March 2015 • Vol. 27 • No. 1

Birding
Taiwan

Middle American Rarities

Western Nebraska

Michigan’s Tawas Point

Plus:

• Pelagic Directory
• Conservation Birding
• Make the Most of Your Tour
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

Sign up for our email newsletter, the VENTflash, for birding news plus discounts and special offers.
We didn’t just reinvent binoculars.
We reinvented birding.

**Explore the new ZEISS VICTORY SF.**

**Introducing VICTORY SF.** Stunning light transmission. The widest, most natural field of view. And an extremely lightweight ergonomic design that enhances comfort. It’s like seeing every bird for the very first time. Developed especially to catch your birding moments.

Explore the new ZEISS VICTORY SF at your local dealer or join us at:

http://www.zeiss.com/nature

We make it visible.
Are you impressed with this magazine? Looking for more on birding?

Well, join the club...literally!

The ABA is all about birders sharing the wonder and excitement of birding across North America and around the world. We are the voice and face and heart and soul of the birding community. Joining the ABA will make you a better birder. You joining the ABA will make birding better for all.

aba.org/join
Contents

Birder’s Guide to Travel
March 2015 • Vol. 27, No. 1

Correspondence

From the President
JEFFREY A. GORDON

From the Editor
MICHAEL L. P. RETTER

Articles

Finding and Seeing the Avian Unicorns of Middle America
JOSH BECK

Birding Michigan’s Tawas Point
KIRBY ADAMS

Making the Most of Your Next Birding Tour
DANA DUXBURY-FOX

Taiwan: The Beautiful Island
KEITH BARNES

Western Nebraska
The Teeming Void
RICK WRIGHT

Pelagic Directory

International Tourism Initiative
See it, save it. Help save endangered species.
DANIEL LEBBIN

On the cover: To spend time with beautiful, unique, and endemic birds. To build a life list. To get to know new people and new cultures. These, some of the reasons birders travel, are encapsulated in this gorgeous image of a Yellow Tit surrounded by cherry blossoms, so highly revered in East Asia. To learn more about birding in Taiwan, turn to page 36. Photo © Sue Hsu
# High Lonesome Birdtours

**WORLD-CLASS BIRDING**

**SMALL-GROUP COMFORT**

*Your Small Group Birding Alternative For Beginners to Target Birders*

## ALASKA TOURS FOR SPRING 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adak, Aleutian Birds &amp; Asian Vagrants</td>
<td>May 16 – 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pribilofs I (St. Paul Island) Puffins &amp; Alcids</td>
<td>May 21 – 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambell: The Siberian Express</td>
<td>May 26 – June 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nome I: Bluethroat &amp; Bristle-thighed Curlew</td>
<td>May 29 – June 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrow: Spectacled &amp; Steller’s Eiders</td>
<td>June 2 – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nome II: Bluethroat &amp; Bristle-thighed Curlew</td>
<td>June 3 – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denali &amp; Kenai. Birds, Mammals &amp; Spectacular Vistas</td>
<td>June 5 – 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Harbor: The Whiskered Auklet &amp; Albatrosses</td>
<td>June 15 – 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pribilofs III. (St. Paul Island) Puffins &amp; Alcids</td>
<td>June 18 – 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### POPULAR COMBINATIONS (others available)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pribilofs I, Gambell &amp; Nome II</td>
<td>May 21 – June 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambell &amp; Nome II</td>
<td>May 26 – June 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trips all-inclusive from Anchorage

SEE OUR TRIP SCHEDULE FOR ARIZONA, COLORADO, TEXAS, HONDURAS & OTHERS FOR WINTER/SPRING 2015:

[www.highlonesometours.com](http://www.highlonesometours.com)

Email: info@highlonesometours.com

443-838-6589
A s different as birds and humans are, wanderlust is something that many, many of us share. So it’s unsurprising that travel and birding combine uncommonly well. Not only will an appreciation of birds add zest and interest and dimension to your vacations and other trips, having bireed in other areas will also spice up and inform the time you spend right around home.

At the American Birding Association, we aspire to do the same. In all our programs and publications, online and off, we aim to share information and insights that will help you solve tricky identification problems, get you to the best birding places at the best times, and plug you into a community of birders who are passionate not only about getting the most out of birding today, but also in helping ensure that there is great birding for those who follow in our footsteps.

Whether you’re a longtime member of the ABA, or you’ve just happened upon this Birder’s Guide to Travel by clicking a link that you saw in your wanderings online, we hope you’ll find a lot to like—and a lot that you can use. We also hope you’ll share your knowledge and passion for birding with others you meet, be they beginner or expert. And remember, all editions of the Birder’s Guide series are available online, free, to all at aba.org/birdersguide. Please pass it on!

Happy trails, wherever your birding takes you,

Jeffrey A. Gordon
President, American Birding Association

From the President

From the Editor

T ravel means different things to different people. For some birders, it’s a day trip, driving a couple hours from their homes in the Detroit suburbs to Tawas Point for spring warbler migration. For a few, it’s full-fledged globetrotting, and Taiwan Blue-Magpie is just one of the many extravagant birds on their bucket lists. They’ll want to make sure they’re fully prepared for such an expensive trip, to make sure they get the most out of it. Still other birders will fall somewhere in between, adding a few birds to their lifelists while they’re visiting relatives in Nebraska. However you travel, I hope you will find something of use in this issue of Birder’s Guide to Travel. Instead of “The 20 Best Birds of...” we’ve taken the idea and given it a twist this year: the 12 hardest birds of Middle America (and where to see them). Finally, the trusty Pelagic Directory brings up the rear, and should help you get your tubenose fix this year.

Please let us know what was missing that you’d like to see in the next travel 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
Every year, thousands of birders flock to S.P.I. to see over 300 species of migratory birds at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Book your stay today and discover what countless migratory birds and thousands of birding enthusiasts already know... this place is for the birds!

Book now at sopadre.com/birding
Kirby Adams is an avid and full-time birder living “between the lakes” in Lansing, Michigan. He is the birding columnist for the travel blog “National Parks Traveler” and guest feature writer in 2014 for Michigan Audubon Society’s Jack Pine Warbler. Kirby started birding way too late in life but is making up for lost time and paying his dues. He fancies himself a revolutionary for “holistic birding”, remembering always that birds are an inseparable part of a greater ecosystem.

Keith Barnes was born in South Africa and spent the better part of 30 years traipsing the length and breadth of Africa’s wilderness areas in search of birds and other critters. He contributed to several scientific papers, books, and articles along the way. However, his work as an owner and tour leader for Tropical Birding, an international bird tour operator, led him to delve into the avian delights of the Orient, where it was easy to fall in love with the exotic pheasants and pittas. In 2010, Keith and his family relocated to Taiwan, which is now his base for Asian wanderings. When not birding, Keith loves snorkeling and diving in the Pacific Ocean, as well as practicing his Mandarin on the patient and polite peoples of the Far East.

Josh Beck is currently in northern South America as part of a multiyear New World birding expedition with his partner, ornithologist Kathi Borgmann. In addition to looking for the rarest species, they are recording for Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Macaulay Library, volunteering for conservation organizations and projects, and attempting to draw attention to conservation issues and new birding locations. Josh and Kathi are documenting their birding travel on their blog, with hundreds of birding sites already detailed from Mexico to Colombia, at birdsofpassage.wordpress.com.

Dana Duxbury-Fox has been fascinated by birds all her life. She joined a local bird club and the Massachusetts Audubon Society by the age of 12. After graduating from Cornell University, she was off to teach biology in one of India’s Rural Institutes. For more than 20 years, she and her husband, Robert Fox, have traveled the world, following their fascination for birds. Dana is active with the Loon Preservation Committee in New Hampshire, and she assisted her husband and Allan Keith with their recent book, The Birds of New Hampshire.

Daniel Lebbin is a lifelong birder with a special passion for tropical birds and their conservation. As the Director of International Programs at the American Bird Conservancy, he works with the ABC’s partners in Latin America to reduce threats and establish, expand, and manage nature reserves for the most threatened birds. He is the lead author of the ABC’s Guide to Bird Conservation, and his illustrations are featured in the forthcoming Birds of Bolivia field guide. Daniel received a Ph.D. from Cornell University, where he researched habitat specialization among Amazonian birds in Peru.

Rick Wright is the Book Review Editor of Birding and The ABA Blog. Earlier this century, he served as Editor of Winging It; he also coordinated the field trip program for the ABA’s 2009 conference in Xalapa, Mexico. Rick leads Birds and Art tours in North America and Europe, and is a frequent and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader at festivals and other birding events. He lives in northern New Jersey with his wife, Alison Beringer, and their chocolate lab, Gellert. You can read about their adventures at Rick’s blog, “Birding New Jersey”.

About the Authors
THE MOST INTERESTING BIRDS
MAKE FOR A MOST INTERESTING VISIT.

Point your scope towards North Dakota. We’re home to more national wildlife refuges with birding infrastructure than any other state. With more than 300 species of birds calling our wide open spaces home, chances are you’ll spot your favorites. Start your journey at LegendaryND.com.
Here in the ABA Area, we have genuinely rare species (Kirtland’s Warbler, Florida Scrub-Jay, Gunnison Sage-Grouse), remote species that are hard to get to (McKay’s Bunting, Whiskered Auklet), and yet more that are certainly not easy to see (Black Rail, Flammulated Owl). However, if you are determined, plenty of information is available to help you find them. You can easily hire a guide to take you to and set up a telescope on each one. Even the lesser-known of these species are still at least somewhat studied, with fairly well-understood ranges and seasonal movements. In comparison, the tropics abound with species that I like to call “avian unicorns”.

They are poorly known, little studied, and very infrequently seen. I came up with that nickname after I had invested months looking for Gray-headed Piprites in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. People claim to have seen them, but a quick check of the internet shows that there are far more people who have purported to have seen a unicorn than a Gray-headed Piprites.

After more than a year birding Middle America, my partner Kathi and I found some rare species with ease, yet struggled with some
more common birds. That’s just the way it goes. But in the process we gained an appreciation for just how rare, poorly known, and hard to observe some birds are in the Neotropics. So what constitutes an avian unicorn? Crested Eagle, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, and Lovely Cotinga are hard-to-find birds, but there are known Crested Eagle nest sites, there are a few places in Panama where Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo can be staked out, and both species have extensive ranges in South America. Lovely Cotinga, certainly a unicorn in Mexico or Costa Rica, is nearly guaranteed at The Lodge at Pico Bonito in Honduras.

Many birders may have other opinions, but the following species are what Kathi and I believe are the rarest of the rare—the unicorns of Middle America—in no particular order. Included are tips on where and how to (attempt to) see them. Good luck!

**Bare-necked Umbrellabird** (*Cephalopterus glabricollis*) is an odd-looking but incredible member of the cotinga family that is essentially restricted to Costa Rica and western Panama. It needs contiguous intact rainforest from middle elevations down to the lowlands for breeding...
Avian Unicorns of Middle America

and seasonal movement. If you look at satellite maps of Costa Rica and Panama, you will see that very little intact forest remains stretching from 1,000m (3281 ft.) to sea level. Sadly, this severely endangered species is certainly still declining, and it is increasingly difficult to connect with. From time to time, umbrellabirds are found near Parque Nacional El Copé in Panama, in the Volcán Arenal area of Costa Rica, and from some of the aerial trams in Costa Rica. Hands down, though, the best site at which to see Bare-necked Umbrellabird is the San Gerardo Biological Station in the Children’s Eternal Rainforest in Costa Rica. It is rainy and muddy, but the field station is comfortable, the hosts are very kind, and this is the only known lekking site (March and April) for the species. It is also a fantastic location for some other great birds: Highland Tinamou, Buff-fronted, Chiriquí, and Purplish-backed quail-doves, Ochre-breasted and Scaled antpittas, Three-wattled Bellbird… And we even saw a Solitary Eagle from the station!

