Superior focus.
Designed to last a lifetime.

Endeavor HD
Engineered for performance and designed to last a lifetime

Vanguard’s Endeavor HD Spotting Scope delivers the best clarity and protection in its class. At a time when optics has become complacent, Vanguard has redefined optics technology, making the impossible now possible. The Endeavor HD features fully multi-coated optics and a phase-coated BaK4 prism, with extra-low dispersion glass (ED) giving you exceptional clarity and brightness. Endeavor HD has optimized protection with innovations like a rubber armored magnesium body, along with being 100% waterproof and fogproof. Vanguard builds optics to last a lifetime and we stand behind that with our 100% Premium Lifetime Warranty.
For over 35 years, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours has conducted birding and wildlife tours worldwide. We also operate fine wildlife cruises accompanied by our expert lecturers and leaders.

Some key reasons to travel with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours:

- Superb, world-renowned leaders living “on the spot” in South Africa, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Australia, and all over the United States with all the local knowledge at their fingertips

- Excellent and experienced office staff

- High quality tours at very competitive prices

- Guaranteed departures for all of our United States tours (excluding Alaska & Hawaii)

Sign up for our email newsletter, the VENTflash, for birding news plus discounts and special offers.

Facebook: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours
Twitter: VENTBIRD
Correspondence

From the President
JEFFREY A. GORDON

From the Editor
MICHAEL L. P. RETTER

Articles

Birding Nunavut’s Cambridge Bay
JIM RICHARDS

The 20 Best Birds in Ecuador
SAM WOODS

Birding Urban Arizona
MAGILL WEBER

South Africa: The Best of “the Birding Continent”
ADAM RILEY

A Review of World Birding Strategies
JASON LEIFESTER

Birding on Southern Vancouver Island
ANN NIGHTINGALE

Pelagic Prep: Getting Ready to Bird at Sea
DIANA DOYLE

Pelagic Directory

Why We Travel
TED FLOYD

On the cover: Travel is all about changing your perspective and getting a fresh take on both the exotic and the familiar. In South Africa, birders from the ABA Area will encounter curious Jackass Penguins on the beaches near Cape Town, experience a flush of spring blossoms during October, and notice a host of other seeming incongruities that will delight the senses and challenge expectations. Join the ABA, Rockjumper Tours, and BirdLife South Africa for a very special southern safari this October—details are in this issue on page 51!  Photo © Bjerne’s Photography
From the famed Verandah, Birds and Beauty Abound!
A Fabulous introduction to Neotropical Birding

• Spot hummingbirds, honeycreeper, toucans, motmots, jacamars & more
• On trails look for tinamous, oilbirds, antbirds, manakins, bellbirds...
• Your Ecocenter visit funds education & conservation programs

Scarlet Iris, Oilbird, and Ruby Topaz by Jay Eisenberg

New MM3 50 ED

A new level of performance for less than you might think.

Available in straight or 45° angled bodies with prices starting from $449.
Fieldscope & eyepiece combos from $749.
For product information, your nearest dealer and to order a Product Guide please phone 704 895 3046 or visit us online at www.opticonusa.com
Opticon LLC, 16501-D Northcross Drive, Huntersville, NC 28078 Fax (704) 895 3047 Email sales@opticonusa.com

Birders’ Guide to Travel
March 2014

Birder’s Guide is published by the American Birding Association, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that seeks to inspire all people to enjoy and protect wild birds.

The American Birding Association, Inc., seeks to encourage and represent the North American birding community and to provide resources through publications, meetings, partnerships, and birder networks. The ABA’s education programs develop birding skills, an understanding of birds, and the will to conserve. The ABA’s conservation programs offer birders unique ways to protect birds and their habitats.

CHAIR
Louis Morrell

DIRECTORS
Carl Bendorf
John Bertson
Michael Bowen
Matthew Fraker
Scott Fraser
Susan Jones
Kenn Kaufman
Robin Leong
John C. Robinson
Lili Taylor
Charles Teske

PRESIDENT
Jeffrey A. Gordon

FINANCE
Lisa Slocum, Accounting

PARTNERSHIPS & MARKETING
Bill Stewart, Director

MEMBERSHIPS & COMMUNICATION
David Hartley, Director
LeAnn Pilger, Coordinator
Greg Nese, Web Development

EVENTS
George Armistead, Coordinator

BIRDER’S EXCHANGE
Liz Gordon, Logistics

PROGRAMS
Bill Stewart, ABA Young Birders
Nate Swick, Bird of the Year

PUBLICATIONS
Ted Floyd, Birding
Michael L. P. Ritter, Birder’s Guide
Edward S. Brinkley, North American Birds
Ken Barron, Advertising
Ed Boster, Design & Production

VOLUNTEER SERVICES
Liz Gordon, Volunteer Coordinator

BLOG MANAGERS
Nathan Swick, The ABA Blog
John Puschock, ABA Area Rare Birds
Jennie Duberstein, The Eyrie

PAST BOARD CHAIRS
Dick Ashford (2009–2010)
Bernt E. Harriman (2006–2007)
Arnold Small (1978–1979)
G. Stuart Keith (1973–1976)
G. Stuart Keith (1970 pro tem)
Oregon’s Washington County is for the birds.

Not far from the city of Portland, Oregon is a playground rich in wildlife. Oregon’s Washington County is home to an abundance of parks and preserves, each providing diverse habitats. Hot spots Jackson Bottom Wetlands Preserve, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, Fernhill Wetlands, Cooper Mountain Nature Park, Tualatin Hills Nature Park, L.L. “Stub” Stewart State Park and Tillamook State Forest host hundreds of species of native and migratory birds. Check off your bird “life list” and plan a Washington County adventure today. Get your free copy of the Nature Passport today at oregonswashingtoncounty.com/Nature-Passport.

Banks • Beaverton • Chehalem Mountains • Cornelius • Durham • Forest Grove • Gaston • Helvetia • Hillsboro • King City North Plains • North Willamette Valley • Sherwood • Tigard • Tualatin • Wilsonville

Visit Oregon's Washington County
1.800.537.3149
oregonswashingtoncounty.com
welcome to a brand new year of *Birder’s Guides*! We are thrilled to see the overwhelmingly positive response to the *Birder’s Guide* series. The three issues we published in 2013 (Travel; Listing & Taxonomy; Gear) did much of what we hoped they would and, in many cases, more.

In 2014, you’ll see those three topics again: Travel in winter, Listing & Taxonomy in summer, and Gear in fall. We think all three subject areas have lots of life in them.

We’re also introducing a fourth topic this spring. *Birder’s Guide to Conservation & Community* will showcase the myriad things that birders and field ornithologists are doing to help secure the future of the birds and the places that we so love. Some of the material will be focused on conservation science and the discoveries we are making by using new research techniques.

But science alone doesn’t tell the whole story of the legacy that birders are building and the leadership we provide. So we’ll also shine a light on the ways in which birders are growing and strengthening the birding community, reaching out to a bigger and more diverse audience and making real progress on the ABA’s mission of inspiring all people to enjoy and protect wild birds. In short, expect a compelling, clear-eyed, and upbeat look at the ground we’re gaining and resources to help us all gain more.

Will these four annual *Birder’s Guide* themes then repeat *ad infinitum*? That depends very much on you. As I said, we’ve chosen them because we believe they are rich and will reward repeated coverage. But we certainly don’t rule out introducing a new theme or resting an established one. So do let us know what you are finding useful and worthwhile as well as other topics you think would be good for the *Birder’s Guide* treatment.

For now, sit back and enjoy a bit of armchair travel. Spring and summer will be here and gone soon enough. Winter is a great time to dream of warmer, longer, bird-filled days in locales both familiar and new. Wherever your birding travels may take you, I hope you’ll come away refreshed and enthused, with renewed dedication to exploring and sharing the wonders of birding.

Happy trails,

Jeffrey A. Gordon
President, American Birding Association
BEST OF ALASKA BIRDING (& MAMMALS)
May – September 2014
Space still available on Alaska 2014 for Adak, Gambell, Pribilofs, Nome, Dutch Harbor.

THE FABULOUS PANTANAL & Extension to CRISTALINO LODGE
July 10 – 25, 2014
Jaguars, Jabiru, Hyacinth Macaws, Harpy Eagles & More

TANZANIA & RWANDA
August 1 – 18, 2014
The Great Wildebeest Migration, Gorillas, Big Game & Birds

SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR COMPLETE SCHEDULE: www.highlonesometours.com
EMAIL: info@highlonesometours.com • 443-838-6589
Travel means different things to different people. For some birders, it’s a day trip, driving an hour or so from their homes in the Phoenix suburbs up to Sunflower to look for Gray Vireos and Black-chinned Sparrows. For a few, it’s full-fledged globetrotting, and South Africa is just one of the many locations on their bucket lists. Still others fall somewhere in between, adding some birds to their lifelists while they’re visiting relatives in Victoria, British Columbia. However you travel, I hope you will find something of use in this second issue of Birder’s Guide to Travel. We listened to your criticisms of the last issue and applied them to the content you see here. The “20 Best Birds” column and the Pelagic Directory were particularly well received, so we were sure to include them again.

Please let us know what was missing that you’d like to see in the next issue. Tell us what you liked, too, so that we can start planning to bring it back in next year’s Birder’s Guide to Travel. And we always appreciate hearing from folks who want to offer their own advice to the rest of the membership by penning an article. You can reach me at mretter@aba.org and via discussions linked to at <aba.org/birdersguide>.

Happy travels!

Michael L. P. Retter
Editor, Birder’s Guide
New TERRA ED, starting at $399:
Legendary ZEISS quality is now within every birder’s range.

Introducing TERRA ED Binoculars, a new line of premium optics that combines legendary German design and engineering with the performance features you expect from ZEISS — all at an incredible value. TERRA ED offers SCHOTT ED glass for best-in-class image quality, even in low light, when birds are more active. With comfortable ergonomics, and lightweight, waterproof construction, TERRA ED binoculars are built to handle the rigors of the field, and fully backed by ZEISS’ limited lifetime transferable warranty for extra peace of mind. Available in 8x42 and 10x42. Your adventure begins at www.zeiss.com/birding.
Diana Doyle is a licensed Coast Guard captain and birds aboard her own boat from Maine (Atlantic Puffins) to The Bahamas (White-tailed Tropicbirds). She founded the “SeaBC”, which encourages boaters to document their at-sea bird sightings <tinyurl.com/SeaBirdCount>. She’s also “Tools of the Trade” columnist for ABA’s *Birding* magazine.

Ted Floyd is the Editor of *Birding* magazine, and he is broadly involved in other programs and initiatives of the ABA. He is the author of more than 100 magazine and journal articles, and has written four recent books, including the brand-new ABA Guide to Birds of Colorado. Floyd is a frequent speaker at birding festivals and state ornithological society meetings, and he has served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations.

Jason Leifester was 12 when a chance encounter with a slightly out-of-range Phainopepla sparked his interest in all things bird-related. A family move to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas coupled with long summer road trips through the western United States with his patient parents cemented his love of birding and travel. Jason and his wife Nita live in a small town near Austin, Texas.

Ann Nightingale is Co-President of Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) on Vancouver Island, Canada, and is a licensed passerine, hummingbird, and owl bander. A former President of the Victoria Natural History Society, she leads birding field trips and coordinates the local Christmas Bird Count, which boasts more than 200 field participants. She is a co-author of the recently published *Nature Guide to the Victoria Region*. In addition to her “administrative birding” responsibilities, Ann is a frequent guest on talk radio shows, fielding spontaneous and sometimes bewildering questions on bird identification and behavior.

Jim Richards is the retired Manager of the McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve for General Motors of Canada Ltd., in Oshawa, Ontario. Also a bird photo tour leader, he spends as much time as he can birding and photographing birds in the Canadian Arctic. Jim is a co-author of Birds of Nunavut: A Checklist with Tony White. He is currently on contract with the territorial government of Nunavut to prepare an annotated checklist for all 28 of the territory’s communities.

Adam Riley has grown up with a lifelong interest in wildlife—an interest which evolved into a particular fascination with the birds of the world. Coming from a rural background in South Africa, he studied accounting and qualified as a CPA. However, Adam decided to pursue his passions and founded Rockjumper Birding Tours in 1998. Since then, he has traveled extensively throughout the world, leading tours to numerous locations, ranging from Antarctica to Alaska, Angola to Guyana, and Bhutan to Papua New Guinea.

Magill Weber has been a birder since childhood and eventually realized her dream (however briefly) of getting paid to watch birds as a bird bum and grad student, during which time she wrote her master’s thesis on the spring stopover ecology of Blackpoll Warblers. She is the author of *Door County Outdoors* (University of Wisconsin Press), and her bird photos have appeared in numerous field guides and magazines. Magill works as a lawyer and conservation consultant for Mayes Wilson & Associates, helping land trusts and landowners across the country protect land for birds and wildlife. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

Sam Woods grew up in Surrey, southeast England. Since 2005, he has been working as a full-time guide for Tropical Birding Tours and Tandayapa Bird Lodge, and has been living in Quito, Ecuador. He has guided tours throughout Ecuador and developed an intimate knowledge of its birds, and also guides in Australasia. Sam is a co-author of the recently-published Princeton guide, *Wildlife of Australia*. He is also working on future book projects for Princeton covering Central America and India.
Come PLAY in QA!

For a Weekend or a Day...
A full weekend of birding for the avid birder or the beginner.
Boat Tours, Walks, Lectures, Kayak Tours... MAY 2, 3, 4

Maryland’s Eastern Shore
JUST A SHORT DRIVE FROM BALTIMORE, WASHINGTON DC, AND PHILADELPHIA

QUEEN ANNE’S COUNTY
MARYLAND

410.604.2100
CALL FOR A FREE BROCHURE
VISITQUEENANNES.COM
EDITOR’S NOTE: Nunavut is absolutely enormous, spanning more than 808,000 square miles. To put that number into perspective, Greenland is about 708,000 square miles, and mighty Alaska is “only” 586,000 square miles. Nunavut is about the size of western Europe. But whereas western Europe has a population of nearly 400 million, Nunavut’s population isn’t even one-hundredth of one percent of that number! Fewer than 36,000 people live in Nunavut. Most of its people are Inuit; the territory’s official languages are English, French, Inuktitut, and Inuinnaqtun.

Jim Richards literally wrote the book—the checklist, in fact—on Nunavut. And as he tells us in this article, Nunavut presents remarkable opportunities for the intrepid birder. Nunavut is waaaay up there, making it the least-appreciated “East-meets-West” region in the Americas. The territory is remarkably close to both Iceland and Siberia. Accordingly, the territorial list contains such improbable combos as Short-tailed and Great shearwaters, Fieldfare and Varied Thrush, Northern Lapwing and Eastern Yellow Wagtail, and Corn Crake and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. All three puffins are on the territorial list. So is Fork-tailed Flycatcher. A Black-browed Albatross recently wandered to Nunavut, and a flock of Ruddy Shelducks famously once put down there. With the melting of polar ice and increased coverage from birders, the Nunavut list can be expected to explode in the years to come.

You can learn more about the status and distribution of Nunavut’s dynamic avifauna by studying Tony White and Jim Richards’ Birds of Nunavut: A Checklist and by regularly consulting the Northern Canada and Greenland report in North American Birds.

I have traveled to “exotic” places like Kenya, Tanzania, The Bahamas, Costa Rica, mainland Ecuador, and the Galápagos, as well as to some of the well-known birding locations within the U.S., in Texas, Florida, Utah, California, Virginia, Alaska, and Arizona. But it was not until 1983 that I got my first taste of Arctic “edge” birding, when I visited Churchill, Manitoba, for three weeks in June and July. It had such a profound impact on me that I returned every summer for the next six years.

After my trip to Churchill, I read about numerous locations in the real Canadian Arctic, like Ellesmere, Baffin, Devon, Melville, Bathurst, and Banks islands. I decided that one location in particular, Cambridge Bay on southeastern Victoria Island (now in the territory of Nunavut), seemed to host the greatest number of true Arctic species in one general area. About 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle, it seemed like the place to go. Hey, if it was good enough for the likes of George M. Sutton, David Parmelee, and Dennis Paulson to do research there, then it was good enough for me!

Fortunately, most of the major islands and communities in the Canadian Arctic are serviced daily by airplanes, and the airports can handle fairly large planes. Cambridge Bay, at 69°11’N, 105°04’W, is no exception. However, one of the main differences with this location, compared to many other Arctic communities, is the presence of a fairly extensive road network, due in part to the area being traversed by the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line. (A Cold War remnant, the DEW Line was a network of radar stations meant to pick up incoming Soviet aircraft and missiles.) The hamlet of Cambridge Bay has a population of about 1,300, mostly indigenous Inuit people.
A vast number of seldom-seen species engaged in frantic aerial and vocal displays.
Most of the major habitats can be sampled from within walking distance of one of the two main (gravel) roads that meander along the coast for about 30 miles, east and west of the hamlet, mainly along eskers (glacier-created ridges). A third road heads into the interior of the island. Renting an ATV or truck is a must for field trips beyond the hamlet, and costs start around $185/day. All Arctic communities have very high food and accommodation costs, so you must be prepared to pay two to three times what you would expect in “the south”. The hamlet has two well-stocked food stores, a bank, a medical clinic, and most other amenities (except a liquor store) necessary for a comfortable visit, including a comfortable lodge, rental units, and outfitters.

