

2025 Belize Birding for Raptors

Nov 15 - 23

Belize is a beautiful English-speaking country in Central America that has a rich tropical avifauna and a culture heavily influenced by the Mayan civilization. It also has a high diversity of resident and migrant raptors, including a recently discovered fall migrant flight of Hook-billed Kites that begins in October and peaks in November. Bird with Dr. Byron Stone, former president of TOS and raptor enthusiast and local bird experts.

This 9-day and 8-night birding and culture trip will cover three main birding locations in the country: two nights at a lodge northeast of Belize City for Yucatan specialties, water birds and a few specialty raptors; three nights with two mornings at the raptor watch at Punta Gorda and nearby great birding locations in the southern part of the country; and three days in the "Mayan Mountains" region of northwestern Belize for regional endemics, Orange-breasted Falcon and good chances for all three Hawk-eagles.



You should have the opportunity to see over 30 species of diurnal raptors, including such specialties as King Vulture, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Roadside Hawk, White Hawk, Black-collared Hawk, Snail Kite, Gray-headed Kite, good numbers of migrating Hook-billed Kites, Laughing Falcon, Bat Falcon, Orange-breasted Falcon, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Black Hawk-Eagle and maybe even Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle and Stygian Owl. Additionally, we should see many other species of birds, about 20% of which you will never see in Texas, including Ocellated Turkey, Great Curassow, Mayan Antthrush, Yucatan



Jay, tinamous, trogons, toucans, motmots, a manakin or two, parrots and parakeets, Yucatan and lots of other flycatchers, over a dozen hummingbird species, and other neotropical birds that I'm not thinking of right now.

Two species of monkeys and some other mammals are a good bet, and there is a chance to visit Mayan ruins and learn about and sample locally-produced chocolate, with plenty of good food and great scenery.

Habitats will be tropical but varied, between lowland forest and rivers in the northeast, tropical savannahs in the south, and mid-elevation tropical forests in the northwest. We will have a couple of long travel days, but with several stops en route for birding on one of those days. Walks will not be especially long or rigorous, but we will be in the tropics, where it will be hot at mid-day, when we will take meals and rest or visit cultural sights. On the final day of the tour, we will fly from Punta Gorda back to Belize City in time to catch afternoon flights back home.

JB Journeys is pleased to work with Texas Ornithological Society on this fundraising trip.

Day 1 – Nov 15, Saturday – fly to Belize International Airport (BZE)

Plan your flight to arrive Belize by 1:00 pm. On arrival, collect your bags and go through passport inspection and customs. You will be met by a guide from Lamanai Outpost Lodge who will usher you and your luggage to the van for a 1 hour trip to the river. From there it is about another hour by boat on the New River. Be sure to have a hat, waterproof jacket, sunscreen, and of course your binoculars within easy reach. It's an open-air boat to allow for wildlife viewing and there are good chances to see Boat-billed Heron, Tiger Heron, Snail Kite, Black-Collared Hawk, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Northern Jacana, Lesser Nighthawk, and Sungrebe, as well as manatee and crocodile along the way.



Check into your rooms, then meet in the lodge for the first group dinner and go over the itinerary for the next few days.

Overnight Lamanai Outpost Lodge (D)

Day 2 – Nov 16, Sunday - Maya Ruins

The Lodge sits less than a mile from the Mayan ruins of Lamanai, an extensive, largely unexcavated site that sprawls along the western shore of the lagoon. Lamanai, (Submerged Crocodile in Mayan) was occupied as early as 1500 BC and is one of the largest Mayan sites in Belize, with over 800 structures deep in the forest. Among the ruins it's possible to see many birds typical of the hardwood forest here and from the Peten of Guatemala, such as Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Pale-billed, Chestnut-colored, and Golden-olive woodpeckers, various woodcreepers, Tody and Lesson's motmots, curassows, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Slaty-tailed, Black-headed and Gartered trogons, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Black-cowled Oriole, Blue Bunting, Tawny-Crowned Greenlet, and the tiny Tody Motmot.



Return to the lodge for lunch and an afternoon rest before heading out to Indian Village, an agricultural area not far from the lodge. These growing fields or *milpas* and the second growth scrub in the area along with some savanna may show you a group of birds not found in forest, such as White-tailed Hawk, saltators, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Red-legged Honeycreepers, Hooded Orioles some of the Yucatan specialties like Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay, and Yucatan Woodpecker, Grasshopper and Botteri's sparrows, maybe even a Jabiru.

Overnight Lamanai Outpost Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 3 – Nov 17, Monday – On to the Maya Mountains

This morning, very early, start with dawn coffee, muffins, and juice in the dining room before heading out by boat to explore the New River and surrounding waterways. Be on the lookout for species such as the Jabiru, Sungrebe, Grey-throated Chats, Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, Yucatan Jay, Yellow-Lored and Yellow-Headed parrots, and a variety of herons and kingfishers.

Return to the lodge for full breakfast and to pack up. Get ready for the drive back to Belize airport where a driver will pick you up for the ride to the next destination, the Maya Mountains.

