A FAMILY TOUR TO HONDURAS: THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO

JUNE 25 – JULY 1, 2013

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Mantled Howler Monkey © Michael O’Brien
TOUR REPORT
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THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO
June 25–July 1, 2013

By Michael O’Brien

This tour marked the first of our summer offerings in Honduras, and was based at the justifiably famous Lodge at Pico Bonito. This wonderful place offered very comfortable cabins, excellent food, a great swimming pool, and a bounty of wildlife. Compared to our other Honduras tours, this itinerary was designed with a wider focus and a more relaxed pace, appropriate for naturalists of all ages. Though most outings were focused on birds, we always took time to observe mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, moths, and any other interesting critters that crossed our paths.

Although much of our adventure took place right around the lodge, we also made several full-day or half-day outings to explore nearby areas. One morning, we took a ride on a charming, narrow-gauge train through pastures, marshes, and homesteads to get to Cuero y Salado National Wildlife Refuge. Here, a tranquil boat ride on the river brought us up-close to a family of Mantled Howler Monkeys, several crocodiles, and two groups of roosting Long-nosed (Proboscis) Bats. This was a particularly good outing for birds as we also found Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, four species of kingfishers, nesting White-necked Puffbirds, several family groups of Northern Jacanas, and even a fly-by Great Curassow.

Another day brought us to Rio Santiago Nature Resort, a nearby lodge with an astounding number of hummingbird feeders. We spent quite a bit of time enjoying uncountable numbers of hummingbirds, mostly Brown Violetears and White-necked Jacobins, many of them just inches away. Among the nine species of hummers, highlights were two Violet Sabrewings, one Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, and several Blue-throated Goldentails. While enjoying the hummers, we also enjoyed watching a dazzling pair of Golden-hooded Tanagers tending their nest, and point-blank views of a Gartered Trogon. A short walk up the hill behind the lodge brought us to another active location where we enjoyed views of the much-sought Keel-billed Motmot, along with Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Rufous Mourner, and White-shouldered Tanager. A great find on that trail was an Eastern Casquehead Iguana, a striking and seldom-seen lizard. A spectacular fuzzy, red-black-and-white caterpillar captivated us for a while too.

For a taste of the Caribbean, we took a boat ride out to Cayos Cochinos Marine National Park, situated at the south end of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the world’s second largest reef system. Snorkeling was the main focus of the day, and the water was delightful! We snorkeled at two locations, and saw a wonderful array of tropical fish such as Four-eyed Butterflyfish, Bluestriped Grunt, Spotlight Parrotfish, Yellowtail Damselfish, Caribbean Blue Tang, and Spotted Eagleray. There were also many types of corals, sea fans, seastars, and Christmas Tree Worms. Although our bird list was not long, we were always accompanied by frigatebirds and pelicans, and found a single Brown Booby loafing on a sandbar. And a real treat was coming across two tiny islets with nesting colonies of Bridled and Roseate terns—possibly the first nesting records for Honduras! On land, a remarkable density of Yucatan Vireos, and also several White-crowned Pigeons enlivened our walk on Cochino Grande. For lunch, we stopped at Cayo Chachahuate, a tiny Garifuna community, where we had an authentic and delicious meal featuring fried fish, plantains, and rice.
Of course, much of our time was spent right on the grounds of the lodge and on nearby trails. The main clearing was always one of the most active spots, with regular sightings of such birds as White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, Collared Aracari, Boat-billed and Social flycatchers, Rose-throated Becard, Masked Tityra, Clay-colored Thrush (always singing!), Yellow-winged Tanager, and Montezuma Oropendola. Even a roosting Great Potoo entertained us almost every day, and Central American Agoutis were hard to miss as they wandered the grounds. Walks on nearby trails produced such gems as White Hawk, Squirrel Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Blue-crowned Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan, and the much-sought Lovely Cotinga. And dazzling butterflies like Erato and Tiger heliconians, Leading Red-ring, Four-spotted Sailor, Spotlight Catone, and Common Morpho were frequent distractions. We were literally surrounded by some of these species when we stopped at the butterfly house, and the nearby serpentarium allowed safe viewing of several native snake species. Of course, the swimming pool was popular on a few warm afternoons, and some of us also took a dip in the river at Mermaid Falls and Las Pilas.

A special highlight at Pico Bonito was our series of night walks. Every evening, some of us went to check out the “moth sheet” where an amazing diversity of moths, katydids, mantids, and other insects gathered by the lights. We also made several trips to a frog pond where we saw beautiful Red-eyed Treefrogs, along with a few other species. Along the trails we were able to spotlight numerous interesting critters including a Central American Woolly Opossum and two Helmeted Iguanas. And then there was the “rustle-thump-rustle,” the sound of a large animal jumping out of a tree and running off. We don’t know what that was, but we all imagined it as a Jaguar!

