



Sunrise Birding LLC
GUATEMALA
 February 17 – March 2, 2018
TRIP REPORT



Photos: Panoramic of Lake Atitlan), Horned Guan, and Brown-backed Solitaire by Diego Calderon. Goldman's Warbler and Pink-headed Warbler by Karen Chiasson.



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Report by Diego Calderon

Highlights and top sightings of the tour as voted by participants:

- Horned Guan
- Resplendent Quetzal
- Pink-headed Warbler
- Blue-throated Motmot
- Emerald-chinned Emerald
- Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner
- Long-tailed Manakin
- Black Hawk-Eagle
- Wine-throated Hummingbird
- Goldman's Warbler
- Lesson's Motmot
- Painted Bunting
- Red-faced Warbler
- Azure-rumped Tanager
- Elegant Euphonia
- Redback Coffee Snake
- Kinkajou
- Northern Potoo
- Black-and-white Owl
- Aaron!

February 17

Today we all arrived at the beautiful city of Antigua in Guatemala, and had the chance to wander around a bit, do some sightseeing, or even going birding . Some of the group landed very late at night, but everyone was resting well before midnight to start a great trip next morning.



February 18

We started our trip just in the outskirts of Antigua and by the gate of Finca El Pilar we had great views of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Bushy-crested Jay. We went all the way up the road and with the tremendous volcanoes in the background we started to have fun seeing White-eared Hummingbirds, Grey Silky-Flycatchers, Wilson's and **Townsend's Warblers**, (Photo: Karen Chiasson) Baltimore Orioles and Western Tanagers. I got my life Cedar Waxwing, and both target Orioles showed up really well in the scope, Bar-winged and Black-vented. There was a beautiful Rufous-collared Thrush on every treetop we looked at and Black-headed Siskins were almost eye-level on some bushes. We were looking at some Band-backed Wrens, when a

Collared Forest-Falcon gave us a brief glimpse and disappeared; we worked a bit more, and eventually Aaron re-located it for us allowing decent scope views.

We then started birding a bit down the road trying unsuccessfully for Blue-throated Motmot, but we nailed down the sweet-singing Brown-backed Solitaire and Collared Trogon. We moved lower and while having breakfast pinned several hummers including the target Rufous Sabrewing, along with Mexican Violetears, Azure-crowned, Berylline, more White-eared Hummingbirds, Green-throated Mountain-Gem, Rivoli's Hummingbird, and some Ruby-throateds. We did a bit of the trail above the breakfast camp and worked hard trying Rufous-browed Wren that was only glimpsed decently by Karen, A Grey-breasted Wood-Wren and the colorful reddish Slate-throated Whitestart rewarded us, all with more cooperative and active Wilson's Warblers. Black-throated Green Warbler was seen high up in the canopy while we played with a much lower family of Golden-crowned Warblers. Here, the unexpected prize of a female Sparkling-tailed Woodstar (or also named Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird) - a well-received bonus for sure!



We had a great lunch in town and then the group split in two. Some went with Maynor to enjoy a cultural tour around the city during one of the Easter parade celebrations while others went birding to San Cristobal Alto unexpectedly nailing down Slender Sheartail for Bill's hummer list, along a gorgeous Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo that was very cooperative. The trail had all sorts of good birds in the form of White-winged Tanagers and White-throated Swifts among many others, but the real jewel was a Blue-throated Motmot that after nearly giving up trying to locate, Aaron found and we all enjoyed scope

views. Highland Guans and Fulvous Owls sang in the distance while we were returning to our bus. We all reunited and had a great dinner enchanted by a local marimba music band and local dances and went to bed after a pretty cool first day of our trip.

February 19

We left our nice hotel in Antigua city after a very early coffee and biscuits, and drove to El Rincón Suizo, a nice roadside restaurant nestled in some beautiful conifer highland habitat. We enjoyed a hearty local breakfast and went searching for birds on the property roads and trails. We started with a nice flock with plenty of the beautiful Crescent-chested Warblers and a couple of our main targets: **Pink-headed** and Red-faced **Warblers**

(Photo: Karen Chiasson) both of which we reveled in wonderful views (and even Michele made a beautiful digiscoped video of a Pink-headed!). Blue-headed and Hutton's Vireos also joined this flock, and Northern Tufted Flycatchers were around as well as a gang of very attractive Golden-browed Warblers.