En route, you will make a stop at the Belize Zoo. You may ask 'why visit a zoo when you are in a country filled with amazing flora and fauna?' This question can be answered by reading *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* by Bruce Barcott. A book of inspiring environmental activities, it is the story of the late Sharon Matola, founder of the Belize Zoo. The inhabitants here are mostly injured or orphaned animals and the facility serves as an educational tool for visitors as well as locals, teaching them about their natural heritage.

Once you arrive at Black Rock Lodge, as you are getting to your rooms, look for afternoon activity at the local feeders. Settle into your rooms, then at dinner meet the local guide here.

Overnight at Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 4 – Nov 18, Tuesday – Birding Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

This whole day will be spent birding at the lodge, both on foot and by vehicle. You start with an early walk to see and hear tanagers, honeycreepers, and others in mixed flocks, and always checking the feeders.

A pair of Orange-breasted Falcon have resided here for a number of years, and they should be visible from many spots on property. Other species along the trails you can look for are Blue Ground Dove, Roadside Hawk, Olive-throated Parakeet, Red-lored Parrot, Blue Bunting, Barred Forest-Falcon, Rose-throated Becard, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Black-cowled Oriole.

Overnight at Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 5 – Nov 19, Wednesday - Caracol Ruins (B,L,D)

Caracol ("Snail" in Mayan) is perhaps the largest and also most historically significant Mayan site in Belize. The site covers a large plateau deep in primary rainforest and was once home to the conquerors of Tikal in Guatemala. The site was settled around A.D. 300 and was in its prime until around A.D. 650, when it went into decline. Caracol was the dominant power in the region for about a century following its great victory over Tikal in A.D. 562. The highest temple on the site is 136 ft., just higher than the pyramid at Xunantunich. Though the ruins are partially excavated, a lifetime of archeological research will be needed to excavate the ruins within 6-9 miles of the central plaza. One of the last outposts where the Keel-billed Motmot is common. Also, you may see Ocellated Turkey Crested Guan, and Great Curassow, in addition to toucans and trogons. In addition to the birds, a variety of forest-dwelling mammals including 5 species of cats live in the area and are occasionally seen. Other notable mammals include the endangered Red Brocket Deer, Yucatan Black Howler Monkey, and Red Spider Monkey.



Overnight at Black Rock Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 6 – Nov 20, Thursday - Drive to the Southern Belize (B,L,D)

After an early breakfast at the lodge, you will load onto the van for the drive to Southern Belize. The drive is 4-5 hours with comfort stops along the way, via the scenic Hummingbird Highway. You may stop at Blue Hole National Park for a picnic lunch, with chances of seeing other raptors overhead.

Arrive at Tanager Rainforest Lodge in time to check in and meet for dinner.

Overnight at Tanager Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 7 – Nov 21, Friday-Bird the Lodge, Hawk Watch, Dump Area Birding (B,L,D)

After an early coffee you'll spend this first morning birding right at the lodge. It sits on thirty acres along the Rio Grande and includes riparian, secondary growth forest, disused agricultural land, orchard, and meadow habitats. Species to search for include Black-faced Antthrush, Barred Antshrike, Great Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Black-and-white Owl, Crimson-collared Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Black-crowned Tityra, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, and Stub-tailed Spadebill.



Back to the lodge for a full breakfast, then as the day heats up, you'll head over to the official Belize Hawkwatch, where you'll meet others already in the field.

Hawkwatch programs are key components of raptor research and conservation; monitoring raptor populations, educating the public, and giving much needed economic opportunities to local biologists. Across the globe there are 388 watch sites, but only two in Mesoamerica, and formerly there were

none along the northern Caribbean coastline. To better understand raptors migrating through Belize and fill that gap in Mesoamerica, the Belize Raptor Research Institute (BRRI), now the Belize Bird Conservancy, initiated a community-based Raptor Watch Program in 2013 in Punta Gorda, southern Belize. The target species is the enigmatic Hook-billed Kite, a potential indicator species of climate change. This annual fall migration count is conducted daily by local biologists assisted by the local community and international students. The data obtained will assist in the conservation of raptors from the Neotropical and temperate zones by informing the scientific community and management agencies of changes in raptor populations.



Late afternoon you'll visit the Rice Dump Field, a swampy area just a few miles from the lodge, looking for Sora, Ruddy and Uniform crakes, Purple Gallinule, White-throated Flycatcher, Least Bittern, Short-tailed Hawk, Limpkin, and Common Tody-Flycatcher. Back to the lodge for check list and dinner.

Overnight at Tanager Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 8 – Nov 22, Saturday - Nim Li Punit Birding and Hawk Watch (B,L,D)

Birding this morning focuses on the Nim Li Punit Maya site, located just a few miles from the lodge. Nim Li Punit is a small, yet important archaeological zone located in the south of Belize. It is a modern name



meaning "Big Hat" in Kekchi Maya after an image of a ruler depicted on a stela recovered from the site. The site is centered upon the leveled summits of small hills within a richly diverse tropical forest situated in the foothills of the Maya Mountains. It was established to exploit the areas natural resources and to take advantage of the extensive trade network that existed in the region. The population has been estimated between 5,000 to 7,000 individuals.

