

BELIZE:
RELAXED & EASY

MARCH 20 – 27, 2011

LEADERS:
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TOUR REPORT
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By Michael O'Brien

As we often do, we began this year's *Belize: Relaxed & Easy* tour on the grounds of our hotel in Belize City. And I am always a little surprised just how birdy this place is. This time, not only did we get a nice start to our trip with such birds as Social Flycatcher, Tropical Mockingbird, Black-cowled Oriole, Melodious Blackbird, and Cinnamon Hummingbird, but we also saw a fly-by Eurasian Collared-Dove, a species that continues to expand in the New World and seems destined to become established in Belize. But the main event of the morning was a visit to Altun Ha, a lovely Maya site where we toured the ruins and saw many new birds. Our guide, John, was very patient with us as we occasionally interrupted him to see such birds as Olive-throated Parakeet, Green-breasted Mango, Black-headed Trogon, and Keel-billed Toucan. Later, at Mayan Wells, we enjoyed a fabulous traditional Belizean lunch followed by birding on the grounds, highlighted by White-bellied Emerald, Boat-billed and Piratic flycatchers, Rose-throated Becard, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. We also visited the butterfly house there, which was full of Common Morphos, Malachites, Erato Heliconians, and an odd-looking hybrid that we haven't figured out yet. En route to Crooked Tree, we stopped to visit a Jabiru on the nest, tending two large chicks.

We spent from the afternoon of Day 1 to the morning of Day 3 entirely at Crooked Tree Sanctuary. One of the great things about Crooked Tree, and Bird's Eye View Lodge, is that there were birds literally right at our doorstep—binoculars were a must during cocktail hour on the porch! Right around the building there were wintering Yellow-throated Warblers and American Redstarts, and nesting Mangrove Swallows, Gray-breasted Martins, and Vermilion Flycatchers. And a scan of the lagoon from our porch yielded sightings of Jabiru, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, Laughing Falcon, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, and Northern Jacana, among many others. A boat trip on the lagoon allowed close views of many special birds including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Black-collared Hawk, Great Black-Hawk, and four species of kingfishers. Short walks from the lodge and short drives to nearby pine-savanna habitats yielded White-fronted, Red-lored, and Yellow-headed parrots, Acorn and Yucatan woodpeckers, Rufous-breasted Spinetail (on the nest!), Yucatan Jay (two very cooperative groups), and Painted Bunting. For those interested, a short night walk yielded excellent views of Common Pauraque hunting under streetlights.

The second phase of our trip was based at Lamanai Outpost Lodge, situated on the banks of New River Lagoon, and close to the beautiful Lamanai Maya ruins. Although only a short distance from Crooked Tree, the forested habitats and thatched-roof cabanas at Lamanai give this place a very different feel. Lush gardens around the cabanas attracted Squirrel Cuckoo, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-crowned Motmot, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Barred Antshrike, Spot-breasted Wren, Black-headed Saltator, Green-

backed Sparrow, Blue Bunting, Yellow-winged Tanager, and a host of North American migrants. Our local guide, Ruben, took us on a fascinating tour of the ruins, and on a couple of nice walks. Forest birding around the ruins produced some excellent sightings including Bat Falcon; Mottled Owl; Black-headed, Gartered, and Slaty-tailed trogons; White-necked Puffbird; Collared Aracari; Plain Xenops; Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet; a variety of little green flycatcher-things (each with a different call!); Black-throated Shrike-Tanager; and Yellow-throated and Olive-backed euphonias. One strangler fig was particularly loaded with birds, as well as a troop of inquisitive howler monkeys.

Ruben also took us on three wonderful boat trips. An evening Spotlight Safari produced some fine birds including Least Bittern, Yucatan Nightjar, Northern Potoo, and an odd mix of roosting diurnal birds. Equally interesting were several Morelete's crocodiles, as well as gray four-eyed opossum, proboscis bat, and greater fishing bat (the latter was HUGE, and flew more like a nighthawk than a bat). Another trip across the lagoon to the Lamanai Savannah had many highlights, including Agami Heron, Yellow-lored Parrot, Mangrove Cuckoo, Canivet's Emerald, Black Catbird, Grace's Warbler, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, and Botteri's Sparrow. And, to really cap things off, on our last evening we took a delightful late afternoon Cocktail Cruise. Between the beautiful late afternoon light and some fine Belizean rum, we hardly needed to see any birds, but a few highlights included White-tailed Kite, Aplomado Falcon, and a large movement of migrating swallows. Finishing with sunset over High Temple was the perfect way to end our tour.

Day 1, 20 March: Arrivals and 5:30 p.m. meeting at Biltmore Plaza Hotel; Night at Biltmore Plaza Hotel.