My first experience with Cambridge Bay and “real” Arctic birds was over three weeks in 1990. That year, I had timed things just right. Nesting was just getting started when I arrived, and by the time I left, some species had newly hatched young. In the central and high Arctic, there is only a small window of opportunity for the birds (and the birders) because of temperature and weather conditions. The last week of June and the first two weeks of July seem to be the peak period for most species that breed here. Enjoying 24 hours of daylight during the summer is not hard to take, either. The long hours of daylight require a few days to get used to at the start of the trip (and a few days to unwind after you get home), but they give you many options, as you can avoid birding in adverse weather. At this time of year, you can expect the best in the way of temperatures: usually 35–50°F (3–10°C). Anything warmer than that, and mosquitoes can be a problem. You should expect almost anything from a heat wave to freezing rain and snow flurries with strong, cold winds. You can experience all four seasons up here in an hour! You will need plenty of warm clothes, and you should dress in layers so that you can adapt to the changing winds that, although light, almost never let up. From the south, they bring warmer air up from the North American prairies; any other direction brings in cold air off the pack ice.

The lure of the Arctic is not so much a quest for lifers as it is to experience a vast number of seldom-seen species engaged in frantic aerial and vocal displays. And seeing birds that we in the “south” usually encounter as drab migrants, here in their full breeding plumage, is such a treat. On my first trip, I was able to add a few new species to my life list, such as Yellow-billed Loon, Rock Ptarmigan, Sabine’s Gull, and Long-tailed and Pomarine jaegers, but it was the density and diversity of birds...
that really impressed me—and the fact that they didn’t seem to regard humans as predators. This trust allowed me to get extremely close to most of the 50 or so regular species here, and it made photography almost easy for a change. Scopes are not necessary, but good binoculars and a GPS unit are basic necessities, along with waterproof footwear.

I have a love affair with Cambridge Bay—its wildlife, its people, and its solitude—and have returned for 13 summers since my first visit 25 years ago. As well, I have had the pleasure of introducing many people to the splendor and beauty of the area by conducting private photo workshops here. If the birds were not enough, imagine the thrill of seeing Arctic fox, Arctic hare, and lemmings—and stopping your vehicle while muskoxen cross the roadway ahead of you. Other mammals (caribou, ermine, seals, Arctic wolf) may be seen as well but are not encountered regularly. Unlike in most Arctic communities, polar bears are not a hazard in Cambridge Bay. Wildlife officers and hunters here tell me that they are seldom, if ever, encountered. There are reports of Grizzly Bears, but they are quite rare, too, so should not be considered problematic. Still, you should always ask for up-to-date information from the locals, just to be sure.

Imagine, too, the intense color of the tundra as millions of dwarf wildflowers of stark whites, vivid yellows, deep purples, and soft pinks compete with each other for space amid a tapestry of ponds and hillsides dotted with waterfowl and shorebirds, and all during the same general window of time required by the birds. It is spectacular, to say the least.

By combining my own field notes with the limited literature about birds of the area, I have compiled a checklist of 106 species for the general area, of which 50 species are known to breed. You can expect to see no fewer than 43 species during any one visit of about five days.

By mid- to late June, most of the breeding birds are on territory, although some stragglers are still arriving. By then, too, most of the snow and ice has melted; only small drifts remain in sheltered locations, and ice remains only on the larger lakes. Within days of their arrival, birds disperse across the tundra to actively engage in nesting duties. The now-familiar songs of Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings are heard around the clock. As well, the vocalizations of Stilt and Semipalmated sandpipers are always within earshot, and the frequent “booming” calls of male Pectoral Sandpipers are almost eerie. The early breeders, such as Rough-legged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, and Common Raven, are well under way by the time I usually arrive in late June, but most other species are just getting started.

In the village itself, species such as Common Raven, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, and redpolls are common “yard” birds; a drive along the bay road here will produce Iceland and Thayer’s gulls as well as Red-throated Loon and eiders.

Just west of the hamlet, near the airport, a well-marked road will take you to the DEW station. Driving past the station, you enter a very productive area for Tundra Swan, jaegers, loons, phalaropes, American Golden-Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, and other shorebirds, as well as Arctic hare and Arctic fox.

Back on the main road, past the airport, you can drive to West Arm. It is here in dry tundra where you have your best chances for Horned Lark, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Rock Ptarmigan.

On the east side of the hamlet, you will find the town dump, a great place for Glaucous, Sabine’s, and Thayer’s gulls, as
well as Sandhill Crane, Arctic Tern, King Eider, and phalaropes. Crossing the river emptying Grenier Lake, you can swing right to visit the old townsite and some historic features; look for Semipalmated Plover and Rough-legged Hawk.

Continuing eastwards on the Pelly Road, you encounter many ponds and wet marshy areas. It is along this 12-mi. (16-km) stretch to Mt. Pelly where you have chances to see American Golden-Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Stilt, Semipalmated, and Pectoral sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstone, Long-tailed Duck, Brant, Cackling Goose, and Snowy Owl. Here you may also see muskox and Arctic fox.

Your final destination at the end of this road is Mt. Pelly. Around the base, you may encounter Baird’s Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, and American Pipit; it’s also your best chance for finding Yellow-billed Loon. The top of this “hill” plays host to species such as Peregrine Falcon, Rough-legged Hawk, and Red Knot.

Most everywhere, in the shallow ponds and small lakes that are free of ice, you encounter large numbers of Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, Brant, Tundra Swan, Northern Pintail, King and Common eiders, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, and Red-throated Loon. The mating antics of the eiders, especially, are a spectacle.

Pacific and Yellow-footed loons nest along the shorelines or on small islands in the larger ponds, and Brant, Glaucous, and Sabine’s gulls, and Arctic Tern inhabit those same islands.

In the wet, grassy tundra and along the edges of small ponds, you may find breeding species such as Willow Ptarmigan, Sandhill Crane, White-rumped, Pectoral, and Stilt sandpipers, Red and Red-necked phalaropes, and Short-eared Owl. If dwarf willow is present, Common and Hoary redpolls may be around.

The upland areas of heath-lichen provide nesting habitat for Greater White-fronted Goose, Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Semipalmated and Buff-breasted sandpipers, Parastic Jaeger, Horned Lark, and Lapland Longspur.

On the eskers and boulder-strewn ridges, you can find a variety of nesting species: Rough-legged Hawk, Rock Puffin, Semipalmated Plover, Baird’s Sandpiper, Pomarine and Long-tailed jaegers, Snowy Owl, and Snow Bunting. Gyr falcon and Thayer’s Gull are found along the bay coast fairly regularly, and I have seen some rare visitors there, such as Slaty-backed and Ross’s gulls. The coast west of the hamlet is also an ideal area to view ringed seals.

During periods of high lemming populations, certain bird species seem to explode in numbers. It was during one such year (1996) that I counted six nests of Rough-legged Hawk, 18 nests of Pomarine Jaeger, and 16 nests of Snowy Owl on slight mounds right along or within sight of the roadway.

If you have ever contemplated a trip to the Arctic, what are you waiting for? Why not investigate some destinations like Bathurst Inlet, Pond Inlet, and, yes, Cambridge Bay? Tour groups go to these locations every year. I would recommend Eagle-Eye Tours <eagle-eye.com>, or you can head out on your own if you are adventurous.

Getting there

Using Edmonton, Alberta as a base, you can connect on flights to Cambridge Bay via Canadian North or First Air. Most international carriers using Edmonton can arrange for connecting flights, or you can do so yourself. Depending on when your incoming flight arrives in Edmonton and your connection to Cambridge Bay, you may have to stay overnight. An internet search reveals many hotels near the airport with shuttle services. There is one short stop between Edmonton and Cambridge Bay, at Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories.
Accommodations
• Green Row Executive Suites: 1 or 2 bedrooms with fully equipped kitchen, washer, dryer, etc. <greenrow.ca>
• Arctic Island Lodge: <cambridgebayhotel.com>

Vehicle Rental
• Wilf MacDonald 867-983-2918
• Haomik Enterprises 867-983-2156

If you stop over in Yellowknife
National Car Rental has a desk at the airport, and many hotels are easily found on the internet. There is good birding outside of town amid forest and lakes for breeding birds such as Horned and Red-necked grebes, Lesser Yellowlegs, California, Mew, and Bonaparte’s gulls, Tennessee and “Myrtle” warblers, Gray Jay, Rusty Blackbird, and Lincoln’s Sparrow. You may also be fortunate enough to locate Harris’s Sparrow, or Boreal, Northern Hawk, or Great Gray owls.

I thank Dawn Wilson for providing me with a great place to stay and a vehicle for nine glorious summers, and Doug Stern for the use of his house four other summers. I also extend my thanks for logistical assistance to Rhiannon Leshyk, Wilf MacDonald, Craig Machans, Mark Mallory, and the many friendly people of Cambridge Bay. I would like to acknowledge the friendship of my various Arctic field companions, including Gerry Binsfeld, Glenn Coady, Glen Fox, Tyler Hoar, Bruno Kern, Mike McEvoy, George Peck, Mark Peck, Jim Robinson, Roy Smith, Dan Strickland, and the late Bob Taylor. Thanks to Attima Hadlari, Albert Kuhnigk, and Richard Knapton for use of their detailed field notes. Finally, a thank you to Ron Tozer for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. ☛
When I started thinking about a “Top 20” list, I began with the continent of South America. But I quickly scaled it down to just Ecuador, because I was afraid of reducing the continent’s 3,300 species to a list of only 20! As a resident of Ecuador, I believed it should be easy to make a list, but this is an area of the globe where diversity goes off the chart. The tiny country of Ecuador boasts more than 1,600 species. This game was clearly going to be a challenge, but if it were easy, it wouldn’t be nearly as fun, right?

The Best Birds in Ecuador
Like many birders, I love lists. Some of us even center our lives on lists, and it could be argued that we have an unhealthy obsession with them. I greatly enjoy the remarkable diversity of choices that comes out of these “top” lists. In every tour I lead, whether it be in Ecuador, China, or Papua New Guinea, the final top five votes for “birds of the trip” are always plugged with the odd surprise or two (for instance, Masked Water-Tyrant in Ecuador; Willie-wagtail in Papua New Guinea; Large-billed Leaf-Warbler in China), and they rarely follow a pattern from group to group, which is the very reason such lists absorb my thoughts. If you asked me to compile this list again tomorrow, I must confess that I might just come up with an entirely new selection.

First, a word about my criteria. I wanted the list to reflect the diverse bird groups found in Ecuador. Ecuador boasts more than 130 species of hummingbird and in excess of 100 species of tanager, but I restrained myself from picking a batch of hummers or tanagers to fill my entire top 20.

This list is, of course, riddled with my own idiosyncrasies and open to huge disagreement among the birding community. I encourage this. I hope to cause some birders to spill beer in fevered surprise, and spark a debate on my choices.

1. Crescent-faced Antpitta
   (Grallariaca lineifrons)

The Crescent-faced Antpitta is the ultimate antpitta, a tiny bird with crisp white crescents on its face. It hangs out in some of the more remote parts of the country, close to treeline, often in dense stands of bamboo. I have known
this bird to cause such extreme excitement within a group that tour participants cursed uncontrollably from sheer exhilaration!

2•White-plumed Antbird
(*Pithys albifrons*)  
One of the great Amazonian experiences is running into an ant swarm, with an attendant flock of birds preying on the fleeing insects. This bird is an obligate ant-follower, meaning that if you don’t find the ants (and you do not always find army ants), you probably will not find the bird. Watching the understory vegetation twitching under the weight of excited antbirds dashing in and out of the front edge of the swarm is exciting enough, but then this bird appears. It has chestnut-colored underparts and a crisp white headdress which forms an erect crest above the head and runs like two gleaming white sideburns down either side of the bill. This may not be the rarest antbird, but it is definitely the dandiest.

3•Sword-billed Hummingbird
(*Ensifera ensifera*)  
With more than 130 species of hummingbird in Ecuador, perhaps more than two should have appeared on my list. I picked this one not because of any remarkable plumage features, but because it possesses the longest bill relative to body size (bill = 4.5”; body = 5”) of any bird on Earth. It looks like it has been drawn from the pen of a comic artist, rather than formed as a result of evolution within the natural world.

5•Flame-faced Tanager
(*Tangara parzudakii*)  
Flame-faced is my absolute favorite tanager—the Blackburnian Warbler of the tanager world. (As you’ll see, I’m addicted to Blackburnian Warblers.) It is a genuinely breathtaking bird. Flame-faced Tanager, even in a country loaded with fashy birds, causes an intake of breath for me each and every time. It has black upperparts decorated with handsome patches of blue-green. The seduction, though, is all at the head end, which is a vivid, fire-orange, and responsible for the familiar “Blackburnian effect”. Although this species holds its plumage all year long, it just feels like the vibrant plumage of spring.

6•Andean Cock-of-the-rock
(*Rupicola peruvianus*)  
To come to the cloudforests of Ecuador and not see a cock-of-the-rock could be considered a crime against birding. Sightings are special not just because this bird looks dramatic—the males are bright scarlet with black-and-silver wings and a permanently-crested red head which hides the bill underneath—but also because of the nature of the encounter. To observe an Andean Cock-of-the-Rock requires walking down muddy trails into the cloudforest before dawn, and overlooking the species’s regular lek display trees. As light begins to break through the canopy, ugly, pig-like squeals betray the arrival of the first male cocks-of-the-rock. Then, suddenly, a number of males appear in quick succession. It’s a kind of domino effect, whereby all the other males in the area also begin displaying frantically, for fear that if they do not get in on the act, a visiting female will pass them by.

7•Ocellated Tapaculo
(*Acropternis orthonyx*)  
You may be surprised to see a tapaculo on this list. After all, tapaculos are generally small, gray, mouse-like birds of very limited appeal. However, the Ocellated Tapaculo breaks the mold: it is big, far from mouse-like, and instead of being dowdy and gray, it sports plumage dominated by a constellation of white polka dots and a bold, brick-red face. It does retain the skulking characteristics of the
family, making any sighting within Ecuador’s cloudforests very special.

**8• Jocotoco Antpitta**  
*(Grallaria ridgelyi)*

Antpittas get world listers very excited. They are furtive species that are far easier to hear than see. With the exception of the “easy” Tawny Antpitta, seeing any of this group in Ecuador feels special. But the Jocotoco Antpitta has a particularly interesting history. It was only discovered in 1997, and was a truly remarkable find because, unlike many more cryptic species which have been discovered in recent times, it is a large and distinctive bird. Thus, when Robert Ridgely and his colleagues saw the bird for the very first time on 20 November 1997, there was absolutely no doubt they were looking at a completely new species. The species’ discovery led to a scramble to buy the land and save it from extinction, and, ultimately, to the formation of the Jocotoco Conservation Foundation. The foundation has since not only purchased the land where this discovery was made, but also bought land at eight other reserves, saving many imminently threatened species in the process. Ironically, this species, one of Ecuador’s rarest birds, is now remarkably easy to see by virtue of a feeding station and the habituation of a particularly cooperative pair.

**9• Banded Ground-Cuckoo**  
*(Neomorphus radiolosus)*

Few species boast near-mythical status, but this one certainly can. Indeed,
all five of the *Neomorphus* ground-cuckoos hold a special allure for regular visitors to the Neotropics. They are extremely difficult to see, even after spending months in the field. The two authors of the Ecuador field guide spent years collecting birds and describing new species, and logged many, many long hours in the field, yet neither saw this bird during their decades of research. Ground-cuckoos have the added charm of being ant-followers, making sightings of them all the more exciting, as they appear, dramatically, in a frenzy of action around the center of a swarm. This is how I saw my first one, running in to snatch insects fleeing the lead phalanx of an ant swarm in the Andes.

10 • Orange-throated Tanager
(*Wetmorethraupis sterrhopteron*)

Ecuador is graced with a profusion of gorgeous and colorful tanagers. In my mind, this one stands head and shoulders above most of the rest. Not only is it a large and beautiful species, it is also rare, confined to the foothills of the far southeast. It has a tangerine-colored throat and black upperparts, with cerulean-blue panels in the wings. It inhabits the treetops, so “warbler neck” often results from searching for it. But it’s another source of the “Blackburnian effect”: its throat glows from within the dark recesses of the canopy.

11 • Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan
(*Andigena hypoglauca*)

I simply had to pick a toucan, as they have brought such joy to me and the many groups I have led in Ecuador. The mountain-toucans hold a special magnetism; they comprise a small group of inconspicuous, though colorful, species, and are confined to the scenic Andean cloudforests. They are characterized by a largely blue body—unusual among toucans—and beautifully patterned bills. Given its cloudforest habitat, it’s often seen perched on branches that are decorated with deep-red tank bromeliads, copper-colored moss, and gray-green lichens, making for quite a sight indeed.

12 • Cream-colored Woodpecker
(*Celeus favus*)

This woodpecker is exactly what it says on the box. It is a woodpecker, and it is cream-colored. The thing is, woodpeckers are just not meant to be this color! It’s an Amazonian species, so you often see it from a canopy tower while perched in the treetops and surrounded by magnificent rainforest.

13 • Giant Conebill
(*Oreomanes fraseri*)

This tanager family member is the high-Andean equivalent of a nuthatch, and it has a finicky preference for “hatching” within distinctive, red-barked *Polylepis* trees. The stands of these trees, which oxymoronically occur above treeline, exist amid the scenic windswept páramos that are home to Andean Condors. These hardy woods can often appear birdless, until the silence is broken by a jumbled warble that reveals the presence of a conebill within. Finding conebills in the dense stands is not easy, but it is well worth the effort for such a handsome bird. They are dove-gray above, with a burnt red underside, and white flashes on the cheeks.
cies has special appeal because of its ability to eke out a living in such an inhospitable environment.