You'll be looking for several woodpeckers (Lineated, Pale-billed, Smokey-brown, and possibly Chestnut-colored) and woodcreepers (Streak-headed, Wedge-billed, and Ivory-billed), as well as various migrant warblers and vireos. Other possible highlights include White-crowned Parrot, Keel-billed Toucan, White-throated Thrush, Hook-billed Kite, Red-legged and Green honeycreepers, Bat Falcon, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Blue Grosbeak, Montezuma Oropendola, and Rose-throated Becard.

One of these days you may have lunch at the café of a chocolate company, where they incorporate chocolate into the meal. You'll have a chance to learn the history of chocolate and its importance in the Maya culture.

Overnight at Tanager Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 9 - Nov 23, Sunday – departure (B)

After an early breakfast and a last look around, you'll drive to Punta Gorda airport for an early flight to Belize City. You should book your return flight for departure after 1 PM.

Note: The order and sites visited may vary due to weather, sightings, road conditions, and other factors beyond our control.

Local guides at each lodge will be with the group and TOS ex-president, Dr Byron Stone will be with the group throughout.

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COST:

- \$4,150 per person (TOS member) in double occupancy, with 10 participants.
- \$4,250 with 8 participants; \$4,350 with 6.
- Plus \$100 for non-TOS members, includes 1 year membership
- Single \$750. Singles are very limited. *Rooms are either a smaller room (with private bath) or a double at single rate.*
- Minimum 6 to operate, maximum 10 participants.
- To confirm your spot, please [complete the reservation form on-line.](#)
- **Deposit** \$1000 to hold space; final payment will due August 15, 2025.
- Cancellation: After 30 days, deposit is non-refundable. Once paid in full, the tour is non-refundable. Name changes may be allowed. There is no refund for unused parts of the tour. ***Travel insurance** to include trip cancellation coverage in addition to medical coverage and medical evacuation is required. Your tour leader will request proof of insurance.***

TRAVEL INSURANCE is required for this trip with Texas Ornithological Society. Please start here at [TravelGuard](#) but feel free to look elsewhere, like [Squaremouth](#), a comparison tool. We recommend trip cancellation coverage as well as comprehensive medical coverage that includes medical evacuation. MedEvac can be purchased separately as you'll see in TravelGuard's offerings. Any extra expenses due to weather or any other reasons are at your expense and must be dealt with your insurance carrier.

Also, if you are paying for your trip by credit card, check with the card company to see if they cover any insurance for travelers.

INCLUDED:

- Transportation as listed by van
- Local flight, Punta Gorda to Belize on Day 9
- 8 nights lodging with all taxes
- Services of local bilingual bird guides
- Entry fees to parks, etc
- Meals as listed
- **Basic gratuities for hotels, meals, & drivers**
- Donation to TOS
- Escorted by TOS ex-president and raptor enthusiast, Byron Stone

NOT INCLUDED:

- International airfare (to/fr Belize International BZE)
- Drinks
- Gratuities to local guides*(See suggestions)
- **Travel Insurance – required by TOS
- Personal expenses

**Suggested tipping for guides:*

Local bilingual bird guides will be with you throughout. We recommend tips of \$15-20 per day, to be given on your final day with each guide.

ACCOMMODATIONS



Lamanai Outpost Lodge is very comfortable, with spacious rooms with private bath, mini-fridge, and verandah. Delicious food (Special diets can be accommodated) is served in the dining room which overlooks the forest and the river, with Wi-Fi available in the public areas of the lodge.

Also, the Lamanai area is currently the number 1 eBird site for Belize.



Black Rock Lodge is located in the dense rainforest on the banks of the Macal River flowing through the Maya Mountains of Belize. Over 390 species of birds are possible to sight on Black Rock's property. The cabins are one room structures built to take advantage of the fresh mountain breezes. All cabins come equipped with hammocks, Wi-Fi, and have paved walkways. Rooms have ceiling fans and screened windows, en suite hot water showers, verandas with hammocks, and most have views of the river.

The restaurant is well known and most ingredients come from their own farm, including dozens of different fruits, goats offering cheese and milk, even grow their own coffee!



Tanager Rainforest Lodge (formerly The Lodge at Big Falls) is located near Punta Gorda in the Toledo District of Southern Belize. The resort is surrounded by rainforest, gardens, birds and on three sides a river. It is one of the best birding lodges in Belize, with lovely grounds, a beautiful swimming pool and a spa. .

The on-site restaurant features local foods and has its own bakery and a fully stocked bar. Rooms have hardwood interiors, en suite bathrooms with hot water showers, comfortable furnishings, fully screened windows, room safes, pool towels, and umbrellas. Kayaks and tubes are to borrow for time in the river.

NOTE: All hotels have hot water showers but may not have hot water in the sink. Also, they may not have washcloths; if you are used to using one, we suggest you bring your own along with a Ziplock bag to carry it.