Flycatchers were among the more noteworthy species. En route to Belize City we stopped at a Jabiru nest where the mother stood shading three downy young!

An afternoon flight took us to Caye Caulker where, with special permission, we visited a private yard in hopes of seeing the poorly known and seldom seen Rufous-necked Wood-Rail. We had incredible views of nearly 20 of these special birds, in addition to fabulous studies of Yucatan Vireo, Black Catbird, and the "Mangrove" subspecies of Yellow Warbler.

The final two days of our trip were spent in the Pine Ridge region at Hidden Valley Lodge. Here we experienced my most memorable moment of the tour. As we stood at the King Vulture Falls lookout, a male Orange-breasted Falcon came screaming in, protesting our presence. Incredibly, he landed no more than 20 feet away in a lone pine at the edge of the canyon drop-off. He remained perched there for easily ten minutes as we photographed and leisurely viewed this very rare and endangered species. It was the best look I have ever had of this bird! Across the gorge, King Vultures drank and bathed in the appropriately named waterfall. Other highlights around Hidden Valley included mating Swallow-tailed Kites, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Rufous-capped

Warbler, Golden-hooded Tanager, Rusty Sparrow, and a very rare Lincoln's Sparrow. Feeders at the lodge itself hosted Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Green and Brown jays, Yellow-tailed and Yellow-backed orioles, Hepatic Tanager, and Melodious Blackbird.

We tallied 192 species in four days of birding before heading off to Chan Chich Lodge (Part II of our Grand Belize tour). This trip provides the perfect complement to Chan Chich, as the avifauna of Crooked Tree and the Pine Ridge is quite different from the rainforest there. In combination with Part II, we had an amazing 309 species of birds in ten days!

Itinerary:

March 1 - arrival in Belize City

March 2 - land birding around Crooked Tree all morning; Northern Highway; afternoon flight to Caye Caulker (132 species; 132 total)

March 3 - boat trip to south lagoon and Spanish Creek at Crooked Tree in the morning; drive to Hidden Valley via Western Hwy (102 species; 165 total)

March 4 - Hidden Valley area all day including King Vulture Falls, Bull's Point, Thousand Foot Falls, and areas around the lodge (49 species; 188 total)

March 5 - brief morning walk around Hidden Valley, Bull's Point; charter flight to Gallon Jug for Grand Belize Part II (46 species; 192 total)

Key:

H = Hidden Valley

T = Crooked Tree Sanctuary and surrounding areas

B = Belize City, Caye Caulker, and surrounding areas

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence or species rarely seen even though they occur regularly

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low densities as to be easily missed

Birds:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (Dendrocygna autumnalis) T---about 50 in one day

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (Dendrocygna bicolor) generally uncommon but we had two right near Bird's Eye View Lodge

Muscovy Duck (Cairina moschata) T---two on our boat trip; very uncommon

Blue-winged Teal (Anas discors) T

Plain Chachalaca (Ortalis vetula) H

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) T
American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchus*) T---three at Crooked Tree where rare but increasing
 Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) B
 Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) T---1000 in a day
 Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) B
 Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) T---40+ on our boat trip
 Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) B
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) B,T---nice views; seven total
 Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) T
 Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) T,B
 Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) T,B
 Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) T,B
 Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) T,B
 Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) T,B
 Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) T---60+ in one day
Agami Heron T---fantastic views at Crooked Tree where we had three total, two of which were seen very well; voted the favorite bird of the tour!
 Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) T
 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) B---great studies on Caye Caulker
 Boat-billed Heron (*Cochlearius cochlearius*) T---exceptional views of these comical birds
 White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) T
Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) T---40+ at Crooked Tree where uncommon
Jabiru (*Jabiru mycteria*) B,T---adult on nest outside of Belize City, plus four more on the boat trip!
 Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) T
 Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) daily
 Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) daily
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture (*Cathartes burrovianus*) T---about six total; one close on the ground
 King Vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*) H---a total of **19** seen including excellent scope views of perched birds at King Vulture Falls and wonderfully close flyovers
 Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) T,B
 Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) H---sixteen total including two copulations; just arriving back from wintering grounds; always a treat
 Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) T---nice views of males & females
 Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*) H---spotted by Fred's wife?
 Black-collared Hawk (*Busarellus nigricollis*) T---stunning!; an impressive nine seen
 White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*) H---always stunning!
 Common Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) B---near Belize City
 Great Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus urubitinga*) T---superb views of immature bird plus one adult flyover
 Roadside Hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*) B,T,H---many great views
 Gray Hawk (*Asturina nitida*) T

Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus melanoleucus*) C---extremely distant views of one near King Vulture Falls; rarely seen

Black Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*) T---unusual was a distant bird over Crooked Tree

Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*) T,H---great views of two from the boat

Bat Falcon (*Falco ruficularis*) T---a pair the first morning near Bird's Eye View Lodge

Orange-breasted Falcon (*Falco deiroleucus*) H---prolonged, close scope study of pair at King Vulture Falls, the male at one point within twenty feet!!!!; generally rare & local everywhere; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!

