



Collared Aracari

Beautiful Belize: Birds, Maya Monuments, and Beaches

Leader: Bob Speare
March 7-15, 2020

*Optional Belize Barrier Reef
Extension: March 15-19, 2020*

Belize is a tiny natural marvel. It contains densely-layered broadleaf forests, three types of savannas, pine forests and ridges, tropical forests, five freshwater aquatic ecosystems including lagoons and freshwater mangrove swamps, seagrass beds, mangroves, coral reefs, and the open sea.

This astonishing habitat diversity is home to over 500 species of resident and migrant birds, the second largest barrier reef in the world offering spectacular snorkeling opportunities, around 900 Maya sites, and mammals such as jaguar, manatee, tapir, and howler monkey.

This trip has something for everyone: bird every day, explore three outstanding Maya sites, swim in rivers (or the ocean on the extension), hike the Maya Mountains, canoe/tube the Macal River, or just relax on the grounds of our wonderful lodgings nestled in gorgeous natural surroundings.

Mass Audubon has a 30-year history of working with the Belizeans to protect their natural biological wealth. We know the country and its people and look forward to sharing our passion for this place. Join us!



Yellow-headed Parrots, by Mark Faherty



Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, by Mark Faherty

ABOUT THIS TRIP

FOCUS: Birds. Our days will be filled with birding, without neglecting opportunities to observe other fauna, flora, and cultural highlights.

PACE AND COMFORT: Relaxing pace compare to other birding trips! Full days of birding. Transportation will be in small bus; walks and birding will be on easy-to-moderate trails (distances up to 2.5 miles).

LODGING: Very good jungle lodges with birding right on the grounds: private rooms and bathrooms, excellent local food.

WEATHER: Generally warm (75-85F), humid, occasional rainfall.

BIRDS: Several rarely seen and highly sought-after birds among a list that should approach 250 species (plus good chances to see some mammals). Expected highlights include:

SPECIES HIGHLIGHTS

- Jabiru
- King Vulture
- Orange-breasted Falcon
- Sungrebe
- Boat-billed Heron
- Agami Heron
- 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 Hummingbird
- Azure-crowned Hummingbird
- Black Catbird
- Rufous-browed Peppershrike
- Yellow-tailed Oriole
- Black-cowled Oriole
- Yucatan Flycatcher



Mexican Hairy Dwarf Porcupine, by Mark Faherty

Day-to-Day Itinerary – Main Trip

DAY 1 March 7: Arrive In Belize – Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

Upon arrival in Belize, you will be met by our Mass Audubon naturalists and local guide outside baggage claim for our transfer to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Please plan to arrive at the International Airport in Belize City (BZE) by early afternoon. Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is just 40 ft above sea level and comprised of 16,400 acres of lagoons, creeks, logwood swamps, broadleaf forest, and pine savannah; it's a top birding destination in 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 Catbird, Yucatan Woodpecker, and the Yucatan Jay.

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. Every February, the 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 commitment and involvement. During the dry season, many resident and migratory birds find refuge in the lagoons. We have timed the trip to coincide with falling water levels to maximize the viewing opportunities of waterbirds congregated in and around the remaining water.

On and around the grounds of Bird's Eye View Lodge, we will expect to see the ubiquitous Tropical Kingbird, the Social Flycatcher, and the eye-popping Vermilion Flycatcher. In the nearby forests, we'll look for: Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan 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. We will meet this evening for our program orientation followed by a welcome dinner in the hotel restaurant. **Overnight:** [Birds Eye View Lodge](#) | (BLD)



Bird's Eye View Lodge room

Day 2, March 8: 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 can be found, including: White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Northern Jacana, Purple Gallinule, Least Grebe, Limpkin, Boat-billed Heron, Black-collared Hawk, and Wood Stork. With luck, we could also find a Jabiru, the largest wader in the Western Hemisphere. After lunch, we'll walk at an easy pace along relatively flat trails through the nearby pine forest and savannah areas to look for: Yellow-headed Parrot, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Grace's Warbler, Forked-tailed Flycatcher, and the Aplomado Falcon. **Overnight:** [Birds Eye View Lodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 3, March 9, 2020 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 two-hour drive with birding stops along the way looking for: Aplomado Falcon, Jabiru, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Laughing Falcon, and Masked Tityra. Rio Bravo is the largest terrestrial conservation area in Belize,



Ruddy Woodcreeper, by Bill Gette

comprising 4 percent of the country's total land area. With the help of Mass Audubon, it was established by Programme for Belize (PFB) 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 PFB to protect the land.