Ocellated Quail (Cyrtonyx ocellatus) is a secretive and decidedly rare relative of Montezuma Quail with a range, as best we know, from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to Honduras. There are a handful of sites where they have been seen in the past 10 years, but most records are in the Alta Verapaz department of Guatemala and the highlands of central Honduras. Throughout its range, it occurs in middle elevations, in areas where pasture, grassland, or fallow agricultural fields adjoin or blend into open pine or oak forest. In Guatemala, near the city of Cobán, John Cahill (johnpaulcahill@gmail.com), or his parents’ conservation organization, Community Cloud Forest Conservation (cloudforestconservation.org), are good places to start if you seek Ocellated Quail. In Honduras, it occurs in the grassland and pine savannah areas near La Unión and Parque Nacional La Muralla. Contact Robert Gallardo (birdsofhonduras.com) for information and local guiding.

Unspotted Saw-whet Owl (Aegolius ridgwayi) is certainly the most difficult owl to find in Middle America and probably all of North America. Ranging from Chiapas to western Panama, this species occurs at many sites but is never common...
and never easy to see. There are places to seek it in Chiapas and Guatemala, but the logistics can be tricky. Many of the locations are either on private/native land or just hard to find, and it can be difficult to obtain up-to-date information. If you do go looking for Unspotted Saw-whet near San Cristóbal, Chiapas, read up on access and safety issues because there have been problems with locals breaking into cars and extorting birders in the past. Unspotted Saw-whet Owl is probably easiest to see in Costa Rica, on Volcán Irazú and in the Savegre Valley. In both locations, lodging is available, the roads and trails are safe, and there are no issues with wandering about at night with a spotlight!

**Eared Poorwill** (*Nyctiphrynus mcleodii*) is poorly known, rare, spottily-distributed, and nocturnal. That makes this Mexican endemic one hard-to-find goat-sucker! Fortunately, Eared Poorwills can be found somewhat reliably at a few sites in west Mexico if you are willing to put in some extended night hours. They occur on Cerro San Juan (on which sits Rancho La Noria) in Nayarit, on the Puerto Los Mazos road above Autlán in Jalisco (no longer drivable, though readily hiked, and excellent for hummingbirds, including Mexican Woodnymph), and on the old Volcán de Fuego road, where good ground clearance is necessary and four-wheel drive is very helpful. All of these sites are described in Steve Howell’s *A Birdfinding Guide to Mexico*. Seek out scrubby, thicket-covered hillsides, and you will have a fair chance of hearing and, with some luck, actually seeing the poorwill. Be aware, though, that this nightjar really likes heavy cover and can be very hard to find perched.

**Beautiful Treerunner** (*Margarornis bellulus*), a member of the furnariid/woodcreeper family, is endemic to just a few mountaintops in eastern Panama. The only two areas it inhabits that are realistically accessible are Cerro Chucantí and Cerro Pirre. This very poorly known species seems to be quite uncommon if not downright rare within its tiny range. Cerro Chucantí is accessible, with difficulty, via Advantage Tours Panama and Guido Berguido, who own a reserve and rustic lodge on the mountain. The other location, Cerro Pirre, was formerly accessible via airstrip at Ancon Expedition’s camp at Cana, deep in the Darién Gap. Nowadays, Cerro Pirre is best accessed via some difficult logistics, lots of permits, and either good Spanish skills or a bilingual guide. One way or another, you will have to hire Isaac Pizarro, who is essentially the only way to get to Pirre Station and Cerro Pirre these days. The good news is that (along with terrible accommodations at Pirre Station and some long, miserable, steep, muddy, slippery hikes) you can see some other amazing endemics (Pirre Warbler, Pirre Hummingbird, Pirre Chlorospingus, Green-naped Tanager) as well as some just plain awesome birds, like Sharpbill, Sapatoya, Great Jacamar, Harpy Eagle, Crested Eagle, Crimson-bellied Woodpecker, and many, many more. Going to Cerro Pirre is a real adventure, but it offers some of
Avian Unicorns of Middle America

Townsend’s Shearwater. Photo © Matt Sadowski

Townsend’s Shearwater (Puffinus auricularis, sensu stricto) is one of the most endangered seabirds in the world. It has been extirpated from two of the three islands where it historically bred and is now declining on the last, Isla Socorro, due to predation by cats and burrow-trampling by sheep. Townsend’s Shearwater could probably be seen readily near Isla Socorro during the breeding season, but there is no access to the island short of an expensive multi-day boat charter, and landing on the island is prohibited by law. Your best bet for seeing Townsend’s Shearwater is a pelagic trip from Puerto Ángel, Huatulco, or Puerto Escondido in Oaxaca. The continental shelf is within 3–4 mi. (5–6km) of shore at Puerto Ángel, and the possibility of seeing other rare seabirds is terrific. Townsend’s Shearwater, though, is most frequently seen inside the shelf edge; we saw one about two miles from shore. If you go, give yourself a couple of days in town to find a boatman and sort out some chum. Knowing Spanish or hiring a bilingual guide will help a lot. Note that Newell’s Shearwater (P. [auricularis] newelli) of Hawaii is not considered part of Townsend’s Shearwater for our purposes, and that the AOU is considering splitting them this year.

Bearded Wood-Partridge (Dendrortyx barbatus) is an elusive species of forest quail that has a very restricted range in eastern Mexico, occurring in remnant cloudforest patches in Veracruz and a few surrounding states. If you spend a few days in its habitat, you will most likely hear one, but seeing it
Bearded Wood-Partridges have been introduced in Macültépetl Ecological Park in Xalapa; however, this is an urban park, and the birds are even more secretive than typical. Above Xalapa, the town of Coatepec is the classic site for this species, although it seems increasingly rare there these days. Perhaps the best place to see one is in nearby Zapotal, which hosts a large amount of cloudforest and a healthy population of Bearded Wood-Partridge. Zapotal has a fledgling ecotourism program with very rustic lodging, amazing homemade food, and trail guides to help you look for the chivizcoyo, as the species is called locally. Arrangements to visit Zapotal can be made via an agency called SENDAS AC. It has a website (sendas99.wordpress.com) and an email address (sendas_ac@yahoo.com.mx). Note that only Spanish was spoken when we made our arrangements.

**Gray-headed Piprites** *(Piprites grisiceps)* is probably the most challenging regularly-occurring species to find in Central America, and it would be a good contender for the most challenging in all of North America were it not for a certain swift in Mexico, but more on that later. The three species of piprites (*Pipp*-*RYE*-*teez*) are vaguely manakin-like birds whose taxonomic affinities are unresolved. Gray-headed Piprites is thought to occur from eastern Guatemala to western Panama in intact lowland or foothill rainforest on the Caribbean slope. While still found in very remote areas of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, most recent Gray-headed Piprites records come from Costa Rica. This probably reflects the combination of more intact habitat, better access to it, and more birders, rather than the number of birds. There is no slam-dunk strategy for finding this bird. Learn its call, which is a little series of trilling pips, and spend a lot of time in good habitat. Then you have a shot...maybe. I have heard this species twice in Costa Rica: once near Rara Avis and once in the Vereh Valley. Still, after about two months birding in healthy forest in its range, I have not yet laid eyes on it!

**Chocó Tinamou** *(Crypturellus kerriae)* barely makes it into Panama but is perhaps more readily found in a few spots in the Panamanian Darién than in the rest of its range in Colombia. In Panama, Chocó Tinamou occurs in wet ravines in the foothills of the Serranía de Pirre (the ridgeline topped by Cerro Pirre). Most notably, it is readily heard from the Rancho Plástico campsite on the trek up to Cerro Pirre. If you want to actually see one, be prepared for some extremely steep off-trail terrain and perhaps plan an extra day to have a fair shot. We heard this species several times but did not see it in several hours’ effort.
**Avian Unicorns of Middle America**

**Short-crested Coquette** (*Lophornis brachylophus*) occurs only in the Sierra de Atoyac in the state of Guerrero in Mexico. Steve Howell’s directions to the area above Atoyac (in his birdfinding guide) are excellent, but the “political situation”, as he calls it, is currently very unstable. I believe it would be unwise to head to this area without a good bit of research and current information from a well-informed local. If you can make it there, be sure to look for two other striking endemics: White-tailed Hummingbird and White-throated Jay.

**White-fronted Swift** (*Cypseloides storeri*) is probably the least-known bird species in North America. Only a few specimens exist, and in the past 30 years it has been documented perhaps just five times, with only one unequivocal photograph of a live bird. The known range is in the mountains of western Mexico from Jalisco to perhaps Oaxaca. The best place currently known to look for the species is in the vicinity of Tacámbaro, Michoacán (again using Howell’s birdfinding guide). It is not known whether the species is resident or migratory, and most specimens and records are from summer, so unless you’re looking to establish one of the first winter or migratory records of a species whose migratory habits are almost completely unknown, summer might be the best time to go.

**Glow-throated Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus ardens*) is by far the most difficult hummingbird to see in North America. This Panamanian species is barely known and has a tiny, poorly understood range that overlaps with Scintillant Hummingbird, a species which is essentially identical except for the gorget color of adult males (rosy-red in Glow-throated, orangeish-red in Scintillant). Various authors have proposed criteria for separating female and juvenile Scintillants from Glow-throateds, but it is still unclear whether these criteria are reliable and whether museum specimens are even identified correctly. To look for Glow-throated Hummingbird, go up to Cerro Santiago in Panama. The road (accessed from the Pan-American at San Félix) is now improved most of the way, though to continue on and look for the endemic Yellow-green Finch, high clearance is handy. There are no services, so a couple days spent car-camping might be a good idea to maximize your chances. This is a native peoples’ area, so you must ask permission of the locals to camp, which will require Spanish. A few recent articles by Bill Adsett (e.g., tinyurl.com/ cerro-santiago), help provide the most current understanding of the range, occurrence, and identification of this species. We spent a few days searching for Glow-throateds, but saw only many female/juvenile hummingbirds that went

---

Above: Male Short-crested Coquette. Photo © John Cobb
Below: Female Short-crested Coquette. Photo © Ryan Shaw

Continued on page 18
Because Birding is Priceless...
but getting there is not!

We Can Help!

35 Years Experience
Planning Birding & Nature Travel

Your Budget, Your Time Frame,
Your Choice of Destinations
Worldwide!

... Put our Travel Planners to
work for you.

Guided Group Tours
... Independent Birding Ventures
with expert guides...
Lodge Stays at Famous
Eco-lodges

Call 800-426-7781 to book your
birding adventure today!

www.naturalistjourneys.com
www.caligo.com

A Sample of Upcoming
Guided Tours:
Say you saw us in the
Travel Issue of Birding
Magazine for $100 per
person discount on
these destinations:

Trinidad & Tobago
Birding & Leatherback
Turtles
Multiple departures
April – July

Panama Birding &
Biodiversity
Special Green Season
Savings
July 13-22

Kansas Tallgrass Prairies
Splendor in the Grass
Sept. 12-19

Guyana Birds &
Mammals
Hidden Gem of South
America
Oct. 18-29

Colombia: Andes &
Valleys of the Coffee
Triangle
Nov. 8-22

Featured Independent
Birding Venture
Southeast Arizona, 7N
Birding package from
Tucson
Casa de San Pedro and
Cave Creek Ranch

Let us do the planning
for you!

Similar packages in
Trinidad & Tobago,
Costa Rica, Belize,
Jamaica, South Texas
and other destinations

Caligo Ventures proudly represents the Asa Wright Nature Centre,
Trinidad and Tobago. Your visit benefits the first-established
Nature Centre in the West Indies!

Book one of our Birding & Leatherback Turtles tours, April to July,
and receive a $100 discount when you say you saw this ad in Birding!
Avian Unicorns of Middle America

The only males we could make a positive ID on were all adult male Scintillants. It’s a very difficult species to ID with certainty, and the nearly constant gale-force winds in the area don’t help. It is theorized that this species’ occurrence on Cerro Santiago is seasonal, with spring (April) perhaps being best.

