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On the cover: Atlantic Canada is the only place in North America where you can experience the spectacle of a Northern Gannet nesting colony. In this issue of Birder's Guide, Newfoundland's Jared Clarke offers helpful, practical advice on where and when to go to see, hear, and smell (!) a gannetry for yourself. Photo © Luc Gilbert
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The American Birding Association, Inc., seeks to encourage and represent the North American birding community and to provide resources through publications, meetings, partnerships, and birder networks. The ABA's education programs develop birding skills, an understanding of birds, and the will to conserve. The ABA's conservation programs offer birders unique ways to protect birds and their habitats.

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Check often for all the latest prizes, updates, contest details, and more.
I’m writing to you from Gate C102 at Newark International Airport. My wife, Liz, and I are about to board a plane to New Delhi, where we will join a wonderful group of 65 American Birding Association members and staff for our ABA India Safari. Over the next two weeks, we will share some of the most exciting birding and wildlife observation to be had anywhere on Earth. You can imagine I’m pretty pumped about all of this.

Of course, most birding travel isn’t on such a grand scale, and it needn’t be. Many of my most treasured memories are of trips that didn’t involve grand outings, wholly unfamiliar birds, and exciting new cultures. Many are of explorations barely beyond my doorstep, often in cars of questionable road-worthiness, and with planning that seldom rose above the level of “Hey, that looks like a cool spot—let’s check it out!”

In this Birder’s Guide to Travel, we aim to give you useful, helpful insights into the how, when, where, why, and with whom of birding travel around the globe and around the block. We hope to inspire you to get out into new places both nearby and far-flung. Birding is a wonderful way of coming to know and understand and love the world and the places and people and other living things that comprise it.

So here’s to birding, to travel, and to traveling birders! I hope that our paths cross soon.

Bon voyage,

Jeffrey A. Gordon
President, American Birding Association

Birder’s Guide strives to offer you helpful, practical information to enhance your future birding endeavors. It’s one of many services the ABA offers to the birding public free of charge. Looking for a new vacation destination? Articles on Newfoundland and western Texas are sure to whet your appetite. Or maybe you’re in Seattle for a wedding or a long layover and have only a few hours to steal away for some birding? We’ve got you covered there, too. Our popular “20 Best Birds” series is back, this time highlighting birds such as the exquisite Splendid Fairywren—almost sure to entice you to travel down under. Advice on how to prepare for a trip to the Neotropics will help you make the most of the experience. And as always, our Pelagic Directory brings up the rear.

No matter what your interests or your time and ability to travel, I hope that you find something useful in this issue. If you didn’t, please let us know what you’d like to see next time. Be sure to tell us what you liked, too, so that we can start planning next year’s Birder’s Guide to Travel. We always love to hear from folks who want to offer their own advice in the form of an article. Indeed, we depend on our members’ contributions to make future issues a reality. You can reach me at mretter@aba.org or via discussions linked to at aba.org/birdersguide.

Happy travels!

Michael L. P. Retter
Editor, Birder’s Guide
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Kathi Borgmann has spent the past 20 years birding and studying birds throughout the Americas. She received her master’s degree from Ohio State University, where she studied the effects of non-native plants on nesting success of birds. She received her Ph.D. in 2010 from the University of Arizona, where she studied factors that affect the risk of nest predation throughout the breeding season. Recently, Kathi and her partner, Josh Beck, embarked on an ambitious journey traveling and birding throughout the Americas. They spent 14 months birding nearly every day from Baja to Panama. Kathi and Josh are currently continuing their expedition in South America. You can read about their adventures at birds of passage.wordpress.com.

Cameron Carver was begrudgingly indoctrinated since early childhood in the ways of birding by his loving parents. Fully embracing birding by his late teens, he has never looked back. A past president of the Llano Estacado Audubon Society and an environmental scientist for Tetra Tech, Inc., Cameron devotes much of his life to birding and wildlife-related endeavors. He currently keeps personal belongings in Oklahoma City near his favorite pizza shop.

Jared Clarke is a native Newfoundlander who grew up on the northeast coast of the island and was introduced to the outdoors at a very young age—mostly by his grandfathers. Always a nature enthusiast, he became interested in birds while working for a local conservation group. Jared soon became one of the most avid birders in the province. Despite his “official” training as a health researcher (Ph.D. Medicine), his love of nature and sharing it with others increasingly led him astray. He currently runs a small bird and nature tour business, Bird•The•Rock, and routinely leads trips at home and abroad for various tour companies. Jared lives in St. John’s with his amazing wife, Susan, and their two fun-loving daughters, Emma and Leslie. You can follow his adventures on the blog birdtherock.com.