We continued a bit in the trails and got everyone on the scope for another of our main targets: Blue-throated Motmot. After that, some enjoyed a Chestnut-capped



Brushfinch, and other part of the group got Velasquez's Woodpecker in the scope. Black-capped Swallows and Mexican Violetears were all over the place, and an Amethyst-throated Mountaingem/Hummingbird offered some views.

After having perfect views of a Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, we moved along the road. Shortly, we were studying a couple of Mountain Trogons in the scope that Nancy and Lisa found, and finally got good views of a Hermit Warbler. We came back to the restaurant parking lot which was filled with good birds, and took our group photo at the Pink-headed Warbler sign, and then drove nearby for a nice lunch (escorted by black corn tortillas!).

After lunch and a couple of driving hours towards Quetzaltenango, we visited Fuentes Georginas but it was covered in thick fog. Despite the conditions, we enjoyed Unicolored Jays, more Mountain Trogons, and a Common Chlorospingus. This was a nice appetizer for tomorrow's visit to this great road. (Checking some photos, we today found a nice shot of Nashville Warbler taken by Peter yesterday).

February 20



Today we got an early 4:45am light breakfast and directly went up to Fuentes Georginas. We arrived there and played a couple of tapes, and there we were, enjoying scope views of **Fulvous Owl** (Photo: Peter Auster) and Mexican Whip-poor-will! The dawn finally broke, and we were getting plenty of Rufous-collated Thrushes (also named as Robins), Common Chlorospingus, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. We walked a bit along the road and a few seconds after being in the territory of one of these beautiful birds, got an amazingly fancy **Wine-throated Hummingbird** (Photo: Diego Calderon) perched for scope views and



photos (later on, we got it again with much better light!). There were Highland Guans all over and we worked with a couple of individuals for a long time getting only glimpses and a fly-by.



We were enjoying hot chocolate and coffee, when Aaron called us on the radios saying he had tracked-down a **Horned Guan** (Photo: Diego Calderon) a few meters above in the –very steep- trail, so we rocketed up the mountain. Cheryl and I got there first after running and jumping like goats up the hill, then one by one, with the local guides help, everyone arrived to enjoy scope views of this mythical beast. We spent some good 20 minutes with this bird, photographed it, saw it walking on the sub-canopy, and then fly away... elated, we came

back down the steep trail realizing how high and far we had gone without feeling it under the adrenaline rush. On the parking lot, we tried again for Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo but only heard it. We came down back to hotel, doing some stops to appreciate the big agricultural landscape around us, and finally got a nice brunch just before noon. We left and drove to our next destination finishing the day with a great dinner.



February 21

Today we had a 6:00 am leisurely breakfast and left for Todos Santos Chuchumatan highlands above Huehuetenango. We were picked up Esteban our superb local guide and went into his indigenous community land to look for birds. On our very first bird upon arriving we found our main target **Goldman's Warbler** (Photo: Karen Chiasson); We got to enjoy a full adult male and a juvenile male in the same area, and later on, thanks to Aline and Dennis who were a bit ahead, some more individuals of this beautiful species restricted to the highlands of Guatemala and SE Mexico (only a handful of records from Mexico come from the Tacaná volcano in the border, so the only reliable and easy site(s) to see it are in Guatemala, making

it practically a Guatemalan endemic).