In addition to these highly coveted and hard-to-find avian delights, several other species are worth mentioning. Some are nomadic and can be very hit-or-miss, such as Aztec Thrush, Black-capped Siskin, Thick-billed Parrot, and Red-fronted Parrotlet. Some have tiny ranges, such as Sierra Madre Sparrow, Worthen’s Sparrow, Viridian Dacnis, Costa Rican Brush-finch, and Tuxtla Quail-Dove (the last is now much easier to find near Ruiz Cortines than at the “traditional” site near Bastonal). To be honest, though, these species are pretty easy ticks compared to Gray-headed Piprites or White-fronted Swift! Tacarcuna Wood-Quail and Tacarcuna Tapaculo are also worth a mention; aside from a couple of Panamanian guides from the Darién, no birders or ornithologists are known to have dared the political unrest of the area and summited Cerro Tacarcuna since 1964. These two species are, thus, logistically inaccessible.

And if the Black-banded Woodcreepers that occur (in extremely small numbers) in North America are ever split from the Black-banded Woodcreepers in the Amazon basin, that “new” species will earn an instant spot on this list.

Have you tried to see any of the unicorns listed above? Did you succeed? Did you fail? Do you have tips of your own for how, where, and when to look? Are there other species you believe are deserving of the title? Please share your own stories and thoughts with us at aba.org/birdersguide.

Central America refers to the continental landmass between Mexico and Colombia; it does not include Mexico. Middle America is a term widely used to refer to the continental landmass between the U.S. and Colombia (that is, Mexico plus Central America); the West Indies are also sometimes included in this definition. North America is the continental landmass north of the Panama-Colombia border (and sometimes its associated islands, such as Greenland, Cuba, and Haida Gwaii). Thus, Central America is part of Middle America, and Middle America is part of North America. The ABA Area is essentially North America and its associated islands north of the U.S.-Mexican border. It is not synonymous with “North America”.

White-fronted Swift. Photo © Brian Gibbons

Adult male Glow-throated Hummingbird. Gouache painting © Michael L. P. Retter

Continued from page 16

Unidentified. The only males we could make a positive ID on were all adult male Scintillants. It’s a very difficult species to ID with certainty, and the nearly constant gale-force winds in the area don’t help. It is theorized that this species’ occurrence on Cerro Santiago is seasonal, with spring (April) perhaps being best.

Central America refers to the continental landmass between Mexico and Colombia; it does not include Mexico. Middle America is a term widely used to refer to the continental landmass between the U.S. and Colombia (that is, Mexico plus Central America); the West Indies are also sometimes included in this definition. North America is the continental landmass north of the Panama-Colombia border (and sometimes its associated islands, such as Greenland, Cuba, and Haida Gwaii). Thus, Central America is part of Middle America, and Middle America is part of North America. The ABA Area is essentially North America and its associated islands north of the U.S.-Mexican border. It is not synonymous with “North America”.

Have you tried to see any of the unicorns listed above? Did you succeed? Did you fail? Do you have tips of your own for how, where, and when to look? Are there other species you believe are deserving of the title? Please share your own stories and thoughts with us at aba.org/birdersguide.
Meet the Whoopers at their winter home.

Observation tower and boat tour viewing. Learn more at www.rockport-fulton.org @ visitrockportfulton 1-800-242-0071

Photography by Capt. Tommy Moore

Bird Festival
at Fairchild
October 1-4, 2015
Miami, Florida

FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN
Exploring, Explaining and Conserving the World of Tropical Plants
10901 Old Cutler Road, Coral Gables, Florida 33156-4296 USA
305.667.1651 • www.fairchildgarden.org

Scottish Birding Tours
Visit the Scottish Highlands for abundant wildlife and beautiful scenery
Year round itineraries • Custom made tours
Fully inclusive from $1495 per person
Staying with birders at Cygnus House, locally produced food • complimentary drinks

Visit www.blackislebirding.com for itineraries and further information
It's just a small clump of shrubbery in front of me, not much bigger than my car, but it's full of warblers. By the time I figure out what all is in there, I’ve counted a Canada, two Wilson's, a Black-throated Blue, two Pines, and a Yellow. With so many birds in this scruffy patch, I can't imagine what the small stand of conifers up the trail holds. The wind is up this morning, and the waves are crashing just out of sight beyond this bush of warblers. Ignoring the songbird cacophony for just a moment, I turn 180 degrees to scan the mudflats behind me. It's a field of peeps with some stately Whimbrels strolling among them. Do I scan for oddities among the peeps or get back to hunting warblers? A Baltimore Oriole is loudly voting for the latter just as the entire expanse of shorebirds takes flight and disappears over the bay. A Peregrine Falcon lands somewhat clumsily in the mud. That settles it. I turn on my heels to catch a Black-billed Cuckoo that just whistled in my ear.

I could have written those words to describe an April morning at High Island in Texas, but this actually happened on the shore of Lake Huron late in May. The Great Lakes area may have Whitefish Point, Magee Marsh, Point Pelee, and famous hawk watches near Detroit and Duluth, but, given a couple days of freedom in any season, I’m heading to Tawas.
The hottest of the hotspots along Huron’s west shore is found in Tawas Point State Park. A triangular patch of forest juts into the mouth of Saginaw Bay with a mile-long sandy peninsula sweeping southward and westward from its tip. If you were asked to design a perfect migrant trap, you might arrange something like this. The peninsula is sparsely treed in a narrow strip down its center with dune grass predominating along the edges. The Tawas Bay side is lagoonal with extensive mudflats, while the Lake Huron side is a sandy, wave-battered beach, giving the peninsula the feel of a barrier island on the Atlantic Coast.

The 183-acre park is a National Audubon Society Important Bird Area, with about 300 species recorded in the immediate area. Just north of Tawas Point is Tuttle Marsh Wildlife Area, with a 400-acre impoundment hosting thousands of migrating waterfowl. Many wader species nest at Tuttle, which is one of the...
Michigan’s Tawas Point

best spots in Michigan for close encounters with both American and Least bitterns. In the spring of 2010, a Purple Gallinule was the highlight of the decade in the marsh. Only four years later another Purple Gallinule, or perhaps the same bird, spent May at Tuttle Marsh.

Spring migration is a wondrous event at Tawas Point. It may be clichéd to paint a picture of warblers “dripping from the trees”, but no description more accurately captures the experience of a May morning spent meandering the length of the peninsula on the Sandy Hook Nature Trail. Because there is little vegetation compared to a place like Magee Marsh, the migrants concentrate on the trees and shrubbery like ornaments on over-decorated Christmas trees. You might get six warbler species in one tree at other migrant traps, but here the same six will all be in one small, isolated bush 10 feet off the trail. A goal of 20 warbler species in one day is realistic during peak migration in mid-May. Even as late as the last few days of May, I’ve managed to pick up a dozen warblers.

A particularly fine warbler treat at Tawas Point is one of the ABA Area’s rarest songbirds, Kirtland’s Warbler. With nearly all of the world’s population of Kirtland’s nesting in the jack pine forests within 100 miles of the point (to the west and north), these birds are becoming reliable annual visitors in May. During the Michigan Audubon Society’s Tawas Point Birding Festival in 2010, birders were rewarded with a particularly boisterous Kirtland’s. The male was foraging literally at the feet of the assembled birders, “singing its head off”, according to one seasoned festival attendee, who couldn’t help but use the word “magical” in describing Tawas Point. A species that may have become extinct a few decades ago was—thanks to the intervention of federal and Michigan agencies under the Endangered Species Act—foraging too close for the use of binoculars. Approaching a ground-nesting bird that closely on the breeding grounds is both reckless and prohibited, but at migration traps you can stand in one spot, and the rarest of birds may come to you!

Of course, migration is about more than
Volunteers help keep birds (and birders) happy at Tawas Point. Fresh-cut oranges attract orioles. Photo © Wayne Pope

warblers. Scarlet Tanagers, vireos, thrushes, and joyfully singing *Empidonax* flycatchers all crowd onto the point in May. The vegetated interior of the peninsula tapers from several hundred feet across to little more than 50 ft. at some points, so the birds are really packed in. Even the more cryptic lurkers, like cuckoos, have no choice but to offer themselves up for good views.

North of Tawas Point at Tuttle Marsh, the waterfowl impoundments are surrounded by dense conifer forest. Ovenbirds and Wood Thrushes serenade birders who are scoping the waders and ducks. There are no facilities at Tuttle Marsh, but the unpaved road through the area has frequent pullouts. The raised dikes are open to hiking. The best birding strategy in this area is to park and wander along the road or the dikes.

As in most of the Midwest, summer is a more relaxed season at Tawas Point. Mimids take over the central vegetated strip on the peninsula, with Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers adorning almost every tree. They’re joined by Baltimore and Orchard orioles, as well as a few warblers that stick around to nest, most notably American Redstart and Yellow Warbler. With the chaos of migration winding down, birders’ attention can be turned to the beach near the tip of the peninsula, where several pairs of the endangered Great Lakes population of Piping Plover are regular nesters. The summer of 2013 saw five nesting pairs, although only four chicks were successfully fledged. The immediate area around the nests is closed to access, but several nearby spots provide easy viewing even without a spotting scope. A small observation deck at the terminus of the trail is a good spot, as well as atop the small dune between the trail and the beach.

Once midsummer rolls around, Arctic-nesting shorebirds are already headed south. The observation deck at the end of the Sandy Hook Nature Trail overlooks pebble beaches, mudflats, an offshore sandbar, and a vegetated island. Any shorebird on the Atlantic or Mississippi flyways can be expected here. Highlights in recent summers and falls have included American Golden- and Black-bellied plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, White-rumped and Baird’s sandpipers, Whimbrel, and Red Knot. The last two are more frequently found in May than during fall migration, which may be a result of having more eyes on the point during the festival.

Where there are shorebirds and weary
migrants, there will often be Peregrine Falcons. A sudden dispersal of every shorebird on a mudflat is the typical fanfare of a Peregrine’s (or a Bald Eagle’s) arrival. Spring and fall are both good times to look for falcons. Merlin is regular throughout the year, and often one is engaged in aerial harassment of a bird much larger than itself.

Migrating passerines are just as abundant in the fall, if a little less showy. Days with double-digit warblers are easy to come by in September. The western subspecies of Palm Warbler, which tends to favor shorelines on fall passage, is often absurdly abundant.

Fall also brings waterfowl. Diving ducks are plentiful in the bay, although it’s important to note that duck hunting is allowed here. It’s easy to be startled by a shotgun blast or embarrassed by excitedly scop ing a group of decoys. Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, and Common Goldeneye are regular, along with appearances by all the mergansers.

My favorite fall experience at Tawas Point was the exodus of a line of Double-crested Cormorants, perhaps the most-maligned bird species of the Great Lakes. I sat on a driftwood log and counted 187 cormorants.
**Unforgettable!**

The Birding Paradise of Latin America, has open wings to the World!

- **Andes & Choco Region**
  - 450-550 Species / 23 Endemics
  - 15 Days / 14 Birding Locations
  - Cloud, Dry, Paramo and Very Humid Tropical Forest
  - Availability: All the Year!

- **Magdalena Valley & Santa Marta Mountains**
  - 500-600 Species / 42 Endemics
  - 16 Days / 18 Birding Locations
  - Cloud, Dry, and Humid Tropical Forest
  - Wetlands of Low and High elevations
  - Availability: All the Year!

**COLOMBIA IS MAGICAL REALISM**

More than 1900 Species to Enjoy!!!

info@manakinnaturetours.com / www.manakinnaturetours.com

---

**Vital Sanctuary**

Our region provides safe sanctuary for numerous at-risk species, such as the Cerulean Warbler. Nationally endangered, this vibrant blue migratory warbler can be spotted high in the treetops of our lush Carolinian Forests.

---

**Ojibway Prairie Complex**

More than 240 species have been recorded at the Ojibway Prairie Complex, situated in the southwest corner of Windsor. Walk or bicycle trails that wind through tall grass prairie, savanna and oak woodland, supporting species like the Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren and Indigo Bunting.
flying in perfect single file only 15 ft. off the water, making a beeline out of the bay to the south. I’m not sure how many minutes they took to pass, but it was like waiting at a train crossing and guessing how many more cars would come before the caboose.

