



*Ocellated Turkey*

# Guatemala *with Schoodic Institute*

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March 10-24, 2024

## *March 10 - Antigua*

After our group arrived, everyone settled into their rooms at Hotel Meson de Maria and took a break to enjoy the courtyard and rooftop views of the bustling city of Antigua. We had arrived during Lent, and it was nearly Holy Week or Semana Santa so the streets were alive with activity. Our group soon gathered in front of our hotel to watch the procession. The air was full of incense, and drums and brass instruments were heard as the larger-than-life float featuring the crucifixion was carried down the street, surrounded by hundreds of men in purple robes. After the excitement, we went to the rooftop of a nearby brewery to watch more of the parades. We were treated to the site of smoke irrupting from Volcan de Agua, which dominates the beautiful landscape around Antigua. After a delicious group dinner, it was time to rest up for birding in the morning.



*Procession in Antigua*

## *March 11- Birding at Finca El Pilar and Afternoon Culture Tour of Antigua*

We started our first full day in Guatemala with a short drive from the city center to San Cristobal El Alto, a small paradise in the mountain forest. It was cooler up in the high elevation, and we found ourselves surrounded by coffee and pine and oak trees already buzzing with bird activity as soon as we exited the van. We birded the road enjoying great looks at Band-backed Wrens, Bar-winged Orioles, Yellow-winged Tanagers, Black-headed Siskin, and a curious flock of Bushy-crested Jays. As the sun rose, the sky above us came alive with several Black-capped Swallows swooping low for insects. After birding for a few hours, we paused for a delicious traditional Guatemalan breakfast on a lovely open-air veranda with a wonderful view of Antigua. While sipping our coffee, we had great scope looks and photography chances at nearby perched Gray Silky-flycatchers. After a filling breakfast, we birded the road back towards the vans, adding new species such as Guatemalan Tyrann-



nulet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, and better looks at Blue-and-white Mockingbird. We then drove to Finca El Pilar Nature Preserve to enjoy the hummingbird feeders and got great looks at several species, including Rufous and Violet Sabrewings, and Rivoli's, White-eared, Azure-crowned, and Beryline Hummingbirds.

After returning to our hotel in Antigua, it was time for our city tour. A local guide walked us around the historic city center, telling us about the history and architecture of this Spanish Colonial-inspired city founded in the early 16th century. Notable stops included La Merced Church, Central Park, and the famous Santa Catalina Martir Arch of the 5th Avenue. After another delicious dinner within walking distance of our hotel, we returned to rest and prepared to say goodbye to the city in the morning.

### *March 12 - Birding in the Tecpan Area-Transfer to San Marcos Area*

We waved farewell to Antigua and took a short one-hour drive to breakfast at Restaurante Rincon Suizo. More than just a place to stop for a delicious breakfast, the forest reserve behind the restaurant is part of the Atitlán Important Bird Area. We were charmed by the Swiss architecture and awesome birding in the parking lot! After ordering, everyone went outside to explore while waiting for breakfast. After we were properly fueled and caffeinated, it was time to explore the reserve to find our targets. We spent over three hours birding and were treated to great looks at Golden-browed Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Crescent-chested Warbler, Mountain Trogon, and heard Rufous-browed Wren. Best of all, we found five individuals of our main target, Pink-headed Warbler, and everyone was treated to eye-level views and excellent photography chances. We then loaded into the bus and headed to San Marcos (stopping for a wonderful lunch along the way) and checked into our hotel for the next two nights.



*Our group at Rincon Suizo*

## *March 13 - Sendero Vega Del Volcan*

The go-to way to see Horned Guans in Guatemala used to be a steep all-day hike up Volcán San Pedro. Through his work with training other bird guides, our local guide, Maynor, discovered a flock on a family farm up Sendero Vega Del Volcan. We rose early and set off in search of this elusive bird. The drive to the volcano was stunning, and we were glad when a rest stop gave us a chance to take pictures of the view. We stopped in a village below the volcano to transfer to a four-wheel drive bus and up, up, up we went! The local family greeted us, and we quickly set off with our guide to look for guans. Unfortunately, even though the flock had been seen that morning, they had moved farther into the forest, where there were more fruiting trees. Although we did not find our target, we still had a wonderful time hiking the volcano and had great looks at Blue-throated Motmot, Green-throated Mountain-gem, Black-capped Siskin, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and more Pink-headed Warblers. After a morning of birding, we were invited to join them for a homemade lunch prepared by our guide's family. It was a rich cultural experience that everyone agreed was a highlight of the trip. We birded a bit more after lunch and then headed back down the mountain to our hotel for an afternoon rest.