Day 2, 21 March: Early birding behind the Biltmore; birding and ruins tour at Altun Ha (with John); lunch and early afternoon birding at Mayan Wells; drive to Crooked Tree; Night at Bird's Eye View Lodge.

Day 3, 22 March: Crooked Tree all day, including a morning boat trip to Black Creek (with Leonard & Michael), and afternoon drive to Trogon Trail; Night at Bird's Eye View Lodge.

Day 4, 23 March: Crooked Tree to Trogon Trail; afternoon drive to Lamanai via Shipyard agricultural fields; night at Lamanai.

Day 5, 24 March: Lamanai lodge area; mid-morning birding and ruins tour with Ruben; afternoon walk to Sugar Mill; night at Lamanai.

Day 6, 25 March: Lamanai lodge area and ruins with Ruben; afternoon drive to airstrip area; evening Spotlight Safari with Ruben; night at Lamanai.

Day 7, 26 March: early boat trip across lagoon to pine savannah (with Ruben); entrance road to ruins; sunset cocktail cruise (with Ruben); night at Lamanai.

Day 8, 27 March: early walk at Lamanai; mid-morning departure for Belize City and flights home.

KEY TO SPECIES LISTS:

CT=Crooked Tree

BIRDS

Great Tinamou – heard at Mayan Wells

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – numerous at CT

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

Muscovy Duck – 3 distant fly-bys at CT

Blue-winged Teal – numerous at CT

Lesser Scaup – a flock flew by the Biltmore on our first morning

Plain Chachalaca (aka, “Ca-ca-ca”) – seen every day at Lamanai; for those trying to get a little extra rest, it’s hard to forget how they say “WAKE ‘em up”!

Pied-billed Grebe – numerous at CT; 306 were tallied in one scan from the porch of Bird’s Eye View Lodge!

Jabiru – seen on several days, including two different nests

Wood Stork – seen almost daily

Magnificent Frigatebird – a few around Belize City

Neotropic Cormorant – abundant at CT

Anhinga – a few at CT and Lamanai

Brown Pelican – a few around Belize City

Least Bittern – seen on the Spotlight Safari at Lamanai

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron – seen at CT and New River

Great Blue Heron – many at CT; a few at Lamanai

Great Egret – abundant at CT; several at Lamanai

Snowy Egret – abundant at CT; several at Lamanai

Little Blue Heron – numerous at CT and Lamanai

Tricolored Heron – a few at CT and Lamanai

Cattle Egret – numerous in open areas

Green Heron – seen most days

Agami Heron – a brief fly-by at CT and a better view at Lamanai

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

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – a few at CT

Boat-billed Heron – a few at CT and Lamanai

White Ibis – numerous at CT and Lamanai

Roseate Spoonbill – small numbers at CT

Black Vulture – seen daily

Turkey Vulture – seen daily but much less abundant than Black Vulture

Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture – numerous around CT; a few at Lamanai

King Vulture – a few circling overhead at Lamanai

Osprey – numerous at CT

Swallow-tailed Kite – 1 at Lamanai

White-tailed Kite – seen at Shipyard and the Lamanai Savannah

Snail Kite – numerous at CT and Lamanai

Plumbeous Kite – seen a few times at Lamanai

Black-collared Hawk – excellent views at CT

Great Black-Hawk – seen at CT, Lamanai, and at the New River toll bridge

Roadside Hawk – seen most days

Short-tailed Hawk – one dark morph at Lamanai, seen by the 3 of us who climbed to the top of High Temple

Collared Forest-Falcon – heard at Lamanai

Laughing Falcon – seen at CT
American Kestrel – 1 at Shipyard
Aplomado Falcon – seen at the savannah at Lamanai
Bat Falcon – seen several times
Peregrine Falcon – seen at CT and Lamanai
Ruddy Crake – heard at Lamanai
Gray-necked Wood-Rail – seen well both at CT and at Lamanai
Purple Gallinule – seen at CT and Lamanai
Common Moorhen – a few at CT
American Coot – numerous at CT
Limpkin – seen or heard every day
Black-necked Stilt – a few at CT
Northern Jacana – seen on most days
Spotted Sandpiper – a few along the shorelines at CT
Solitary Sandpiper – one in Shipyard
Greater Yellowlegs – one at Shipyard
Lesser Yellowlegs – a few at CT
Least Sandpiper – small numbers at CT
Gull-billed Tern – a few at CT
Caspian Tern – numerous at CT
Royal Tern – 1 in Belize City; another at Lamanai was a surprise inland
Sandwich Tern – 1 at CT was a surprise inland
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
Eurasian collared-Dove – It was inevitable. Eurasian Collared-Doves finally made it to Belize, and we saw one at our hotel in Belize City.
White-winged Dove – apparently increasing in Belize; seen at Shipyard
Ruddy Ground-Dove – seen daily
Blue Ground-Dove – heard at Lamanai
White-tipped Dove – heard daily, and seen well at CT
Gray-headed Dove – heard and seen briefly at Lamanai
Olive-throated Parakeet – seen daily
White-crowned Parrot – a few 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 seen most days, including one stuffing its face with “horse balls” at Lamanai; it must have spent all afternoon wiping the latex off its bill.
Yellow-headed Parrot – particularly numerous at CT this year; a few also at the Lamanai savannah
Squirrel Cuckoo – seen at Lamanai
Mangrove Cuckoo – one in the savannah at Lamanai was a nice surprise
Groove-billed Ani – seen most days
Mottled Owl – excellent views of 2 roosting at Lamanai
Lesser Nighthawk – 1 seen foraging over the trees on the cocktail cruise at Lamanai
Common Pauraque – excellent views at CT
Yucatan Nightjar – seen on the spotlight safari at Lamanai
Northern Potoo – seen on the spotlight safari at Lamanai
Green-breasted Mango – nice views at Altun Ha and Mayan Wells
White-bellied Emerald – seen at Mayan Wells and Lamanai
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird – seen daily