Ruddy Crake (*Laterallus ruber*) T---heard only (as is usually the case) from just feet away!

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*) B---by a few on Caye Caulker

Rufous-necked Wood-Rail (*Aramides axillaris*) B---superb views of about a dozen of these rarely seen birds at Dorothy & Jim's place; not likely to be seen on future tours

Gray-necked Wood-Rail (*Aramides cajanea*) T---great views from the boat; about 18 total

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*) T---uncommon

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) T

American Coot (*Fulica americana*) T

Sungrebe (*Heliornis fulica*) T---good views of three on the boat trip; often missed entirely

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) T

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) B

Semipalmated Plover (*charadrius semipalmatus*) B

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) T

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) T,B

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) T---wonderfully common

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) T,B

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) T

Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*) B

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) T

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) B

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) B

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) B

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) B

Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*)

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) T,B

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) B

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) B

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*) T

Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) T

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) B---only a few seen

Pale-vented Pigeon (*Patagioenas cayennensis*) T

Scaled Pigeon (*Patagioenas speciosa*) T,H
White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) B---quick views on Caye Caulker
 White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) B---only on Caye Caulker
 Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) T
 Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) T
 White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*) T,H
 Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga nana*) T---subspecies *astec*
 White-crowned Parrot (*Pionus senilis*) T,H---unusual at Crooked Tree
 White-fronted Parrot (*Amazona albifrons*) T---scope views of perched birds
 Red-lored Parrot (*Amazona autumnalis*) T,H---ditto
Yellow-headed Parrot (*Amazona oratrix*) T---a nice bonus!
 Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) T
 Vermiculated Screech-Owl (*Megascops guatemalae*) H---heard only
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) H---fantastic scope study right near the rooms
 Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) B---one quickly across the road
 White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) H---distantly from King Vulture Falls
 Green-breasted Mango (*Anthracothorax prevostii*) T
Canivet's Emerald (*Chlorostilbon canivetii*) T---prolonged scope views of perched female
 Azure-crowned Hummingbird (*Amazilia cyanocephala*) H---common at the lodge feeders
 Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (*Amazilia tzacatl*) T---the most common hummer in the area; an in-hand inspection thanks to Brian!
 Buff-bellied Hummingbird (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) T---uncommon
 Cinnamon Hummingbird (*Amazilia rutila*) B
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) T
 Ringed Kingfisher (*Ceryle torquata*) T
 Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) T
 Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*) T---close studies of two
American Pygmy Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle aenea*) T---a total of three birds seen with prolonged views of one; voted the third favorite bird of the tour
 Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) T,H---southern race *lineatus*
Yucatan (Red-vented) Woodpecker (*Melanerpes pygmaeus*) T---nice views; subspecies *rubricornis*
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) T---subspecies *dubius*
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) T---uncommon winterer
 Golden-olive Woodpecker (*Piculus rubiginosus*) H---super scope views
 Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*) T,H
Rufous-breasted Spinetail (*Synallaxis erythrothorax*) T---great from the boat; uncommon
 Ivory-billed Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus flavigaster*) T
Streak-headed Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes souleyetii*) T---uncommon
 Barred Antshrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*) T---nice study of a male
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) T---uncommon

Yellow-bellied Elaenia (*Elaenia martinica*) T,H
 Northern Bentbill (*Oncostoma cinereigulare*) T---heard only
 Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) H---uncommon
 Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*) T---a pewee giving a very strange call near Crooked Tree was thought to be this species rather than the more expected Tropical Pewee
 Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) T
 Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) T---up to 20 in one day!
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) T---subspecies *lawrencei*
 Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) T,H
 Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) T,B,H,C---common; seen daily
 Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) T,B,H
 Couch's Kingbird (*Tyrannus couchii*) T---a few of the kingbirds heard around Crooked Tree were of this species
 Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) T---uncommon; subspecies *sumichrasti*
 Masked Tityra (*Tityra semifasciata*) T,H---nice views at Bull's Point
 White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) T
 Mangrove Vireo (*Vireo pallens*) T
Yucatan Vireo (*Vireo magister*) B---up close on Caye Caulker; spotted by New Orleans Kathy; not to be seen on future trips
 Green Shrike-Vireo (*Vireolanus pulchellus*) H,---heard only
Rufous-browed Peppershrike (*Cyclarhis gujanensis*) T---good views; uncommon
 Green Jay (*Cyanocorax yncas*) H---common around Hidden Valley; the yellow-eyed race *maya*
 Brown Jay (*Cyanocorax morio*) T,H---daily; the southern race *fuliginosus*
Yucatan Jay (*Cyanocorax yucatanensis*) T --- the best views ever of this often difficult to locate species; tied for second favorite bird of the tour!
 Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) T
 Gray-breasted Martin (*Progne chalybea*) T
 Mangrove Swallow (*Tachycineta albilinea*) T
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) H
 Spot-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus maculipectus*) T---heard only
 Plain Wren (*Thryothorus modestus*) H---after much effort, good views; localized
 House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) T---the "Southern" House Wren of some authors (*T.musculus*)
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*) T
 Clay-colored Thrush (*Turdus grayi*) T,H---seen daily; subspecies *grayi*
 Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) T,H
Black Catbird (*Melanoptila glabrirostris*) B---unusually numerous on Caye Caulker with about a dozen seen; **#900 for Caryl & Donna**; not to be seen on future tours
 Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) T,B
 Northern Parula (*Parula americana*) T---only one seen
 Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) B,T---including the stunning "Mangrove" Warblers on Caye Caulker