The highlands were full of (Guatemalan) Yellow-eyed Juncos, Spotted Towhees, Rufous-collared Thrushes, Eastern Bluebirds, Guatemalan (Northern) Flickers, among many others. We move a bit more and roved a long open area looking for Savannah Sparrow without success, but Bill found a great-looking Chiapas Malachite Spiny-Lizard. We also played-backed and kept our eyes open for Ocellated Quails but nothing called our attention. Once we returned to town, Esteban took us to a special place near the cemetery to look for Broad-tailed Hummingbird, which we found perched at his stakeout offering great views for everyone. We



then hit the tasty Pomodoro restaurant for lunch and kept driving all afternoon to reach Los Tarrales where we had dinner, checklist, and hit the hay after a successful long day.

February 22

This morning we met at 6:00 am for coffee and biscuits and left on our 4x4s to explore the labyrinth road system of Los Tarrales; our first stops got us enjoying Crested Guans and Gartered Trogons in the scope, as well as Red-legged Honeycreepers seemingly everywhere. There were Social Flycatchers along with Boat-billed Flycatchers, and good views of Blue-tailed Hummingbird. We moved a bit more, and scanning a big area with Cecropia trees, we found our main target of the day: the **Azure-rumped (AKA Cabanis's)**

Tanager (Photo: Diego Calderon) feeding on the

fruits of these trees (called “the most hospitable tree” by renowned ornithologist Alexander F. Skutch). We enjoyed scope views and different angles of this special tanager and moved a bit higher, nailing down (with scope views!) of Green Shrike-Vireo before finally hitting a spot on the coffee grounds where a superb picnic breakfast was waiting for us. Yvonne and Karen found us a Masked Tityra at the very same time, as we were joined by good-looking Rufous-backed Wrens and Painted Buntings, and nearby some got quick glimpses of White-faced (Prevost's) Ground Sparrow. A little trail nearby delivered more Azure-rumped Tanagers, along Blue-crowned Chlorophonia and a Common Tody-Flycatcher couple in the place where we went trying for our other target hummer of the day (Emerald-chinned) without success.

We then decided to go even higher, and at a stakeout, got to find several individuals of these Emerald-chinned Hummingbirds along with Nashville Warbler and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. We noticed the hummers were apparently feeding on some sap-type liquid bubbles that were “hanging” -attached by a thin filament- from Inga tree branches.



We drove down for lunch, but got quite entertained by a roosting Mottled Owl, and several other open area species near the main farm camp as **Cinnamon Hummingbird** (Photo: Diego Calderon), Scrub and Yellow-throated Euphonias, among many, many others (including White-tailed Deer). After lunch and checking some of the fruit feeders, we caught up with Lesson's Motmot that was seen by Cheryl this morning near the main house, and another Velasquez's Woodpeckers. We did a trail in the afternoon, adding a lot of open-area species, but our main special birds were Long-tailed Manakin and Tody Motmot. After a long day, some still had energy to go on a night walk to look for critters with the best local guide here: Lester, Aaron's brother, and they did see Kinkajous, owls, Potoos, and snakes!

February 23

This morning, before breakfast we did a circuit trail across the coffee plantations, getting views of a load of birds, Central American Agouti and a lovely family of White-tailed Deer at close range. Some of the cool birds in the morning included very posey and obliging birds as White-bellied Chachalacas and **Black-headed Saltators** (Photo: Diego Calderon), a Gartered Trogon female, and a stunning Turquoise-browed Motmot. A gang of White-throated Magpie-Jays serenaded us while we were getting views of the skulky Rufous-breasted Spinetail and White-faced (Prevost's) Ground Sparrow and Bill and Joe were chasing a lovely **Silky Anole**, that they eventually caught up with for photos.



We came back to lodge for breakfast and spent some time in the fruit feeders where a number of Pacific Parakeets and some Melodious Blackbirds were making a lot of noise, three species of Orioles (Baltimore, Spot-breasted, and Orchard) were around, and everyone photographed Lesson's Motmots. We then did a couple of trails in the drier section of the reserve, finding Violet Sabrewing, Yellow-olive Flycatcher and Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and nailing down our main target: a couple of Black-and-white Owls roosting.