Big thanks are due to the friendly and highly competent staff at Pico Bonito. Their attention to our every need kept us safe and comfortable, and made our stay that much more enjoyable.
**ITINERARY**

June 25 – Arrivals and transfers to The Lodge at Pico Bonito. Night at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.
June 26 – All day around the lodge including walks to the entrance road, Serpentarium, and Butterfly Farm; afternoon hike and swim at Mermaid Falls. Night at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.
June 27 – Boat trip at Cuero y Saldo National Wildlife Refuge via train from La Union; afternoon walk around lodge; night walk to Serpentarium, Corinto Trail, and Frog Pond. Night at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.
June 28 – Early walk around lodge; Rio Santiago Nature Resort; afternoon swim at La Pilas. Night at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.
June 30 – Early walk around lodge; day trip to Lancetilla Botanical Garden. Night at The Lodge at Pico Bonito.
July 1 – Departures.

**KEY TO LISTS**

LPB = The Lodge at Pico Bonito

**BIRDS**

*Tinamous (Tinamidae)*
Great Tinamou – heard several times at LPB
Little Tinamou – heard at LPB

*Waterfowl (Anatidae)*
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – two on the train to Cuero y Saldo

*Chachalacas, Guans & Curassows (Cracidae)*
Plain Chachalaca – two at the botanical garden
Great Curassow – female flying across the river at Cuero y Saldo

*Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)*
Magnificent Frigatebird – numerous at Cayos Cochinos

*Boobies (Sulidae)*
Brown Booby – one immature at Cayos Cochinos

*Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae)*
Neotropic Cormorant - one at Cuero y Saldo

*Anhingas (Anhingidae)*
Anhinga – one at Cuero y Saldo

*Pelicans (Pelicanidae)*
Brown Pelican – numerous along the coast

*Heron & allies (Ardeidae)*
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron – two at Cuero y Saldo, including a nest with a big nestling
Great Egret – one near San Pedro Sula
Cattle Egret – a few around Cuero y Saldo
Green Heron – two at Cuero y Saldo
Boat-billed Heron – one at Cuero y Saldo

New World Vultures (Cathartidae)
Black Vulture – incredibly abundant in open areas
Turkey Vulture – numerous, but much less so than Black Vulture

Hawks, Eagles & Kites (Accipitridae)
White-tailed Kite – seen a few times along roadsides
Roadside Hawk – a few at Cuero y Saldo
White Hawk – two at LPB
Gray Hawk – one at LPB
Short-tailed Hawk – one at LPB

Rails, Gallinules & Coots (Rallidae)
Ruddy Crake – heard at the botanical garden

Jacanas (Jacanidae)
Northern Jacana – numerous at Cuero y Saldo, including close looks at an adult on a nest and another with chicks

Gulls, Terns and Skimmers (Laridae)
Bridled Tern – It was a real highlight to find this mostly pelagic species nesting at Cayos Cochinos
Least Tern – one at Cayos Cochinos
Roseate Tern – These were nesting on two small islets at Cayos Cochinos along with the Bridled Terns
Royal Tern – one at Cayos Cochinos
Sandwich Tern – one at Cayos Cochinos
**Pigeons & Doves (Columbidae)**
Rock Pigeon – a few in more urban areas
Pale-vented Pigeon – numerous at the botanical gardens; a few at Cuero y Saldo
White-crowned Pigeon – numerous at Cayos Cochinos
Red-billed Pigeon – several locations
White-winged Dove – several locations
Inca Dove – several locations
Ruddy Ground-Dove – several locations
Blue Ground-Dove – heard at the botanical gardens
Caribbean Dove – heard at Cayos Cochinos
Gray-chested Dove – seen and heard at LPB

**Cuckoos (Cuculidae)**
Squirrel Cuckoo – nice views at LPB
Groove-billed Ani – seen every day

**Owls (Tytonidae)**
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl – several nice views at LBP

Mottled Owl – heard (and seen by Marianne & Pete) at LBP
Black-and-white Owl – heard at LBP

**Potoos (Nyctibiidae)**
Great Potoo – roosting bird seen most days at LBP

**Swifts (Apodidae)**
Chestnut-collared Swift – good sized flocks seen most mornings at LBP
White-collared Swift – seen daily at LBP; often in very large numbers in mid-day and afternoon
Vaux’s Swift – seen several times at LBP
Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift – two at the botanical gardens
Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)
White-necked Jacobin – seen daily; the most numerous hummingbird at LPB
Long-billed Hermit – a few seen daily
Stripe-throated Hermit – a few seen daily
Brown Violetear – seen daily at LBP, and the most numerous hummingbird at Rio Santiago; this species spends most of the year at middle elevations, but descends to the lowlands for a short time in summer

