

Best Birding in Belize

March 12-20, 2016
With Jeff Collins & Mark Faherty



Always popular, our Belize program is a long-standing favorite. Our itinerary provides time to fully experience the birds, other fauna, and flora of Belize. We will visit conservation sites where Mass Audubon has a long history of cooperation and partnerships. In addition, we will not neglect the rich history of this country. There are fascinating Mayan ruins to explore, lovely rivers to swim in, beautiful scenery to admire, and trails to hike. In addition to outstanding birds, tiny Belize also supports the highest density of Jaguars known and the world's second largest barrier reef.



Travel with the Massachusetts Audubon Society
208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773
800-289-9504

Birds and other animals: Several rarely seen and highly **sought-after** birds among a list that should approach 250 species and good chances to see some mammals, as well. *Jabiru*, *King Vulture*, *Orange-breasted Falcon*, *Sungrebe*, *Boat-billed & Agami Heron*, **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, *Great Curassow*, *Pheasant Cuckoo*, *Spotted Wood-Quail*, *Yellow-headed Parrot*, *Olive-throated Parakeet*, *Chestnut-colored Woodpecker*, *Keel-billed Toucan*, *Emerald Toucanet*, *Yucatan Jay*, *Green-breasted Mango*, *Cinnamon & Azure-crowned Hummingbird*, *Black Catbird*, *Rufous-browed Peppershrike*, *Yellow-tailed & Black-cowled Oriole*, *Yucatan Flycatcher*, to name just a few.

For those who wish, a few days of relaxing and snorkeling on the Belize Barrier reef is an option at the end of the tour.



DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY (9 DAYS)

Day 1 – Saturday, March 12: Arrival in Belize and travel to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

Please plan to arrive at the International Airport in Belize City (BZE) by early afternoon. You will be met by the local guides and our Mass Audubon naturalists. It is about a 30-minute drive to Belize Audubon Society's Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary where we will spend two nights at Bird's Eye View Lodge.



Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is managed by Belize Audubon Society and comprised of 16,400 acres of lagoons, creeks, logwood swamps, broadleaf forest, and pine savannah; it is one of the best birding destinations in all of Belize. From the commonly seen *Northern Jacana* to the elusive *Sungrebe*, Crooked Tree offers a plethora of birds, including *Jabiru*, *Agami Heron*, *Bare-throated Tiger-Heron*, *Boat-billed Heron*, *Snail Kite*, *Black-collared Hawk*, *American Pygmy Kingfisher*, *Black Catbird*, *Yucatan Woodpecker*, and *Yucatan Jay* among the many possibilities. The sanctuary protects globally-endangered species such as the *Central American River Turtle* (locally known as Hicatee) and *Yellow-headed Parrot*.

Crooked Tree is recognized as a Wetland of International Importance, especially as waterfowl habitat, under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. During the dry season many resident and migratory birds find refuge in the lagoons. Each year, in February, Belize Audubon Society celebrates World Wetlands Day in the local communities. A key to the conservation success of this globally-significant wetland is local community involvement. We have timed the trip to coincide with falling water levels to maximize the opportunities for waterbirds.

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary contains a mosaic of wetland and terrestrial habitats. On and around the grounds of the Bird's Eye View Lodge, we will expect to see the ubiquitous *Tropical Kingbird*, *Social Flycatcher*, as well as the eye-popping *Vermilion Flycatcher*. In the nearby forests, we'll look for *Yellow-lored Parrot*, *Red-vented Woodpecker*, *Yucatan Flycatcher*, *Yucatan Jay*, *Barred Antshrike*, *Yellow-bellied Elaenia*, *White-collared Seedeater*, and *Groove-billed Ani*. In the fields and along the edge of the wetland, we will also look for one of the newest Belizean birds, *Southern Lapwing*. Overnight: Bird's Eye View Lodge (D) www.birdseyeviewbelize.com.

Day 2 – Sunday, March 13: Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

It will be an early start with a boat trip into the Northern Lagoon. Here, a wide variety of wetland birds, including *White Ibis*, *Roseate Spoonbill*, *Northern Jacana*, *Purple Gallinule*, *Least Grebe*, *Limpkin*, *Boat-billed Heron*, *Black-collared Hawk*, and *Wood Stork* can all be found. With luck, we could also find a *Jabiru*, the largest wader in the Western Hemisphere.