We came back to the lodge, refreshed with showers, had lunch and started our short journey to Posada Santiago on the shore of the stunning Lago Atitlán. Before checking-in, we visited the Mirador del Rey Tepepul and even though it was quite foggy, we got some decent views of a fly by and briefly perched **Resplendent Quetzal** (Photo: Diego Calderon) male that Aaron dragged (literally! ... whistling and bushwhacking step by step for almost 400m) all the way from the bottom of the valley. We finally came back to lodge, checked-in at this fantastic place, and enjoyed one of the best dinners, along



with live music, of the trip!

February 24

This morning after breakfast we boarded our boats and went around Volcán San Pedro; after a short and very cool-picturesque ride in the back of a couple of pickup trucks we were enjoying a very active field full of birds, there were Orchard, Baltimore and Black-vented Orioles, Townsend's, Hermit, and Nashville Warblers, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Bushy-crested Jays galore, Summer and Western Tanagers, a parade of sparrows: Lincoln's, Rufous-collared, and Rusty, along with White-faced (Prevost's) Ground Sparrow and Spotted Towhees,

among many other species. With the assistance of our local guide Cruz, we looked for our main target here in a couple of areas but weren't lucky connecting with these Belted Flycatchers unfortunately.

As a consolation prize a beautiful female Ruby-throated Hummingbird entertained us for a while as well as a family group of the not-so-easy-to-see Cabanis's Wren and Black-and-white Warbler. We came back to town, met with another great local guide named Germán, and



changed from pick-ups to tuk tuk rickshaws and went with to a drier area in town to look for Slender Sheartail which we got along a passing by Lesser Roadrunner at this Germán's stake out.

We returned to our Posada for lunch and a bit of rest, before enjoying a great boat trip in the late afternoon along the shore of the lake seeing a multitude of herons and egrets, Belted Kingfisher, Sora, and a beautiful sunset. We had a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron which is apparently one of the few from this lake as per Maynor's comments. This afternoon, around my room at Posada Santiago, I heard a couple of **Blue-throated Motmots** (Photo: Diego Calderon) calling, and after a bit of work from my part running all over the hotel finding most of my group people, we got amazing close views of these beauties. As this was our last night together before some kept traveling to the Tikal extension and some returned back home, we had our farewell dinner at the private porch of the hotel overlooking the lake and with a cozy fire... a lovely night.

February 25

This morning we paid another visit to the Mirador del Rey Tepepul where we met with our young great local guide Freddy that took us on a short walk on a steep trail where he found us a male and a female extravagant Resplendent Quetzals that posed for our group just in front of our incredulous eyes... no doubt, one of the best nature experiences ever for everyone in the group! The males of this, the nominate, subspecies have much longer streamers than the



subspecies *costaricensis* that occurs in Panama and Costa Rica where most of the birders have seen these birds before - a show!

We also got to finally see something out of the Highland Guans that eluded us all over the trip, when a couple of flying by birds were spotted. The morning was especially good for hummers producing Rufous Sabrewing, Mexican Violetear, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Green-throated Mountaingem and Sparkling-tailed Woodstar. We also got the first

Plumbeous Vireo and Grey Catbird of the trip, plus a couple of lovely Elegant Euphonias. We returned back to Guatemala City, where we had a last great lunch together and drop off the people continuing for the Tikal extension that I unfortunately couldn't do this year due to other trips I had scheduled in Colombia. Some people flew to Flores and some went to a hotel in the city to leave the country next day.



(from here on, both trip report and list are written and compiled by the extension guides Aaron and Benedicto Lucas – I just translated it from Spanish to English)

February 26

In the morning, while commuting to the Estación Biológica Las Guacayamas, we stopped at a swamp where we got a very well camouflaged Pinnated Bittern, and Wood Stork, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, among others. On our way, Fork-tailed Flycatchers were all over the place. After checking in at the station, we went to the viewpoint nailing down Northern Schiffornis, Collared Trogon and Brown-hooded Parrot. That day, we got to also see Yucatan Black Howler Monkey and Geoffroy's Spider Monkey.

Back at the lodge, and after a quick rest, we went night birding on boat getting Northern Potoo, Common Pauraque and an only-heard Yucatan Poorwill. We had dinner, checked the list and went to rest for a great next day at the amazing Las Guacamayas Biological Station.