Magnolia Warbler (Dendroica magnolia) T,H---a few almost daily
 Yellow-rumped Warbler (Dendroica coronata) H
 Black-throated Green Warbler (Dendroica virens) T,H
 Yellow-throated Warbler (Dendroica dominica) T,H---on our table!
 Grace's Warbler (Dendroica graciae) T,H
Prairie Warbler B---very uncommon; thanks to Brian
 Black-and-white Warbler (Mniotilta varia) T,H
 American Redstart (Setophaga ruticilla) T,B
 Prothonotary Warbler (Protonotaria citrea) T---close study of one from the boat
 Northern Waterthrush (Seiurus noveboracensis) T,B---common
 Common Yellowthroat (Geothlypis trichas) T,B
 Gray-crowned Yellowthroat (Geothlypis poliocephala) H---great scope views
 Hooded Warbler (Wilsonia citrina) B
 Rufous-capped Warbler (Basileuterus rufifrons) H---fantastic views after much searching
Bananaquit (Coereba flaveola) B---uncommon; just one see
 Blue-gray Tanager (Thraupis episcopus) T
Golden-hooded Tanager (Tangara larvata) H---very responsive; stunning
 Grayish Saltator (Saltator coerulescens) T
 Black-headed Saltator (Saltator atriceps) H
 White-collared Seedeater (Sporophila torqueola) T,B,H---daily; *moreletti*
 Yellow-faced Grassquit (Tiaris olivacea) H---less numerous than usual
 Rusty Sparrow (Aimophila rufescens) H---big, hulking Aimophila; subspecies *pyrgatoides*; scarcer than usual, but great views
 Chipping Sparrow (Spizella passerina) T
Lincoln's Sparrow (Melospiza lincolni) H---very rare was one at Hidden Valley our last morning
 Hepatic Tanager (Piranga flava) H---at the feeders; the southern race *figlina*
 Summer Tanager (Piranga rubra) T,H
 Northern Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis) T
Blue Grosbeak (Passerina caerulea) H
 Indigo Bunting (Passerina cyanea) T,H
 Red-winged Blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus) T---our first spotted by Rosie
 Melodious Blackbird (Dives dives) B,T,H---seen daily!
 Great-tailed Grackle (Quiscalus mexicanus) B,T---plenty at the hotel
 Giant Cowbird (Molothrus oryzivorus) T---uncommon here
 Black-cowled Oriole (Icterus prothemelas) T
 Orchard Oriole (Icterus spurius) T
 Hooded Oriole (Icterus cucullatus) T
 Yellow-backed Oriole (Icterus chrysater) H---superb views
 Yellow-tailed Oriole (Icterus mesomelas) H---ditto
 Baltimore Oriole (Icterus galbula) T
 Yellow-billed Cacique (Amblycercus holosericeus) T---heard only
Scrub Euphonia (Euphonia minuta) T---uncommon
 Black-headed Siskin (Carduelis notata) H---scope views

total species - 192 (a tour record)---(309 species in combination with Grand Belize Part II)

Leader only birds:

Crested Guan---by Brian during a break at Hidden Valley

Chestnut-collared Swift---five each afternoon at Hidden Valley; casual in Belize

Mammals:

Virginia Opossum

Raccoon

Yucatan Squirrel---leader only; Crooked Tree

total species - 3

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Spiny-tailed (Black) Iguana

Green Iguana

Brown Anole

Mediterranean or House Gecko

Common Slider

Morelet's Crocodile

Striped Basilisk

Rose-bellied Lizard

total species - 8

Butterflies:

Cloudless Sulphur

Large Orange Sulphur

Little Yellow

Great Southern White

Gold-stained Satyr

Banded Peacock

White Peacock

Monarch

Queen

blue species

Guatemalan Patch

Gulf Fritillary

Guatemalan Cracker

Dark Purplewing

Brown Longtail
Brown Skipper
Yellow-washed Skipper
Red-headed Firetip---leader only
plus many others left unidentified

total species - 18+

Significant others:

Jersey Devil sighting?