14•Ocellated Antbird
(Phaenostictus mcleannani)
This boldly-patterned antbird is arguably the most attractive of them all. It is rust-colored, with striking black scale-like markings over most of the body, and a large azure-blue patch of facial skin. It is also an obligate ant-follower, meaning that a sighting of this species is usually associated with the excitement of discovering a pulsating ant swarm. Insects frantically attempt to flee the leading phalanx of the ants, and in the process, are regularly picked off by the attendant ant-following birds in a frenzied rush of feeding activity.

15•Orange-breasted Fruiteater
(Pipreola jucunda)
This species makes the list because of its sheer, unadulterated gaudiness. The male sports a jet-black hood, shamrock-green upperparts, and a yellow underside that is surpassed by its garish orange throat. It’s another bird that brings on symptoms of the “Blackburnian effect” (the sharp intake of breath associated with seeing the first male Blackburnian Warbler of the spring).

16•Scarlet-and-white Tanager
(Chrysothlypis salmoni)
The male of this species is the brightest, most vivid of all scarlets above, with the most pristine, spotless white underneath. It also has the pleasant virtue of following mixed-species feeding flocks, which can include such hallowed, colorful company as Scarlet-breasted Dacnis and Emerald Tanager.
17•Elegant Crescentchest
(Melanopareia elegans)
This species lives in the dry Tumbes region of southwestern Ecuador, where many of the birds are dowdy brown-and-gray things—ideal for living in this relatively colorless, scrubby ecosystem. This one, though, bucks that trend. It has a striking black highwayman’s mask, a creamy throat and eyebrow, and a black chest band bordered below with rich cabernet. It is anything but dull, and brings a welcome splash of color to this habitat. The crescentchests have a checkered taxonomic history. Formerly considered a group within the largely dowdy tapaculo family, they have since been recognized as a distinct family in their own right.

18•Booted Racket-tail
(Ocreatus underwoodii)
This bird is a living cartoon. With its minuscule stature; comical, fluffy white boots; and odd tail, it seems like it has been created by sticking the end of a motmot onto the back of a hummingbird. This species regularly tops “bird of the trip” lists in Ecuador.

19•Long-wattled Umbrellabird
(Cephalopterus penduliger)
While many of the birds in this list are brightly colored, or even gaudy, this species is just black. But what it may lack in chromatic qualities, it more than makes up for in terms of shape. The male of this large species of cotinga gathers with other males at lek sites to display for females. When displaying, he transforms himself from a vaguely crow-like bird into something entirely different. He erects his crest feathers, which expand into something resembling a Teddy Boy haircut from the ’50s, and simultaneously extends a large wattle down from his chin. The wattle can be more than 10 inches long! This gives the bird a remarkable silhouette, quite unlike any other on Earth. And it’s all accompanied by an incredibly low-pitched, cow-like moo!

20•Andean Condor
(Vultur gryphus)
Ecuador’s national bird, the Andean Condor is one of the largest birds on Earth, with a wingspan of 10.5 ft. The appeal of this bird comes from both its immense size and its beautiful surroundings. It is a bird of the high Andes, where it can often be seen soaring effortlessly above spectacular, snow-topped volcanoes. It appears large and all dark except for its “Elizabethan” white neck ruff, and when it banks, it reveals gleaming white “solar panels” on its upperwings.

For those of you who have not visited Ecuador, I hope this list encourages you to venture here. For those of you who have visited, I hope you’ll stop by the Birder’s Guide website <www.aba.org/birdersguide> to share your own Top 20 list. Or perhaps some of my choices will even inspire you to come back to the country I am pleased to call “home”.

And one final thought: I am riddled with guilt. Should I have included Hoatzin? or Velvet-purple Coronet? or Toucan Barbet? No, no, no, I really must stop this!
CHAMPIONS OF THE FLYWAY:
BIRD ENTHUSIASTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD!
JOIN IN EILAT FOR THIS UNIQUE 24 HR COMPETITION!

What is it?
The “Champions of the Flyway” is a major international fund-raising bird race based on the concept of the American Big Day. Competing teams from around the world will try to log as many species as possible in a 24 hour period in one of the world’s finest migration destinations, Eilat. The goal is to raise money for the campaign against illegal hunting in SE Europe in conjunction with BirdLife International.

Get involved
You can either:
• enter a team and compete to become one of the champions of the flyway

or

• support a team and be part of the conservation effort to protect Europe’s migratory birds.

TO ENTER THE COMPETITION AND FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO: www.champions-of-the-flyway.com
Phoenix and Maricopa County

Birding Urban Arizona

Sunset over Phoenix from Piestawa Peak.
Photo © jgareri
Sprawling, urbanized Phoenix, Arizona has always lived in the shadow of popular birding destinations to the south. Aesthetically, there is no comparison to the iconic canyons of southeastern Arizona, but as more birders visit, Maricopa County is getting some good word of mouth. Birding in Phoenix can be exciting—with the possibility of Mexican rarities, eastern vagrants, and (around water recharge facilities) even coastal species. Phoenix and its suburbs lie at the center of Maricopa County, which boasts a list of more than 450 species and counting. The Phoenix area also offers reliable spots for Le Conte’s Thrasher, Gray Vireo, the recently split Bell’s and Sagebrush sparrows, and the now-ABA-countable introduced Rosy-faced Lovebird. If you’re passing through the Phoenix area, consider a visit to the following birding sites.
Gilbert Water Ranch, in suburban Gilbert, entered the collective consciousness of ABA birders across the country in 2005, when a Streak-backed Oriole was discovered here, and then hit news feeds again in December 2010, when a Baikal Teal spent nine days in the area. Due to its popularity with visiting and local birders, 273 species have been recorded at the preserve, including Cave Swallow, Elegant Tern, Groove-billed Ani, and a number of eastern warblers.

Located about 15 miles east of central Phoenix, the park includes a series of trails and native plantings around wastewater recharge ponds. Birding is good here year round. Photographers will find staggeringly close views of waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds, with diversity and numbers highest in the winter months. Neotropic Cormorant, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Cinna-
Mon Teal are common. Check Inca Dove flocks in dry basins for Ruddy Ground-Doves, which are seen here most winters. Rosy-faced Lovebirds can often be found in the mesquites near the children’s play area and around the astronomy observatory. Desert specialties like Curve-billed Thrasher, Abert’s Towhee, Verdin, and Gambel’s Quail are abundant residents. An average outing during the summer months should yield about 50 species, and during the winter and migration periods, lists of more than 100 are possible. Birding walks are offered throughout the year.

Parking is free and easy, though it can get crowded on weekends. From Phoenix, take I-10 East to US-60 East. Exit at Greenfield Road (Exit 185). Proceed south on Greenfield Road 1.4 miles to Guadalupe Road. Turn left (east) onto Guadalupe Road. Two parking areas are located just east of the intersection on the south side of Guadalupe Road. For more information, go to riparianinstitute.org.
#2 Baseline–Salome Thrasher Site

Many a lifer Le Conte’s Thrasher has been ticked at the “Thrasher Site”, a nondescript piece of state trust land about 45 miles west of Phoenix. Five species of thrasher—Sage, Le Conte’s, Bendire’s, Curve-billed, and Crissal—can be found here in the winter. The saltbrush flats also harbor the recently-split Sagebrush Sparrow, common in the winter months, with the occasional wintering canescens, or “Mojave”, Bell’s Sparrow. Brewer’s Sparrow (winter), Loggerhead Shrike, Verdin, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher are also common. Le Conte’s, Crissal, Bendire’s, and Curve-billed thrashers are resident here, but are easiest to find from January to March, when they sing from the tops of mesquites. Arriving well before sunrise and waiting near your car along the road for the birds to start singing is the tried-and-true method for finding Le Conte’s. Note that the use of recordings is discouraged at this site. Dress warmly in the winter; this area is much colder than Phoenix.

From Phoenix, head west on I-10 to AZ-85 (Exit 112). Take AZ-85 south for 4.1 miles to Baseline Road. Turn right, heading west on Baseline Road for 8.4 miles to Salome Highway. Take a sharp left on Salome Highway. Immediately pull off and park along the right side of the road (west side of Salome Highway). Cross an old wire fence, and start looking for thrashers on the west (actually more southwest) side of Salome Highway near the intersection. Almost all thrasher sightings are less than 500 meters from the road.

#3 Sunflower

If you find yourself in the aptly named “Valley of the Sun” during the scorching hot summer months, a trip to Sunflower is in order. Sunflower is located about 45 miles to the northeast of Phoenix in the Tonto National Forest. Along the scenic drive, the elevation climbs several thousand feet as you pass through Sonoran desert, chaparral, and then rocky, juniper-studded hillsides.

Sunflower is worth birding any time of year, but is most visited in late spring and early summer, when multiple pairs of nesting Common Black and Zone-tailed hawks draw photographers. Sunflower is also one of the most reliable local spots for breeding Gray Vireo.

Sunflower refers generally to a small residential neighborhood along Sycamore Creek and several more miles along a
long-closed highway known as “Old Bee-
line Highway”. The best strategy for bird-
ing Sunflower is to bird along the road in
the neighborhood, moving your vehicle as
you go. Local residents are accustomed to
birders and may point out hawk nest sites
in the neighborhood. Watch for hawks
soaring overhead within Turkey Vulture
kettles, as well.

After about 1.5 miles, the road ends
at a roadblock and cul-de-sac. Park here
and walk around the roadblock to the old
highway, crossing onto public land (Tonto
National Forest). At this point you can
bird along the old highway, which is a
flat, easy walk, although you will have to
walk around some earthen road barriers.
The old highway goes for miles, but most
birders concentrate on the first mile or so
between the roadblock and a U.S. Forest
Service workstation.

In summer, the sycamore-dominated
riparian forests along the creek are alive
with the sounds of breeders, including
abundant Bell’s Vireo, Cassin’s Kingbird,
Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Rufous-crowned
Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak, Hooded
and Bullock’s orioles, Blue Grosbeak, Yel-
low-breasted Chat, and Summer Tanager.
Walking along the old highway on summer
nights, you can kick up Common Poorwill
and hear Elf Owl and Western Screech-
Owl. The chaparral- and juniper-covered
slopes near the roadblock and upslope
from the old highway are good for Gray
Vireo (in summer), Juniper Titmouse, and
the occasional Black-chinned Sparrow.
In the fall and winter, look for Townsend's Solitaire, Lawrence's Goldfinch (uncommon), Western Bluebird, Green-tailed Towhee, and Red-naped Sapsucker. Careful checking of wintering White-crowned Sparrow flocks may turn up a stray White-throated or Harris’s sparrow.

From Phoenix, take AZ-202 east to Country Club Drive (Exit 13) and follow signs north to AZ-87 (Beeline Highway). Go 41.0 miles north on AZ-87 to mile marker 218. Get into the left lane and take a left across oncoming lanes of highway traffic to enter Sunflower.

#4 - Glendale Recharge Ponds

The Glendale Recharge Ponds have been open to birders only for the past few years, but the site has grown quickly in popularity with local birders, who have discovered a rapid succession of rarities. The site now has a list of more than 215 species, including 15 species of gulls and terns and 28 species of shorebirds—impressive for the middle of the desert. Rarities have included Ruff, Red Knot, Roseate Spoonbill, Elegant Tern, and Eurasian Wigeon. The first nesting record for Arizona of Least Tern came from here recently (one of the adults was a California-banded bird).

Located about 12 miles west of central Phoenix in suburban Glendale along the mostly dry Agua Fria River, this is a working recharge facility owned by the local water utility. The ponds are surrounded by a private airport, a Dodgers/White Sox baseball complex, and the Arizona Cardinals football stadium. Access is by foot only. The site has been completely stripped of all vegetation, and birding it means hiking across dusty berms along open canals and recharge control structures. Summer is brutally hot, with zero shade, and visits should be attempted only in the early morning hours.

The riparian area along the Agua Fria River harbors resident desert species, including Curve-billed Thrasher, Verdin, and Abert’s Towhee, and, during migration, Blue and Black-headed grosbeaks, Western Tanager, and Bullock’s Oriole. Water levels in the recharge basins fluc-
tuate considerably from day to day, and birding is very dependent on water levels. In the cooler months, check the American Pipit and Horned Lark flocks in dry basins for longspurs—these basins have yielded Lapland Longspur, one of only a few local records, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. August and September are best for shorebirding. Baird’s, Pectoral, and Solitary sandpipers are regular in fall, along with Snowy Plover. From September to November, check for vagrant gulls. Records include Heermann’s, Mew, Herring, Western, Glacous-winged, and Sabine’s.

From Phoenix, head west on I-10 to AZ-101. Take AZ-101 north to the Camelback Road exit and head west on Camelback Road to 107th Avenue. Go right (north) on 107th Avenue and follow the road until it ends at the ponds. You can either follow the gravel road up to the left and park on a small graffiti-covered bridge, or proceed to the right (east) down the gravel road (toward the Cardinals Stadium), and park in a gravel/dirt lot at the other end of the ponds. Do not leave valuables in your car. Birders have reported recent vehicle break-ins. Solo birders should use appropriate caution.

#5 - Encanto Park

Before Rosy-faced Lovebird was added to the ABA Area list, Encanto Park was a rarely
Naturetrek
Expertly guided birding tours worldwide ... a choice without equal

We offer members of the American Birding Association:

- 410 tours & cruises in 105 countries
- Competitive, unrivaled tour prices
- A comprehensive selection of birding, botany & wildlife tours worldwide
- The widest choice of birding & wildlife tours to Europe, Nepal & India (Tiger tours a specialty!)
- Customized itineraries for groups & individuals, arranged on request
- 28 years of operation & experience
- Expert guides; expert & friendly office & support staff
- Fully licensed tour operator, bonded & insured for your full financial protection

... why travel with anyone else?

visit www.naturetrek.co.uk
email info@naturetrek.co.uk
call +44 1962 733051
office hours Mon - Fri until 1230 (Eastern Time)
birded urban park in central Phoenix. Now, with birder visits on the rise, other decent birds have been detected (a Lewis's Woodpecker recently spent the winter here), but the Rosy-faced Lovebirds remain the primary draw. Desert species like Gila Woodpecker, Verdin, Anna's Hummingbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Abert's Towhee are common residents.

From Interstate 10, exit 7th Avenue and head north to Encanto Boulevard. Take a left on Encanto Boulevard and proceed west eight blocks to 15th Avenue. Take a right on 15th Avenue and head a few blocks north to the park entrance near Wilshire Drive. Keep your vehicle windows down along the entrance road to listen for these noisy exotics. Rosy-faced Lovebirds are generally found around the parking lots bordered by the playground, 15th Avenue, the golf course pro shop, and the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department buildings. Look and listen for Rosy-faced Lovebirds in palms (where they breed), other exotic trees, and mesquites. The palm trees on Amp Island, on the other side of the park off Encanto Boulevard, are also good places to look.

Parking is free and generally easy, but this park is well-loved by the public for its golf course, Enchanted Island amusement park, fishing lake, and sports complex, so it is extremely busy on weekends. Get there early for the best viewing. If you can't find Rosy-faced Lovebirds in the park, you can always walk the streets of the Encanto–Palmcroft neighborhood (between 15th Avenue and 7th Avenue) south of the park and the Willo neighborhood (between Central Avenue and 7th Avenue) east and south of the park. These neighborhoods are safe at all times of the day, although the same cannot be said of neighborhoods west of the park. More up-to-date information on Rosy-faced Lovebirds can be found at <tinyurl.com/Phoenix-lovebirds>.
2014 ABA Young Birder Camps

Camp Colorado • July 8–14, 2014
YMCA of the Rockies • Estes Park, Colorado
Join us as we explore Colorado from grasslands to glaciers! From the shortgrass prairie of northeastern Colorado to the aspen groves and alpine tundra of the Rocky Mountain National Park, Camp Colorado 2014 has it all!

Camp Fee: $1195.00 includes all lodging, meals, transportation during camp events, instructional sessions and shuttle to and from Denver International Airport.

Camp Avocet • August 10–16, 2014
The Virden Center • Lewes, Delaware
Our newest ABA camp in its second year will be based at the University of Delaware’s stunning Virden Retreat Center in historic Lewes, Delaware, only minutes away from two major National Wildlife Refuges and a short ride to six, ecologically-based birding regions!

Camp Fee: $1195.00 includes all lodging, meals, transportation during camp events, instructional sessions and shuttle to and from Philadelphia International Airport.

Questions? Need more details?
Log on • events.aba.org/aba-young-birder-camps
Email Bill • bstewart@aba.org Call Bill • 719.884.8240

• ABA Camps are open to all young birders aged 13 to 18.
• Fabulous field trips led by the ABA Staff and guest instructors will be punctuated by terrific educational workshops.
• Scholarships Available: The ABA, through the generous support of our sponsors, provides limited scholarships to help young people who are interested in birds to attend our camps. Go to aba.org/yb/scholarships.html for details.
South America, with far more species than any other landmass, is without a doubt “the bird continent”. But Africa is “the birding continent”, and perhaps nowhere else are birds as brightly colored, abundant, and easy to see!