When autumn begins to look more like winter, it’s gulling season at Tawas Point. Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous gulls join the always-present Ring-billeds and Herrings. The entire bay side of the peninsula offers good gullying from the campground to the point. Offshore sandbars are best viewed from the beach just behind the lighthouse and from the observation deck at the end of the trail. Flocks of Bonaparte’s Gulls churn the shallow water in the bay throughout the fall.

Oddly, the all-time highlight for November at Tawas wasn’t a gull at all. In 2011, a Common Ground-Dove spent much of the month there, delighting birders with one of the northernmost records for the species.

When the bitter cold and heavy snow of winter arrive, few birders will brave a walk at Tawas Point. For those who do, the ducks and gulls can still be rewarding, as can flocks of Snow Bunting on the flats and beaches. There is little shelter anywhere for human or bird, so only the hardiest of tundra-migrant month listers will be around. During “invasion” years, Snowy Owls frequent the ice floes and enjoy easy access to ducks in the bay.

Getting to Tawas Point is easy, and the drive scenic. The second half of the three-hour drive from Detroit on US-23 takes you past a host of birding destinations. Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge is on your left, and Bay City State Recreation Area at the base of Saginaw Bay is on your right. In spring and summer, Nayanquing Point State Wildlife Area can get you Yellow-headed Blackbirds, the species’s easternmost continually used nesting location.

Tawas City is a tourist town but without a tourist-trap feel. Lodging is inexpensive and readily available. Tawas Point State Park has a campground, providing the opportunity to sleep as close to the birds as possible.

Things get a little more hectic during the Tawas Point Birding Festival on the third weekend of May. Contact the Michigan Audubon Society at (517) 641-4277 or go to tawasbirdfest.com for details on the annual event. The gathering has produced great bird lists, including some unexpected rarities almost every year.

The park’s Victorian lighthouse is a must-see attraction for a break from birding. In the summer, you could try your hand at a new hobby by joining the kite surfers on the beach. If you’ve never attached yourself to a kite in a Lake Huron wind, however, you may want to do what every good birder at Tawas Point does: just watch and marvel.
ABA Summit & Annual Members Meeting

When:
ABA Summit:  
Sept 30-Oct 2, 2015
American Birding Expo:  
Oct 2–4, 2015

Where:
Grange Insurance Audubon Center, Columbus, OH

How Much: FREE!
Limit: All are welcome

Join the ABA Staff, fellow ABA members, and a great mix of well-known birding personalities at our first-ever ABA Summit to be held just prior to and in association with the American Birding Expo hosted by Bird Watcher’s Digest and sponsored by the ABA.

Not only is the ABA Summit a unique one-of-a-kind event, it’s FREE! ALL ARE WELCOME! An exciting slate of activities is scheduled for the two days including:
• VIP Access to the American Birding Expo vendor areas
• Annual ABA Members Meeting
• Birding Workshops (photography, art, field skills, etc.)
• Optics Demonstrations & Panel Discussions
• Socials (meet and reconnect with friends)
• And of course…….a little bit of birding too!

For more details go to:

events.aba.org

events@aba.org • 800.850.2473
Making the Most of Your Next Birding Tour

Birding in India on a Rockjumper tour.
Photo © Felicity Riley
hen you sign up for a birding tour, you become part of a team. With everyone preparing well and following some thoughtful field practices, the trip will go more smoothly and be more successful. After a recent birding trip to South America, I realized that it might be helpful to develop a list of guidelines for preparing for a birding trip and of specific behaviors to encourage during the trip in order to make it a better experience for each participant.

Part One: Preparing for the Trip

MINIMAL PREPARATION
If all participants have at least minimal knowledge of the birds that might be seen on the tour, the whole group will function more efficiently. Here are some ideas that are essential for all.

• Begin your study period early. Try to start at least two months in advance.
• Read the material provided by your tour company. Then read it again and again. This is valuable information about the birds you will see, the places you will visit, and the things you should bring to make the trip enjoyable. As one company puts it, “It is our experience that difficulties on tours arise from clients not having fully read the pre-trip materials”.
• Buy the recommended field guide for where you are going. Get a second one if you want to keep a library-quality copy of the book.
• Get the daily field checklist from your tour company. This will provide you with your target list of birds to study.
• Mark your book with the species that you might see. Your field checklist and your field guide may use different English and/or scientific names for a particular species because the
Scientific Name Changes
Over time, taxonomists have changed the scientific names of many species. The specific epithet—the second part of the scientific name—is very stable and seldom changes, but changes in genus are much more prevalent as taxonomists reconsider how species are related to one another. Even a name like Turdus migratorius (American Robin), which has been in use for many, many years, could change overnight if taxonomists were to decide that Song Thrush (which is the type species for Turdus and must retain that genus name) is in a different genus than American Robin.

Learn How to Find Current Taxonomies • If your tour checklist and your book differ, the easiest way to find synonyms (either English or scientific) is to use Denis Lepage’s Avibase website, avibase.bsc-eoc.org. Whatever name you type into the “find” field, vernacular or scientific, the website will take you to the bird that you are seeking. Lepage’s database is quite up-to-date and goes back many, many years.

Checklist Variations • As you probably know, there are quite a few checklists of the world’s bird species, and taxonomy can vary among checklists. Many of these checklists are updated regularly, so there can be a great deal of difference between what is in an older book and what is available today. The major world checklists are the International Ornithological Committee (IOC) World Bird List, Clements Checklist of Birds of the World, Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW), Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World, Birdschecklist, and BirdLife International checklist. Check with your tour operator to see which taxonomic authority it follows on its bird lists; this is often listed on the book’s cover. If you have kept it up to date! and with a checklist of birds for the area you plan to visit, but it also will show you which species you have seen previously.

Find all (sub)species on your tour

Advanced Preparation
Many participants start to prepare much earlier than two months before the trip. They begin as above and add steps to enhance their knowledge of the species they might see. Here are some additional things you can do to be even more prepared.

Mark up your book. I mark up my book extensively by placing a large, bold plate number in the right-hand corner of each plate’s page, labeling the plate in large letters with the families depicted on the plate, and writing each bird’s name beside its picture so that I can find it quickly. I underline the name if I have seen the species before.

Use your database. Most birders keep a record of their sightings in a database such as Avisys for the Mac and Windows, BirdBase for Windows, and Bird Brain for the Mac, or the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird, which keeps your observational data online on its servers. One new database you might try is iGoterra (igoterra.com), which lets you keep your data according to the IOC or Clements lists. Your database will not only provide you with an updated taxonomic list of the species you might see (if you have kept it up to date!) and with a checklist of birds for the area you plan to visit, but it also will show you which species you have seen previously.

Find all (sub)species on your tour

A checklist that you have already seen. The rest are potential lifers! Use a colored highlighter to mark the potential lifers.

Create a hit list of your target birds. These will mainly be lifers, but you may want to add other birds of special interest. I carry such a list in my pocket each day so I can keep track of which ones I have not yet seen. Often, I show this list to the leader so that (s)he can be on the alert for my targets.

Make a quick index of the families of birds covered by the plates and any special birds you want to find easily. I do this in Excel and size it to fit inside the cover of the field guide. I then laminate it to the inside cover. Because different books list the families of birds in different sequences, this index will help you find a bird’s image quickly. See the photo above for an example.

Consider pulling your book apart... if your book contains the plates and additional information on separate
pages. Create two books: a metal spiral-bound book with just the plates that you can take into the field and another book containing all the text pages. The latter can be left in your room.

- Get a “book bag” to easily carry your plate field guide into the field.
- Request prior trip lists from your tour company. These are often available as PDFs on the company’s website. They will help you figure out how likely it is that you will see each species during the trip. Prior trip lists can give you a sense of the abundance of each species, and where it has been seen previously; at least one company, Rockjumper, lets you know just how often they have seen a particular bird on all previous tours.
- Check out the eBird output for the area. The eBird Location Explorer at ebird.org/ebird/places is a very useful tool for planning a trip. Simply enter the country or other jurisdiction you plan to visit, and from there you can get further output. By far the most helpful tools for well-birded areas are the bar charts, which show your likelihood of observing any particular species during any week of the year. You may, however, find that the eBird maps function is of more help for more remote areas.
- Make lists of the birds by day/area as you will see them. Use the tour company’s written materials (prior years’ bird lists, trip reports, itineraries) to guide you. Use these smaller lists to study the birds you are likely to see at each location, which is more efficient than, say, learning all of the hummingbirds you might see on the whole trip. Many participants refresh their memories by consulting this list each evening or early morning; doing this reinforces the images of species which might be seen during the next outing.
- Bring electronic equipment with you. Recently, I began to add to my travel equipment the smallest laptop computer that will run my database. I now have my database, and any special pictures I have downloaded, with me. I often want to know where I saw a species previously (no, I cannot remember where I saw every bird!). This sometimes becomes important when I am checking for subspecies. If your data are on eBird, you can display your lifelist anytime you have an internet connection on some devices. Even better, download your life list as an HTML file so that you can have access to it even when offline. These days, many traveling birders also pack their smartphones, tablets, and GPS devices.
- Download the taxonomic updates. Regardless of which taxonomy you use, keep the checklist open as you look for current names or subspecies. If you record your sightings in eBird, your observations will be (sometimes automatically) updated if one of your observed species is ever split.
- Seek out additional illustrations for hard-to-ID birds. Because the quality of reproductions in a particular book might not be the best, additional views of the bird can be very helpful. Googling a species’s name will often give you many options to see images and often videos.
Making the Most of Your Next Birding Tour

If you are headed to Asia, for example, the Oriental Bird Club has assembled a website of images of Asian birds at orientalbirdimages.org. You can download images of species that you want to see on your tour. Put the images (typically jpg files) in a folder on the smartphone, tablet, or notebook computer that you are bringing with you on the trip. While you are traveling from site to site (and sometimes these drives are long), you can review the photos to remind yourself what your next target birds look like—if you’re not prone to motion sickness, that is!

• Become familiar with the songs of key birds before you go. This can really increase your enjoyment of the trip. I put together a collection of songs from the specific region I will visit and try to learn the key birds. The best place to find those recordings is xeno-canto.org. I just used it to download calls for a trip in California, but it took some work to assemble a playlist. Many bird sound CDs are on the market, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Macaulay Library has many (un-downloadable) recordings available.

• If you plan to record your sightings in eBird, download BirdLog Worldwide. This app (for iPhone, iPad, or Android) lets you quickly create a checklist based on GPS coordinates. Using the “create offline checklist” option is usually best, because it immediately grabs the coordinates. Later, when you have a WiFi connection, you can match the location with an existing eBird hotspot or other pre-existing location.

• Get maps for where you are going. If there is no paper map available, you could download Google Maps to your device and then download the appropriate map for offline use. This means that you can use the map anytime, even when you are not connected to the internet. Genius Maps also has a map service that can be used offline.

Three Key Considerations

Three key issues that will impact your ability to see a bird are noise, motion, and the color of your clothing.

• Noise: At all times proceed quietly. This means limiting conversation on the trail, always speaking in a soft voice, walking quietly (especially in dry leaf litter), and wearing clothing (especially rain pants and jackets) and boots that do not squeak or swish. Unless describing the location of a bird to others, whispering a quiet “got it”, or telling the leader when you’ve not yet seen the bird it’s apparent everyone else has, maintain absolute silence when lined up trying to see a bird or during taping or playback. At those times, let the leader do the talking.

• Motion: Avoid all movement when trying to see a bird. Don’t lean against or grab a small tree or sapling: an inch of horizontal motion at three feet above the ground can easily translate to a three-foot motion 15 feet up the tree. Plant your feet comfortably on level ground if you have to stand still for some while. Because your leader’s goal is for everyone to see the bird, (s)he will direct you if you need to move.

• Color of your clothing: Wear appropriately-colored clothes in the field. The right clothing increases the probability that the bird will stick around longer for a more satisfying viewing experience. In forest situations, wear only dull, dark clothes, such as dark greens, browns, grays, blues, and black. Colors such as beige, fawn, cream, and khaki are too light for forest birding, but are usually fine in more sunny, open habitats, such as savannah. In no case should bright colors (including white) be worn in the field.