*On our way to try for Horned Guan*

## *March 14 - Birding the San Marcos Area*

Quetzal Day! After breakfast, we headed straight for El Refugio del Quetzal. This natural reserve is an important water reserve for the community and provides a food-rich environment for many bird species, including Resplendent Quetzal. We walked the evergreen-covered path down past the river with the song of Brown-backed Solitaires serenading us until we got to the quetzal area. After moving a bit further into the trees and waiting patiently, we were treated to close views of four



quetzals, including two males! After that tantalizing experience, we continued to bird along the river and added more species to our list, including Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Black Hawk-Eagle, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, and Blue-crowned Chlorophonia.



*Resplendent Quetzal*

After leaving the reserve our local guide took us to a nearby road that is a known birding hotspot. There, we got enviable looks at Elegant Euphonia, Azure-rumped Tanager, Yellow-winged Tanager, and Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner. All this before lunch! We stopped at a newly opened lodge for lunch and ate al fresco in their beautiful garden before heading to our hotel for the night: Las Cumbrés Hotel. More than just an eco-hotel, it is also a natural thermal spa with steam coming right out of the ground in the private bathrooms. Some of us opted to enjoy the spa amenities while the rest of the group birded the grounds and added new species, such as Morelet's Seedeater, Mountain Thrush, and Cabanis's Wren.

### ***March 15 -Birding Fuentes Georginas and Transfer to Los Tarrales Nature Reserve***

Where there are volcanos, there are hot springs. Beautiful Fuentes Georginas are natural hot springs heated by the Volcán Zunil. The springs have been converted into man-made pools surrounded by lush gardens. We got up dark and early and headed to the park gates in search of owls. Our group was very fortunate to see and hear Mexican Whip-poor-will and three Fulvous Owls. After the sun

rose, we continued to walk along the main road and bird the humid sub-tropical forest, adding more birds to our list, including Highland Guan, Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, Unicolored Jay, Mountain Trogon, and Mexican Violetear. After eating breakfast at the resort near the springs, we enjoyed the gardens and pools before heading down the mountain to lower elevations.

We stopped for lunch at Villa Amanda Resort, a hotel with an impressive swimming pool but an even more impressive garden and ponds. Before and after lunch, we birded the grounds and got great looks at many lower-elevation bird species, including Boat-billed Heron, Amazon Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Hummingbird, and Great Kiskadee.



*Boat-billed Heron*

After lunch, we continued to Los Tarrales Nature Reserve, our home for the next three nights. This 1300-hectare reserve on Guatemala's Volcán Atitlán is a birder's paradise with an extensive trail network and coffee plantation. After checking into our comfortable rooms, we gathered to bird in the fading light just outside the main lodge. We quickly located Collared Aracari, White-bellied Chachalaca, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, and Masked Tityra. We also watched several parakeet species heading to roost, including Orange-chinned, Orange-fronted, and Pacific.

### ***March 16 - Full Day Birding at Los Tarrales***

We loaded up bright and early and headed up Volcán Atitlán in 4x4 vehicles. We birded the road along the way, and after a packed breakfast next to the beautiful coffee plantations, we hiked

up some of the nearby trails. Our morning list was impressive and included Crested Guan, Green-throated Mountain-gem Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Blue-tailed Hummingbird, Gartered Trogon, Lesson's Motmot, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, and Long-tailed Manakin.

We went back to the lodge for lunch and then gathered to bird around the lagoon and fields where commercial houseplants are grown. While waiting to begin our walk, a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl perched in a tree directly in front of us and stayed long enough that everyone enjoyed close-up views of the owl and his false eyes. During our walk, we added more low-elevation species such as King Vulture, Lineated Woodpecker, White-throated Magpie-Jay, and Scrub Euphonia.

### ***March 17 - Birding and Cultural Ride Around Atitlan***

After breakfast at the lodge, we headed to Lake Atitlan, where we boarded a boat to San Juan La Laguna, one of the most culturally rich villages on the lake. The streets of this municipality were bursting alive with color from art and woven fabrics made by the Tz-utujil Maya people. We loaded into Tuk Tuks (the best local mode of transportation) and zoomed through the streets to our first culture stop, the Chocolate Factory Licor Marron. After a presentation on how cacao is harvested and made into chocolate, we enjoyed shopping and tasting. We then went to our next stop, Case Flor Ixcaco, a unique shop that sells items hand-woven by local women, including dresses, purses, tablecloths, and more. The shop is run entirely by the local women, and most of the proceeds of sales go directly



*Slender Sheartail -  
A highlight of a quick birding stop before our cultural tour*

to the weaver. Each item has a tag saying who the weaver was, what dyes they used, and how long it took them to make the item. We were treated to a weaving presentation and learned that their



technique has not changed since the days of their ancestors. After supporting the local weavers and adding much weight to our suitcases, we headed back towards the boat and across the lake to Santiago Atitlan.

We enjoyed lunch at a resort with a restaurant overlooking the lake and sipped on refreshing lemonade. After lunch, we headed down to the beach for a bit of birding and added more species to our trip list, including Lesser Scaup, Tricolored Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Tropical Mockingbird, and Common Yellowthroat.