After lunch, we'll explore the nearby pine forest and savannah areas to look for *Yellow-headed Parrot*, *Azure-crowned Hummingbird*, *Grace's Warbler*, *Forked-tailed Flycatcher*, *Aplomado Falcon*, and other birds characteristic of this habitat. Walking on the relatively flat trails in this area is easy with a relaxed pace. Overnight: Bird's Eye View Lodge (B, L, D).



Day 3 – Monday, March 14: Crooked Tree to Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area

After breakfast this morning, we'll drive northwest to the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area. It'll be about a 2-hour drive with birding stops along the way looking for *Aplomado Falcon*, *Jabiru*, *Fork-tailed Flycatcher*, *Gray Hawk*, *Laughing Falcon*, and *Masked Tityra*.



Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area is the largest terrestrial conservation area in Belize, comprising 4 percent of the country's total land area. With the help of Mass Audubon, it was established by Programme for Belize in 1988 with the purchase of 110,044 acres of land from Gallon Jug Agro-industries. With logging encroachment imminent in 1989, The Nature Conservancy joined forces with Mass Audubon and the Programme for Belize to protect the land.

Our base here will be La Milpa Ecolodge and Field Station in the northwestern portion of the reserve, only 3 miles from La Milpa Archaeological Site, the third largest Mayan ruin in Belize. La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center (and the Programme for Belize) is an important conservation partner for the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Many wonderful tropical species are readily found on the lodge property, including toucans, trogons, motmots, parrots, woodcreepers, manakins, and tanagers. Mammals are also frequently encountered with Central American Spider Monkey and Mexican Black Howler Monkey likely, and even a real possibility for seldom-seen species such as Ocelot, Red Brocket Deer, or even the nearly mythical Jaguar.



We will arrive in the tropical forest in time for lunch and get an orientation to La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center. In this protected area it is possible to find some of the fabulous big birds that have been extirpated in most of Belize, including *Ocellated Turkey*, *Crested Guan*, *Great Tinamou*, and *Great Curassow*. Overnight: La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center (B, L, D).

Day 4 – Tuesday, March 15: La Milpa, Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area

More than 400 species of birds have been identified in the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area. We will start birding early, looking for both resident and nonmigratory birds and many Neotropical migrants, including *Ruddy Woodcreeper*, *Gray-headed Tanager*, *Red-capped Manakin*, *Olive-backed Euphonia*, *Blue Bunting*, *Bright-rumped Attila*, three species of trogons (*Black-headed*, *Gartered*, and *Slaty-tailed*), *Keel-billed Toucan*, *Collared Aracari*, and *Rufous-browed Peppershrike*, among others.



This morning we'll explore the open areas and forest trails of La Milpa, with good chances of seeing *King Vulture*, *Spot-breasted* and *White-bellied Wrens*, *Purple-crowned Fairy*, *Strong-billed* and *Ivory-billed Woodcreepers*, *Plain Antvireo*, *White-bellied Wren*, *Chestnut-colored*, *Black-cheeked*, and *Golden-fronted Woodpeckers*, and a host of other forest birds.

After lunch, we will visit the nearby archeological site called “La Milpa.” This is one of the largest Mayan sites, but mostly unexcavated. The forests here are full of woodland birds including *White Hawk* and, with any luck, a mixed foraging flock of tanagers or an army ant swarm with attendant antbirds. There is always a remote, but

exciting, chance of finding a cat (Ocelot, Jaguar), or more likely, the pawprints. After a short drive back to the cabanas, we'll relax before the delicious buffet dinner. The night walks here are full of life and sound, and given the remote location, the stars here are incredible. Overnight: La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center (B, L, D).

Day 5 – Wednesday, March 16: Travel to Western Belize and the Mountain Pine Ridge

After some early morning birding and breakfast, we'll pick up our picnic lunches and head out. There will be some interesting stops along the way, including the Belize Zoo. Although zoos are not normally included on our tours, The Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center is home to more than 125 animals of about 48 species, all native to Belize. The natural environment of Belize is left entirely intact within the zoo -- the dense, natural vegetation makes it a pleasant stop. The zoo has an important education purpose within Belize, receiving almost 15,000 school children every year. We plan to arrive at Black Rock Lodge late afternoon - in time to enjoy the birds from the open-air dining hall.

The Maya Mountains in western Belize and the pristine Macal River is our destination for the end of the tour. Our lodge sits on over 240 acres along the banks of the river. There have been nearly 300 species of spectacular resident and migratory birds counted on this property, including all three species of toucan. In addition this lodge has a passionate commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable operations, which makes it doubly rewarding to stay here.

