HONDURAS: COPAN
FEBRUARY 14–19, 2014

LEADER: BRIAN GIBBONS
COMPiled BY: BRIAN GIBBONS

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM
TOUR REPORT
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By Brian Gibbons

Meandering through the Honduran countryside, we saw roadside markets, corn fields, and raw coffee beans drying on the pavement. Today the Copan valley has fewer residents than it had during the classic period of the Mayans 1,500 years ago. Our first stop to immerse ourselves into the history of the Maya was at El Puente, a satellite community of the main settlement. Here we saw a few modest temples and some residences, as Yobani guided us through the complexities of Mayan history. In the associated museum there were tools and pottery from more than 1,000 years ago, and that curious skull with jade-aded teeth. While wandering through history, we also saw a few birds: Scrub Euphonia, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, tityras, and a few orioles.

Hacienda San Lucas, in the hills overlooking the modern town of Copan Ruinas as well as the Ancient Mayan ruins, would be our delightful home for the next four nights. The food, a Nuevo Mayan, is local, in abundance, and excellent to the dish.

Tortillas are handmade, starting with corn that is cooked with lye, then ground and patted out into a wholesome, thick, and delicious staple. Tamales, fish, chicken, and beans all kept us going during our archaeological and ornithological explorations of this amazing valley. Birding on the grounds can be great, as motmots, magpie-jays, chachalacas, and oropendolas all visit on a daily basis.

On our first evening in Copan we enjoyed David Sedat’s lecture on the Chocolate birdman of Copan, YaxK’uk Mo. This had us primed for the next morning when we would spend hours at the main ruins with Fito marvelously directing us through centuries of Mayan history as we climbed temples and wandered through plazas. Time and again he pointed out the Mayan’s follies that caused their decline. There are thousands of ruins in the Copan valley and we visited the most spectacular: Altar Q, Temple 16, the ball court, Hieroglyphic stairway, numerous stelae, and the grand plaza. Copan is so special because the material they used, a volcanic tuff, is more
durable than most of what they built the rest of their kingdom with—limestone. One afternoon we enjoyed the excellent Harvard Peabody Museum photo exhibit, Fragile Memories, drawn from 10,000 glass plate negatives taken in the late nineteenth century. It was amazing to see the disarray that the temples had fallen into during 1,000 years of decay. It was equally amazing to walk among these beautifully reconstructed temples today.

Thoroughly saturated with Mayan lore, we headed to the mountains to find some of the special birds on Honduras. At the edge of town we stopped, overlooking an old field. Blue Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, orioles, kingbirds, and a pair of Rusty Sparrows were all seen, and the elusive Crested Bobwhite called and called, never to be seen. Farther up the road in the oak forest we were exceptionally lucky to have Bushy-crested Jays in the scope for everyone; usually they move through the forest for easy scope views. Every stop in the pines and oaks seemed to have a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl or two. Birding was a touch slow, so we kept pushing uphill and finally arrived at a windswept ridge that had trees laden with mistletoe. The Elegant Euphonias were easy to find, as a beautiful pair sat still long enough for us to enjoy them in the scope. We had one more stop—the Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird spot! Within minutes Yobani had spotted the bird teed up on the tiniest twig at the tip-top of a tree. This confiding little beauty sat for scope views before he zipped off and disappeared into the trees to forage.

On our final birding day we birded well up into the mountains in pine and oak forest. We found amazing flocks of warblers, including one flock that was composed of more than 50 Black-throated Green Warblers. Black-and-white, Crescent-chested, Hermit, Magnolia, Wilson’s, Grace’s, and Tennessee warblers were all tallied, as were Slate-throated Redstarts. The ethereal cascading song of the Brown-backed Solitaire led Donna to spot him way up on a hillside; he sat for good looks before disappearing into the forest to charm us with his song. An elusive Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch was a nice find in a shady gully, but my favorite bird we saw had to be the Great Swallow-tailed Swifts zipping overhead for several minutes. During our lunch break the very elusive Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge called several times, tempting us to
venture downslope chasing sirens. Strong-billed Woodcreeper was another great bird that cooperated well for us, sitting still for prolonged scope views. Finally, we had to turn around and leave the mountains behind us after an excellent day of birding and a lunch catered from Hacienda San Lucas by motortrike!

Thank you all for traveling with VENT. I look forward to our next birding adventure.