Our base here will be La Milpa Ecolodge and Field Station in the northwestern portion of the reserve, only three miles from La Milpa Archaeological Site, the third largest Maya ruin in Belize. La Milpa Ecolodge and Research Center (and PFB) is an important conservation partner for Mass Audubon. Many wonderful tropical species are readily found on the lodge property within the broadleaf, cohune and bajo forest habitats, including manakins, motmots, parrots, tanagers, toucans, trogons, and woodcreepers. Mammals are also frequently encountered with Central American Spider Monkey and Mexican Black Howler Monkey likely, and a real possibility for seldom-seen species such as Ocelot, Red Brocket, 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 and Crested Guan. **Overnight:** [La Milpa Research Station and Ecolodge](#) | (BLD)



Lamanai, by Bill Gette

Day 4, March 10: Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area

This morning travel by boat up the New River to the Maya ruins of Lamanai, with birding along the way. Lamanai, whose name means, "Submerged crocodile," was once a prominent ceremonial center of the Maya civilization. The surrounding forest is home to hundreds of species, such as the Collared Aracari, Snail Kite, flycatchers, and tanagers. After exploring, the ruins enjoy lunch and then return to the boat for the journey back to La Milpa. Birding around the lodge before dinner. This evening take a walk night walk to search for nocturnal species. **Overnight:** [La Milpa Research Station and Ecolodge](#) | (BLD)



Purple-crowned Fairy on nest, by Mark Faherty

Day 5, March 11: Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area

After breakfast, we will visit the nearby archeological site: La Milpa. This is one of the largest Maya sites, but is 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 paw prints. After a short drive back to the cabanas, we'll relax before a delicious buffet dinner. The night walks here are full of life and sound, and given the remote location, the stars here are incredible. Return to lodge for lunch. More than 400 species of birds have been identified in the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area.

This afternoon, we'll explore the open areas and forest trails of La Milpa, with good chances of seeing many wonderful forest birds, including King Vulture, Spot-breasted Wren, White-bellied Wren, Purple-crowned Fairy, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Plain Antvireo, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker. **Overnight:** [La Milpa Research Station and Ecolodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 6, March 12, 2020 Belize Zoo and the Maya Mountains

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 (~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 cool, serene stop. The zoo has an important education purpose within Belize, receiving almost 15,000 schoolchildren every year. We plan to arrive at Black Rock Lodge in the late afternoon in time to enjoy the birds from the open air



Russet-naped Wood-Rail, by René Laubach

dining hall.

The Maya Mountains in western Belize and the pristine Macal River are our destinations for the end of the tour. The lodge is nestled among 240 acres along the banks of the Macal. Nearly 300 species of spectacular resident and migratory birds have been counted on this property, including all three species of toucan, plus various flycatchers, manakins, puffbirds, tanagers, trogons, vireos, and woodcreepers. The bird list here includes Olive-throated Parakeet, Orange-breasted Falcon, Lineated Woodpecker, Pale-billed Woodpecker, White Hawk, King Vulture, Golden-hooded Tanager, Purple-crowned Fairy, Tody Motmot, and the Blue-crowned Motmot.

Black Rock Lodge has a passionate commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable operations, which makes it doubly rewarding to stay here. This lodge will be our base of operations for the next three days as we explore the beautiful Cayo District and Mountain Pine Ridge area. **Overnight:** [Black Rock Lodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 7, March 13, 2020 Maya Mountains 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 Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Ringed Kingfisher, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Brown Jay, Great Kiskadee, Squirrel

Cuckoo, Black Phoebe, Gray-necked Wood Rail, and the Sungrebe (fingers crossed!). 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 river tubing, or hiking on the lodge trails. Canoes and kayaks are also available. The view over the forest and fruit trays near the open pavilion will give us wonderful views of honeycreepers, orioles, tanagers, and toucans, among others. **Overnight:** [Black Rock Lodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 8, March 14: Maya Mountains and Xunantunich

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!) Maya 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, or canoe. **Overnight:** [Black Rock Lodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 9, March 15: Depart for Home or Transfer to Southern Belize Extension

Enjoy your last honeycreepers, toucans, and other tropical birds before breakfast, after which we must check out and head to Belize City and our flights home. Flights can be scheduled after 1:00 pm.



South Water Caye Reserve, courtesy Jaguar Reef Lodge

Day-to-Day Itinerary – Southern Belize Extension

Day 9, March 15: St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park and Jaguar Reef Lodge

Depart Black Rock Lodge for Hopkins. En route, visit the very popular St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park, which is within the Sibun Watershed. Explore its forests and unique geological features and then visit, a sunken underground cave that is approximately 300 feet wide and 100 feet deep by tube. There is an onsite changing room so bring your swimsuit! Have lunch at local restaurant then later this afternoon check in at the beachfront Jaguar Reef Lodge. The remainder of the day is at leisure to enjoy the beach. Dinner is on your own. **Overnight:** [Jaguar Reef Lodge](#) | (BL)

Day 10, March 16: Birding and Snorkeling at South Water Caye Marine Reserve

This morning there will be sunrise birding around grounds after which will be breakfast at the lodge then birding on own to explore the beach and surrounding area. Return to the lodge for lunch. This afternoon, gear up for a marine adventure by boat to snorkel along the pristine coral reef of

the South Water Caye Marine Reserve. Dinner back at the lodge. **Overnight:** [Jaguar Reef Lodge](#) | (BLD)