The “Rainbow Nation” of South Africa represents the very best of the continent and is one of the planet’s most pleasurable destinations for travel. Along with offering unrivaled birding and wildlife viewing, world-class infrastructure, and low travel costs, South Africa has been listed by Conservation International as one of the world’s 17 megadiverse nations; it harbors a large proportion of the planet’s fauna and flora. On the birding front, South Africa boasts the largest number of regionally endemic bird species of any African country, as well as rich seabird diversity and many widespread, yet no-less-spectacular African birds. Add to this the greatest wildflower show on the planet, fine food and wines, friendly people, fascinating history, and scenic splendor, and it’s not hard to see why South Africa is such a popular destination.
“the Birding Continent”
South Africa offers 846 bird species, including more than 160 regional endemics, so there are many choices to make when planning a trip. This article covers just two areas in South Africa: Cape Town and Kruger National Park. The combination of these two key regions provides the best that South Africa offers. Cape Town is one of the world’s most beautiful cities, and Kruger is renowned for its vast size and teeming populations of large mammals. Both offer superb birding opportunities.

Nestled beneath the impressive, flat-topped Table Mountain, Cape Town is situated on the southwestern tip of Africa (not the southernmost tip, as is sometimes claimed—an accolade belonging to Cape Agulhas). This windswept peninsula was originally settled by a now-extinct Khoisan hunter-gatherer tribe known as the Standlopers (meaning “beachwalkers”), but the city was founded in 1652 when Jan van Riebeeck was sent by the Dutch East India Company to set up a
Dideric Cuckoo. Photo © Adam Riley

Bateleur. Photo © Adam Riley

Goliath Heron. Photo © Adam Riley

Kruger National Park. Photo © Keith Barnes
South Africa

supply station for its ships sailing between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies (now called Indonesia). Cape Town has since grown into a huge metropolis of nearly five million people spread over most of the Cape Peninsula. Within the city limits are more than 30 nature reserves, including sprawling Table Mountain National Park, which protects all elevations of the mountainous spine of the Cape Peninsula, from the 3,300-ft. (1,006-m) high Table Mountain to the rugged Cape Point at sea level. What makes the Cape region so special for naturalists is that its isolated Mediterranean climate has produced the smallest yet most diverse of the world’s six floral kingdoms: the Cape Floristic Region. More than 9,000 vascular plants, most of which are endemic, flourish in this biome, which is also known as Fynbos (“finebush”). Famous endemic plants include a staggering variety of Protea, Erica, and Restio, and these in turn provide habitat for a variety of endemic birds. Most sought-after are two species belonging to families endemic to southern Africa: Cape Sugarbird and Cape Rockjumper.

Cape Town also provides access to other habitats, including the rich offshore upwellings of the Benguela Current, which attracts hundreds of thousands of pelagic birds and supports populations of several endemic seabirds, including Jackass (or African) Penguin and three species of cormorant. Further inland, the Fynbos (pronounced FAYN-boss) is replaced by the semidesert plains of the Succulent Karoo (kuh-ROO), a distinct habitat region that supports its own variety of endemic bird species. All these habitats can be visited on day outings from a single comfortable base in Cape Town. Key outings for a chance at all the local specialties are listed below.

The Cape Peninsula • A day may be profitably spent exploring the rugged peninsula and sites within the city. The immaculately arranged Kirstenbosch National Botanical...
Garden is a great starting point and abounds with birds. Helmeted Guineafowl (belonging to the African-endemic family Numididae) are particularly approachable here, as are raucous Cape Spurfowl. Look for the lovely Cape Batis and Southern Boubou in the more forested sections, and if you are very lucky, you may also locate the tricky Knysna Warbler. The protea gardens attract birders and nectar-loving birds alike, and here one is bedazzled by stunning Orange-breasted, Southern Double-collared, and Malachite sunbirds while regal Cape Sugarbirds watch from atop brilliant flowering proteas. As the day heats up, keep an eye out for soaring raptors, which often include Red-breasted Sparrowhawk, Forest Buzzard, and an as-yet-undescribed buzzard species provisionally named “Elgin Buzzard”. The scenic drive southward to Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve offers numerous stunning views, and the final destination—dramatic Cape Point—is even more spectacular. The mountains, grasslands, and Fynbos protected by this wonderful reserve provide superb birding, mammal viewing, and herping. Target species include a variety of endemics, from Gray-winged Francolin and Hottentot Buttonquail (if you are very lucky!) to Cape Siskin and Cape Grassbird. With regard to mammals, look out for eland (the world’s largest antelope), bontebok, the endangered Cape mountain zebra, and troops of comical chacma baboon. Numerous reptiles and amphibians also occur here, most noticeably angulate tortoises and prehistoric-appearing black girdled lizards. Other nearby locations worth visiting include Table Mountain, Strandfontein, Rondevlei Nature Reserve, and Tokai.

**Pelagic birding and the coastline**

The cold upwelling of the Benguela Current off Cape Town supports a wealth of pelagic seabirds, with large concentrations of albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, and prions gathering in the deeper water at the edge of the continental shelf. Birding is excellent year round. At the peak of diversity, from August to October,
you can expect Shy, Black-browed, Atlantic Yellow-nosed, and Indian Yellow-nosed albatrosses; Southern and Northern giant-petrels; White-chinned Petrel, Sooty and Great shearwaters; Antarctic Fulmar; Black-bellied and Wilson's storm-petrels; Subantarctic Skua; and Cape Gannet. Birding around commercial fishing trawlers can be truly spectacular, with a cloud of seabirds following in a vessel’s wake to feed on fish offal and bycatch. Carefully search through the thousands of birds present for less common species, such as Wandering and Northern Royal albatrosses and Great-winged, Soft-plumaged, and Spectacled petrels. Cetaceans are almost always encountered; regulars include Bryde’s, humpback, and southern right whales and common and dusky dolphins. South African fur seals can also be expected. A day off the Cape is likely to be a highlight of any trip to South Africa! Coastal sites also offer terrific birding opportunities, and Boulders Beach at Simonstown is among the best. Here, boardwalks take you into the heart of a large Jackass Penguin breeding colony, and hours of entertainment can be had observing these curious birds’ antics. Keep a lookout, also, for three endemic species of cormorant: Cape, Bank, and Crowned. African Black Oystercatcher and Hartlaub’s Gull can be spotted among the numerous terns and shorebirds.

West Coast National Park • An hour north of Cape Town, this park protects 107 square mi. (27,600 ha) of prime Fynbos, grassland, and shoreline. During the spring wildflower season (which peaks from August to September), the area erupts into a blaze of flowers that is truly one of the world’s most remarkable natural phenomena! The vast Langebaan Lagoon is the winter stronghold for thousands of migrant shorebirds and supports large numbers of Greater and Lesser flamingos, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, and other waterfowl. The surrounding short, coastal vegetation (Strandveld) is home to Southern Black Korhaan, Cape Penduline-tit, Karoo Lark, Fiscal Flycatcher, and...
the rare and magnificent Black Harrier. Another of the reserve’s prominent sights is the Common Ostrich, which strides across the low, vegetated dunes. In addition, several mammal species inhabit the plains that dominate the park. Red hartebeest, springbok, Cape grysbok (the previous three all ungulates), bat-eared fox, and the elusive caracal (a cat) are all possible.

**Rooi-Els** (ROY-chlz) • Tucked into the rugged Hottentots-Holland Mountains overlooking the Cape Peninsula, this location is key for one of South Africa’s finest endemics: the handsome Cape Rockjumper. Though strikingly plumaged and conspic-
South Africa

uous when vocalizing, this charismatic species possesses an incredible ability to disappear among the boulders. Rocky outcroppings and slopes also support Verreaux’s Eagle (which preys predominantly on the abundant rock hyrax), Rock Kestrel, the strange Ground Woodpecker, and Sentinel and Cape rock-thrushes. Nearby, thick mountain Fynbos is the favored habitat of the beautiful Victorin’s Warbler, among other Fynbos specialties.

Tankwa Karoo • Roughly three hours drive inland from Cape Town, the Karoo is the semi-arid central plateau of South Africa and offers endless vistas and stark beauty. The open flats are home to species such as Karoo and Spike-heeled larks; Tractrac, Sickle-winged, and Karoo chats; the elusive Karoo Eremomela; the delightful Rufous-eared Warbler; and Yellow and White-throated canaries. Pale Chanting Goshawks may perch conspicuously on any vantage point. It is worth stopping to listen for the distinctive flight calls of Namaqua Sandgrouse or the strange croaking of Karoo Korhaan. If you’re fortunate, Ludwig’s Bustard, Black-headed Canary, and Black-eared Sparrow-Lark may be found here. Rocky canyons harbor Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, White-backed Mousebird, Acacia Pied-Barbet, Pirit Batis, and Namaqua, Layard’s, Chestnut-vented, and Fairy warblers.

A 2.5-hour flight from Cape Town to Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport will whisk you to a much different, subtropical world. Kruger National
Park stretches 220 mi. (354 km) along South Africa’s northeastern border and protects a staggering 7,580 square mi. (19,632 square km) of pristine lowveld habitat. This park is part of the 13,500 square mi. (34,965 square km) Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which includes adjacent reserves in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The park boasts numerous world-class tourist facilities, including a selection of modern camps with excellent accommodations and restaurants, a superb network of roads, and numerous picnic and viewing sites. Both self-driving and guided trips can be done in the park, making it a popular venue for local and international tourists. Two weeks can easily be spent traveling through the park, but at least four days should be set aside as a minimum. Kruger is excellent year round; however, bird diversity is augmented during the warmer austral months (October to March) by numerous “winter” visitors from Eurasia and farther north in Africa.

The park consists of 13 habitat zones, ranging from open grasslands to dense woodlands, plus isolated rocky outcrops and the Lebombo Mountains. The park’s bird list is impressive. More than 550 species have been recorded, and first-time visitors are astounded by the sheer volume of birds encountered the moment they enter the park. Because the mixed woodlands (also known as bushveld) have the high-

Greater Flamingos. Photo © Adam Riley
est avian diversity, you should spend a lot of time birding here. Birds often move in mixed flocks, which are usually led by the vociferous Fork-tailed Drongo. Common flock members include Yellow-breasted Apalis, Brubru, Neddicky, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, African Paradise-Flycatcher, and Rattling Cisticola. The woodlands are packed with species from typically African bird families: hornbills, bee-eaters, rollers, kingfishers, robin-chats, barbets, and woodpeckers. The starling diversity is a sheer delight, and visitors are regularly blinded by iridescent Greater Blue-eared, Cape, and Burchell’s glossy-starlings. Finches are also popular with birders, and the number of species is staggering. Names such as Green-winged Pytilia, Jameson’s Firefinch, and Violet-eared Waxbill only hint at the exquisiteness of these delicate birds. One of the highlights of birding this habitat is bumping into a party of enormous Southern Ground-Hornbills. These unusual-looking birds spend their days patrolling the woodlands for scorpions, spiders, and snakes, which they toss into the air and swallow whole (and alive)!

All of Kruger’s camps and picnic sites provide excellent birding and permit birding on foot. **Visitors are bound to vehicles throughout the rest of the park due to the presence of dangerous mammals.** Within the camps, many of the birds have become extremely habituated after years without human disturbance. In fact, you may have to guard your meal from an overzealous Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill or a bold Gray Go-away-bird! Productive birding and photography can be enjoyed while quietly stalking the trails and paths that wind through the camps. Look out for species such as African Green-Pigeon, White-throated Robin-chat, Bennett’s Woodpecker, and the multicolored Purple-crested Turaco.

Areas of more open grassland—especially towards central Kruger—host a bevy of different species: Common Ostrich, Secretarybird, Kori and Black-bellied bustards, Shelley’s and Swainson’s francolins, Small Buttonquail, Crowned Lapwing, Zitting Cisticola, and African Quailfinch. Rocky outcrops (locally known as kopjes) host their own avifauna, including Mocking Cliff-chat and Striped Pipit. The raptor density throughout Kruger is astonishing and a sobering reminder that raptors have been decimated outside of large conservation areas. Bateleurs are almost constantly overhead, sweeping low over the savannah in search of carrion and small prey. Martial Eagles watch from high perches, and snake-eagles (both Brown and Black-chested) abound. African Fish-Eagle (a close relative of the Bald Eagle) is regularly encountered along rivers and lakes, and numerous other eagles, buzzards, kites, sparrowhawks, goshawks, falcons, harriers, and kestrels can be expected. Vultures are also a prominent feature. No fewer than five species are regularly encountered, and they often signal a large cat kill.

Numerous rivers, lakes, and human-made dams in Kruger provide habitat for an exciting array of waterbirds. Large species predominate and are found here in densities that no longer exist outside of the park. Nowhere in South Africa are Saddle-billed Stork, Goliath Heron, and African Finfoot as easily seen. Several other large species also occur, including the Black Stork, African Openbill, Yellow-billed Stork, and the unique Hamerkop. Giant, Pied, and Malachite kingfishers hunt conspicuously along watercourses, but only the most fortunate birders will come across such cryptic species as Greater Painted-
Snipe, White-backed Night-Heron, and Pels Fishing-Owl. Denser forests along some of Kruger’s rivers host other superb birds, including Narina Trogon, Trumpeter Hornbill, and the aptly named Gorgeous Bushshrike.

The availability of sunset and night drives in Kruger has opened up a whole new avenue for birders. Plan to take at least one during a stay in the park. Eleven or more species of owl are possible, with the most likely ones to be encountered including Southern White-faced Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl, and African Scops-Owl. African Barred and Pearl-spotted owlets are more often found during the day. Other night birds you may see include Square-tailed and Fiery-necked night-jars, Spotted and Water thick-knees, and Bronze-winged Courser.

It would be almost criminal—and next to impossible!—to concentrate only on birds in Kruger. Mammals cannot be avoided even by the most hardened birders. It is common to be stuck on Kruger’s roads as you wait for a lumbering herd of a thousand Cape buffalo to cross to a drinking point, or to be entertained by the antics of a troop of mischievous chacma baboons as they frolic in the traffic. Even Ground Woodpeckers. Photo © Adam Riley

Black Stork. Photo © Adam Riley
elephants and rhinos regularly hold up the tourist crowds, and, in those cases, you may only pass when Kruger’s original inhabitants allow!

Kruger offers unrivaled opportunities for observing big cats. About 2,000 lions, 1,000 leopards, and 120 cheetahs reside in the park. Prides of lions are usually found lounging in the shade or near waterholes during the day, but early morning starts and night drives can provide exhilarating opportunities for watching lion behavior. The thrill of experiencing lions roaming at close quarters cannot be easily described. Leopards have a reputation for being nearly impossible to spot, but in Kruger their high density and relative habituation provide the visitor with excellent chances of encountering one. Cheetahs are the toughest of the big cats to find because they tend to avoid areas dominated by lions and occur at lower densities. They are diurnal hunters, and you may luck into a chase by this fastest of land mammals.

Other predators to keep an eye out for include the endangered African wild dog, packs of which are most regularly encountered roaming the southern section of the park, and spotted hyena, which is often seen patrolling the roads at dawn and dusk.

Matriarchal herds of African elephant are a regular sight. Kruger’s elephants are famously relaxed and sometimes even surround your vehicle. Herds of Cape buffalo are always accompanied by oxpeckers. Usually these are Red-billed, but if you are lucky, a Yellow-billed Oxpecker may show itself. Another popular animal is the world’s tallest, the giraffe, which occurs at high densities in Kruger. Rhinoceros of both species (white and black) are present, but the former is more regularly encountered than the more shy and aggressive black rhino. Smaller mammals can provide just as much excitement as big ones, especially such characterful creatures as dwarf mongoose, vervet monkey, and the notorious honey badger (thanks to YouTube). No fewer than 148 mammal species occur in the park, and you never know when you might snag the tricky ones, such as ground pangolin, aardvark, roan antelope, and sable antelope. It is unusual to locate fewer than 20 species of mammals in a day. Other regularly-encountered species include impala, Burchell’s zebra, blue wildebeest, hippopotamus, common bushbuck, reedbuck, waterbuck, greater kudu, and common warthog.

This article covers only two relatively small regions of South Africa. With its incredible diversity of wildlife and flora, amazing scenery, ease of travel, and friendly people, it’s no wonder that South Africa has become one of the world’s most popular birding destinations. If Africa is on your bucket-list, then South Africa should be seriously considered for your next birding adventure. On behalf of the South African birding community, we welcome you to the Rainbow Nation.

SUGGESTED READING

Mammals:

Reptiles and Amphibians:

Plants:

Other Wildlife Guides:

Travel Guides:
Bradt and Lonely Planet Country Guides.
ABA South Africa Safari

October 7-17, 2014 • Capetown and Kruger National Park

ABA Safari Staff: Jeff & Liz Gordon, Adam Riley, Forrest Rowland, George Armistead, and more.

Big game, incredible birds, an amazing group of people all gathering for a great cause.
Join the ABA, Rockjumper Worldwide Birding Adventures, and BirdLife South Africa for an utterly unique Safari experience.
Safari profits will help support local conservation efforts through BirdLife South Africa.

Fee: $3500 includes all lodging, meals, and transportation during safari.

Log on • events.aba.org | Email • events@aba.org | Call • 800.850.2473
Sometimes, a Birding magazine article comes along at exactly the right time. The September/October 2008 issue had just such an article for me: Keith Barnes’s “Birding the World: Strategies for the Modern Birder”. By chance, I was giving serious thought to my own birding strategy, albeit without Keith’s wealth of first-hand knowledge.

I’d been interested in birding outside the ABA Area since childhood, when I would see advertisements in Audubon magazine for places like the Asa Wright Nature Centre on Trinidad. By the time I entered college, I started dipping my feet in the Neotropics, with road trips into northeastern Mexico on several occasions.

In 2000, I made my first birding trip to a country that didn’t border the U.S., when my wife and I went to (big surprise) Trinidad and Tobago. In the years that followed, I took short trips to Ecuador and Panama, interspersed with lots of trips around the ABA Area. But in 2008, I started devising a more ambitious plan.