Brian Gibbons

Itinerary

15 Feb 2014 San Pedro Sulato El Puente Mayan site Hacienda San Lucas and Los Sapos for some
16 Feb 2014 Copan Ruins and town
17 Feb 2014 La Laguna San Francisco road, photo museum, new archaeological site Rastrojon
18 Feb La Laguna San Francisco road, and Los Sapos for some
19 Feb transfer to San Pedro Sula

130 species seen and heard

Guans, Chachalacas & Curassows

Plain Chachalaca

New World Quail
Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge
Crested Bobwhite

Herons, Egrets and Bitterns
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Cattle Egret
Green Heron

New World Vultures

Cracidae
Ortilisvetula

Odontophoridae
Dendroptxleucophrys
Colinuscristatus

Ardeidae
Ardea alba
Egrettathula
Egrettacaerulea
Bubulcus ibis
Butoridesvirescens

Cathartidae
Black Vulture: Coragypsatratus
Turkey Vulture: Cathartes aura

**Hawks, Eagles and Kites**

Common Black-Hawk: Buteogallus anthracinus
Roadside Hawk: Buteo magnirostris
Broad-winged Hawk: Buteo platypterus
Short-tailed Hawk: Buteo brachyurus

**Plovers and Lapwings**

Killdeer: Charadrius vociferus

**Sandpipers and Allies**

Spotted Sandpiper: Actitis macularius

**Pigeons and Doves**

Rock Pigeon (I): Columba livia
Red-billed Pigeon: Patagioenas flavirostris
White-winged Dove: Zenaida asiatica
Inca Dove: Columbina inca
Ruddy Ground-Dove: Columbina talpacoti
White-tipped Dove: Leptotila verreauxi

**Cuckoos**

Squirrel Cuckoo: Piayacayana
Striped Cuckoo: Taperanaevia
Groove-billed Ani: Crotophagia sulcirostris

**Owls**

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl: Glaucidium brasilianum

**Nightjars and Allies**

Common Pauraque: Nyctidroma albicollis

**Swifts**

Great Swallow-tailed Swift: Panyptila sanctihieronymi

**Hummingbirds**

Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird: Tilmatura dupontii
Canivet's Emerald: Chlorostilbon canivetii
(Salvin's Emerald): Chlorostilbon canivetii salvinii
Azure-crowned Hummingbird: Amazilia cyanoccephala
Cinnamon Hummingbird: Amazilia rutila

**Trogons**

Gartered Trogon: Trogon caligatus

**Motmots**

Blue-crowned Motmot: Momotus momota (coeruliceps)
Turquoise-browed Motmot: Eumomota superciliosa