Stephan Lorenz caught the travel bug first and later developed chronic birding fever. Fortunately, the two go hand in hand. He has been fortunate to work as a guide in Alaska, Texas, Costa Rica, and Brazil and leads tours for High Lonesome Bird Tours. His writing and photos have appeared in several publications. Currently, Stephan has taken to the road permanently with plans to visit all continents.

Brendan McGarry has been birding since he was eight years old. When not traveling elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad to bird, he always comes back to the Pacific Northwest, where he enjoys scanning the Salish Sea for rarities. He works as a naturalist guide and a freelance writer and photographer, specializing in natural history. Brendan blogs about birding and nature at wingtrip.org. He lives in Seattle, Washington, with his girlfriend and their cat.
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Australia, the island continent, kingdom of reptiles, and homeland of marsupials, also abounds with many unusual species of birds—so many, in fact, that whittling down the Red Continent’s avian diversity to a mere 20 species was a real challenge. But with tough decisions come also great joy and celebration.

Birding in Australia is unlike anything the other continents can offer. Isolation and unique ecosystems have led to the evolution and preservation of several major bird lineages not found elsewhere. Poor soils, fire-prone forests and grasslands, and harsh deserts have long shaped Australian birds and their behaviors. For example, cooperative breeding and nomadism is unusually common among Australia’s avian denizens. Today, Australia harbors a fascinating mixture of ancient and modern bird families.

In order to curtail the difficulty of selecting the top 20 species from dozens of great candidates, I limited myself to Australian endemics. Though several bird
The 20 Best Birds in Australia
families and many species are restricted to the Australo-Papuan region, which is biogeographically a cohesive unit, I tried to choose true country-level endemics but ended up making one exception. This still left nearly 350 species to choose from. Indeed, Australia is second in the world in terms of country endemics, being surpassed only by Indonesia.

The 20 species I selected showcase the country’s endemic bird families and provide some breadth of ecology and behavior. The final choices also reveal my penchant for hard-to-find and secretive species of the remote Australian outback. I hope readers will enjoy this all-too-brief list, and if you have not birded Down Under, there is no time like the present. Good birding, mate!

#1 • Plains-wanderer 
(Pedionomus torquatus)
This is a high-priority species for the majority of birders visiting Australia. A mysterious bird, it is exceedingly difficult to see, range restricted, and of uncertain affinities. For family listers, its monotypic status only adds to the allure—it’s closest relatives are the South American seedsnipes! While it superficially shares similarities with buttonquails, it is allied with shorebirds. The female is larger with a broad necklace of speckled black and white offset by a chestnut breast patch. The male is streaked in basic browns. The Plains-wanderer breeds on endless plains and prefers cropped grass such as that found in sheep paddocks. How it evades detection is a mystery to me, but it is nearly impossible to see during the day. In order to catch a glimpse, it is necessary to venture out at night. With the help of expert Phil Maher, it is possible to spotlight one or two out on the plains near Deniliquin in south-central New South Wales. Phil first discovered that it is possible to see the species at night and has taken hundreds of birders to see it over the past three decades. He can be contacted at philipmaher.com. Driving at night in widening circles through empty sheep paddocks is memorable in itself. When a bird finally appears and freezes in the headlights, it is immediately apparent one has laid eyes on a one-of-a-kind bird only Australia could harbor.

#2 • Emu (Dromaius novaehollandiae)
Decidedly easy to see compared to other species on this list, the Emu stands out by size alone. These flightless birds stretch up to six feet tall and thankfully are relatively
common and easily observed. Watching a group of Emus sprint across desert flats is an iconic Australian birding experience. How the second-largest bird on the planet survives and thrives in some of the arid outback regions is truly remarkable.

#3 • Superb Lyrebird
(Menura novaehollandiae)
Made famous by David Attenborough’s Life of Birds, this is one of the most well-known and cherished of Australia’s avifauna. One of the first questions locals inevitably ask visiting birders is whether they have yet seen a lyrebird. Despite its pheasant-like appearance, lyrebirds belong to one of the most ancient songbird lineages. The species uses its powerful feet and legs to dig through litter on the forest floor in search of food, while trailing an impressive set of plumes and twisted tail feathers. The Superb Lyrebird’s most remarkable talent is only revealed on its display court, where males give one of the most complex vocal displays of any bird on Earth. Superb Lyrebirds are masterful mimics, and the calls of an entire forest seemingly emanate from the syrinx of a single male. Singing lyrebirds are often hidden among dense vegetation, so it is best to sit back, wait, and let the songster perform. Along with the scarcer Albert’s Lyrebird, the two-species family, Menuridae, is endemic to Australia.