Also Important

• What to bring. Carefully read the written material about what to bring on the trip. For example, I can attest that if a walking stick is recommended, you should bring one, as it can enhance safety, speed, and enjoyment.

• Rotation on the trail. When walking along narrow trails in forests, the first person behind the leader should allow himself or herself roughly three or four minutes before stepping aside and rejoining the group at the rear of the line. Unless invited, always stay behind the leader. Do not stray off alone, and never go ahead of the leader unless told to do so.

• Rotation in the vehicle. One company, Zoothera Birding, says, “As with trail etiquette, we ask that everyone rotate their seating positions within the vehicle on a daily basis so that everyone gets a fair chance to sit in the best seats (if there is such a thing!). Even though you may feel happy sit-
Not far from the city of Portland, Oregon, is a playground rich in wildlife. The Tualatin Valley is home to an abundance of parks and preserves, each providing diverse habitats. Hot spots, such as Jackson Bottom Wetlands Preserve, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, Fernhill Wetlands, Cooper Mountain Nature Park and the Tualatin Hills Nature Park, host hundreds of species of native and migratory birds. Check off your bird “life list” and plan a Tualatin Valley adventure today. Get your free copy of the Nature Passport today at tualatinvalley.org/Nature-Passport.
The Most of Your Tour

Continued from page 32

ting in the seat you are in, others may not!”

• Everyone should be looking. If everyone is constantly looking for birds rather than just relying on the leader to find them, the group will be more productive. More eyes find more birds.

• Pay attention to the leader’s description of the target bird. For example, “It’s about the size of a Swainson’s Thrush and will walk on the ground, bobbing its head and tail like a small, dark rail with electric blue skin around the eye.” Knowing where to look and what you’re looking for will increase your chances of getting on the bird.

• Lining up to see a bird. Determine early on who the taller and shorter members of the group are; when you line up to see a bird, be thoughtful and take height into account. In the forest, remove a wide-brimmed hat when lining up so you do not block the view of the person behind you.

• Let the leader know immediately if you cannot see the bird. Leaders report that one of the most frustrating aspects of bird guiding is trying to help people who wait until after a bird has disappeared to say that they didn’t see it. Everyone is sometimes embarrassed or shy about speaking up, but rarely can a leader get a bird back into view; so speak up immediately.

• Punctuality is not only appreciated—it’s mandatory. The rest of the group can quickly become upset if you cut into its birding time by arriving late. If not early, be on time!

• Keeping up with the group. It is important to keep up. You will miss birds, and you will disturb the group (and possibly scare away the bird) if you lag behind and rush up after everyone else is already lined up and seeing a bird.

• Finding the bird. There is an art to describing the location of a bird quickly and efficiently. How often have you heard someone say, “The bird is over there.” or “It’s right in front of me!”—and you have no clue? Use a few key cues to communicate quickly and softly how to get on the bird. Here are some examples:

QUESTION: “What have you seen?”
ANSWER: “It’s a male Lovely Cotinga.”
In the forest, laser pointers are the quickest method to point out a bird, if you are at a good angle to “see the light.” Some guides use the clock method (e.g., “the bird is at 3 o’clock” means in the righthand portion of the tree). Others, after the group has been familiarized with often-seen objects, such as Cecropia trees, will cite some of those features.

- **Remember that others may not hear or see as well as you.** As we get older, our hearing and/or vision may degenerate. Let the leader and the group know if you are experiencing any difficulty. At the same time, make sure your optical prescriptions are up-to-date before you go. And take lots of batteries if you use hearing aids. Though you may not be able to hear it, the loud, high-pitched whine of a dying or malfunctioning hearing aid can cause the leader to miss hearing birds.

- **Assist those who need help.** Remembering that you are a team with the goal of having everyone see each species, offer to help those who need assistance in seeing the bird. The leader and the other participants will appreciate your help.

I hope that these ideas, gleaned from a wide variety of birders around the world, will help you get the most out of any birding tour. I am grateful to all who have contributed to and reviewed this article, and wish you success on your next trip!

---

Do you have tips of your own for how to pick the right tour? We welcome you to join the discussion with other ABA members at aba.org/birdersguide.
On a cold and dark morning on Alishan, Taiwan’s most famous mountain, as the sun broke over the peaks, we stared down at the cloud sea and ushered in The Year of the Horse. Along with many other pilgrims, we were joined in a Chinese New Year tradition that stretches back thousands of years. But I was one of the few that noticed the White-whiskered Laughingthrush uttering its loud call, and soon thereafter a Taiwan Rosefinch and dapper Collared Bush-Robin greeting the frigid dawn.

Taiwan has been my home since 2010, and each day I uncover some new beauty in a land that seems to have it in abundance. But I am not the first to have noticed it. When the Portuguese revealed Taiwan to the Western world, they dubbed it “Formosa”, The Beautiful Island. Chinese explorers and travelers have long reveled in its stunning landscapes, and just about every expatriate I meet here loves traveling around the island, soaking in the peaks and seascapes.

Taiwan’s unique beauty is born from the fact that it has a high density of tall mountain peaks in a relatively small area, practically jutting out of the sea. There are some 160 peaks taller than 10,000 ft. (3048m), including the island’s highest peak, Jade Mountain (12,966 ft./3952m). While the Himalayas, Andes, and Rockies all boast taller peaks, Taiwan is tiny, only 13,800 mi.² (35742km²); some 250 mi. (402km) long and around 90 mi. (145km) wide at its broadest point. It is a tilted fault block formed by...
Beautiful Island

“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.” – Confucius
the action of tectonic plates on the eastern edge of the Asian shelf, the so-called Pacific “Ring of Fire”, and was thrust from the ocean floor. This dramatic uplift has given it some of the most remarkable topography on Earth.

Before I first visited, my impression was of an island jam-packed with people, politically defying the mainland Chinese government, and industriously producing high-tech products in cities flooded with scooters, skyscrapers, and factories—with only roof gardens for greenery. This impression is not entirely wrong in the urban centers of Taipei or Taichung, but is very misleading when applied to the island as a whole. The reason that the cities are so crowded is that only 23% of the island’s land surface area is flat enough for the sizable population of 23 million people to inhabit. An amazing 55% of the island is pristine subtropical and montane rainforest and alpine vegetation, much of which is formally protected in seven national parks and other protected areas. A very high percentage of Taiwanese land is under formal conservation management, making it one of the most protected environments on Earth. Of course, like everywhere else, Taiwan still suffers environmental problems, but the amazing montane biodiversity of Taiwan is well protected overall.

Having emerged from the ocean floor—like a phoenix some five million years ago—and being highly mountainous, Taiwan has a lot of endemicity across plant and animal groups, and birds are no exception. The island has biogeographical connections with the high mountains of central China and the eastern Himalayas, such that many species of bird found there have disjunct ranges, seemingly reappearing in Taiwan (e.g., Alpine Accentor, Gray-headed Bullfinch). Because most of eastern China is flat, and the Philippine Plate has long been separated from the Eurasian Plate, Taiwan’s (especially highland) birds have had a long while to diverge in isolation from their mainland cousins. The island is home to an amazing 77 endemic bird taxa. With the increasing application of the phylogenetic species concept, at least one “new” endemic species is recognized every other year. The Clements
Checklist of Birds of the World currently recognizes 26 endemic species, but this is certain to grow as more comprehensive taxonomic analyses of the island’s avifauna are conducted. Several splits seem imminent, including the local race of Island Thrush, sporting a gleaming white head and chestnut underbelly that make it the most distinctive and beautiful of the group, and the local race of Gray-headed Bullfinch, which is duller and less distinctive than those on the mainland and really should be considered the endemic Owston’s Bullfinch.

As with most places, the endemic birds rate among the island’s most wanted by visiting birders, and most itineraries focus on finding as many as possible. It helps that almost every one of Taiwan’s endemics are knock-out charismatic birds, and quality definitely wins over quantity on this score. So, it doesn’t matter whether you are seeking out the garrulous Taiwan Partridge or handsome Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler. Luckily, it is quite feasible to find all 26 endemic species and more than 70 endemic subspecies on a regular one- to two-week trip.

Although most endemics inhabit the highest parts of the country, a few are found at lower altitudes, including the magical Taiwan Blue-Magpie. Some 30 in. (76cm) in length and a cooperative breeder, flocks numbering 6–15 individuals of this gaudy creature can be surprisingly difficult to find. When showing visitors around the island, it is always a re-
It is a delight to see a flock of these purple-and-black beasts come bounding out of the forest. The lowlands of the east coast, particularly south of the magnificent Taroko Gorge, support Styan’s Bulbul. Unfortunately, its closest congener, the Chinese Bulbul, seems to be displacing it, and some hybridization is occurring, pushing this locally common endemic farther south and creating one of the few threatened species on the island.

On the steep slopes of the mountains, the mid-to high-altitude mixed broadleafed and coniferous forests support most of the endemics. Many of the forest plants are familiar to people from temperate northern latitudes, with maple, fir, pine, and spruce being common, but there are also plenty of mystical oriental influences, with bamboo, palms, and figs mixed in.

The two endemic pheasants are the most spectacular birds on the island. The steely-blue Mikado Pheasant has been dubbed “king of the mists” because of its elegant plumage and its secretive habits; it prefers foraging in misty or rainy conditions. Generally found between 4,500 and 10,000 ft. (1372 and 3048m), it was the last Taiwanese-endemic species to be described by scientists in 1900. The scarlet face patches of the male add dramatic effect. Occurring at slightly lower altitudes, Swinhoe’s Pheasant upon its discovery was described as “the most beautiful bird in the world”. Although Swinhoe’s is more common than Mikado, the former’s timidity, agility, and propensity to be startled mean that it is usually seen only

Male Taiwan Rosfinch. Photo © 阿堯

Taiwan Fulvetta. Photo © Keith Barnes

Taiwan Barbet. Photo © Keith Barnes
briefly, if at all, before merging with the undergrowth. Fortunately, there are now a few select feeding stations around the island where these amazing birds can be seen well and for prolonged periods. The once-skittish and difficult-to-lay-eyes-on Taiwan Partridge is another feeding station attendee, making the gamebirds, which used to be very difficult to see, decidedly gettable on shorter trips to the island.

Most of Taiwan's other spectacular endemics have always been quite simple to find. In the central highlands of Dashueshan, it is possible to see 17–20 endemic species in a day or two, including the fruit-eating Taiwan Barbet, and a bevy of babblers: the gregarious and spritely Taiwan Yuhina, with its quaint crest; White-eared (Taiwan) Sibia; the furtive Steere's Liocichla; and the tree-hugging Taiwan Barwing. The noises of the forest are complicated by the varied calls of the White-whiskered, Rusty, and Rufous-crowned laughingthrushes; Collared Bush-Robin; the cute and tailless Taiwan Cupwing (Wren-babbler); Flamecrest; Taiwan Bush-Warbler; and Yellow Tit. Joining the endemics in the mixed-species flocks are other spectacular resident birds, including Eurasian Nuthatch, Vivid Niltava, Gray Treepie, several species of energetic fulvetas such as Grey-headed (Morrison's) and Dusky, Vineous-throated and Golden parrotbills, Green-backed Tit, and “Owston’s” and Brown bullfinches, and the tiny, bamboo-loving Rufous-faced Warbler.

With such steep slopes and high rainfall on Taiwan, impressive waterfalls, gushing torrents, and lakes abound. These hold another guild of exciting birds, including the dapper Brown Dipper, which dives into the fast-flowing water, immersing itself and scrambling along riverbeds, looking for amphipods and arthropods. The dipper has to share its home with another Asian stream specialty: Little Forktail. Seeing these little riverine treasures darting in and out of the rapids is an incredible treat. The edges of river scrub or the eaves under bridges are the favored nesting habitat of the endemic Taiwan Whistling-thrush, an iridescent violet-blue creature most often detected by its spine-tingling screeching. Where the water slows and

Pair of Mikado Pheasants.
Photo © Keith Barnes

Temple pillar carving near Tsengwen Estuary. Photo © Keith Barnes

Steere's Liocichla. Photo © 阿壇
forms ponds and lakes, it is possible to see the scarce Mandarin Duck, possibly the most spectacular of the world’s waterfowl, in its natural home.