Cinnamon Hummingbird – a few at the Biltmore Plaza Hotel
Ruby-throated Hummingbird – seen on several days; most numerous on firebush at Lamanai
Black-headed Trogon – seen at Altun Ha and Lamanai
Gartered Trogon – seen at Lamanai; this is a recent split from Violaceous Trogon which is found only in South America; Gartered ranges from Mexico to nw. South America.
Slaty-tailed Trogon – seen at Lamanai
Blue-crowned Motmot – seen at Lamanai
Ringed Kingfisher – seen daily; especially numerous at CT
Belted Kingfisher – a few seen on most days
Green Kingfisher – seen on most days
American Pygmy Kingfisher – excellent views of this shy little bird at both CT and Lamanai
White-necked Puffbird – Amazingly, we saw this uncommon bird three times! That’s bad news for next year’s group; I think we used up some of their luck!
Collared Aracari – a few at Lamanai
Keel-billed Toucan – a few at Altun Ha and Lamanai
Acorn Woodpecker – numerous in the pine woods at CT where we saw several “stash” trees full of acorns
Yucatan (Red-vented) Woodpecker – nice views at both CT and at the Lamanai savannah
Golden-fronted Woodpecker – seen almost daily
Smoky-brown Woodpecker – 1 at Lamanai
Golden-olive Woodpecker – 1 at Lamanai
Lineated Woodpecker – 1 at the Biltmore Plaza Hotel, and another at Lamanai
Pale-billed Woodpecker – seen at Altun Ha and Lamanai
Rufous-breasted Spinetail – a pair seen at their nest at CT
Plain Xenops – seen at Lamanai
Tawny-winged Woodcreeper – 1 seen at Lamanai
Olivaceous Woodcreeper – 2 seen at Lamanai
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper – seen almost daily
Barred Antshrike – a few at Lamanai
Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet – nice views of several family groups at Lamanai
Greenish Elaenia – seen at Lamanai
Yellow-bellied Elaenia – seen almost daily
Sepia-capped Flycatcher – 1 at Lamanai
Northern Bentbill – 1 at Lamanai
Common Tody-Flycatcher – several at CT
Yellow-olive Flycatcher – seen several times
Tropical Pewee – seen at Mayan Wells
Least Flycatcher – seen on several days
Vermilion Flycatcher – a delightfully common “yard bird” at CT
Bright-rumped Attila – had a belly-view of one at singing Lamanai on our last morning
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – seen numerous times
Brown-crested Flycatcher – seen numerous times
Great Kiskadee – seen daily
Boat-billed Flycatcher – seen at Mayan Wells and Lamanai
Social Flycatcher – seen daily (it’s the one that says “cheese cheese tortilla”)
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher – nice views on our last morning at Lamanai
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
Fork-tailed Flycatcher – a few at CT and Lamanai