I knew that I would never have the opportunity to
travel the world at will, making repeated trips to distant countries in an effort to find a large percentage of the world's birds. I don’t play the lottery, and I have no wealthy relatives who will, make me rich someday. But a more modest target was within reach. My interest in geography predates my interest in birds, and I thought that another goal—to visit every continent at least once—would help me expand my birding horizon.

I spent a lot of time looking at birding tour catalogs and websites as I began to formulate my plan. Antarctica was quickly scratched from the list. I’d love to go to Antarctica, but for the price of a trip there, I could take two or three trips to other fantastic locations. No, I would focus on add-
And then Keith’s article was published. His recommendation for those he called “dabblers” (people who were not addicted to travel, but would make four major world birding trips) aligned well with my plan, although my goal was a little different.

The article focused on maximizing a bird list while visiting the fewest countries. I was less concerned about a total list number, although I am a lister. Instead, I decided to visit places that held particular interest for me, and not just because of the birds. Other wildlife, scenery, and food were also important.

**Favorite Birding Moment**

**South Africa:** Taking the time to observe a Southern Masked-Weaver carefully threading long strands of grass into the nest he was building.
I wanted to pay special attention to bird families, which would be my measure of world bird diversity. I chose to follow the Clements Checklist of Birds of the World to keep track of everything. Clements seemed the best option for my purpose, bearing in mind that all checklists are moving targets, especially as DNA analyses provide clearer information about everything from what constitutes a species to the relationships among major groups of birds. Keith’s recommended trips were longer than the ones I would routinely be able to take due to work and other commitments. And his plan for a dabbling trip didn’t include Europe, because the European continent doesn’t offer as many species as tropical countries do. Keith suggested trips to the Neotropics (Ecuador), the Afrotropics (Kenya), Asia (Thailand), and Australasia (eastern Australia), with an estimated total of 1,700 to 2,300 birds.

I’d already traveled to Ecuador (though to a lesser extent than Keith recommended), so Africa was to be my first step along my new path. While Kenya and South Africa had already traveled to Ecuador and then to Kenya, it was having some political instability at the time that made me nervous. Instead, I settled on a trip to lovely South Africa.

I spent a little more than two delightful weeks there in January 2009. I saw 353 bird species, and all but 16 were new for me. I also added a remarkable 38 new families. Africa has more than its share of great mammals, and I enjoyed more than 40 species, with Karoo and Kruger national parks standing out as prime places to see them. South Africa also introduced me to the “full English breakfast.” It was hard to return to my cold cereal at home after enjoying that every morning.

Favorite Birding Moment

Australia: Driving around in circles in the dark in a dry pasture near Hay until we finally found our target, a Plains-wanderer.

Australia:

Red dirt and mallee at Round Hill Nature Reserve in New South Wales, Australia. Photo © Michael L. P. Retter

Driving around in circles in the dark in a dry pasture near Hay until we finally found our target, a Plains-wanderer.

Favorite Birding Moment

Australia:

Superior Fairywren in Australia. Photo © Jason Leifester
A Review of World Birding Strategies

Favorite Birding Moment

Thailand: Watching a male Rusty-cheeked Hornbill pass small fruits to his mate that was walled inside their nest in a large tree in Kaeng Krachan National Park.

Group looking for Giant Nuthatches at Doi Chiang Dao in Thailand.

A mere nine months later, I was crossing the Pacific Ocean on my way to eastern Australia. I spent almost three weeks there, starting in the tropical northern part of the country near Cairns and finishing the trip in cool, windy Tasmania. I tallied 401 bird species on this trip, of which 367 were new. I also picked up another 32 new bird families. It was the last opportunity I would ever have to add such a large number at that taxonomic level during a single trip. Australia felt a lot like my native Texas, except for the accents, the driving on the “wrong” side of the road, and the fact that you have to dodge kangaroos instead of white-tailed deer on the highways.

By February 2011, I was ready to suffer through another long, miserable flight, and I headed to Thailand for almost three weeks, focusing on the central and northern parts of the country. This time I saw a sensational 449 species. I began to see the first effects of overlap on this trip. It didn’t really show up in the number of species, as 395 of these were new. But I “only” added 12 new families. As you might expect, the food was a real bonus on this trip. We had family-style meals for lunch and dinner almost every day, and I enjoyed all of them. The trip also turned me into a harsher critic of my favorite Thai restaurants around Austin, Texas. My wife and friends are weary of the “This isn’t as good as what I had in Thailand” comments.

The guide in Thailand noticed my interest in new families, and questioned...
using that as a marker for world bird diversity. He suggested that I focus on genera, rather than families; to make his point, he said, “If you’ve seen a Cooper’s Hawk, you’ve essentially seen a Sharp-shinned Hawk. But you sure haven’t seen a Harpy Eagle!” I can’t disagree with that. Of course, I have no intention of ignoring a Harpy Eagle, should I get the chance to see one, just because I’ve had plenty of encounters with common hawks back home. I was only trying to set a more manageable target: 229 extant families, compared to 2,165 genera. Nevertheless, I started tracking new genera as well after that trip.

I completed the final leg of my initial plan in June 2012 with a short trip to Spain, spending most of my time in two mountain ranges: the Picos de Europa and the Pyrenees. As expected, the bird list was shorter for this trip. I saw just 168 species, including 107 new ones. I picked up three new families, too. With the exception of one rainy day, this trip was ruled by beautiful weather and spectacular scenery.

So, how do my results stack up to the

Favorite Birding Moment

Spain: Having a Wallcreeper fly right past me at eye level before landing on a low, rocky overhang less than 50 feet away in Picos de Europa National Park.

European Stonechat in Spain. Photo © Jason Leifester

Photo © Ignacio Yufera

Birding the steppe around Aguero, Spain. Photo © Jason Leifester

March 2014 | Birder’s Guide to Travel
predictions Keith made in his article? It’s hard to make direct comparisons. Keith’s article assumes that the reader has extensively birded the ABA Area, but I interpreted his totals to be based solely on the four trips he suggested for a dabbler, with ranges resulting from overlap among the trips. Some of those species also occur in the ABA Area, and they wouldn’t be new to the traveling birder, so I’m not sure how they factor in. Plus,
I’ve made various additional birding trips (including a week in Costa Rica between my trips to Thailand and Spain), which affected my personal results.

In any case, my personal list now has 2,541 species, which represents about a quarter of the world’s birds. I’ve encountered 1,050 genera of birds, which is just under half of the world’s total. Of the 229 bird families, I’ve crossed paths with 183, more than 80%. I essentially doubled my numbers in all those categories since I initiated my plan and made the trip to South Africa.

Does this mean I’m ready to put away my passport and revert to destinations closer to home? You probably can guess the answer to that question. Keith used the term “moderate” to describe the next level for world birders beyond dabblers, and I am ready to graduate. There are still so many places—and birds—I want to see, and I’ll never get to all of them in my lifetime. But while I still have the ability and the means to travel, I’ll have a lot of fun along the way.

Addendum
After I submitted this article, I continued to take international birding trips. I call it “Phase 2” of my plan. Cost, timing, and duration of the trips are still major factors, but I’ve also been choosing destinations in order to see areas of the world that are of particular interest to me.

Southern South America was the first place I decided to go after Spain. I spent two weeks in November 2012 birding Chile, from Santiago south to Tierra del Fuego. Chile’s bird list is limited compared to other South American countries, but I still saw more than 200 species, of which 144 were new, along with four new families. The scenery in the Southern Andes was as spectacular as I’d imagined, and I had an opportunity to savor a lot of fresh seafood. I recommend conger eel stew (calddillo de congrio) if you haven’t tried it.

My most recent trip was to Brazil in July 2013. I’d wanted to see the rapidly disappearing Atlantic rainforest. Because my non-birding wife was joining me and she prefers single-site vacations, we chose to spend a week at the lovely Guapi Assu Bird Lodge in the mountains northeast of Rio de Janeiro. Bird diversity and endemism are high in that region. I picked up 173 new species out of a total of 275 seen and encountered three new families. That puts my list today at 2,858 species, 1,160 genera, and 190 families. I hope many more trips will follow.

I’m not typically one to give unsolicited advice, but I have some suggestions. If you’re interested in building an
A Review of World Birding Strategies

impressive list while taking some great trips, then read Keith’s article and treat it as the gospel truth. I’ve met Keith, and I follow him on Facebook. The man knows world birding.

In more personal terms, I think birding—like any hobby—should be about the joy it brings to your life. If that means trying to see as many species as you possibly can, then more power to you. If you find the idea of all this international travel and tour groups and listing distasteful, and would rather focus your efforts on carbon-neutral bike rides to your local birding patch, that’s great. I have international wanderlust, and as long as I’m able, I plan to keep traveling. You never know what may happen in life or what the political situation may be in some country you’d like to visit or how climate change and habitat destruction may affect bird populations. So my suggestion is simple: Visit your “most wanted” place on your next trip. Treat it like it’s your last trip, and enjoy every minute of it.

**Favorite Birding Moment**

**Brazil:** Working hard to find a Southern Antpipit that was slowly walking across the forest floor as it occasionally sang its loud, shrill song.

**View of a wetland and the Serra do Mar at Guapi Assu Bird Lodge in Brazil’s Atlantic Rainforest.**

Photo © Nita Leifester
Why you should travel with Rockjumper?

- Our annual repertoire of 250 birding tours covers the world’s prime birding sites in 100 countries and all 7 continents
- Our skilled and experienced professional tour leaders will ensure you find the world’s most sought-after birds
- Our tour leaders are fun, energetic and motivated
- Over 15 years running specialized birding tours
- The most generous loyalty program in the industry
- Our tours represent excellent value
- We offer customized private tours in addition to our scheduled departures

Please visit our website for more info on our wide selection of tours.

Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com
Email: info@rockjumperbirding.com
Tel: +1-888-990-5552

COLOMBIA, The Holy Grail of Birding!
Most species-rich country on the planet.

Your Premiere, Local Operator for Custom and Group Tours to Colombia’s 5 Natural Regions:
Andean Region and Interandean Valleys
Caribbean Region and Santa Marta Mountains
Pacific or Choco Region
Amazon Region
Orinoquia or Llanos Region

Scheduled Departures
Jul 1 – Jul 15, 2014
Dec 2 – Dec 13, 2014
Jan 6 – Jan 20, 2015

More than 1900 species
A Mecca for Endemics (70+)
Lowest Group Size (8 birders)
Alluring Specialties and Diversity

(USA and Canada toll free) 1-855-631-8907
(USA) 541-891-9394
(Colombia) 57 318-594-2891
chriscalonje@colombiabirdwatch.com
www.colombiabirdwatch.com
Birding on Southern

Fisgard Lighthouse overlooks the entrance to Esquimalt Lagoon.

Photo © Dave Logan
Imagine an island in the Pacific with lush rainforests, rugged coastlines, sandy beaches, famous hiking trails, and close to 400 species of birds. Did you think of Canada?

Located on the west coast of Canada, Vancouver Island is a big island—290 miles (460 km) long—but an island nonetheless. You won’t find venomous snakes, poison ivy, poison oak, skunks, porcupines, moose, or possums on Vancouver Island, but if you are very lucky, you might see a wolf or a cougar. Birding is typically done on “island time”—relaxed and easy—although there is enough diversity to keep even a serious lister busy.

Nestled in the rainshadow of Washington state’s Olympic Mountains, the climate of southern Vancouver Island is temperate throughout the year. The summers are warm and generally dry, and the winters are cool, but much less rainy than nearby Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle, Washington. Temperatures fall below freezing occasionally during the winter, but prolonged cold snaps are rare. This moderate climate makes the area one of the first suitable stops—and often the wintering destination—for many northern species on their southward migration. Victoria’s Christmas Bird Counts have recorded as many as 154 species on a single day, and more than 220 species overall.

Victoria is the capital city of British Columbia and the hub of southern Vancouver Island. With a population of about 100,000, Victoria is a vibrant city with a rich cultural heritage, excellent restaurants, and a variety of outdoor activities for birders and nature lovers alike.

Sky Lark. Photo © Liron Gertsman
345,000, the city is big enough to offer most amenities, but small enough to make people feel instantly comfortable. Tourism is the region’s major industry, and each year millions of visitors experience high tea at the Empress Hotel, take a trip to the Butchart Gardens, or spend time at the Royal British Columbia Museum. When people think of Victoria as a birding destination, however, they often think of a single species: Sky Lark.

**Sky Lark**
A target of many listers and Big Year birders is the Sky Lark, which was released in Victoria along with several other British bird species in 1913. European Goldfinches, Linnets, Blue Tits, and European Robins were also in the crates transported on the four-week sea and train journey, but none managed to sustain a viable population. Only the Sky Larks thrived, increasing to a peak estimated at more than 1,000 in the 1960s. Since then, development and intrusions into agricultural and fallow fields have reduced their preferred habitat, and the population has plummeted to fewer than 100. The most likely places to find Sky Larks are at Victoria International Airport and in the agricultural fields along Central Saanich Road and nearby Lochside Drive near Martindale Road. The best seasons to find Sky Larks are spring and early summer, when their spectacular aerial courtship displays make the birds easy to find.

**Western Specialties**
Other sought-after birds include American Dipper, Bewick’s Wren, Pacific Wren, Steller’s Jay, Varied Thrush, Bushtit, Spotted Towhee, Anna’s Hummingbird, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee, which is the only chickadee species documented on southern Vancouver Island. All of these can be found year-round in suitable habitat. Spring and summer additions include Black-throated Gray, Townsend’s, and Orange-crowned warblers; Pacific-slope, Willow, Hammond’s, and Olive-sided flycatchers; and Hutton’s, Warbling, and Cassin’s vireos.

Most local birding destinations are quite accessible, and many are well suited for people with mobility issues. The shoreline features prominently on any day’s birding.
route. Clover Point, located only a short distance from downtown Victoria, is a great spot to look for coastal species, including Harlequin Duck, Rhinoceros Auklet, and other alcids, as well as many gull and shorebird species. Rarities frequently turn up here, despite the human and vehicle traffic. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Snowy Owl, and Snow Bunting are among the uncommon species that have been seen on this tip of land. Cattle Point in nearby Oak Bay provides a view to the east, and is another rarity trap.

One of the nicest loop trails near downtown is at Swan Lake in Saanich. This very popular birding spot is primarily riparian with some open field and marsh habitat. The lake hosts American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Sora, Green Heron, and most of Victoria’s common species. Anna’s Hummingbirds are present year-round, and Barred, Short-eared, Barn, and Northern Saw-whet owls are possible under the right conditions. There is a nature house on site, and guided birding walks are offered twice weekly. (Note that what is called a “nature center” in the U.S. is often called a “nature house” in Canada.)

The Martindale Valley on the Saanich Peninsula north of Victoria is an important birding destination, especially during the winter. While many landowners allow birders to walk the tractor routes through their farm fields, visitors must respect the “no trespassing” signs where posted. Waterfowl, shorebirds, and hedgerow-dwellers such as sparrows and warblers can be found by walking the roadsides and trails. Shorebirds probe the muddy fields, and Trumpeter and Tundra swans are anticipated each winter. Northern Shrikes, Western Meadowlarks, and huge mixed flocks of Red-winged and Brewer’s blackbirds (with the occasional Yellow-headed or Rusty to make it interesting) draw birders to the area. Peregrine Falcons, Red-tailed Hawks, and Bald Eagles can be found here, too, and frequently cause the flocks to take to the air. Sky Larks were once abundant in these fields, but are now found less often.

To the west of Victoria, Esquimalt Lagoon and the adjacent Royal Roads University grounds attract both birds and birders throughout the year. The area is especially lively in the winter, when the waterfowl have returned. You can circumnavigate the lagoon if you are sure-footed and reasonably fit. At a birding pace, it takes about five to six hours, and in the spring can easily turn up more than 70 species. The Royal Roads University campus provides diverse habitats, from old-growth forest and open fields to riparian corridors and shoreline. Purple Martins nesting on the dock attest that humans can reverse some population declines. In the 1980s, there were fewer than 10 pairs of Purple Martins in British Columbia. A nest box program was initiated, and now the breeding population in the province is estimated at 950 pairs. Visitors from the east will notice that the nest boxes are not the “apartment” style frequently seen at home. Like many West Coast residents, Purple Martins seem to prefer townhouses over condominiums! Anna’s Hummingbirds can be found throughout the year, and are joined by Rufous Hummingbirds in the spring. Five species of woodpecker (Downy, Hairy, and Pileated woodpeckers; Red-breasted Sapsucker; and Northern Flicker) and six species of swallow (Violet-green, Tree, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, and Barn swallows, and Purple Martin) are regularly seen on campus.

Most of the southern portion of the island doesn’t rise much above sea level, but there are a few hills—including several with the word “mountain” in their names—and even a few legitimate mountains to explore. In the spring, the hilltops
of Mount Tolmie, Mount Douglas, and Little Saanich Mountain near Victoria are great locations to find passing migrants, including Townsend’s Solitaire, Lazuli Bunting, Vaux’s Swift, Western Kingbird, American Pipit, Cassin’s and Hutton’s vireos, Western Tanager, and a good variety of western warblers, thrushes, and sparrows.

On the opposite end of the scale, there are only a few wetlands in the area, but they can turn up good numbers of resident and migrant birds. Rithet’s Bog, located just off Highway 17, has an easy loop trail that covers a variety of habitats. Waterfowl, Red-winged Blackbirds, Vaux’s, House, Pacific, and Marsh wrens, Anna’s Hummingbirds, Bushtits, Common Yellowthroats, and the occasional Virginia Rail can be seen here. A viewing tower at Viaduct Flats near the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific overlooks a shallow wetland that is known locally for massive flocks of swallows and breeding Pied-billed Grebes in the spring, and it is prime habitat for wintering waterfowl. Viaduct Flats does not have a loop trail, a deliberate decision to preserve a significant natural area just for the wildlife. Frequent field trip leader and guide Rick Schortinghuis names this as one of his favorite birding locations because of its peacefulness, connection to other nearby green spaces, and lack of traffic.