We then headed back to the lodge and enjoyed one last full group dinner together.

### ***March 18 - Birding Los Tarrales and Transfer to Guatemala City***

We got up bright and early to squeeze in one more birding opportunity at Los Tarrales before it was time to head to the city. Our efforts were rewarded by early morning species, including Mottled Owl and Common Pauraque. We also enjoyed more looks at Gartered and Collared Trogon, Roadside Hawk, and Barred Forest-Falcon. After breakfast, we loaded into the van and headed to Guatemala City, where our group would separate. Some flew on an afternoon flight to Flores for the lowland extension, while the rest checked into the Radisson Hotel for one last group dinner together before heading to the airport in the morning.

### ***March 19 - Transfer to Estación Biológica Las Guacamayas - Birding En Route***

After a wonderful breakfast at our hotel, we started our journey to Estación Biológica Las Guacamayas. There is fantastic habitat along the route, and we made several stops before making it to Paso Caballos to catch our boat. Some highlights along the way included Limpkin, Wood Stork, and Fork-tailed Flycatcher. After a short boat ride along the river to get to the lodge, we were welcomed by Wedge-tailed Sabrewings on the hummingbird feeders. After lunch and a siesta, we hiked one of the trails on the property. Highlights for the afternoon included Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Bat Falcon, and Red-capped Manakin.

### ***March 20 - Birding El Peru Archaeological Site and Río Sacluc***

During breakfast, we enjoyed many species around the lodge before heading out for our morning of birding at the El Peru Archaeological Site. This area is one of the last known spots for nesting Scarlet Macaws, which was our main target for the morning. The trail passes through wonderful habitat and there were many wonderful birds to see along the way. Highlights of the hike included King Vulture, Black-headed Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Yucatan Woodpecker, Dusky Antbird, Worm-eating Warbler, Yellow-winged Tanager, and of course, Scarlet Macaw!



After lunch, we got back in the boat to explore Río Sacluc, just a short distance from the lodge. We found our main target for the afternoon, Agami Heron, and had other great birds along the way. Highlights included Russet-naped Wood-Rail, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Yucatan Woodpecker, and Green Jay.

After dinner, we got back in the boat to go looking for some of the nocturnal birds that call this area home. After finding several Common Paraques, we finally found the star of the night, Spot-tailed Nightjar! This is a very difficult species to find in Central America, and this location is the only spot in Guatemala where it has been seen. Along the way, we also saw Yucatan Poorwill and Northern Potoo.

### ***March 21 - Las Guacamayas - Transfer to Tikal National Park***

After breakfast, we explored another trail on our lodge's property. We had a great list of birds, including Tody Motmot, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Northern Schiffornis, Scaly-throated Leaftosser, and Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher. After our hike, we packed up and started our journey to our next destination, Tikal National Park.

We arrived at Tikal in the midafternoon and got settled into our hotel before taking a short hike in the late afternoon along the landing strip. We added some of the specialty birds of the region to our list, including Ocellated Turkey and Gray-throated Chat.

### ***March 22 - Full Day Birding at Tikal National Park***

Our morning started very early to go in search of some of the nocturnal birds that call Tikal home. We found Common Parakeet, Yucatan Poorwill, Middle American Screech-Owl, and Mottled Owl along the way. Once the sun rose, bird activity picked up, and we had quite a good list of species before heading back to our hotel for breakfast. Highlights included Boat-billed Heron, Mangrove Vireo, and Rose-throated Tanager.

After breakfast, we entered the main ruins at Tikal to learn about this amazing historical site and to look for birds, of course! We knew it was going to be a very hot day, and the temperature started rising very quickly. We made several stops to rest and get cold drinks, but we still found some great birds, including Orange-breasted Falcon, Eye-ring Flatbill, and Black-throated Shrike-Tanager. While we would normally continue to explore Tikal after lunch, the temperature was around 100 degrees with high humidity, so we decided to head back to the hotel for the day.

### ***March 23 - Morning Birding at Tikal - Flight to Guatemala City***

Our morning started with another walk along the old airstrip and the main road. Although bird ac-

tivity was low this morning, the group enjoyed seeing Ocellated Turkey, Tawny-winged and Northern Barred-Woodcreepers, and Keel-billed Toucan.

On our way back to Flores for our flight to Guatemala City, we stopped at a spot known to have Black Catbird. Unfortunately, there were no catbirds to be found, but we enjoyed seeing Vermilion Flycatcher and Botteri's Sparrow.

We arrived in Flores in time to have a wonderful lunch at Nativo Restaurante on Flores Island before spending some time exploring the island. We took an evening flight to Guatemala City and settled into our hotel for the night to get ready for flights home the following day.



*Two of the incredible temples at Tikal*