The island offers more than just endemic-rich forests. Rivers draining the precipitous interior terminate at estuaries and mangrove swamps. Being located astride one wing of the East Asian Flyway, Taiwan is a critical stopover point for migrants between mainland China and the Philippines. The best times for migrants are September–October and March–April, when thousands of waders and waterfowl pass through. Every year, more than half of the world’s Black-faced Spoonbills come to the Tsengwen Estuary, just north of Tainan. These spoonbills—among the world’s rarest large wading birds, with a total global population of some 2,500—come from their North Korean breeding grounds and faithfully spend each winter at Tsengwen. Joining them are other rare waterbirds, such

Kaohsiung, Taiwan.
Photo © shih-wei

Taiwan Whistling-thrush.
Photo © 阿堯

Taiwan Yuhina.
Photo © Keith Barnes
as Saunders’s Gull, an odd crab-hunting specialist of the mudflats of the larger estuaries. It is also globally threatened, with significant numbers in Taiwan. Even in the middle of busy Taipei, Guandu Nature Park holds thousands of migrant shorebirds each year. Searching the island’s wetlands for Eastern Spot-billed and Tufted ducks, Little Ringed Plovers, Red-necked Stints, and hordes of Dunlin, vagrants invariably turn up, occasionally including some of the world’s most sought-after waterbirds, such as the declining Baer’s Pochard, Scaly-sided Merganser, Asiatic Dowitcher, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Other migrants include raptors, such as Chinese Sparrowhawk, Gray-faced Buzzard, and Oriental Honey-buzzard, which can occur in kettles of thousands on their southwards migration in October, especially where Taiwan narrows and acts as a fun-

**General Information** • The Taiwanese government has initiated an information campaign about the island’s parks and natural resources. A great deal of information in the form of pamphlets is available island-wide. A barrier for English-speaking travelers is that, outside of Taipei, English is not widely spoken.

**Travel** • There are plenty of flights, either via Tokyo (Japan), Seoul (South Korea), or direct to Taiwan’s Taoyuan International Airport. Gateway cities in North America are Vancouver, Toronto, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. An excellent network of express and local buses and trains has been established around the island. Rental cars are easily available at Taoyuan International Airport, but an international driver’s license is required.
nel at its southern tip in Kenting. Among the most interesting migrants are the passerines, including the beautiful thrushes and robins from the Eastern Palearctic woodlands and steppes of Siberian Russia and China. Perhaps the most famous of these is the highly sought-after Siberian Rubythroat, which is common in Taiwan in winter, found even in the outskirts of Taipei. Stunning migrant passerines also include Mugimaki and Narcissus flycatchers, White’s (Scaly) Thrush, and Dusky Thrush. Other migrant species, including rarities or vagrants, comprise 10 warblers, nine buntings, six flycatchers, and a few shrikes, making winter (October–March) a highly profitable time for birding in Taiwan. Summer (April–June) also has its special visitors, most notably the rare Fairy Pitta, which migrates from the Philippines and Borneo to breed in the small remnants of lowland forest in coastal Taiwan. Unfortunately, the pitta’s habitat is being degraded every year, and the small breeding population in Taiwan is shrinking.

The most popular time to visit the island is the last two weeks of April, when the perfect combination of the most desirable summer and winter migrants overlap, and the endemics and breeding species are very active. At this time, you can get the
very best of both worlds.

There is still much to be learned about the regular breeding and migrant avifauna of Taiwan. Every year, new species are recorded on the island, and several species that were thought to be vagrants are found to be regular visitors in small numbers. A big surprise occurred in June 2000, when some small rocky offshore islets of Matsu revealed one of the most exciting seabird finds of the century. Two pairs of Chinese Crested Tern, a bird ornithologists were convinced was extinct, were discovered breeding when they were “accidentally” photographed amongst some Greater Crested Terns. This emphasizes that Taiwan remains poorly known from an ornithological perspective; however, a growing community of local birders and ornithologists is changing that.

From a logistics perspective, Taiwan is one of the most sophisticated places on Earth, with high-speed trains that travel at 150 mph (241 kph), the world’s second-tallest building (Taipei 101), a bevy of domestic flights, and a slew of boutique hotels and small Chinese-style homestays close to every

White-whiskered Laughingthrush. Photo © Keith Barnes

Taiwan Blue-Magpie. Photo © Lai Wagtail

Male Siberian Rubythroat. Photo © 阿堯

Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler. Photo © 阿堯
Taiwan

Taiwan

The food—and the way of eating it—is also world-famous, with delicious bamboo-basket water-steamed pork dumplings, beef noodle soup, and thousands of street food delicacies such as barbecue squid on a skewer, bubble tea, and scortched tiger peppers.

The people of Taiwan are renowned for their friendliness and hospitality. If you are ever lost or struggling, the almost-universal response from islanders is to stop and help you if they can. In addition, the culture is a fascinating yin–yang mixture of traditional and modern, with old-style rice fields replete with farmers in conical bamboo paddy hats standing next to tech factories selling microchips. The jumble of contrasting imagery makes a trip to Taiwan a phenomenal travel experience.

For those interested in antiquities and temples, Taiwan has the best of both, and a day or two added to the regular birding itinerary could easily help you soak up the delights that only the Far East can offer. The National Palace Museum in Taipei holds nearly 700,000 pieces of Chinese art encompassing 10,000 years of history, including many of the world’s finest pieces once owned by emperors and other royal family members. Taiwan also has a broad religious tolerance, and there are...
DYRTORTUGAS SPRING 2015
WITH FLORIDA NATURE TOURS

If you want to experience one of the most desirable birding locations in the world, now is the time to book a trip to the Dry Tortugas with Florida Nature Tours. A unique combination of history, natural beauty and birds, the Dry Tortugas is a spectacular photographic destination and a birder’s paradise! Whether you are an old pro or just getting started, we invite you to join us for a once in a lifetime experience.

Dry Tortugas Tours

South Florida Land Tour
2015 date: 4/29-5/5

www.floridaminituretours.net
info@floridaminituretours.net
863-674-1127 or 407-376-6967

TROPICAL BIRDING
Worldwide birding & photography tours

With an office in Taiwan, and extensive Far Eastern operations, no company is better positioned to satisfy your oriental birding wanderlust

www.TROPICALBIRDING.com
+1.409.515.5014 – 1.800.348.5941
Taiwan

many sects, but the best temples are constructed by the two dominant religions, Buddhism and Taoism. While moving around the island, you are likely to bump into a few temples adorned with ornate ceramic dragons, smoking stacks of demigods, and paper chambers for making offerings to the ancestors. This quintessential essence of the Far East enhances the experience of birding in Taiwan. Keep an eye out for any special Chinese holidays during your visit; it would be worth a few hours to check out dragon boat races or lantern festival activities if your schedule were to coincide with one of these.

Because of language difficulties, Taiwan is seldom visited independently by Western birders, and it is still little-known to the international birding community, but it is worth the effort. The island is richly endowed with a plethora of exciting birds, and offers an exceptional travel destination filled with amazing scenery, food, cultural distractions, and disarming people. Taiwan is ready to take its rightful place on birding’s global stage and does not disappoint any birding traveler.

Suggested Reading
Brazil, M. (2009). Birds of East Asia: China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Russia.
ABA Event

Cruise to the Dry Tortugas

When: May 5–9, 2015
Where: Key West to Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida
Limit: 20 people

How Much: Register early for $1389! ($1489 after March 6th)
Leaders: Mark Hedden, Nate Swick, and Jeff Bouton

For details and registration, go to:
events.aba.org
events@aba.org • 800.850.2473

ABA Event

ABA India Safari
Taj, Tigers & Birding

When: February 8–18, 2016
Where: Bharatpur & Ranthambhore

How Much: Register now!: $3,850 (double occupancy)
Hosts: Jeff Gordon and Liz Gordon, Adam Riley, George Armistead, Cuan Rush, and more.

From New Delhi, our safari explores two of the most famous birding and wildlife national parks in this amazing country; the royal wildfowl sanctuary of Keoladeo National Park at Bharatpur and the fabled Ranthambhore National Park, the tiger reserve widely considered to be one of the best places to see this most magnificent of the world’s big cats. We’ll also visit the incredible Taj Mahal and other breathtaking historic buildings in and around Agra. Join us in this unforgettable trip!

For more details and registration, go to:
events.aba.org
events@aba.org • 800.850.2473

Official Evacuation Provider of the ABA

Memberships from $119

Membership Benefits:
• Field Rescue from the point of illness or injury
• Evacuation back to the member’s home hospital of choice
• 24hr medical advisory services from critical care paramedics and in-house physicians
• Specialists at Johns Hopkins Medicine available in real-time
• Global network of medical Centers Of Excellence
• Paramedics deployed overseas to the member’s bedside
• Medical evacuation services provided up to a cost of $500,000

Contact Global Rescue before your next trip!

GLOBAL + rescue
+1.617.459.4200 | www.globalrescue.com/aba | 1.800.381.9754
Some of us remember the original of what has become a cultural and cartographic topos, the classic New Yorker cover showing the American hinterland stretching endlessly out beyond the Hudson. First comes Jersey, then comes Kansas City, and then, floating between Las Vegas and Monument Valley, there is Nebraska—that convenient shorthand for the uncertain middle of an uneasy nowhere.
Almost 40 years later, we're still laughing at the metropolitan provincialism so skillfully skewered by the artist, Saul Steinberg; but there's still a disturbing lot of truth to it. Never will I forget chatting with a genial shopkeeper in Boston (that other navel of the universe): When I told her where I was from, she looked thoughtful for a moment, then brightened as she told me that she’d “been to North Carolina once.” And study after would-be scandalous study tells us that children can’t find this or that or the other on a map, an embarrassing failing most of them—most of us—never outgrow.

Birders, of course, are different. (Some of us more different than others.) Almost all of us, from the stubbornest of patch birders to the most widely traveled of world listers, consider ourselves top-notch experts in geography, at least in the old schoolroom sense of “geography” as the ability to stick a pin in the correct place on that dusty scroll of stiff canvas. Borneo? Of course. Attu? Don't make me laugh. We can even, most of us, point with some confidence and some accuracy to the Platte River where it crosses central Nebraska, thanks to our private or our vicarious memories of cool March mornings with the rattles of a hundred thousand Sandhill Cranes or the hoots and whistles of a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek echoing in our mind’s ear.

But even those of us birders who can put our fingers on Churchill and the Kamchatka Peninsula are likely to draw a blank, literally and figuratively, if we’re forced to think about the rest of Nebraska. It’s a big state, with nine times the land area of my adoptive home, New Jersey, and a fifth of the human population, almost all of it concentrated in the densely settled southeastern corner. Despite the recent cultural and economic prominence enjoyed by the springtime pageant of cranes on the Platte, very few of Nebraska’s 1.86 million human residents have taken the step into full-fedged birderdom, with the result that there are still vast areas of the state ornithologically little known even to “the locals”.

One of those underbirded and underappreciated areas is the Nebraska Panhandle, 14,000 mi.² (36,260 km²) and 11 counties bounded to the north by South Dakota, to
the south by Colorado, and to the west by Wyoming. On the edge of the Great Plains, “out where the West begins”, the panhandle seems to have more in common culturally and ecologically with its bordering states than with its own. Tellingly, it is more than six hours’ drive from Omaha to Scottsbluff, the panhandle’s largest city, and barely half that from Denver.

The drive north from Denver into Nebraska’s westernmost west takes the traveling birder through mile after mile of the region’s dominant habitats, shortgrass and mixed-grass prairies. To the non-naturalist passenger, little could be more tedious, but birders and other wildlife watchers know that these high plains, covered with buffalo grass, grama, and prickly pear, are the home of some of the continent’s most charismatic animals. Everyone’s dream is to see the rare swift fox, but the area’s specialty birds are more conspicuous and more obliging. Swainson’s Hawks are abundant and obvious on the roadsides from April through September, perched quietly on fence posts and telephone poles; in June or July, a lone tree is likely to be occupied by a messy twig nest full of equally unkempt young. Ferruginous Hawks are even less demanding, happily perching on the ground as they hunt black-tailed prairie-dogs and other rodents to feed their young in the lee of rock outcrops and low buttes.