Green-breasted Mango – seen at several locations; best views at Rio Santiago
Black-crested Coquette – one at LBP
Canivet’s Emerald – one at Cayos Cochinos
Violet Saberwing – a few at LPB and Rio Santiago
Violet-crowned Woodnymph – numerous at Rio Santiago; a few at LPB
Stripe-tailed Hummingbird – one at Rio Santiago
White-bellied Emerald – several at Rio Santiago
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird – several locations, and two nests
Blue-throated Goldentail – a few at Rio Santiago and LPB

Trogons (Trogonidae)
Black-headed Trogon – seen at several locations, including a family group at the botanical gardens
Gartered Trogon – nice views at LPB and Rio Santiago
Black-throated Trogon – seen at LPB

Motmots (Momotidae)
Blue-crowned Motmot – seen at LPB
Keel-billed Motmot – It was great to see two individuals of this scarce species at Rio Santiago
Turquoise-browed Motmot – one at the botanical gardens

Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)
Ringed Kingfisher – seen at Cuero y Saldo and a few along roadsides
Amazon Kingfisher – seen at Cuero y Saldo and LPB
Green Kingfisher – seen at Cuero y Saldo and the botanical gardens
American Pygmy Kingfisher – pair seen at Cuero y Saldo

Puffbirds (Bucconidae)
White-necked Puffbird – pair at a nest seen at Cuero y Saldo

Toucans (Ramphastidae)
Collared Aracari – seen daily by their nest at LPB; also several other locations
Keel-billed Toucan – a few seen at several locations

Woodpeckers (Picidae)
Black-cheeked Woodpecker – nest with young at LPB
Golden-fronted Woodpecker – seen daily
Smoky-brown Woodpecker – heard at the botanical gardens
Chestnut-colored Woodpecker – nest at LPB
Lineated Woodpecker – heard at LPB
Pale-billed Woodpecker – pair seen at LPB

Falcons & Characaras (Falconidae)
Crested Caracara – seen on the train to Cuero y Saldo
Laughing Falcon – heard at Cuero y Saldo
Bat Falcon – seen at botanical gardens
**Parrots (Psittacidae)**
- Olive-throated Parakeet – seen daily at LPB
- Brown-hooded Parrot – seen daily at LPB
- White-crowned Parrot – seen daily at LPB

**Antbirds (Thamnophilidae)**
- Dusky Antbird – heard at Rio Santiago

**Ovenbirds & Woodcreepers (Furnariidae)**
- Cocoa Woodcreeper – seen at LPB
- Ivory-billed Woodcreeper – seen at LPB

**Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)**
- Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet – seen at Rio Santiago
- Yellow-olive Flycatcher – adult visiting nest at Rio Santiago
- Tropical Pewee – seen at LPB
- Black Phoebe – pair along river at Rio Santiago
- Rufous Mourner – seen at Rio Santiago
- Brown-crested Flycatcher – seen from train to Cuero y Saldo
- Great Kiskadee – seen daily
- Boat-billed Flycatcher – seen daily
- Social Flycatcher – seen daily
- Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher – seen at Rio Santiago and botanical gardens
- Tropical Kingbird – seen several locations, mostly along roadsides

**Cotingas (Cotingidae)**
- Lovely Cotinga – one male seen at LPB

**Manakins (Pipridae)**
- White-collared Manakin – heard at LPB and the botanical garden
- Black-crowned Tityra – seen at LPB
- Masked Tityra – seen at LPB and the botanical gardens

**Becards, Tityras & Allies (Tityridae)**
- Rose-throated Becard – pair seen at LPB

**Vireos (Vireonidae)**
- Yucatan Vireo – abundant at Cayos Cochinos; several nests
- Lesser Greenlet – seen at LPB

**Crows & Jays (Corvidae)**
- Brown Jay – seen daily

**Swallows (Hirundinidae)**
- Gray-breasted Martin – several at the airport in San Pedro Sula

**Wrens (Troglodytidae)**
- (Southern) House Wren – heard at the botanical garden
Spot-breasted Wren – nice views at the botanical garden
White-breasted Wood-Wren – nice views at LPB

Gnatcatchers (Polioptilidae)
Long-billed Gnatwren – heard at the botanical garden

Thrushes (Turdidae)
Clay-colored Thrush – seen daily

Tanagers & Allies (Thraupidae)
White-shouldered Tanager – several at Rio Santiago
Passerini’s Tanager – seen at LPB and botanical garden
Blue-gray Tanager – seen at LPB, La Union, and botanical garden
Yellow-winged Tanager – seen daily
Golden-hooded Tanager – pair nesting at Rio Santiago