Black Rock Lodge is a beautiful property with very nice private cabanas. The bird list here includes *Olive-throated Parakeet*, *Orange-breasted Falcon*, *Lineated* and *Pale-billed Woodpeckers*, *White Hawk*, *King Vulture*, *Golden-hooded Tanager*, *Purple-crowned Fairy*, and both the *Tody* and *Blue-crowned Motmots*, not to mention various tanagers, woodcreepers, flycatchers, vireos, manakins, trogons, and puffbirds. This lodge will be our base of operations for the next 3 days as we explore the beautiful Cayo District and Mountain Pine Ridge area. Overnight: Black Rock Lodge (B, PL, D).

Day 6 – Thursday, March 17: Black Rock Lodge and Macal River

Early morning birding on the deck with coffee and breakfast is not to be missed! The lodge is above the river and has well-maintained paths along the Macal River as well as the hillside above. We should have great opportunities to see forest and riparian birds such as *Amazon*, *Green*, and *Ringed Kingfishers*, *Slaty-tailed Trogon*, *Brown Jay*, *Great Kiskadee*, *Squirrel Cuckoo*, *Black Phoebe*, *Gray-necked Wood-Rail*, and with luck, *Sungrebe*. There is a fine canopy tower and much to see, including the sought-after *Orange-breasted Falcon*, which can be found on the cliffs overlooking the lodge.

In the afternoon, we will have the opportunity to swim in the lovely Macal River, go canoeing, or hiking on the lodge trails. The view over the forest and fruit trays near the open pavilion will give us wonderful views of honeycreepers, tanagers, orioles, and toucans, among others. Overnight: Black Rock Lodge (B, L, D).





Day 7 – Friday, March 18: Mountain Pine Ridge

Today there will be several options based on the road conditions. But our plan is to explore the Mountain Pine Ridge region of western Belize – an area of great natural beauty and diverse wildlife (road conditions and weather permitting). As the name implies, this area is very different from the broadleaf forest we have experienced to date and offers the opportunity to see many new species of birds. On previous trips, we have had some intense tropical forest birding at Rio Frio Cave (e.g., woodcreepers, flycatchers) and have seen raptors including *Plumbeous* and *Swallow-tailed* Kites. Overnight: Black Rock Lodge (B, L, D).

Day 8 – Saturday, March 19: Xunantunich Mayan Site and free time:

This morning we will take an easy trip from the lodge to the local archeological site Xunantunich (“Maiden of the Rock”). To reach this wonderfully restored (and very large!) Mayan site, we will drive along the Western Highway toward the Guatemala border and then take a hand-cranked ferry across a small river. The birding in the broadleaf forest surrounding the historic site and among the structures is usually very productive and the site itself is most impressive. We'll return to the lodge for lunch and more birding or free time to swim, canoe, or just relax. Overnight: Black Rock Lodge (B, L, D).

Day 9 – Sunday, March 20: Black Rock Lodge to Home

Enjoy your last toucans, honeycreepers, and other tropical birds before breakfast, after which we must check out and head east to Belize City and our flights home. Flights can be scheduled for 1 PM on March 20. For those who wish to extend their stay in Belize with some snorkeling along the barrier reef – we have an optional extension to South Water Caye. See attached.

MASS AUDUBON GUIDES – Jeff Collins & Mark Faherty

Jeff Collins is Director of Mass Audubon's Ecological Management Department, coordinating habitat management planning and activities on our wildlife sanctuaries as well as assisting conservation partners through our Ecological Extension Service. He holds a master's degree in botany from the University of Vermont Field Naturalist Program. Jeff takes a holistic approach to exploring and enjoying the landscape, considering the interplay of bedrock, soil, water, plants, and animals, all while sharing his enthusiasm for the natural beauty of each destination. He has traveled extensively, birding and botanizing in North America; exploring Southern Africa while a Peace Corps volunteer in Zimbabwe; visiting birding hot spots in Belize, Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Nepal; and leading tours to Namibia, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, and Mexico's Baja Peninsula.