These sparsely vegetated prairies, especially when they have been heavily grazed by cattle or mule deer, are also home to a much-sought-after shorebird. As recently as 20 years ago,
Mountain Plover was considered a prime rarity anywhere in Nebraska, and the precise locations of the few known breeding sites were valuable currency in the birder’s information market. Today, coinciding with this species’s apparent decrease on the Colorado plains and some truly dedicated survey and conservation work by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO), Mountain Plovers are surprisingly common—or at least more common than previously believed—in the southern panhandle, and dozens of nests are now routinely found each year where once just one or two pairs might have barely hung on. In what has quickly become a model of whole-landscape conservation on the Great Plains, RMBO collaborates closely with Nebraska ranchers and land managers to protect and even to produce plover habitat. A bird that almost no local could have named a decade or two ago is slowly gaining recognition as one of the region’s true natural treasures.

If Denver is the cultural lodestone for the southern panhandle, much of the extreme west feels itself allied to Cheyenne and Laramie. The bird life of the dry shortgrass prairie north of the North Platte River recalls Wyoming, too, with Brewer’s Sparrows trilling from sagebrush and barbwire fences and Burrowing Owls bobbing and nodding next to the holes kindly excavated by the local badger. For many birders, the genius loci here is the Rock Wren, the walker’s constant companion during the warmer seasons, bowing from a yucca stalk or trilling loudly from a distant anthill. Those silvery notes are the lure of a troglodytid pied piper: try, just try, not to follow these hugely charming birds in the hopes of stumbling across the neatly paved runway they construct as an approach to the nest.

The listing birder will finally tear himself or herself away from the wrens to pay attention to the western panhandle’s most important “target” bird, the McCown’s Longspur. Running right along the Wyoming line from Henry to Harrison, Henry Road—known in my youth more poetically as “Last Road”—crosses over the cattail-lined Niobrara River, here barely a trickle, before entering some of the highest of Nebraska’s high plains. The road surface draws great flocks of Horned Larks and Lark Buntings and longspurs, which flush only reluctantly as the birder’s car or the rancher’s truck approaches; vehicles of any kind are rare here, and in late July, when...
the prairie birds have fledged, yours may be the first wheeled conveyance the new generation has seen, and the last it will see until migration pushes the flock south.

As exciting as the close views out the car window can be, the “real McCown’s” can be experienced only on foot. Park on the side of the road, let the pinging and dinging of your engine die away, and you’ll hear that rarest and most precious of sounds: silence, broken only by the stuttering, rising lisps of the larks and the low-pitched slurs of sky-dancing longspurs. When I dream of heaven, I see myself sitting on the ground a half mile off Henry Road, surrounded by lichen-covered rocks and cow pies, serenaded by the males of the prairie birds while the females, quickly accustomed to my hulking presence, creep through the grass all around me. It happens here.

Of all the grand surprises the Nebraska Panhandle offers, the Pine Ridge may be the grandest. Prairie is perhaps expected in this part of the world, even if its subtle variety and heart-stopping beauty are not; but high rock escarpments topped with pine forest and threaded by the trails of bighorn sheep and elk startle even those whose mental horizons are not bounded by the Hudson and East rivers.

The birds of Nebraska’s Pine Ridge are, with a few exceptions, those of the Black Hills of Wyoming and South Dakota, a scant 50 mi. (80 km) away. Unlike that location, American Dippers and Black-backed Woodpeckers cannot be expected here, but Mountain Bluebirds, Townsend’s Solitaires, Western Tanagers, and even the odd Clark’s Nutcracker or Steller’s Jay are all worth looking for—perched atop the high ridges and buttes—during a morning’s walk through these cool, dry forests. The Nebraska National Forest may seem like the too-obvious punchline to a bad joke, but it’s real, and in combination with extensive state-owned lands in the extreme northwestern corner of the state, offers visiting birders more habitat to discover than even the most enthusiastic hiker could cover in a year, or a lifetime, of slow exploration. More than 30 years after this otherworldly landscape first burned its way into my birding heart, I still come home from every visit with an even longer list of sites to check out next time.

Each of those next times, though, finds the Pine Ridge changed. Almost architectural in its visual stateliness, the ridge is also one of Nebraska’s most dynamic ecological regions, and this, like so many western forests, is a landscape ruled by fire. Where one summer Western Wood-Peewees and Cordilleran Flycatchers were singing in the spangled shade, the next
Spring can find Violet-green Swallows prospecting for nest cavities in newly charred stumps and stubs. Lewis’s Woodpeckers swoop in to breed on hillsides once populated by chattering Red Crossbills, and White-winged Juncos move across the ridge, replaced for a few years or a few decades by horizon-loving Vesper Sparrows. At first it feels like loss to see a familiar forest burnt, but time, perspective, and a long walk have a way of showing us that it’s really only change.

The westernness of western Nebraska is only part of its charm: after all, nearly every bird found here can be found, some of them more easily, in Colorado or Wyoming or South Dakota. What the Nebraska Panhandle offers better than any place is an array of western wonders piquantly mixed with an almost equally extensive eastern avifauna. The Plumbeous Vireos of the Pine Ridge streamsides chant their buzzy songs against an acoustic backdrop of Ovenbirds and American Redstarts; an occasional Broad-winged Hawk soars its way north with the April flocks of Swainson’s Hawks. Cassin’s Kingbirds and Red-headed Woodpeckers squabble over the best flycatching perches, and Indigo and Lazuli buntings, Spotted and Eastern towhees, and Rose-breasted and Black-headed grosbeaks make their own special accommodations.

There’s a lot happening out in that blank spot on the map: more than the New Yorker (or even the New Yorker) might imagine. In terms of bang for the birding buck, the Nebraska Panhandle offers an experience you’ll be hard pressed to match anywhere.

Recent years have seen a massive improvement in the information available to birders who want to visit western Nebraska. Richard C. Rosche’s two-part series, “Birding In Western Nebraska”, published in the June 1994 (pp. 178-189) and December 1994 (pp. 416-423) issues of Birding, remains an excellent guide to some of the best sites in the panhandle; the same very knowledgeable author’s “Birding Pristine Nebraska” (pp. 1-6 of the June 1990 Winging It) is also helpful. Though habitat changes may affect the list of species that today’s visitor encounters at the sites in Rosche’s guides, those localities remain productive and attractive.

NebraskaBirdingTrails.com provides very good, frequently updated online directions and descriptions for hundreds of birding sites in the state; some spots are also linked into longer routes, providing the visiting birder a ready-made itinerary. A Nebraska Bird-Finding Guide by Paul Johnsgard, long the state’s preeminent ornithologist, can be printed at no cost from digitalcommons.unl.edu.

Visitors to western Nebraska can also ask for advice and recommendations from participants in the friendly and informative NEBirds Yahoo! group. The Nebraska Ornithologists’ Union (noubirds.org), one of the oldest state ornithological and birding organizations, publishes the Nebraska Bird Review and the Burrowing Owl.
PELAGIC DIRECTORY
March 2015 through February 2016

If you would like to participate in next year’s Pelagic Directory, please contact Michael Retter at mretter@aba.org. Trips are for 2015 unless otherwise noted.

ATLANTIC OCEAN
The Maritimes

Port: Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick
Destination: the tide rips of the outer Bay of Fundy
Date: daily from 25 Jun – 15 Sep
Duration: 4-5 hours
Cost: $70
Target species: Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels; Great, Sooty and Manx shearwaters; Red and Red-necked phalaropes; Common Murre; Atlantic Puffins; jaegers; skuas; Northern Fulmar.
Organizer: Whales-n-Sails Adventures.
(888) 994-4044; www.whales.ca;
info@whales-n-sails.com

New England

Port: Bar Harbor, Maine
Destination: Petit Manan, Great Duck Island, Mount Desert Rock, and waters between these islands
Date: 30 May
Duration: 4 hours
Cost: $85
Target species: Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Black Guillemot, Arctic and Roseate terns, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Fulmar, Pomerine and Parasitic jaegers.
Organizer: Acadia Birding Festival.
(207) 233-3694; acadiabirdingfestival.com,
beckym@acadiabirdingfestival.com

Port: Camden, Maine
Destination: One or more seabird nesting islands, depending on winds; nearshore and inshore waters via Windjammer sailing
Dates: 19-25 July
Duration: 6 days, 6 nights
Cost: $1,025
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.
(207) 865-6000; freeportwildbirdsupply.com and The Schooner Lewis R. French.
(207) 594-2241; schoonerfrench.com

Port: Hyannis, Massachusetts
Destination: Hydrographer, Veatch Canyons area; Nantucket Shoals in Nov.
Dates: 18 Jul; 14 Nov
Duration: 16 hours in Jul; 8 hours in Nov
Cost: $215 in Jul; $120 in Nov
Target species: JUL: 4 or 5 species of shearwater (incl. Audubon's), 3 or 4 species of storm-petrel, skua, phalaropes, jaegers, Bridled Tern, Black-capped Petrel. NOV: alcid, including Dovekies, Northern Fulmar, 3 species of shearwater, gannets, phalaropes, gulls, (including "Kumlien's"), sea ducks.
Organizer: Brookline Bird Club. brooklinebirdclub.org; ida8@verizon.net; (781)-929-8772

Port: Brooklyn, New York
Destination: Hudson Canyon and waters off Long Island
Duration: 8 hours (winter), 12 hours (winter), 18 hours overnight (fall), 22 hours overnight (summer)
Cost: $130 (8 hours), $220 (18 hours), $250 (22 hours)
Target species: SPRING: Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels, Cory’s, Great, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, all 3 jaegers, South Polar Skua, Arctic Tern, Red and Red-necked phalaropes.
SUMMER: Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels; Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters; all 3 jaegers, South Polar Skua, Arctic Tern, Red-necked Phalarope.
FALL: Northern Fulmar, Cory’s, Great and Manx shearwaters, Northern Gannet, Black-legged Kittiwake, Pomerine and Parasitic jaegers, Red Phalarope.
WINTER: Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, Dovekie, Razorbill, Common Murre, Atlantic Puffin, Glaucous and "Kumlien’s" 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

Ports: Hatteras and Wanchese, North Carolina aboard our own boats, Stormy Petrel II and Skua
Destination: Gulf Stream, Continental Shelf and Slope Waters
Dates: 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 May; 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 26, 27 Jun; 10, 11, 24, 25, 31 Jul, 1, 2, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30 Aug; 5, 6 Sep.; TBA Oct. 2014 and Jan.–Feb. 2016; additional dates may be added throughout and private charters are available year-round.
Duration: 10–12 hours
Cost: Regular trips are $165/person/trip; discount for multiple trips paid by check; “Discovery Series” trips and departures from Wanchese 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, Brinded Tern. SCARCE TO RARE SUMMER 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.
Organizer: Brian Patteson, Inc. TA Seabirding, PO Box 772, Hatteras, NC 27943
(252) 986-1363; seabirding.com; seabirding.blogspot.com; brian@patteson.com

Washington

Port: Westport, Washington
Destination: Grays Canyon and Outer Continental Shelf (35-40 miles west of Washington coast)
Dates: 25 Apr; 16 May; 27 Jun; 11 Jul; 1, 8, 9, 15, 29, 30, Aug; 5, 6, 19, 20, 26, 27, Sep; 3, 10 Oct
Duration: 8–10 hours
Cost: $145–150 per person
OTHERS DEPENDING ON TIME OF YEAR: Flesh-footed Shearwater, South Polar Skua, Buller’s Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Leach’s Storm-Petrel, Long-tailed Jaeger, Arctic Tern.
INFREQUENT SIGHTINGS: Laysan Albatross, Manx Shearwater, Xantus Murrelet, 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