Red-legged Honeycreeper – seen at several locations
Blue-black Grassquit – seen at the botanical gardens
Variable Seedeater – seen at the botanical gardens, including a nest
White-collared Seedeater – seen at Cuero y Saldo and the botanical garden
Buff-throated Saltator – seen at the botanical garden
Black-headed Saltator – seen at the botanical garden

Sparrows & Allies (Emberizidae)
Black-striped Sparrow – seen at the botanical garden

Cardinals, Grosbeaks & Allies (Cardinalidae)
Red-throated Ant-Tanager – seen at LPB

Blackbirds (Icteridae)
Melodious Blackbird – seen daily
Great-tailed Grackle – seen daily
Bronzed Cowbird – seen at LPB
Giant Cowbird – fly-bys at Cuero y Saldo
Black-cowled Oriole – seen at LPB and botanical gardens
Spot-breasted Oriole – seen from train to Cuero y Saldo
Yellow-billed Cacique – heard at the botanical garden
Chestnut-headed Oropendula – a few at LPB
Montezuma Oropendula – seen daily

**Finches, Euphonias & Allies (Fringillidae)**
Scrub Euphonia – seen at LPB and botanical garden
Yellow-throated Euphonia – seen at LPB
Olive-backed Euphonia – seen at LPB

**MAMMALS**
Common Opossum – one on our night walk at LPB
Central American Wooly Opossum – seen on a short nighttime “frog walk” at LPB
rat sp. – seen on night walk at LPB
Mantled Howler Monkey – family group at Cuero y Saldo
Varigated Squirrel – seen almost daily
Central American Agouti – numerous and seen daily at LPB
Forest Rabbit – one at LPB
Long-nosed (Proboscis) Bat – two groups roosting at Cuero y Saldo
**AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES**
Banana Salamander – at the “frog pond” on our night walk at PBL
Cane Toad – several around the pool at PBL
Gulf Coast Toad – several at PBL
Red-eyed Treefrog – we made several evening visits to the frog pond view these beautiful animals

Varigated Treefrog – numerous at PBL
Rio Grande Leopard Frog – a few at PBL
Smoky Jungle Frog – this giant frog was in the frog pond one night
American Crocodile – a few at Cuero y Saldo
Meso-American Slider – seen from the train to Cuero y Saldo
House Gecko – numerous at PBL
Turnip-tailed Gecko – one at PBL
Common (Brown) Basilisk – several around PBL and elsewhere
Helmeted Iguana – several on the night walk at PBL
Eastern Casquehead Iguana – one at Rio Santiago
Black-chested Spiny-tailed Iguana – one at Cayos Cochinos
Green Iguana – one at PBL
Blue-headed Anole – one at Cayos Cochinos
Ground (Humble) Anole – several at PBL
Central American Whiptail – one at PBL
Tropical Racer – seen at PBL and Cayos Cochinos

**BUTTERFLIES**
Polydamas Swallowtail
Green-celled Cattleheart
Montezuma’s Cattleheart
Great Southern White
Lyside Sulphur
Cloudless Sulphur
Orange-barred Sulphur
Apricot/Large Orange Sulphur
Mimosa Yellow
Mexican Cycadian
Regal Greatstreak
Red-spotted Scrub-Hairstreak
Black-barred Cross-streak
hairstreak sp. (*Iaspis* sp.)
Common Lemmark
Julia Heliconian
Banded Orange Heliconian
Zebra Heliconian
Gulf Fritillary
Tiger Heliconian
Grinning (Cydno) Heliconian
Erato Heliconian
Heart-spotted Heliconian
Mangrove Buckeye
Banded Peacock
White Peacock
Smooth-banded Sister
Four-spotted Sailor
Leading Red-ring
Spotlight Catone

Dingy Purplewing
Variable Cracker
Northern Crackerlet
Many-banded Daggerwing
Dappled Daggerwing
Two-spotted Prepona
Cypris Morpho
Common Morpho
Carolina Satyr
White Satyr
Quiet Diaph (Luna Satyr)
Monarch
Queen
Two-spotted Banded-Skipper
Broken Silverdrop
Glassy-winged Skipper

**Other Interesting Critters**
Hermit Crab
Whip Spider (Tailless Whip Scorpion)
Helicopter damselfly – We saw several individuals and two different speices. We watched one particularly cooperative individual plucking a spider from its web – apparently the sole foraging technique for all members of this family.
Silver-sided Skimmer – a beautiful dragonfly with red abdomen and silvery thorax; we saw numerous other dragonfly species, but they remain unidentified
Moths – Some of us made nightly visits to the “moth sheet” and saw some dazzling species.

[Sosextra grata © Michael O’Brien]