#4 • Letter-winged Kite
(Elanus scriptus)
An irruptive ghost of the remote outback, this species superficially resembles the more common Black-shouldered Kite but is more graceful in flight. In addition, the extensive black bars across the underwings and exceptionally large eyes are distinctive. Letter-winged Kite populations fluctuate dramatically in response to rodent populations, especially those of long-haired rats. In a given location, the species can range from fairly common to completely absent. It breeds colonially following good rains, but this is not the species’s most unusual feature. It is the world’s only fully-nocturnal member of the hawk family, and by day, birds usually roost among dense foliage. It could show up almost anywhere in the center of the continent, but far-flung desert routes, like the Birdsville or Strzelecki tracks, have been especially good areas in the past. Keep an eye on the sky: the species is occasionally seen in flight during the day!

#5 • Gang-gang Cockatoo
(Callocephalon fimbriatum)
With 14 species, Australia supports two-thirds of the world’s cockatoo diversity, and each species is more spectacular than the next. For me, the Gang-gang Cockatoo takes the top spot among the group and trumps its larger, louder cousins. Its slate-gray plumage is finely edged with silvery white, imparting an overall scalloped appearance. Males sport a scarlet hood accentuated by a wispy crest. Gang-gangs are
mainly restricted to open eucalyptus woodlands and moist forests in the southeast. They also move into suburbs during the winter. The family groups or small flocks they usually travel in can be surprisingly inconspicuous (for a cockatoo) until you hear their distinctive “creaky door” call. Birders moving quietly and looking up in the right habitat may spot a party feeding unconcernedly above.

#6 • Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*)
Megapodes are just fantastic, and this Australian endemic is the only member of its family to thrive in temperate regions. An intricate pattern of muted colors renders the Malleefowl a master of camouflage. It easily blends in with the mallee—its threatened, namesake habitat of low-growing eucalypts and shrubs. When you finally see a bird move, it reveals subtle black and white markings on the neck, a rufous throat, and white bars across a blotchy back. During the breeding season, males tend a nest mound that can exceed 3 feet in height and 12 feet in diameter. Eggs are buried in the sandy center along with rotting vegetation that provides heat for incubation. Watching one of these large birds silently walk through pristine mallee is an unforgettable sight.

#7 • Golden Bowerbird (*Prionodura newtoniana*)
I could have chosen any of Australia’s bowerbirds to include on this list. Half of the world’s bowerbirds occur in Australia, each with a distinctive bower and display. Restricted to the Atherton Tablelands in northeastern Australia, the Golden Bowerbird has one of the smallest ranges of any Australian bowerbird. Males are entirely yellow with a darker, olive mask and wings and a golden crown. Their bower consists of two maypoles three feet apart and a horizontal branch serving as a connection. The bower is also decorated with whitish lichens. Males will tirelessly fix and rearrange their bowers between bouts of uttering their mechanical song.

#8 • Rainbow Pitta (*Pitta iris*)
This is Australia’s endemic member of a family that is most diverse in Southeast Asia, and what a bird it is! Jet black underparts transition into a blood red vent, and an iridescent turquoise shoulder patch pops out from a leaf green back. A rusty crown stripe accentuates the black head. Rainbow Pittas are restricted to monsoon forest and wetter habitats of the Northern Territory. Relatively easy to see for a pitta, individuals hop confidently across leaf litter in search of prey, including small lizards and large insects. This was the first species of pitta I have seen, so it will always hold a special place for me.

#9 • Splendid Fairywren (*Malurus splendens*)
Fairywrens are some of Australia’s most beloved birds. Family groups of up to half a dozen individuals move boldly...
through their territory, and some species even occur in gardens. While several species are bedecked in magnificent blue, purple, or turquoise, the Splendid Fairywren takes the crown in Australia. Males are entirely blue, ranging from violet to sky-blue tones depending on subspecies. Small, inquisitive parties flit through low scrub and woodland edges. The species has a cooperative breeding system, which is quite common among Australian birds, where helpers defend the territory and provision the nestlings alongside the nesting pair. A bit of squeaking in the right habitat could suddenly reveal a low shrub decorated with a troop of active Splendid Fairywrens right in front of the observer.

#10 • Gray Grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus*)

Grasswrens are the browner, streakier cousins of the fairywrens and are much more difficult to see. Most occur in the far-flung reaches of the outback, some with restricted ranges among sand dunes, rocky ridges, or desert flats. Foraging on the ground, birds bounce rapidly between cover, resembling small mammals more than birds—some have even been observed hiding in burrows! Laying eyes on any grasswren species is one of the great challenges of Australian birding. The Gray Grasswren was officially discovered in the 1960s, and the species seems as elusive as ever. It occurs in stands of cane grass in remote corners of the Lake Eyre Basin. The famed Birdsville Track provides chances of seeing this elusive species, and once I managed to locate some remaining water in the drought-stricken area, the grasswrens revealed themselves for brief views.