Oregon

Port: Newport, Oregon
Destination: Perpetua Bank, Stonewall Bank
Dates: 17 May (deepwater); 16 Aug (deepwater), 29 Aug; 19 Sep; 3 Oct
Duration: 8–12 hours (see website)
Cost: $140–$175, early sign-up discounts available
Target species: SUMMER AND FALL: Black-footed Albatross, Sooty, Pink-footed, Buller’s, and Flesh-footed shearwaters, Fork-tailed and Leach’s storm-petrels, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, phalaropes. WINTER: Laysan Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed Shearwater, Ancient Murrelet.
Organizer: Oregon Pelagic Tours. (971) 221-2534; oregonpelagic@comcast.net

Central and Northern California

Port: Bodega, California
Destination: 800 fathom line, Bodega Canyon and Cordell Bank
Dates: 18 Sep
Duration: 8–10 hours
Cost: $218
Target species: FALL: Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, 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, Brown Booby, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Scripp’s, Marbled, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffins.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc. (831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Port: Sausalito, California
Destination: Sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge to the Farallon Wildlife Refuge
Dates: 9 Aug; 18 Oct
Duration: 8–10 hours
Cost: $187
Target species: FALL: Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters; Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels; Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all three jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Scripp’s, Marbled, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffins. This is the best trip to see local nesting seabirds (including Tufted Puffin: 100% success on past Aug. trips); also good for whales and pinne-peds. Excellent chance for Great White Shark on 18 Oct. Landing on islands prohibited.
Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc. (831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com

Port: Pillar Point Harbor, Half Moon Bay, California
Destination: Pioneer Canyon, waters off continental shelf in San Mateo and/or San Francisco counties. Two trips to Farallon Is.
**Pelagic Directory**

**Dates:** 21 Feb; 26 Apr; 12, 26 Jul; 2, 23, 29, 30 Aug; 5, 18, 19, 26, 27 Sept; 10 Oct  
**Duration:** 9–10 hours  
**Cost:** $130  
**Target species:** WINTER: Black-footed Kittiwake, Ancient Murrelet, Short-tailed Shearwater, winter gulls. SPRING: breeding-plumaged Sabine’s Gull, phalaropes, alcids, Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses. SUMMER AND FALL: Sooty, Pink-footed, Buller’s, and Flesh-footed shearwaters; all 3 jaegers, South Polar Skua, Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Ashy, Fork-tailed, Wilson’s, and Black storm-petrels. Great time for rarities. FARALLON ISLANDS: breeding Tufted Puffin, Cassin’s Auklet, whales and pinnipeds.  
**Organizer:** Alvaro’s Adventures.  
(650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

**Port:** Half Moon Bay, California  
**Destination:** 100 fathom line/Continental Shelf, Pioneer Canyon and canyons near Farallon Is.  
**Dates:** 19, 25 Jul; 2, 8, 15, 16, 23 Aug; 6, 7, 14, 20, 23, 28* Sep; 4, 11 Oct; 5 Nov  
**Duration:** 8–10 hours  
**Cost:** $198

**Dates:** 6, 20 Sep  
**Duration:** 8 hours  
**Cost:** $130  
**Target species:** LATE SUMMER AND FALL: Black-footed, and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, 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-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Scripps’s, Marbled, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. Whales, dolphins, and pinnipeds.  
**Organizer:** Shearwater Journeys, Inc.  
(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com  
*Dates marked with asterisks are operated in conjunction with the Monterey Bay Birding Festival; www.montereybaybirding.org.*

**Port:** Fisherman’s Wharf, Monterey, California  
**Destination:** Monterey Bay  
**Dates:** 6, 20 Sep  
**Duration:** 8 hours  
**Cost:** $130  
**Target species:** Great numbers of birds from the first hour of birding. Usually many Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters and all 3 jaegers. Black-vented Shearwater more likely here than farther north. Great for good studies of Rhinoceros Auklet, Buller’s Shearwater, Red and Red-necked

---

The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail runs through Wakulla County with several officially designated sites. If you’re looking for the call of the wild, then look no further. With vast acres of undeveloped lands and protected wildlife sanctuaries, our natural areas support an unbelievable abundance of wildlife with verified counts of over 300 species of migratory and nesting birds.
ABA Event

Olympic Peninsula Birding Rally

When: September 16-20, 2015
Where: Port Angeles & Ocean Shores, WA
Hosts: Jeff Gordon and Liz Gordon, George Armistead, Shawneen Finnegan, Dave Irons, Bill Stewart, and more.

Let’s go birding! Join your fellow ABA members and ABA Staff as we hit Hurricane Ridge and the Hoh Rain Forest in Olympic National Park, and also explore Puget Sound and the coast south to Ocean Shores, where the coast teems with shorebirds. Searching for Sooty Grouse, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Golden-Plover among other regional specialties we’ll see a great array of birds while getting to know the peninsula. Evenings feature lectures on an array of fascinating topics.

For more details and registration, go to:

events.aba.org

events@aba.org • 800.850.2473
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’ Stormy 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

Pelagic Directory

Continued from page: 58

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

Port: Monterey, California
Destination: Monterey Submarine Canyon, Ascension Canyon, Carmel Canyon, Soquel Hole
Dates: 7, 21 Aug; 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 24*, 25*, 26*, 27* Sep; 3, 10 Oct
Duration: 8 hours (except 12 hours on 12 Sep.)
Cost: $168; book by 1 Jul and get $40 off!
Target species: Black-footed, and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Hawaiian, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Great, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed, Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters; Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels; Brown Booby, Red-necked and Red phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Terns, Scripp’s, Guadalupe, Craveri’s, and Ancient murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted puffin. Excellent opportunities for cetaceans. Trip on 12 Sep targets warm water (Scripp’s & Guadalupe murrelets).

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

*Dates marked with asterisks are operated in conjunction with the Monterey Bay Birding Festival; www.montereybaybirding.org

Southern California

Port: Dana Point, California
Destination: Lausen Sea Mount
Dates: 2 May; 11 Jul; 13 Sep
Duration: 8 hours
Cost: $60

Organizer: Sea & Sage Audubon.
(949) 786-3160; seaandsageaudubon.org; nancykenyon@cox.net

Port: San Diego, California
Destination: San Diego County waters
(with brief excursions on some fall trips
into Los Angeles Co. and Mexican waters).

**Dates**: 25 Apr; 16 May; 14 Jun; 20 Sep; 11 Oct; 7 Nov

**Duration**: 10–12 hours

**Cost**: $90–125

**Target species**: SPRING AND SUMMER: Scripps’s Murrelet, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Brown Booby, Ashy, Leach’s, and Black storm-petrels, Black-vented, Pink-footed, and Sooty shearwaters, Red and Red-necked phalaropes, Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, Northern Fulmar. FALL: As above, plus Craveri’s Murrelet, Red-billed Tropicbird, Least Storm-Petrel, 3 subspecies of Leach’s Storm-Petrel, South Polar Skua, Sabine’s Gull.

**Organizer**: Buena Vista Audubon. Reservations (619) 223-1627; socalbirding.com

---

**Port**: Fishermans Landing, 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**: 7–11 Sep

**Duration**: 5 days

**Cost**: $1,250

**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; all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Guadalupe and Craveri’s murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets.

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

---

**CUBA!**

Leaders in Bird Conservation Programs in Cuba since 1996

Caribbean Conservation Trust

860.350.6752 • cubirds@aol.com • www.cubirds.org

---

**May 8-10**

Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival

Keynote by Ted Floyd

pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org

---

**Spain & Morocco**

“First birding tour company accredited by the Spanish Tourism Board”

www.spainbirds.com

Tel: 00 34 687 83 77 19

email: info@spainbirds.com

---

**Birder’s Guide to Travel**

March 2015
Have you dreamed of visiting South America to see a Long-whiskered Owlet or a Marvelous Spatuletail? Or to be awed by the sight of spectacular Lear’s Macaws at their cliff-side nesting colonies? If that imagery isn’t enough for you to start making travel plans, imagine further that your visit could also help protect habitat for these species. Ready to go?

Lear’s Macaw populations have increased tenfold to more than 1,000 birds thanks in part to the protection of Canudos Biological Station (managed by Biodiversitas), where 80% of the population of this Brazilian endemic nests. Photo © Ciro Ginez Albano
These idyllic opportunities exist because the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and its partner conservation groups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean have created the Conservation Birding initiative to help finance the management of bird reserves by providing lodging and facilities for birding tourists.

ABC has helped its partners create or expand more than 65 nature reserves for birds in 14 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and more than a dozen of them provide ecolodges, trails, and other facilities for visitors. Combined with conservation easements, these designated areas now protect close to a million acres and provide refuge for more than 2,000 bird species—nearly half of the total found throughout all the Americas.

Some of the world’s most endangered birds are among the species that shelter at ABC-supported reserves. Many of these places also provide wintering habitat for migratory songbirds, such as the declining Cerulean Warbler, that nest in the ABA Area.

“International birding travel is already popular, and we want more birders to know that their pastime can actually contribute to saving the species they love”, said ABC Vice-President Mike Parr. “Visiting birders can provide a source of direct financial support to the reserves, helping them become self-sufficient and sustainable in the long term.”

A key component of this landmark effort is an interactive website. The site has been designed specifically to assist visitors in planning their birding trips to help conservation, by presenting detailed profiles of reserves and lodges established by the conservation groups. Reserve profiles include bird lists, photographs, and reservation information.

The website also offers videos of rare species and Google Earth maps of seven birding routes in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Many of the sites featured are already

Left: Owlet Lodge at Abra Patricia is an anchor destination along the northern Peru birding route. Photo © Daniel Lebbin

Right: Profits from Owlet Lodge help Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (a leading Peruvian conservation group) protect more than 25,000 acres of cloudforest for Long-whiskered Owlets and other endangered species. Photo © Dubi Shapiro
International Tourism Initiative

anchor locations for birding tours offered by major tour agencies and guides. In addition, website visitors can download a beautifully illustrated book about the reserves, *The Latin American Bird Reserve Network: Stopping Extinction in Its Tracks.*

“Birdwatchers in Canada and the U.S. contribute billions of dollars to the economy through the purchase of equipment, travel, books, and bird seed for backyard feeders”, Parr said. “The Conservation Birding initiative aims to tap into this market to help cover the costs of managing habitat at each of these bird reserves, thereby helping rare endemic species and providing habitat for declining migratory birds.”

It’s working. Tourism revenue generated at the El Dorado Reserve in Colombia and at the Abra Patricia Reserve in Peru adds much-needed income to cover management costs for these reserves, including thousands of acres that are not visited by tourists at all. These reserves also serve as a model to neighbors. As the culture of conservation spreads, additional landowners are becoming inspired to protect habitat and establish facilities for visitors.

Many of the reserves protect “Alliance for Zero Extinction” sites, which are the last refuges for the world’s rarest species. Not only are these places important for birds, but a new study has shown that they are also important carbon stores, watersheds, and even cultural centers with a diversity of rare indigenous languages.

Who knew that international bird travel could be so rewarding? Start planning your trip at ConservationBirding.org.

ProAves’s El Dorado Reserve is a mecca for birders in Colombia. It’s the best place to see Santa Marta endemics like Santa Marta Parakeet. Photo © Benjamin Skolnik

Marvelous Spatuletail can be seen feeding from feeders and native flowers at Huembo, a site easily combined with Owlet Lodge in the same itinerary. Photo © Dubi Shapiro
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
- 29 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)
BECAUSE YOU CAN HAVE LIGHT
WHILE BEING LIGHT.
(25 OUNCES TO BE EXACT)

11-33 x 50

"IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A SCOPE WITH GOOD OPTICAL QUALITY THAT YOU CAN CARRY WITH YOU UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, THE 50MM VORTEX RAZOR HD IS THE NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN."

—BIRDWATCHING.COM

EAGLE OPTICS
800-289-1132 | WWW.EAGLEOPTICS.COM | FOLLOW US ✪ ✪ ✪

Binoculars, spotting scopes, tripods and more — Visit us online for great deals from the best brands in optics.