Mark Faherty has been the Science Coordinator at Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary since August 2007 and has led birding trips for Mass Audubon since 2002. While his current projects involve everything from oysters and horseshoe crabs to bats and butterflies, he has studied primarily bird ecology for the last 20 years, working on research projects in Kenya, Florida, Texas, California, Arizona, Mexico, and the Pacific Northwest. He was a counter for the famous River of Raptors hawk watch in Veracruz, Mexico, and has birded Africa, Panama, Belize, and both Eastern and Western Europe. Mark is an emcee and trip leader for multiple birding festivals and leads workshops on birding by ear, eBird, birding apps, and general bird identification. He is past president of the Cape Cod Bird Club, and is a member of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee.

What you should know about this trip

Pace and comfort: A comfortable trip with full days and transportation in vans. Early morning birding walks are optional. Walks and birding are on easy-to-moderate trails (distances up to 2.5 miles) and there are more extensive hiking trails for optional hikes on the last 2 days. There is a full morning boat trip. There are options for free afternoons to choose to go hiking, canoeing, or just relaxing the last 3 days of the tour.

Lodging: Very good jungle lodges, each with private rooms with private bathrooms. Excellent local food and excellent birding at all lodges. Pool and river swimming available at one property.

Weather: Generally warm (80 - 90 degrees F), sometimes humid, with just occasional rainfall.

PRICES, TERMS, & CONDITIONS

Main Tour Price: \$ 3000 per person, double occupancy. Single Supplement: \$600 *single rooms are limited.*

Price Includes:

- All meals and accommodations as shown in the itinerary
- Services of Mass Audubon naturalist leaders
- Local guides and naturalists
- All excursions, entrance fees
- Extensive trip preparation notes
- Transportation within Belize
- All Tips and Gratuities

Price Excludes:

- International airfare
- Passport and visa fees; Trip cancellation insurance;
- Airport taxes; excess baggage charges;
- Items of a personal nature, including alcoholic beverages, laundry, and telephone calls; other items not specifically mentioned as included.

APPLICATIONS, RESERVATIONS, DEPOSITS: Early applications are strongly encouraged. Trip rosters usually must be finalized 4 months before departure! All applications must be accompanied by a completed reservation form and \$500 deposit. Deposits can be by check or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). We reserve the right to decline your application. In the case of questionable health, we reserve the right to require a physician's certification to affirm you are capable of the activities. Final payment is due 90 days before the departure date. Final payment must be by check or money order.

RATES: All tour prices are based on double occupancy. If you would like us to find you a roommate, we will do our best, but cannot guarantee a share. If we cannot find a share, you will need to pay the single supplement. All forms and fares are accurate at the time of publication June 2015 but are subject to change at any time prior to departure. It is our policy to only pass on the actual amount of any increases in airfares or land costs such as those increases due to the devaluation of the dollar. Rarely, a price increase may be called for if the group falls below the minimum, as listed in the itinerary.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: A U.S. Passport valid for *at least* six months *beyond* the trip's departure date is required. A departure tax must be paid (~ \$35 US dollars) in cash when exiting.

FLIGHTS: **You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights.** Once you reserve your space, we will provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our staff will take. You may book flights directly with the airline, online, or with a travel agent. Please be aware that most tickets are non-refundable, therefore you should not book your flight arrangements until you have checked with us to be sure the tour has the minimum number of participants for the trip to go. We ask that you provide us with your flight details. **The trip will begin at the Belize International Airport the afternoon of March 12 and end at the airport on the afternoon of March 20, 2016.**

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application for optional trip cancellation, illness and baggage insurance will be sent to you upon registration. We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself. Mass Audubon does provide Medical Evacuation Coverage as part of the tour price. See www.insuremytrip.com

PHOTOS: Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photograph taken on the tour. We guarantee that no photos of a compromising nature will be used. If you have questions or concerns, please contact us.

Photo Credits for those shown on this brochure: Donna Cooper, TIDES, Pelican Beach Resort, Karen O'Neill.

CANCELLATION Policy: If you need to change your booking, you must inform us immediately in writing. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the Massachusetts Audubon Travel Office. Cancellations received up to 121 days prior to departure will be refunded deposits less a \$300 per person fee. For cancellations between 120 and 90 days prior to departure, all deposits will not be refunded. There are no refunds for cancellations 90 days or less from departure. We strongly urge all travelers to purchase trip cancellation insurance. You will be sent information from the Massachusetts Audubon Society upon receipt of your deposit.