**Pacific Marine Circle Route**

If you plan to be on the island for a few days, consider the Pacific Marine Circle
Route, which includes the southwest coast of the island. It’s easy to get to any of the route’s destinations, or even to cover the whole loop in a single day, but it’s worth taking a couple days to really enjoy it.

Heading west from Victoria, visit Witty’s Lagoon Regional Park, a 56-ha (138-acre) natural park featuring mature Douglas-fir forest, a beautiful waterfall, saltmarshes, and one of the area’s best sunbathing and swimming beaches. More than 160 species of birds have been observed in the park or offshore from Tower Point. It’s a favorite spot to seek out rare shorebirds like Ruff and Red-necked Stint.

At nearby Pedder Bay, Rocky Point Bird Observatory operates a migration monitoring and banding station. This site is open to the public between August 1 and October 15, and guided birding walks are offered twice a week. The Pedder Bay RV Resort and Marina rents power boats, kayaks, and bicycles for those who want alternative transportation for their outings. There is easy access here to the Galloping Goose Regional Trail for hiking or biking along this decommissioned railway. A few miles away, East Sooke Park is one of the best places to watch migrating raptors and vultures during September and October.

Farther along the route, you’ll come to Sooke and the Whiffin Spit Park birding hotspot. Black and Ruddy turnstones are among the shorebirds frequently found along this short walk. The grassy spit and small woods have turned up many rare and uncommon species, including Grasshopper Sparrow, Lesser Nighthawk, Pacific Golden-Plover, Mountain Bluebird, Lark Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting.

Continuing along West Coast Road, you’ll move out of the rainshadow of the Olympic Peninsula and find yourself in the lush rainforest of western Vancouver Island, passing through the surfing and fishing communities of Jordan River and Port Renfrew. The scenic Juan de Fuca and West Coast hiking trails each have a terminus at Port Renfrew. Logging is the primary industry in this region, so be prepared to see clearcuts and replanted forests along the way. Species found only during the winter on the southern tip of the island breed here. Victoria residents often make the trek to enjoy the early morning songs of Hermit Thrushes and “Sooty” Fox Sparrows during the spring and early summer.

If you can, time your trip to take advantage of low tide at Botanical Beach, where the sandstone shelf is filled with natural aquaria: huge tidepools that provide shelter to urchins, chitons, sea slugs, crustaceans, and fish. The exposed coast provides stunning views of huge waves crashing against the shore, even on relatively calm days.

The route then heads east across the island. If you are adventurous and good on your feet, consider touring Avatar Grove, a magnificent old-growth forest. The Ancient Forest Alliance is constructing a boardwalk to make access easier, and offers guided tours. There are also opportunities to see several really big trees, including Canada’s largest Sitka spruce, closer to the road and on more accessible trails along the route.
Southern Vancouver Island

In the town of Duncan, Somenos Marsh is a “must-do”. Home to waterfowl, waders, and songbirds, this is one of the largest marshes on southern Vancouver Island. More than 220 species have been observed here. Boardwalks and trails make it accessible, and the parking lot right off the main highway makes it easy to find. Derek Marven, the Cowichan Valley’s birding guru, says that “the diversity from agricultural fields to wetlands to lakes to forest to mountains” is what makes this area special. Duncan is also home to the only sewage lagoon on the southern island open for waterfowl and gull viewing.

Nearby Cowichan Bay is an important birding site, with more than 240 bird species (including 32 shorebirds) recorded in this small community. Red-eyed Vireo; Short-eared Owl; Mute, Trumpeter, and Tundra swans; Sandhill Crane; and Yellow-billed Loon are all targets of birders visiting the area.

Returning to Victoria, you’ll pass over the Malahat, the tallest mountain on a major road in the area. Spectacle Lake, near the summit of the mountain, is a good spot to look for higher-altitude birds: Steller’s Jay, Gray Jay, Varied Thrush, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Sooty Grouse, and Townsend’s and Black-throated Gray warblers (the last two usually only in warmer months). At the base of the Malahat, Goldstream Park’s old-growth forest is home to American Dipper, Red-breasted Sapsucker, and Bald and Golden eagles, and, during the fall, hundreds of gulls. The Goldstream River is a major salmon spawning location, and, from mid-November through December, gulls and eagles gather to feed on the carcasses. At times, more than 200 eagles have been counted in the estuary near the nature house.

Seabirds
Whale watching is one of the mainstays of Victoria tourism, and there are several companies offering trips into the Strait of Juan de Fuca/Salish Sea. Although their focus is generally marine mammals, most companies also offer broader nature tours and are happy to check out the birds along the way. It’s also possible to charter boats to take you exactly where you’d like to go. Depending on the time of year, Pacific, Common, and Red-throated loons; Marbled and Ancient murrelets; Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters; Western, Red-necked, Horned, and Eared grebes; and several species of gull can be found. The dominant gull here is Glaucous-winged (and its hybrids with Herring and Western), but Mew, California, Heermann’s, Bonaparte’s, and Thayer’s gulls are easy to find in their respective seasons. If gulls are your goal, September and October offer the greatest diversity. For “true” pelagic birds such as albatrosses, though, you have to leave the shelter of the Olympic Peninsula and head to the Swiftsure Bank and beyond.

For those who want to see marine birds but prefer the stability of larger vessels, BC Ferries offers several routes to the nearby Gulf Islands, including a five-hour “day trip” for less than $15. In the late sum-
mer through the winter, Common Murre; Rhinoceros Auklet; Red-necked Phalarope; Long-tailed and Harlequin ducks; and Pelagic, Double-crested, and Brandt’s cormorants are among the birds easily seen from these vessels. The scenery is spectacular, and marine mammal sightings are also possible. If you have the time, you may want to leave the ship and explore the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve of Canada; there are natural and historic sites on many of the islands.

Community
Southern Vancouver Island has a very active conservation community, with more than 100 organizations focused on nature and the environment. The Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) welcomes visitors to their presentations and on birding walks. The society has also recently published a “Nature Guide to the Victoria Region” and hosts a Bird Alert phone line at (250) 704-2555. There are several online bulletin boards for the region. The most active are <birding.bc.ca/community> and <groups.yahoo.com/group/BCVIBirds>. Many local birders are delighted to show visitors around.

Although there are no regular birding festivals on southern Vancouver Island, Victoria will host a BC Nature conference 1–4 May 2014. Lectures will be offered by experts on everything from insects to marine mammals and numerous field trips will showcase the local specialties, especially birds! Details and registration information can be found at <rpbo.org/bcnatureagm.php>.

Getting to Vancouver Island
Vancouver Island’s largest airport is Victoria International Airport (YYJ). Car ferries travel from the Canadian mainland at Tsawwassen and Horseshoe Bay near Vancouver, and from Washington at Anacortes and Port Angeles. The Victoria Clipper takes passengers from downtown Seattle to downtown Victoria in just a few hours.

Important Warning
This Pacific island has much to offer to visitors, whether they are birders or not. One thing is certain. Once you visit this area, you WILL want to come back! ☑

RECOMMENDED READING
Victoria and Southeastern Vancouver Island: Checklist of Birds, Victoria Natural History Society <vicnhs.bc.ca/checklist.pdf>

Birdfinding in British Columbia, Russell Cannings and Richard Cannings
Nature Guide to the Victoria Region, Ann Nightingale and Claudia Copley
British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas <birdatlas.bc.ca>

BULLETIN BOARDS
BCVI Birds <groups.yahoo.com/group/bcvibirds>

Birding in British Columbia <birding.bc.ca/community>

RARE BIRD ALERT
(250) 704-2555 (Callers from the U.S. need not enter any special code to call Canada.)

OTHER SITES AND ORGANIZATIONS REFERENCED IN THE ARTICLE
Victoria Natural History Society <naturevictoria.ca>
Rocky Point Bird Observatory <rpbo.org>

Swan Lake/Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary <swanlake.bc.ca>
Horticultural Centre of the Pacific <hcp.ca>
Witty’s Lagoon Regional Park <tinyurl.com/wittys-lagoon>

Pedder Bay RV Resort and Marina <pedderbay.com>

East Sooke Park <tinyurl.com/east-sooke-park>

Galloping Goose Trail <tinyurl.com/galloping-goose-trail>

Somemos Marsh Wildlife Society <somenosmarsh.com>

Pacific Marine Circle Route <pacificmarinecircleroute.com>

Ancient Forest Alliance <ancientforestalliance.org>

BC Ferries Southern Gulf Islands Schedules <bcferries.com/schedules/southern>

Gulf Islands National Park Reserve of Canada <pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/gulf/index.aspx>

Victoria International Airport <victoriaairport.com>

Clipper Vacations <clippervacations.com>

MV Coho Ferry (Port Angeles) <cohoferry.com>

Washington State Ferries Route Map <tinyurl.com/BC-WA-ferries>

A short ferry-ride from Vancouver or Victoria Island
Steps from Parks Canada National Seashore and a birders’ paradise!
www.bluevistarosert.com • bluevistarosert@gmail.com
[377] 538-2484 • [250] 533-2463

Catch the Migration
MAYNE ISLAND

IBA Active Pass • Wintering bird hotspot
Wildlife photography safaris by land or sea
Hiking, kayaking, boat charters • B&Bs, inns, resorts, restaurants • Unique shops and galleries
Active birding community • Rich island history • Short ferry-ride from Victoria or Vancouver

Mayne Island Chamber of Commerce

Join us in searching for Baird’s sparrow, Sprague’s pipit, Le Conte’s sparrow and many others. Call to reserve your spot now.

13th Annual Turtle Mountain Birding Festival
May 30 – June 1, 2014
Tel: 1-701-228-5470
dakotaoutlook.com/birding.php

13th Annual Turtle Mountain Birding Festival
May 30 – June 1, 2014
Tel: 1-701-228-5470
dakotaoutlook.com/birding.php

March 2014 | Birder’s Guide to Travel 69
Despite that introduction, if you’ve never taken a pelagic birding trip, you’re missing out on one of the most incredible field trips you’ll ever experience. Nothing on land compares to watching the globe-trotting birds of the open ocean as they ride the air turbulence of waves in an energy-conserving flight called dynamic soaring. This should be on every birder’s bucket list!

Mal de Mer
Let’s tackle the elephant in the room first. There is an old joke about the two stages of seasickness: First you think you’re going to die, then you wish you would. I can personally vouch that this is no joke. Unfortunately, fear of seasickness (or anxiety over the embarrassment of being seasick) convinces too many birders to forgo the adventure and reward of pelagic birding.

Seasickness is not a sign of weakness nor a landlubber tip-off. It’s simply a wave frequency that doesn’t jibe with your inner ear. Everyone, including round-the-world sailors and offshore anglers, experiences seasickness sometime. There are tricks for prevention.

Medicate or Not?
I live and work on boats, and don’t take seasickness medication. But when it comes to a pelagic birding trip, I’m all in. Even a one-day pelagic can set you back several hundred dollars with travel and lodging. I’m not about to gamble that on a bad wave frequency. For me, it’s 10 bucks of trip insurance.

Three popular solutions are acupressure wrist bands, Dramamine or Bonine pills (over the counter), and Transderm Scop patches (prescription). Acupressure wrist bands are pretty much worthless, unless sugar pills cure your migraine. Dramamine may make you severely drowsy, to the extent that you’ll sleep through the day on a bait locker. But, like any drug, its side effects vary with the individual, so test it first on land. You may not experience this side effect. Bonine is well regarded in the boating community, and many of my friends use it regularly in rough conditions.

My prevention of choice is Transderm Scop (scopolamine), a tiny patch you place behind your ear which costs about $20 each. Choose a pharmacy that will sell patches individually so you can purchase only enough for a test and one or two trip doses. (If you’ve never used a Scop patch, try it first on land to check for reactions; some reported side effects include dryness.

Taking the right precautions and properly preparing for your pelagic well before you step onto the boat can mean the difference between getting a killer shot of a Flesh-footed Shearwater and being bent over the stern providing chum for the albatrosses. Photo © Jeremiah Trimble
of the mouth, temporary blurred vision, and drowsiness.) It’s important to use only a half patch if you weigh less than 150 pounds, or one patch otherwise. An application lasts three days, so is suitable for multi-day field trips. On any pelagic trip, you’ll see as many flesh-colored behind-the-ear stickers as Swarovski logos!

**Before Boarding**

You’ll enjoy your pelagic outing more if you’re not apprehensive. Locate your parking, dock, and charter boat the evening prior, which takes a lot of the stress out of your early-morning departure. Get a good night’s sleep and avoid any alcohol. The better you feel the day and night before, the better you’ll feel on-

---

**PELAGIC PREP**

**Getting Ready to Bird at Sea**

“Nothing on land compares to watching the globe-trotting birds of the open ocean as they ride the air turbulence of waves.”
board. Eat well the day before, eat lightly the evening before, get rest, and maintain your bathroom routine so you are not bloated or constipated.

If you’ve opted to take seasickness medication, it must be taken well before boarding. I apply my Transderm Scop when I naturally wake in the middle of the night. Eat a simple starch and protein breakfast, avoiding greasy or acidic foods (including orange juice). If you need coffee, chase it with an antacid tablet.

**The Comforts of Home**

Don’t be anxious about onboard restrooms. Charter boats have a standard private toilet (also known as the “head”). With that worry out of your mind, stay hydrated and in the wind. Yes, using the head means a tiny chance of missing a lifer Great Skua, so hurry!

Many women have told me they are reluctant to sign up for a pelagic because “it’s only men on the tours”. True, women typically are in the minority. But remember that one of the pioneers of pelagic birding tours is female: Deb-ra Shearwater of Shearwater Journeys <shearwaterjourneys.com>. And Brian Patteson’s lead spotter on Seabirding pelagic trips is Kate Sutherland <www.patteson.com>.

---

**Eight Steps to Enlightenment (or, at least, Bliss) Onboard**

If you start to feel overheated, flushed, or queasy (which is not unusual), don’t panic. But don’t ignore it—follow these steps immediately to prevent the onset of seasickness:

1. Stop using your binoculars or camera, or reading your field guide.
2. Move to midships or a bit aft, where there is less motion.
3. Face the breeze, for fresh air on your face. Do not go inside.
4. Remove clothing layers, especially knit hat or gloves, to cool off.
5. Stay away from diesel fumes or chum odors.
6. Look out and focus on the horizon.
7. Bend your knees slightly and let your body absorb the wave cadence.
8. Relax and enjoy the beautiful ocean view. You’ll be back to looking at shearwaters and storm-petrels in no time!

---

Fairy Prion is found in the cold waters of the Southern Hemisphere, and heading out on a pelagic trip is almost certainly the only way you’ll be able to see and identify one.  

Photo © Julian Robinson

---

About to leave port in Hatteras, North Carolina. Triple-check to make sure you have everything you need before you arrive!  

Photo © Diana Doyle

Continued on page 74
Pelagic Prep

If your thalassophobia (fear of the sea) stems from being out of sight of land, consider a near-shore trip, such as Monterey Bay. Most trips off the Atlantic Coast must go farther offshore to reach the pelagic birding areas along the Gulf Stream.

Binocular Use
My husband, in his devilish younger days, contrived a trick whenever someone aboard the boat got a bit out of hand. He’d pass them binoculars and ask them to check on a “problem” at the top of the mast. About two minutes of that and Mr. Overaggressive would take on a greenish cast and sit silently at the back rail for the rest of the ride.

If you use your binoculars to watch an overhead White-tailed Tropicbird, rather than the top of the mast, you might experience the same queasiness on a moving boat. So, use your binoculars judiciously. If you wait, many seabirds will come in close and fly by or circle the boat, drawn by the engine’s wake or the odors of chum. Plus, part of the joy of seabirding is seeing the birds in motion in their element, which you’ll miss while fumbling with your binoculars.

Studies in Gray and White
When it comes to seabird feld marks, it pays to study ahead. Remember when you were a beginning birder, intimidated by all the experts on field trips? For some birders, being a novice again in an unfamiliar setting is another source of anxiety.

On land, you may be able to tell a Nelson’s from a Saltmarsh sparrow. But at sea you may struggle to distinguish a Northern Fulmar from a gull. And what about all those recent splits and renamings, such as Barolo Shearwater or Zino’s Petrel?

Seabird plumages are permutations of gray, white, and black. They are generally light gray or white underneath, blending with the sky when viewed from below, with dark gray or black topsides to match the deep ocean when viewed from above. In other words, they look a lot alike.