Rose-throated Becard – nice views at Mayan Wells and CT
Masked Tityra – several at Altun Ha and Lamanai
White-collared Manakin – seen at Lamanai, through little holes in the shrubs!
White-eyed Vireo – seen on several days
Mangrove Vireo – seen on several days, but heard more often
Red-eyed Vireo – 1 at Lamanai
Lesser Greenlet – seen several times at Lamanai
Rufous-browed Peppershrike – heard at the Lamanai savannah
Brown Jay – noisy and everywhere (and noisy)
Yucatan Jay – 2 groups seen well at CT
Purple Martin – a few at Lamanai
Gray-breasted Martin – numerous at CT
Tree Swallow – a few at CT, and huge masses at Lamanai, mostly over the savannah
Mangrove Swallow – seen daily, including a pair that was nesting under our cocktail cruise pontoon boat
Northern Rough-winged Swallow – a few at CT, and numerous migrants over the lagoon at Lamanai
Barn Swallow – numerous migrants over the lagoon at Lamanai
Spot-breasted Wren – heard daily, and seen a couple of times
(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 at Lamanai
Long-billed Gnatwren – seen at Lamanai
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – seen at CT and Lamanai
Clay-colored Robin – seen daily
Gray Catbird – seen almost daily
Tropical Mockingbird (aka, “Nineteengale”) – seen almost daily
Blue-winged Warbler – a few at Lamanai
“Brewster’s” Warbler – The dominant hybrid form of Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers; we had nice views of 1 at Lamanai.
Tennessee Warbler – seen on several days
Northern Parula – seen at CT and Lamanai
Yellow Warbler – seen daily
Magnolia Warbler – seen daily; perhaps the most numerous wintering warbler in Belize
Black-throated Green Warbler – seen at CT and Lamanai
Yellow-throated Warbler – seen almost every day
Grace’s Warbler – 1 at the Lamanai savannah
Black-and-white Warbler – seen most days
American Redstart – seen daily (probably the second most numerous warbler after Magnolia)
Worm-eating Warbler – a few at Lamanai
Ovenbird – several at Lamanai
Northern Waterthrush – seen almost daily
Kentucky Warbler – a few at Lamanai
Common Yellowthroat – seen daily
Gray-crowned Yellowthroat – 1 at the Lamanai savannah
Hooded Warbler – seen almost daily
Yellow-breasted Chat – seen several times
Black-throated Shrike-Tanager – seen at Lamanai
Blue-gray Tanager – seen daily
Yellow-winged Tanager – seen several times
Red-legged Honeycreeper – seen at Mayan Wells and Lamanai

Grayish Saltator – seen several times
Black-headed Saltator – numerous at Lamanai
Blue-black Grassquit – numerous in open areas, particularly around Shipyard
White-collared Seedeater – seen daily in numbers
Olive Sparrow – heard at the Lamanai savannah
Green-backed Sparrow – several in the garden at Lamanai eventually gave good views
Botteri's Sparrow – seen in the savannah at Lamanai and also in Shipyard
Grasshopper Sparrow – heard at the Lamanai savannah
Summer Tanager – seen in Belize City and at Lamanai
Red-throated Ant-Tanager – several at Lamanai
Black-faced Grosbeak – heard at Lamanai
Northern Cardinal – seen at CT
Rose-breasted Grosbeak – seen at Shipyard and Lamanai
Blue Bunting – seen around the lodge at Lamanai
Blue Grosbeak – numerous at Shipyard
Indigo Bunting – numerous at Shipyard and around Lamanai
Painted Bunting – we saw a female at CT and a male (briefly) at Lamanai
Red-winged Blackbird – a few at CT, Lamanai, and Shipyard
Eastern Meadowlark – a few in the savanna at Lamanai and near Shipyard
Melodious Blackbird – seen daily
Great-tailed Grackle – seen daily
Bronzed Cowbird – several at the Biltmore Plaza Hotel and CT
Black-cowled Oriole – seen on most days
Orchard Oriole – seen daily, often in good numbers
Hooded Oriole – seen on most days
Yellow-tailed Oriole – seen at CT, Lamanai, and the Biltmore Plaza Hotel
Baltimore Oriole – seen daily
Yellow-billed Cacique – seen CT and Lamanai
Montezuma Oropendola – seen at Lamanai
Yellow-throated Euphonia – numerous at Lamanai
Olive-backed Euphonia – a few at Lamanai
Lesser Goldfinch – two at the Lamanai savannah

MAMMALS

Common Opossum
Gray Four-eyed Opossum
Proboscis Bat
Greater Fishing Bat
Yucatan Black Howler
Yucatan Squirrel
Central American Agouti
White-nosed Coati

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

Cane Toad
Rio Grande Leopard Frog
Pepper Treefrog
Morelet's Crocodile
Yucatan Slider

House Gecko (I)
Yucatan Banded Gecko
Brown Basilisk
Black Iguana
Green Iguana
Rose-bellied Lizard
Ghost Anole
Brown-headed Skink
Black-tailed Indigo Snake
Northern Cat-eyed Snake

BUTTERFLIES

Polydamas Swallowtail
Thoas Swallowtail
White Angled-Sulphur
Orange-barred Sulphur
Large Orange Sulphur
Cloudless Sulphur
Ghost Yellow
Little Yellow
Cassius Blue
Eastern Tailed-Blue
Square-spotted Yellowmark
Common Lemmark
Monarch
Queen
Julia
Erato Heliconian
Theona Checkerspot
Four-spotted Sailor
Many-banded Daggerwing
Banded Peacock
White Peacock
Carolina Satyr
Long-tailed Skipper
Potrillo Skipper
Tropical Checkered-Skipper

OTHER COOL CRITTERS

Peanut-head Bug