Your Responsibility: Although every precaution is taken to safeguard you and your belongings, group travel trips by their nature involve a certain amount of risk. Trip participants should understand that the domestic and international trips sponsored/operated by Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon Tours) - hereafter collectively "M.A.S." - involve known and unknown risks. M.A.S. assumes no responsibility for injuries, death, financial losses or damage to clients' property caused by or occurring during participation in any of the travel trips sponsored/operated by M.A.S. Trip participants must assume responsibility for having sufficient skill and fitness to participate in the trips and activities offered or sponsored by M.A.S. Trip participants must also certify that they have no medical, mental or physical conditions which could interfere with their abilities to participate in the activities and/or trips they are participating in and they must assume and bear the cost of all risks that may be created, directly

or indirectly, by any such condition. It is the responsibility of trip participants to have in place adequate insurance to cover any injury, damage or emergency transportation costs related to their travel and/or participation in trip activities and/or to bear the costs of such injury, damage or emergency transportation costs. Because of the risks associated with the travel trips sponsored by M.A.S. we urge all trip participants to supplement their own insurance with travel or vacation or emergency response types of insurance. M.A.S. requires that all trip participants acknowledge and assume these risks by reading and signing an M.A.S. Release and Waiver and Assumption of Risk contract prior to departure.

CONDITIONS OF TRAVEL: Travelers will be provided with an itinerary and trip preparation information. It is expected that travelers will read this information prior to trip departure. Travelers will be responsible for completing an application reservation form, including the personal information and a release of liability. (see attached) Travelers will be expected to abide by the terms set for in the invoice. During the tour, travelers are asked to respect and follow the directions of their guide and leader.

Optional Extension: If you wish to join our relaxing snorkeling extension at South Water Caye, please indicate on reservation form.



BELIZE OPTIONAL EXTENSION MARCH 20 - 23, 2016

ISLAND ESCAPE

4days/3 nights

A chance to relax and reenergize in the warmth of the tropical sun, surrounded by aquamarine waters and the Belize barrier reef in the South Water Caye Marine Reserve.

Package includes:

- Meet & Greet in Dangriga
- 3 nights South Water Caye cottage
- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily
- One half-day guided boat snorkel trip
- Unlimited beach snorkeling & kayak usage
- Boat transfers between Dangriga and the island
- Applicable site fees
- Transportation from Belize City to Dangriga



PRICE: \$1100 per person, double occupancy

- There is unlimited beach snorkeling to the patch reefs offshore and kayaks for guest complimentary use around the island.
- We also offer guided boat side trips for snorkeling at various sites within the South Water Caye Marine Reserve to nearby island, patch reefs and bird sanctuary. These side trips take 1 – 3 hours at \$40USD per person based on a minimum of two people
- Snorkel gear for rent at \$12USD per set per day.

"The cottages and rooms are airy, colorful, and spacious; designed to capture the cooling trade winds with varying features appealing to all."

Most cottages are two-bedroom units with separate entrances, and each bedroom unit is sold individually. These cottages are dotted across the property. With the total width of the island property just under 250 feet, the cottages are spaced for privacy yet only a few yards from the beach.

Each of the cottage units are simply and comfortably furnished and have:

- Private entrances
- One Queen-sized bed and a twin or double bed with comfortable mattresses
- Full baths with basin, toilet and tiled showers with hot and cold water
- Large porch on the east and Smaller porch on the west
- Hammocks.

At the southern end of South Water Caye, facilities utilize "green technology" in the form of solar-powered lighting, flash heaters for hot showers, and environmentally-friendly waste facilities including composting and waste transfer back to the mainland for disposal.

South Water Caye
www.pelicanbeachbelize.com

Reservation Form

Passenger 1 Name as shown on passport: _____

Nickname for Name tag: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Passenger 2 Name as shown on passport: _____

Nickname for Name tag: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____

Email address: _____

Room Preferences:

____ I request single accommodations where available and will pay the single supplement.

____ I would like to be assigned a roommate. If one is not available, I will pay the single supplement.

Personal Information:

____ I/We are non-smokers. (If you are a smoker(s), please check here ____ and note that smoking is limited to outdoors in non-group spaces)

____ Is there anything Mass Audubon should know about your health that might impact your ability to participate comfortably on this trip? Please describe: _____

Optional 3 night extension at South Water Caye

____ Yes, I/we would like to reserve a room at South Water Caye March 20 -23, 2016 at a price of \$1100 per person.

Deposit: ____ Please find my enclosed **check** deposit of \$500 per person: Checks should be made payable to "Massachusetts Audubon Society" OR ____ Please **charge** my credit card:

VISA MC Card # _____ Exp. _____

Signature