Sea turtle, courtesy Jaguar Reef Lodge

Day 11, March 17: Birding at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

Today experience a morning of birding at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, well-known for its healthy population of the elusive Jaguar. Feathered focus includes Crested Guan, Red-capped Manakin, Great Curassow, White-collared Manakin, Passerini's Tanager, Mealy Parrot, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Violet Sabrewing, Long-billed Hermit, Orange-billed Sparrow, and Green-backed Sparrow. Return to lodge for lunch then set out for another visit to South Water Caye Marine Reserve to explore new sites. **Overnight:** [Jaguar Reef Lodge](#) | (BLD)

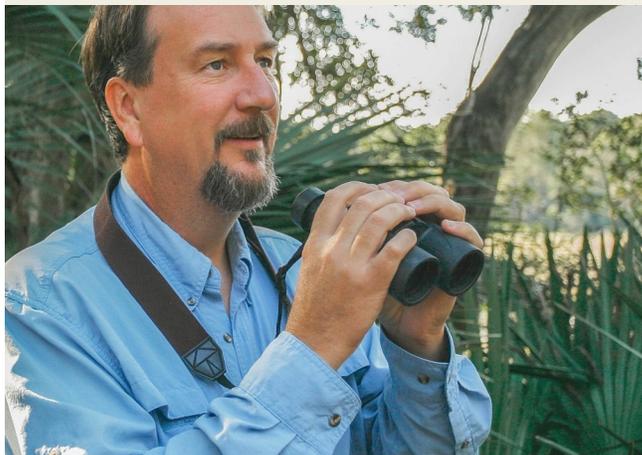
Day 12, March 18: Birding on the Sittee River and Afternoon Snorkeling

Early breakfast birding during a boat ride on the Sittee River in search of Yellow-tailed Oriole, Montezuma Oropendola, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Agami Heron, Sungrebe, Boat billed Heron, Green Heron, Crane Hawk, Bare throated Tiger Heron, Hook billed Kite, Olive throated Parakeet, and Masked Tityra. Have lunch back at the lodge and venture out for your third and final visit to South Water Caye Marine Reserve. Explore the mangroves both above and below the surface. During your time above the surface, be on the lookout for Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Laughing Gull, Sooty Tern, Brown Booby, Osprey, several warbler species and migrant thrushes, and Yellow billed Cuckoo. Visit nearby island to see Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies. **Overnight:** [Jaguar Reef Lodge](#) | (BLD)

Day 13, March 19: Farewell to Belize

Your group will transfer to the airport for flights homeward.

Mass Audubon Naturalist



Bob Speare worked for Mass Audubon for over 23 years as a Master Naturalist, Director of Wildwood Camp, and Regional Director for the Southeast, Cape and Islands region.

Throughout these years, he's led numerous trips throughout the East Coast from Newfoundland to Florida and to many desert regions including Baja California, Death Valley, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Bob has also enjoyed many trips to various parts of Central America and Cuba.

Now living in South Carolina, Bob continues to lead birding and photography tours for a variety of organizations as well as co-teaches the Lowcountry Master Naturalist program for teachers. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society and is a South Carolina Master Gardener.

Main Tour Price: \$4265 per person, double occupancy. Single supplement: \$600 (*single rooms are very limited*). Price based on a minimum of 10 travelers. If the group does not reach the minimum, additional small group supplement fee (~\$300) may be added.

Price Includes:

- All meals and accommodations as shown in the itinerary
- Services of Mass Audubon naturalist leader
- Local guides and naturalists
- All excursions and entrance fees
- Extensive trip preparation notes and bird checklist
- Transportation within Belize, including flight to and from Dangriga
- Medical evacuation insurance
- Carbon offset credits for your international flights
- All tips and gratuities (*included if we have the minimum of 10*)

Price Excludes:

- International airfare
- Passport and visa fees; trip cancellation insurance
- Airport taxes; excess baggage charges
- Use of canoe or kayak at Black Rock Lodge
- Items of a personal nature, including alcoholic beverages, laundry, and telephone calls; other items not specifically mentioned as included.

Barrier Reef Extension Price: \$2750 per person, double occupancy. Single supplement: \$200 (*single rooms are very limited*).

Price Includes:

- All meals and accommodations as shown in the itinerary
- Services of Mass Audubon naturalist leader (with a minimum of 8 travelers)
- Local guides and naturalists
- All excursions and entrance fees
- Extensive trip preparation notes and bird checklist
- Transportation within Belize, including flights
- Medical evacuation insurance
- Carbon offset credits for your international flights
- All tips and gratuities (*included if we have the minimum of 10*)

Exclusions: same as main trip (Black Rock exclusion n/a).

HOW TO BOOK

Email or call us at travel@massaudubon.org or 800-289-9504 to reserve your place.

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 (March 2019) 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.

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

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. See insuremytrip.com.

PHOTOS: Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photographs 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.

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, no deposits will be refunded, but any payment balance will. 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.