**Kingfishers**

Amazon Kingfisher: Chloroceryle amazona
Green Kingfisher: Chloroceryle americana

**Woodpeckers**

Trogonidae

Chlorostilbon canivetii
Chlorostilbon canivetii salvinii
Amazilia cyanoccephala
Amazilia rutila
Trogon caligatus
Momotus momota (coeruliceps)
Eumomota superciliosa
Chloroceryle amazona
Chloroceryle americana
Picidae
| Golden-fronted Woodpecker       | Melanerpes aurifrons         |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker        | Sphyrapicus varius           |
| Golden-olive Woodpecker         | Colaptes rubiginosus         |
| **Falcons and Caracaras**       | **Falconidae**               |
| Laughing Falcon                 | Herpetotheres cachinnans     |
| **Parrots**                     | **Psittacidae**              |
| Green Parakeet                  | Aratinga holochlora         |
| (Red-throated Parakeet)         |                             |
| Olive-throated Parakeet         | Aratinga nana               |
| White-fronted Parrot            | Amazona albilfons            |
| **Typical Antbirds**            | **Thamnophilidae**           |
| Barred Antshrike                | Thamnophilus doliatus       |
| **Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers**  | **Furnariidae**              |
| Olivaceous Woodcreeper          | Sittasomus griseicapillus    |
| Strong-billed Woodcreeper       | Xiphocolaptes promeropirhynchus |
| Ivory-billed Woodcreeper        | Xiphorhynchus flavigailaster |
| Streak-headed Woodcreeper       | Lepidocolaptes souleyetii   |
| **Tyrant Flycatchers**          | **Tyrannidae**               |
| Yellow-bellied Elaenia          | Elaenia flavogaster         |
| Yellow-bellied Flycatcher       | Empidonax flaviventris      |
| Willow Flycatcher               | Empidonax Traillii          |
| Least Flycatcher                | Empidonax minimus           |
| Hammond's Flycatcher            | Empidonax hammondii         |
| Black Phoebe                    | Sayornis nigricans          |
| Dusky-capped Flycatcher         | Myiarchus tuberculifer      |
| Great Crested Flycatcher        | Myiarchus crinitus          |
| Brown-crested Flycatcher        | Myiarchus tyrannulus        |
| Great Kiskade                  | Pitangus sulphuratus        |
| Boat-billed Flycatcher          | Megarynchus pitangua        |
| Social Flycatcher               | Myiozetetessimilis          |
| Tropical Kingbird               | Tyrannus melancholicus      |
| Western Kingbird                | Tyrannus verticalis         |
| **Becards, Tityras & Allies**   | **Tityridae**                |
| Rose-throated Becard            | Pachyramphus aglaiae        |
| Masked Tityra                   | Tityrasemifasciata          |
| Black-crowned Tityra            | Tityra inquisitor           |
| **Vireos**                      | **Vireonidae**               |
| Yellow-throated Vireo           | Vireo flavifrons            |
| Blue-headed Vireo               | Vireo solitarius            |
| Rufous-browed Peppershrike      | Cyclarhis gujanensis       |
| **Crows, Jays and Magpies**     | **Corvidae**                |
| White-throated Magpie-Jay       | Calocitta formosa           |
| Brown Jay                       | Psilorhinus morio           |
Bushy-crested Jay  
**Swallows**  
Gray-breasted Martin  
Tree Swallow  
Violet-green Swallow  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
**Wrens**  
(Southern) House Wren  
Rufous-naped Wren  
Plain Wren  
**Gnatcatchers**  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
**Thrushes and Allies**  
Brown-backed Solitaire  
Wood Thrush  
Clay-colored Thrush  
**Mockingbirds and Thrashers**  
Gray Catbird  
**New World Warblers**  
Ovenbird  
Northern Waterthrush  
Black-and-white Warbler  
Crescent-chested Warbler  
Tennessee Warbler  
MacGillivray's Warbler  
Kentucky Warbler  
Hooded Warbler  
American Redstart  
Magnolia Warbler  
Yellow Warbler  
Grace's Warbler  
Hermit Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Rufous-capped Warbler  
Wilson's Warbler  
Slate-throated Redstart  
**Tanagers and Allies**  
Blue-gray Tanager  
Yellow-winged Tanager  
**Genus IncertaeSedis**  
Grayish Saltator  
Black-headed Saltator  
**Hirundinidae**  
*Cyanocorax melanocyaneus*  
*Progne chalybea*  
*Tachycineta bicolor*  
*Tachycineta albilinea*  
*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*  
*Hirundo rustica*  
**Troglishydiidae**  
*Troglydytes aedon*  
*Campylorhynchus rufinucha*  
*Cantorchilus modestus*  
**Polioptilidae**  
*Polioptila caerulea*  
**Turdidae**  
*Myadestes occidentalis*  
*Hylocichla mustelina*  
*Turda grays*  
**Mimidae**  
*Duemetellacarolinensis*  
**Parulidae**  
*Seiurus aurocapilla*  
*Parkesianoveboracensis*  
*Mniotiltavaria*  
*Oreothlypis superciliosa*  
*Oreothlypis peregrina*  
*Geothlypis mauli*  
*Geothlypis formosa*  
*Setophaga citrina*  
*Setophaga ruticilla*  
*Setophaga magnolia*  
*Setophaga petechia*  
*Setophaga gracilis*  
*Setophaga occidentalis*  
*Setophaga virens*  
*Basileuterus rufifrons*  
*Cardellina pusilla*  
*Myioborus miniatus*  
**Thraupidae**  
*Thraupis episcopos*  
*Thraupis abbas*  
**Genus IncertaeSedis**  
*Saltator coerulescens*  
*Saltatoratriceps*
Buntings, Sparrows and Allies
Blue-black Grassquit
White-collared Seedeater
Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch
Rusty Sparrow
Prevost's Ground-Sparrow

Cardinals and Allies
Hepatic Tanager
Summer Tanager
Red-throated Ant-Tanager
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting

Troupials and Allies
Melodious Blackbird
Great-tailed Grackle
Giant Cowbird
Orchard Oriole
Streak-backed Oriole
Spot-breasted Oriole
Altamira Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Montezuma Oropendola

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies
Scrub Euphonia
Yellow-throated Euphonia
Elegant Euphonia
Lesser Goldfinch

Old World Sparrows
House Sparrow (I)

Mammals
Squirrels, Prairie Dogs & Marmot
Variegated Squirrel

Weasels
Long-tailed Weasel

Emberizidae
Volatinijacarina
Sporophilatorqueola
Arremonbrunneinucha
Aimophilarufulescens
Melozonebiarcuata

Cardinalidae
Pirangaflava
Pirangarubra
Habiafuscicauda
Pheucticusludovicianus
Passerinacaerulea
Passerinacyanea

Icteridae
Dives dives
Quiscalusmexicanus
Molothrusoryzivorus
Icterusspurius
Icteruspustulatus
Icteruspectoralis
Icterusgularis
Icterusgalbula
Psarocoliussmontezuma

Fringillidae
Euphoniasaffinis
Euphoniahirundinacea
Euphoniaelegantissima
Spinuspsaltria

Passeridae
Passerdomesticus

Sciuridae
Sciurusvariegatoides

Mustelidae
Mustelafrenata