February 27

This morning we were having coffee at 6am preparing to our birding hike to the archaeological site known as Peru Waka. After a short boat trip we were enjoying beautiful birds like Green, Belted, and Ringed Kingfishers, and a perched Black-collared Hawk. We started the trail which produced goodies as Gray-throated Chat which we saw amazingly well, Mayan Antthrush, Royal Flycatcher, and Dusky Antbird.

After almost a kilometer on the trail, we found a Cantemó tree where some Scarlet Macaws that were nesting. Before returning to the hotel, we found Pheasant Cuckoo and Yucatan Woodpecker to call this a very successful morning. We got lunch while enjoying the hummingbird feeders, and around mid-afternoon we left again on our boat to the Río Sacluc where we enjoyed Agami Heron, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Gray-headed Kite, Great Blue Heron, Anhinga, and Pale-vented Pigeon. 5:00 pm got us cheering with some wine and beers before returning back to hotel.

February 28

This morning we missed Sungrebe at the Río Sacluc but we were rewarded instead with Red-ored Amazon, Muscovy Duck, Bat Falcon, Pale-vented Pigeon, Ringed Kingfisher, Roadside Hawk, Black-collared Hawk, Yucatan woodpecker, and others. We got breakfast and traveled back to Flores having lunch in the way. Did some owling this night and undoubtedly the birds of the day were Ruddy Crake, Ocellated Turkey and Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

March 01

This great day we started in Tikal where besides great birds we were going to enjoy and learn about Mayan culture. First birds of the day were a gang of some eight Ocellated Turkeys and while we were studying and photographing them, a Yucatan Flycatcher was singing. We then found Rose-throated and Black Catbird, both considered rarities here in Tikal. After breakfast, we did the archaeological site trail, visiting the temples of the Gran Plaza de Tikal where we could get best views ever of an Orange-breasted Falcon. In the afternoon, while seeing the rest of the archaeological city, we were joined by parrots (Brown-hooded, Mealy Parrot, White-crowned, and White-fronted Amazon) as well as Keel-billed Toucan, Roadside Hawk and plenty of Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Returning to hotel that night we heard Common Pauraque and Mottled Owl.

March 02

After an early coffee we were enjoying a flock of Montezuma Oropendolas at the parking lot along with some others like Ocellated Turkey, Keel-billed Toucan, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Red-lored Amazon, Northern Schiffornis, Russet-naped Wood-Rail and Purple-crowned Fairy. After breakfast we returned to the Villa Maya and some birding there got us Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Gray-headed Dove, American Pygmy Kingfisher y White-collared Swift. After lunch we visited Santa Ana Petén where we added a couple of species for the list: Black-throated Bobwhite and Botteri's Sparrow. Later on, that day we went back to airport to finish this extension.

This was an absolutely superb trip! We recorded 350 species of birds, learned so much from Mayan culture, enjoyed superb meals, had an army of very talented and trained local guides, and got to glimpse a little bit of some habitats of this beautiful Central American country. I want to thank all our clients, for making this another very enjoyable Sunrise Birding trip and I am looking forward to more birding together guys (thanks also to the butterfly gang for teaching us so much!). Also, all our local guides were simply marvelous: Esteban Matias (at Todos Santos Cuchumatán), Lester de León (from Los Tarrales), Darwin Fuentes Grijalva (help from the office at Los Tarrales), Cruz Ixbalan Chikibal (in Volcán San Pedro), "Freddy" Alfredo Tol (at Mirador Rey Tepepul), German Cholotio (at both San Juan La Laguna and Mirador Rey Tepepul for a couple of days), Benedicto Lucas (for the Tikal extension), and of course the magical duo of Aaron De León and Maynor Ovando that were the soul of the trip. Also, the backstage backup at the office from Lily and Benedicto was outstanding... can't wait to go back to beautiful warm Guatemala for more birds and great experiences, and finally get to do the Tikal extension as well.