Fortunately, there are now several excellent seabird resources. Realize, however, that seabird taxonomy is in flux, so consider the edition and date. For a general field guide, the newest edition of National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America is strong on pelagic species. Onley and Scofield’s Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World (2007) is an excellent, compact field guide to that family. For a magnum opus of North American seabirds, refer to Howell’s Petrels, Albatrosses, and

Pelagic Packing List

- Binoculars (large, heavier models work better at sea)
- Camera equipment (no tripods or scopes)
- Backpack or other soft gear bag
- Small cooler for food and drink
- Plain foods (low odor and low grease, such as crackers, pretzels, energy bars, or lunchbox-style sandwiches)
- Drinks (low acid, such as water, clear juice, or sports drinks)
- Field guide (optional; there are usually reference copies onboard and any reading should be avoided if you’re predisposed to seasickness)
- Smartphone or tablet (optional; field guide apps work offshore, but it’s best to avoid reading small type at sea, and cell coverage likely will be limited if available at all)
- Cap or sunhat (ideally with leash)
- Sunblock
- Sunglasses (ideally polarized)
- Rain gear (as suggested by the captain and/or weather)
- Windbreaker jacket
- Shoes with good traction (such as non-marking sneakers; special boat shoes are not necessary)
- Clothing in layers (plan ahead for a wind chill 10–20 degrees below the forecasted land temperature)
- Pre-packed pockets (include some tissues and cracker packs or energy bar)
- Lens cloth (do not wipe salt spray off lenses or your glasses; always rinse with fresh water first or you risk scratching the lens coating with salt crystals)
- Tiny compass or smartphone compass app (only if phobic about disorientation out of sight of land)
Seabird Capitol of the Western North Atlantic ~ Hatteras, NC USA

World Class Pelagic Birding on trips to the Gulf Stream just 25 miles offshore from Hatteras!

Trips aboard our own, sea kindly boats the 61’ Storrey Petrel II & the 31’ FV Skua
Private charters available year round

Seabirding
with Brian Patteson
www.seabirding.com
(252) 986-1363
brian@patteson.com

- Home of the enigmatic Black-capped Petrel!
- Spring & Summer trips for Gulf Stream specialties, including rare Pterodroma & tropicbirds
- Winter trips for Great Skua & alcids
- Friendly, experienced leaders
- Chum for bringing the birds close
- Great Photo ops
- Specialty Southeastern land birds found on nearby mainland

Trip reports & photos can be found on our blog: seabirding.blogspot.com

If you’re relying on a field guide app, such as Peterson Birds or the Sibley eGuide, it’s important to be able to compare species side by side. The Peterson app accomplishes this with its illustrated plates; Sibley has a Compare feature (upper right, “Comp.”). Either way, a larger-screen tablet is much easier for comparison than a small phone screen.

Field marks go only so far in the identification of seabirds. For example, the variations in the tail shapes and white rump patches of Wilson’s, Leach’s, and Band-rumped storm-petrels are impossible to see from afar. Instead, traits such as flight style, silhouette, and feeding behavior are key.

To study up on these at-sea traits, read the species descriptions in Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion (2006). And, because flight and behavior matter so much at sea, nothing beats video clips. Pelagic identification DVDs and online videos are available from Shearwater Journeys <www.shearwaterjourneys.com> and Scilly Pelagics <www.scillypelagics.com>. Spending time with these videos will give you a sense of the beauty and excitement of pelagic birding.

Wilson’s Storm-petrel.
Photo © Pablo Gutiérrez Varga

Continued from page 74
2014-15 BEST BIRDING EXPEDITIONS

Tick off a birding holiday to remote and wildlife rich destinations with Heritage Expeditions, created by birders for birders 25 years ago. Offering more than 15 expedition cruises per year including:

SEA OF OKHOTSK
11 – 22 June 2014 From USD8,500
This expedition offers birders the chance to experience some of the most rarely visited and most spectacular seabird breeding islands anywhere in the world. Birding highlights include millions of Crested and Least Auklets at Yanakaye Island, large numbers of Steller’s Sea Eagles on an almost daily basis and up to 14 species of alcid.

SECRETS OF MELANESIA
21 – 31 Oct 2014 From USD5,995
Sail into a world that few have ever experienced for an excellent sample of endemics including Solomon Islands Sea Eagle. This expedition provides a rare chance to visit the Santa Cruz Islands, home to 5 endemics including the recently discovered Varikoro White-eye. There is also a good chance to see the Vanuatu Petrel at sea.

WESTERN PACIFIC ODYSSEY
5 April – 5 May 2015 From USD11,000
This 31 day expedition provides an incredible selection of tubenoses, usually around 50 species, plus a chance to view the Kagu, Crow Honeyeater and almost all of the other New Caledonian endemics. See the majority of the lowland Solomon Island endemics including Rennell Shrikebill, White-headed Fruit-Dove and Roviana Rail. Lookout for Heinroth’s Shearwater, Beck’s Petrel and potentially the Short-tailed Albatross.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 1866 285 7884
OR EMAIL info@heritage-expeditions.com
www.heritage-expeditions.com

Heritage Expeditions
Antarctica • Western and South Pacific
Subantarctic Islands • Russian Far East
PELAGIC DIRECTORY
March 2014 through February 2015

If you would like to participate in next year’s Pelagic Directory, please contact Michael Retter at mretter@aba.org. Trips are for 2014 unless otherwise noted.

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Maritime Provinces

Port: Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick
Destination: Bird and whale feeding areas in the outer Bay of Fundy, Canada
Dates: Daily departures 11:30am from 21 June–20 Sep
Duration: 4–5 hours
Cost: $65.00 (includes fish chowder lunch, marine biologist)
Target species: Great, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, Northern Fulmar, Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels, Red and Red-necked phalaropes, Common Murre, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers, South Polar Skua, Arctic Tern, Red and Red-necked Phalarope.
Organizer: Whales-n-Sails Adventures. (888) 994-4044; whales-n-sails.com; info@whales-n-sails.com

New England

Port: Camden, Maine
Destination: One or more seabird nesting islands; nearshore and inshore waters via Windjammer sailing.
Dates: 3–9 Aug
Duration: 6 days, 6 nights
Cost: $990
Target species: Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Leach’s Storm-Petrel, Manx, Great, and Sooty shearwaters, Red-billed Tropicbird, Arctic and Roseate terns, Black Guillemot, Great Cormorant.
Organizer: Freeport Wild Bird Supply.

Mid-Atlantic

Port: Freeport, New York
Destination: Hudson Canyon and waters off western Long Island
Dates: 1 Feb; 16-17 May; 10 Jan 2015
Duration: 18 hours overnight (spring), 12 hours (winter)
Cost: $185–$225
Target species: Spring: Wilson’s and Leach’s Storm-petrels, Cory’s, Great, Sooty, and Manx Shearwater, Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-tailed Jaegers, South Polar Skua, Arctic Tern, Red and Red-necked Phalarope.
Organizer: See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

Port: Belmar, New Jersey
Destination: Hudson Shelf Valley and New Jersey waters within 25 miles
Dates: 2 Jan 2015
Duration: 8 hours
Cost: $125
Organizer: See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

Port: Cape May, New Jersey
Destination: Wilmington Canyons and waters off New Jersey and Delaware
Dates: 19-20 Sep; 24 Jan 2015
Duration: 18 hours (summer), 12 hours (winter)
Cost: $180–$220
Target species: Summer: Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels; Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters; Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-tailed Jaegers; South Polar Skua; Arctic Tern; Red-necked Phalarope.
Winter: Northern Fulmar; Dovekie; Razorbill; Common Murre; Atlantic Puffin; Glaucous, Iceland, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls; Black-legged Kittiwake; Red Phalarope.
Organizer: See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

Port: Lewes, Delaware
Destination: Baltimore and Wilmington Canyons and waters off Delaware and Maryland
North Carolina

Port: Hatteras, North Carolina aboard our own boats, Stormy Petrel II and Skua
Destination: Gulf Stream, Continental Shelf and Slope Waters
Dates: 12–13 Sep; 31 Jan 2015
Duration: 18 hours (summer), 12 hours (winter)
Cost: $175–$215
Target species: Summer: Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels; Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters; Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-tailed jaegers; South Polar Skua; Arctic Tern; Red-necked and Black-browed albatrosses, jaegers, Sooty Tern. Mega rarities have included Storm-Petrel, Red-necked Phalarope, all three Booby; Seasonal: Sooty Shearwater, Leach’s Red-billed and White-tailed tropicbirds, Masked Booby; Infrequent: Northern Fulmar, Red Phalarope, Great, Manx, and Audubon’s shearwaters; perhaps Manx Shearwater and Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels. Black-capped Petrel, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, and rarities such as Herald, Fea’s, and Bermuda petrels.
Organizer: See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

Oregon

Port: Newport, Oregon
Destination: Offshore 25, 35, 60 miles
Dates: 18 May; 16, 23 Aug; 20 Sep; 4 Oct
Duration: 8, 10, 12 hours
Cost: $125–175
Target species: All year: Black-footed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet. Winter/Spring: Laysan Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, Ancient Murrelet. A number of nearshore species and marine mammals including whales (check our website).
Organizers: Westport Seabirds, 360-268-9141, WestportSeabirds.com, pmand001@comcast.net

PACIFIC OCEAN

Washington

Port: Westport, Washington
Destination: Grays Canyon and Outer Slope (35-40 miles west of Washington coast)

Cost: regular trips are $165/person/trip; discount for multiple trips; “Discovery Series” trips are $195/person/trip; see our website for details

Target Species: Winter: Manx Shearwater, Northern Fulmar, Red Phalarope, Great Skua, Little Gull, Dovekie, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin. Spring and Summer: Black-capped Petrel, Cory’s, Great, Manx, and Audubon’s shearwaters, Wilson’s and Band-rumped storm-petrels, Bridled Tern; Scarce to rare specialties: Trindade, Fea’s, and Bermuda petrels, European Storm-Petrel, Red-billed and White-tailed tropicbirds, Masked Booby; Seasonal: Sooty Shearwater, Leach’s Storm-Petrel, Red-necked Phalarope, all three jaegers, Sooty Tern. Mega rarities have included Yellow-nosed and Black-browed albatrosses, Cape Verde Shearwater, and Swinhoe’s and Black-bellied storm-petrels.

Organizer: Brian Patteson, Inc. TA Seabirding, PO Box 772, Hatteras, NC 27943 (252) 986-1363; seabirding.com; seabirding.blogspot.com; brian@patteson.com

Port: Hatteras, North Carolina
Destination: The Gulf Stream and waters off the continental shelf of North Carolina. With Brian Patteson on the Stormy Petrel II.
Dates: 13 and 14 June
Duration: 8–10 hours
Cost: $165
Target species: Cory’s, Great, and Audubon’s shearwaters; perhaps Manx Shearwater and Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels. Black-capped Petrel, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, and rarities such as Herald, Fea’s, and Bermuda petrels.
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures. (650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com. In cooperation with Brian Patteson.

Photo © Ryan Shaw
Pelagic Directory

legged Kittiwake, Thayer’s Gull. Spring deep: Murphy’s and Mottled petrels, Parakeet Auklet, Horned Puffin. Fall: Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Flesh-footed and Buller’s shearwaters, South Polar Skua, Long-tailed Jaeger, Cassin’s Auklet, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern. Fall deep: Leach’s Storm-Petrel, Scripp’s Murrelet.

Organizer: The Bird Guide, Inc. (503) 680-2405; thebirdguide.com; greg@thebirdguide.com

Central and Northern California

Port: Bodega Bay, California
Destination: 800 fathom line, Bodega Canyon and Cordell Bank
Dates: 24 Aug; 20 Sep
Duration: 8–12 hours
Cost: $218
Target Species: Fall: Black-footed, Short-tailed, White-capped, Shy and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, Great-winged, Parkinson’s, and Cook’s petrels, Streaked, Cory’s, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, Black, and Least storm-petrels, Red-billed and Red-tailed tropicbirds, Brown Pelican, Brown Booby, Brandt’s, Double-crested, and Pelagic cormorants, Magnificent and Great frigatebirds, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Bonaparte’s, Heermann’s, California, Herring, Thayer’s, Western, Glaucous-winged, and Sabine’s gulls, Elegant, Forster’s, Common, and Arctic terns, Common and Thick-billed murrens, Pigeon Guillemot, Long-billed, Scripp’s, Marbled, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets, Cassin’s, Crested, and Rhinoceros auklets, Horned and Tufted puffins. All of these species have been found on our trips. See our website and blog for more than 200 trip reports dating back 13 years. We have offered trips from Bodega Bay since 1980, recording more mega-rare seabirds than any other port in the U.S.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys; (831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Port: Bodega Bay, California
Destination: Cordell Bank and offshore waters.
Dates: 31 Aug
Duration: 10–11 hours
Cost: $150
Target species: Historically a rare bird hotspot! Black-footed Albatross, storm-petrel concentrations, migrant Long-tailed and other jaegers, South Polar Skua, Buller’s Shearwaters along with numbers of Common Murre, Rhinoceros, Cassin’s auklets, Scripp’s Murrelet, and the common shearwaters. Laysan and Short-tailed albatrosses possible, even southern hemisphere albatrosses have shown up here!
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures.
(650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

Port: Sausalito, California
Destination: sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge to the Farallon Wildlife Refuge
Dates: 3 Aug
Duration: 8–12 hours
Cost: $177
Target species: Fall: Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian Petrel, Pink-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels, Brown Pelican, Brandt’s, Double-crested, and Pelagic cormorants, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Heermann’s, California, Western, and Sabine’s gulls, Elegant, Forster’s, Common, and Arctic terns, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Scripp’s Murrelet, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. This is the single best trip to see nesting seabirds and Tufted Puffin (100% success rate). Landing is not permitted on the islands. See our website and blog for more than 200 trip reports dating back 13 years.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc.
(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Port: Half Moon Bay, California
Destination: Pioneer Canyon, waters off continental shelf in San Mateo or San Francisco counties. Dates marked below with an asterisk (*) are trips to the Farallon Islands.
Dates: 4 May; 26 July; 2*, 9*, 16, 21, 22 Aug; 6, 14, 21, 27 Sep
Duration: 9–10 hours
Cost: $130
Target species: Spring: breeding plumaged Sabine’s Gull, phalaropes, alcids, Black-footed and perhaps Laysan albatrosses. Summer and Fall: great diversity of shearwaters, all three jaegers and South Polar Skua, Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, Ashy, Fork-tailed, Wilson’s, and Black storm-petrels, chance of rarities include Cook’s, Hawaiian petrels, Short-tailed Albatross. Farallon trips: a focus on Tufted Puffin and Cassin’s Auklet; should see thousands of Common Murres, many Pigeon Guillemots, shearwaters, and Black-footed Albatrosses during our time off the shelf. Great opportunities for whales and at least 4 species of seals/sea lions. Departure from Half Moon Bay maximizes time offshore on the return trip versus other ports.
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures.
(650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

Port: Half Moon Bay, California
Destination: 100 fathom line, Pioneer Canyon and canyons near Farallon Islands
Dates: 20, 26, 27 July; 2, 16, 17, 23 Aug; 7, 8, 15, 21, 24, 28*, 29* Sep; 5, 12 Oct
Duration: 8–12 hours
Cost: $196
Target species: Late Summer/Fall: Black-footed, Short-tailed, and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, Great-winged, White-chinned, Parkinson’s, and Cook’s petrels, Streaked, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, Black, and Least storm-petrels, Red-billed and Red-tailed tropicbirds, Brown Pelican, Brandt’s, Double-crested, and Pelagic cormorants, Magnificent and Great frigatebirds, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Heermann’s, California, Western, and Sabine’s gulls, Elegant, Forster’s, Common, and Arctic terns, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Scripp’s Murrelet, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. This is the single best trip to see nesting seabirds and Tufted Puffin (100% success rate). Landing is not permitted on the islands. See our website and blog for more than 200 trip reports dating back 13 years.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc.
(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Port: Half Moon Bay, California
Destination: Pioneer Canyon, waters off continental shelf in San Mateo or San Francisco counties. Dates marked below with an asterisk (*) are trips to the Farallon Islands.
Dates: 4 May; 26 July; 2*, 9*, 16, 21, 22 Aug; 6, 14, 21, 27 Sep
Duration: 9–10 hours
Cost: $130
Target species: Spring: breeding plumaged Sabine’s Gull, phalaropes, alcids, Black-footed and perhaps Laysan albatrosses. Summer and Fall: great diversity of shearwaters, all three jaegers and South Polar Skua, Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, Ashy, Fork-tailed, Wilson’s, and Black storm-petrels, chance of rarities include Cook’s, Hawaiian petrels, Short-tailed Albatross. Farallon trips: a focus on Tufted Puffin and Cassin’s Auklet; should see thousands of Common Murres, many Pigeon Guillemots, shearwaters, and Black-footed Albatrosses during our time off the shelf. Great opportunities for whales and at least 4 species of seals/sea lions. Departure from Half Moon Bay maximizes time offshore on the return trip versus other ports.
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures.
(650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

Central and Northern California

Port: Bodega Bay, California
Destination: 800 fathom line, Bodega Canyon and Cordell Bank
Dates: 24 Aug; 20 Sep
Duration: 8–12 hours
Cost: $218
Target Species: Fall: Black-footed, Short-tailed, White-capped, Shy and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, Great-winged, Parkinson’s, and Cook’s petrels, Streaked, Cory’s, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, Black, and Least storm-petrels, Red-billed and Red-tailed tropicbirds, Brown Pelican, Brown Booby, Brandt’s, Double-crested, and Pelagic cormorants, Magnificent and Great frigatebirds, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Bonaparte’s, Heermann’s, California, Herring, Thayer’s, Western, Glaucous-winged, and Sabine’s gulls, Elegant, Forster’s, Common, and Arctic terns, Common and Thick-billed murrens, Pigeon Guillemot, Long-billed, Scripp’s, Marbled, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets, Cassin’s, Crested, and Rhinoceros auklets, Horned and Tufted puffins. All of these species have been found on our trips. See our website and blog for more than 200 trip reports dating back 13 years. We have offered trips from Bodega Bay since 1980, recording more mega-rare seabirds than any other port in the U.S.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys; (831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com
Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. See our website and blog for more than 200 trip reports dating back 13 years. We have offered trips from Half Moon Bay since 1991.

Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc.
(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com;
debi@shearwaterjourneys.com;
shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

* Dates marked with asterisks are trips run in conjunction with the Monterey Birding Festival: www.montereybaybirding.org

---

**Port:** Monterey, California  
**Destination:** Monterey Marine Sanctuary  
**Dates:** 19* Jan; 27* Apr; 3, 18 May; 24 Aug; 7* 21, 28 Sep; 11 Oct.; 9* Nov  
**Duration:** 4* or 8 hours  
**Cost:** $65* or $130  
**Target species:** Winter: Harlequin Duck, Short-tailed Shearwater. Spring: Laysan and Short-tailed albatrosses, Murphy’s Petrel.  
Summer: Cook’s Petrel, Manx Shearwater.  
Fall: 6 species of storm-petrel, all three jaegers, 10 species of shearwater, Black-legged Kittiwake, Tufted Puffin, Scripps’s Murrelet.

Organizer: Monterey Seabirds.  
(831) 375-4658.  
www.montereyseabirds.com

---

**Port:** Monterey, California  
**Destination:** Monterey Submarine Canyon, Ascension Canyon, Carmel Canyon, Soquel Hole  
**Dates:** 1, 8, 15, 22 Aug; 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24*, 25*, 26*, 27*, Sep; 4, 11, 18 Oct  
**Duration:** 8 hours (13 Sep is 12 hours targeting warm water species)  
**Cost:** $164  
**Target species:** Late Summer/Fall: Black-footed, Short-tailed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, Great-winged, Bulwer’s and Cook’s petrels, Streaked, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Great, Wedge-tailed, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, Black and Least storm-petrels, Red-billed and
Red-tailed tropicbirds, Brown Pelican, Brown Booby, Brandt’s and Pelagic cormorants, Magnificent and Great frigatebirds, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Bonaparte’s, Heermann’s, California, Herring, Thayer’s, Western, Glaucous-winged, and Sabine’s gulls, Elegant, Common, and Arctic terns, Common and Thick-billed murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Scripps’s, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Horned and Tufted puffin. All of these species have been found on our trips. See website and blog for more than 200 past trip reports dating back for 13 years. We have offered trips from Monterey since 1976.

Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc.
(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Dates: 19 Aug; 5, 13 Sep
Duration: 8 hours
Cost: $130
Target species: Great numbers of birds from the first hour of birding, many Sooty, Pink-footed shearwaters, Common Murres, and all three jaegers. Great for good studies of birds, Rhinoceros Auklets, Buller’s Shearwaters, Red and Red-necked phalaropes, Black-footed Albatross and nice potential for fall storm-petrel flocks, numbers of whales, and general abundance of sea life.
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures.
(650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

Southern California

Port: Dana Point, California
Destination: Fourteen Mile Bank
Dates: 3 May; 12 July; 20 Sep
Duration: 8 hours
Cost: $60
Target species: Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, and Black-vented shearwaters, Red Phalarope, Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets. Fall: Long-tailed jaeger.
Organizer: Sea & Sage Audubon
seaandsageaudubon.org/FieldTrips/Trips/Pelagic/PelagicTrips.html; nancykenyon@cox.net

Port: San Diego, California
Destination: 9-mile and 30-mile Banks
Dates: 27 Apr; 17 May; 7 June; 21 Sep; 4 Oct; 1 Nov
Duration: 8-12 hours
Cost: $60–$80
Late spring through fall: Red-billed Tropicbird.
Late summer and fall: Leach’s, Ashy, Black and Least storm-petrels, Craveri’s Murrelet.
Fall: Buller’s and Short-tailed shearwaters, South Polar Skua, Long-tailed Jaeger, Arctic Tern. Late winter through early summer: Scripps’s Murrelet
Port: San Diego, California  
Destination: 9-mile Bank  
Dates: 27, 28 Feb; 1, 2 Mar  
Duration: 8 hours  
Cost: $100 plus event registration  
Target species: Black-footed Albatross, Pink-footed, Manx and Black-vented shearwaters, Brown Booby, Red Phalarope, Scripps’s Murrelet, Cassin’s Auklet, Sabine’s Gull.

Organizer: San Diego Audubon Bird Festival  
www.socalbirding.com; dpovey@nethere.com

Port: San Diego, California  
Destination: Offshore deep water, from the extreme southwestern corner of the ABA Area to Point Conception, including Rodriguez Dome, San Juan Seamount, and points past the continental shelf area, and around the Channel Islands  
Dates: 1-5 Sep  
Duration: 5 days  
Cost: $1195  
Target species: Black-footed Albatross; Northern Fulmar, Cook’s and Hawaiian petrels; Flesh-footed, Buller’s, Pink-Footed, Sooty, and Black-vented shearwaters; Least, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels; Red-billed Tropicbird, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-Tailed jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Murre, Guadalupe and Craveri’s murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets.

Organizer: Searcher Natural History Tours.  
(619) 226-2403; bajawhale.com; searcher@bajawhale.com

Organizer: Buena Vista Audubon  
www.socalbirding.com; dpovey@nethere.com

Port: San Diego, California  
Destination: 9-mile Bank  
Dates: 27, 28 Feb; 1, 2 Mar  
Duration: 8 hours  
Cost: $100 plus event registration  
Target species: Black-footed Albatross, Pink-footed, Manx and Black-vented shearwaters, Brown Booby, Red Phalarope, Scripps’s Murrelet, Cassin’s Auklet, Sabine’s Gull.

Organizer: San Diego Audubon Bird Festival  
www.socalbirding.com; dpovey@nethere.com

Port: San Diego, California  
Destination: Offshore deep water, from the extreme southwestern corner of the ABA Area to Point Conception, including Rodriguez Dome, San Juan Seamount, and points past the continental shelf area, and around the Channel Islands  
Dates: 1-5 Sep  
Duration: 5 days  
Cost: $1195  
Target species: Black-footed Albatross; Northern Fulmar, Cook’s and Hawaiian petrels; Flesh-footed, Buller’s, Pink-Footed, Sooty, and Black-vented shearwaters; Least, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels; Red-billed Tropicbird, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-Tailed jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Murre, Guadalupe and Craveri’s murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets.

Organizer: Searcher Natural History Tours.  
(619) 226-2403; bajawhale.com; searcher@bajawhale.com
With scientists Tracy Boal and Mariel Sorlien, I’m treading carefully, very carefully, through the tropical dry forest of Guana Island, off Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. We have the bird in sight: a Bridled Quail-Dove (Geotrygon mystacea). I’m inclined to tell you what the bird looks like, but that wouldn’t get at the three different experiences Tracy, Mariel, and I are having. You see, we’re not really all that interested in the bird’s plumage. Tracy is a population biologist. She and her colleagues have color-banded many of Guana Island’s quail-doves; the birds are strangely abundant on this small island, and Tracy wants to know why. She wants to know stuff like: Which bird is this one? How old is it? Who are its mates? Mariel is a behavioral ecologist. The quail-dove we’re looking at is sitting on a nest, and Mariel is taking notes: What’s the nest made of, and where’s it placed? How many eggs were laid, and how many young will fledge? As for me, I’m interested in how people learn and communicate about birds and nature. Nearby, another quail-dove is singing; I’m recording its spooky song, and it intrigues me that I’ll soon upload the recording to a Dutch website so that birders in South Carolina and Gujarat can discuss the species’ vocalizations.

Traveling to see and study birds is, by and large, a recreational, volitional activity—not for everyone, but for most people who self-identify as birders. If that’s you, if you’re the sort of person who travels not because you have to but because you want to, then I ask you: Why? Why do you do it? In particular, why do you travel to see and study birds?

I’ll start off with a simplistic, practically tautological answer: Because travel is fun. It’s recreation. It’s volitional. Or it ought to be. But if you’re like me, you’ve traveled in situations that weren’t all that fun. I’ve been in two or three that were positively miserable. And not because of volcanic eruptions and civil unrest (I’ve encountered both while birding), but, rather, because of human situations. In birding travel situations where my companion or companions had different objectives, it just didn’t work out. I had a bad time.

I don’t enjoy “target birding”—going after a particular species. I prefer tours that emphasize the whole
Guana Island lies a mile off the northeast coast of Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands. The small island (850 acres, only 1.3 square miles) is hilly and rocky, carpeted by sun-kissed tropical woodland. Guana has no permanent human inhabitants, but many workers from the nearby city of Road Town, Tortola, commute daily to work at the island’s resort.
Why We Travel

experience: all the birds, of course, and at least a sampler of astronomy, entomology, conservation biology, and human culture. To be sure, certain birds are wonderfully emblematic of the experience: Virginia’s Warblers livening the arid hillsides, Long-tailed Ducks yodeling offshore, the aria of a Wood Thrush in an eastern hardwood forest. I can understand going after those birds, those experiences.

But I wouldn’t enjoy “chasing” (or “twitching”) those birds far out of range. I’d be miffed if I signed up for a tour of the northeast coast in winter, and the leader made us “chase” a moribund warbler or thrush being kept alive at some dude’s heated bird bath in the suburbs of New York City. Nope, I signed up for the experience of coastal birding in winter: clambering about the jetties, capering out of the way of the surf, a big bowl of clam chowder, and the constant laughter of the Long-tailed Ducks.

One more personal peeve: “taping out” a bird. It’s not an ethical thing for me, as I’m persuaded that the overall impact of playback—both on individual birds and on populations—is negligible. Rather, it’s an aesthetic thing. It’s personal preference, no more, no less. I’d rather not go on tours that use playback.

All right, now you know some of my dislikes. What about my likes?

I like birding without binoculars. When my companions and I go “bare-naked birding”, we see and hear stuff we tend not to notice when we’re using binoculars. Our senses are put on heightened alert when we don’t have the crutch of high-powered optics. We’re more aware of behaviors, habitats, and so on. I know people who have paid good money to go birding without optics.

I also like birding at night. With optics, though—for stargazing and for birding. You can see owls and other birds just fine at night, especially if there’s a bright moon—and it’s even better if you have bins and a scope. I bring other gear with me at night: always an instrument for recording bird calls, often a small laptop with software for acoustic analysis of what I’m recording, and sometimes a 50-milli-watt laser (for astronomy).

Please don’t go thinking I’m all intense and neurotic about birding. Perhaps my favorite kind of field trip is the “slacker tour”. All the other groups have been birding since “oh-dark-thirty”, but my companions and I aren’t even awake yet. We gather for breakfast at some positively decadent hour, like 8:45 a.m. We hit the buffet two, three, maybe four times, and are finally out birding around 10:00 a.m. We’re back in plenty of time for lunch and a siesta, and, in a delicious irony, we stumble upon some dandy of a bird— at the little park across the street from the hotel—that all the “serious” groups missed.

There you have it; my likes and dislikes, my peeves and preferences. I like bare-naked birding by day, but high-tech birding by night. I’m up for slacker birding, day or night. I’m turned off by target birding in general, by chasing in particular, and most of all by playback. I’ll pass on that tour or field trip where they chase target birds with playback, but if it’s a bare-naked slacker trip, here’s my credit card!

Maybe you’re just the opposite: You need Virginia’s Warbler for your New York list, and it would be unconscionable not to twitch it; as to the bare-naked slacker trip, thanks, but no thanks. That’s great. That’s the way it should be. Yet I’ve seen plenty of instances, sadly, in which a travelling birder was mismatched to the experience. So here’s some practical advice:

- Depending on your budget and lifestyle, you’re making a big commitment by sign-
...ing on for the tour of Madagascar, the bird festival in Florida, or the road trip sponsored by your local bird club. So be informed. Ask around. Find out what the trip or tour is all about. Ideally, get in touch with the leader. Different leaders’ styles and personalities are wildly different—even if they’re employed by the same company or represent the same organization. Better yet, talk to your birding friends. They’ll give you the straight dope on Leader X, Tour Y, and Destination Z.

• Approach the experience of travel with an open mind and an adventurous attitude. Travel is fundamentally about novelty. You’re going to experience some combination of new friends, new cuisine, new scenery, and new birds. Drink deep of the total experience. If you find yourself in a bad situation, chill out. Are you stuck with perfect strangers? Well, how often do you find yourself in the company of perfect people? In one of my happiest birding adventures, I was forcibly conscripted for a chase. My companions—whom I’d never met and who barely spoke English—were unfailingly gracious to me: helpful, generous, patient.

• It’s your life, the saying goes. It’s your time. And it’s your money. We’re talking about recreation, not obligation. I have a friend who, upon hearing of some rare bird far away, reacts by saying, “Oh fiddlesticks.” (He doesn’t actually say “fiddlesticks”...) Then he dutifully books the flight and is grumpily on his way. There is something seriously messed up about that. I have another friend who loves the thrill of the chase—as long as she’s back to the motel in time for Law & Order reruns before happy hour. There is something seriously cool about how my friend birds—or doesn’t bird.

Might I offer a bit of advice to all the tour companies, bird clubs, and state ornithological societies that offer travel opportunities for birders? Here goes: Be honest about what you offer, and about what sort of client you’re after. I appreciate it when a field trip leader tells me we’re going to bird hard, eat on the go, and stay late for owls—even if I’ve strongly hinted that that’s not the experience I seek. Is it really worth the short-term profit of a permanently disaffected client? I take it as axiomatic that the different purveyors of birding travel experiences offer, well, different sorts of experiences. Don’t be bashful: If you represent Tour Company A, tell us how you’re dif-

There are probably as many ways to appreciate Guana’s wildlife (left-Bridled Quail-Dove, center-harmit crab, right-Bananquit) as there are human visitors to the island.
Why We Travel

I hope to get back to Guana Island. I like the management’s philosophy: You’re here, it’s your life, you ought to enjoy the place the way you want to.

I want to learn more about the Bananaquits of Guana Island. Like the Bridled Quail-Doves, many of the island’s Bananaquits are color-banded. I want to make recordings of the different males, and see how they differ—within and among individuals.

I want to go there again in fall migration. I want to hang out at the banding station, and see how many Swainson’s Thrushes and Blackpoll Warblers they’re capturing. Also, I want to hang out on the north beach and watch the migrants coming in off the Atlantic Ocean.

Even more, I want to enjoy the experience of listening to the dawn chorus of the island’s Pearly-eyed Thrashers. They’re big and plucky, and their songs are, objectively speaking, unremarkable for a thrasher. Whatever. I love ‘em! In my experience, they’re perfectly exemplary of the experience of being in the tropical dry forests of Guana Island.

Maybe you’ll decline to join me for any of the preceding. You’d rather photograph the birds of Guana Island. Not the dickey birds, either, but, rather, the big birds: the boobies and tropicbirds just offshore, the American Flamingos and White-cheeked Pintails in the salt ponds, and the Magnificent Frigatebirds constantly aloft. I totally admire you for doing that, but bird photography isn’t my thing, and neither are big birds.

Meanwhile, our mutual friend has entirely different plans. She and her girlfriends are unapologetic twitchers. They’ve never birded in the region. They want to get every bird—especially regional endemics—then move on. You and I aren’t up for that pace: We go too slow; they go too fast.

Another birder won’t be joining us, either. We’ve enjoyed birding with him for years, but not this time. He and his husband and kids are on a family vacation. Oh, he’ll find some great bird; it’s an annoying habit of his. I can picture how it will happen: They’re beachcombing or snorkeling or something, when they just happen upon a first for the island, or even the region. I’m impressed, but I’ve got Bananaquits to record, a banding station to visit, and Pearly-eyed Thrashers to enjoy.

A few months later, we’ll all meet up—you and I, our crazy twitcher friend, and the guy with the annoying habit of finding rarities—at a bird festival or Christmas Bird Count compilation, and we’ll reflect on a splendid paradox. Birding brings us together; birding unites folks who would otherwise never encounter one another; birding transcends linguistic, cultural, and ideological barriers. Yet birding affirms the individual. There are as many valid approaches to the engagement of bird study as there are people who love to watch and study birds.

Acknowledgments

I thank Tracy Boal for fact-checking and copy-editing this article, for helping procure photos, and for showing me the birds of Guana Island. I also thank Jason Goldberg for logistical support with my visit, and for helping with photo procurement.

What do you seek as a traveling birder? What turns you on? What turns you off? What would the perfect field trip or bird tour be like for you? Join the conversation online at aba.org/birdersguide.
ABA Convention in Corpus Christi, Texas

Presenters and guides include:

Jen Brumfield, Cleveland Big Year extraordinaire and Great Lakes “pelagic” pioneer:

Birding the Texas coast in the spring is an absolute whirlwind, and a "revival" after winter's grip. This convention is chock-full of passionate, phenomenal personalities, including the ABA's young birder program staff, Bill Stewart and Jennie Duberstein.

Tom Johnson, Birding Magazine photo quiz editor and rarity-finding guru:

I am excited about watching visible migration. I'm really looking forward to seeing Gerrit Vyn again. He's one of few birders I literally look up to (Gerrit is tall!). And, his inspiring work as a phenomenal photographer/videographer has given people tangible connections to conservation.

Jeffery Kimball, producer/director of the film, Birders: The Central Park effect:

I can never get enough Roadrunners, and those crazy dancing Reddish Egrets. I'm looking forward to meeting Jeff Gordon because, well, he's the Man, and I'm always reading about him or reading his columns.

Join the fray! Come and share in the fun.
April 22-27, 2014
$1445 (includes hotel, food, field trips)

American Birding Association

SWAROVSKI OPTIK

Log on • events.aba.org | Email • events@aba.org | Call • 800.850.2473
SEE WHAT’S IN STORE FOR YOU.