#11 • Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*)

There are a slew of interesting waterfowl that grace Australia’s bays, wetlands, and ephemeral inland lakes, but none of them are quite like the Musk Duck. This large, dark duck is fairly common on bodies of water in the southeast and southwest. It establishes its well-deserved place on this list during the male’s display. With an urgent whistle and bill clapping, a male spreads its tail, rapidly bobs its head, and splashes with its wings. To top it all off, it extends a pronounced, leathery flap attached to its mandible. The species shows pronounced sexual size dimorphism, and only the larger males secrete the namesake odor. It is well worth sitting back to watch a Musk Duck’s outrageous display.

#12 • Gouldian Finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*)

A flock of Gouldian Finches simply overwhelms with color. The males have grass-
green backs, bright yellow bellies, purple breasts, and pale blue rumps, but that’s not all. Males usually have either black or bright red heads. On very rare occasions, males with golden yellow heads are observed. While the species is common in captivity, wild populations have declined in recent decades, and birders must be willing to travel long distances to find it in the tropical savannas of the north. Its colors echo of its varied environment: green riparian vegetation, black burned trees, blue cloudless skies, yellow parched grasses, red sandstone cliffs, and deep purple sunsets.

#13 • **Budgerigar**  
*Melopsittacus undulatus*  
This entire list could have been filled with parrots, since Australia harbors some of the most varied and colorful psittacids in the world. The Budgerigar is the classic Australian parrot. This is one of the most familiar birds of the world, but seeing one in the wild in Australia is far from guaranteed. It’s a typical, nomadic outback species. Flocks wander widely in search of food sources nourished by unpredictable rains. Birders lucky enough to find them soon discover—after experiencing the flocks of wild yellow-and-green parrots wheeling over grassy fields and through scattered eucalypts—that this species is anything but commonplace.

#14 • **Laughing Kookaburra**  
*Dacelo novaeguineae*  
Its raucous, maniacal song (which has graced many movies set in tropical climes, no matter the actual geographic location) is the quintessential sound of the Australian bush. While this kingfisher, the largest in Australia, barely made it onto this list, I feel like it would have been unjust to leave it off. Its sheer size, dark mask, and powerful bill impart a fierce look. It is very
common, including urban parks in the east, where it sometimes harasses picnickers by stealing shrimp right off the barbie!

### #15 • Chowchilla (Orthonyx spaldingii)

Observing a family group of these odd birds scratching through the leaf litter in Atherton Tableland’s ancient rain forest is like birding in a land before our time. These gloomy forests have persisted for millennia, and unfamiliar sounds emanate from the shadows. Chowchillas forage in family groups which regularly utter their namesake call before slipping into the shadows of the wet forest. The birds mainly run and are so well-adapted to ground-dwelling that they hide beneath leaves if disturbed. One of the best ways to locate a group is to listen for their busy rustling. Males are white underneath, and females have an orange throat and breast. The species belongs to Orthonychidae, a small, obscure family restricted to Australia and New Guinea.

### #16 • Spinifex Pigeon (Geophaps plumifera)

Among the two dozen species of large, ornamented pigeons and gaudy fruit-doves that call Australia home, the small Spinifex Pigeon gets my top vote. Flocks scurry quail-like across sandy flats, hurrying from one clump of tussock grass to the next. With patience, they are fairly approachable. The crest, adding three head lengths to the bird, is unmistakable. Upon closer inspection, the red facial skin, a black band across the red-brown breast, and a black throat pop out as distinctive field marks. Depending on subspecies, the belly is either white or red-brown. Spinifex Pigeons can be observed near one of the continent’s most iconic landmarks, Uluru. The sight of a Spinifex Pigeon finally emerging from its hiding place and wandering along the edge of quiet dirt track is quite incredible.

### #17 • Powerful Owl (Ninox strenua)

The largest Australian owl hunts in the tall forests of the southeast coast, where pairs maintain large territories in which they prey mainly on gliders and possums. Occasionally they will even take flying-foxes. They have impressive, piercing yellow eyes and formidable talons. If prey is abundant, these owls move into urban parks and green spaces, which gives birders a good opportunity to come
face-to-face with them. Powerful Owls prefer to roost in shaded gullies, and if spotted they usually just glare at the observer without flying off. Depending on taxonomy, the second endemic owl in Australia is the Lesser Sooty Owl. Think of a small Barn Owl dipped in ashes. Some authorities lump the Lesser with the Greater Sooty Owl, which would leave the Powerful Owl as Australia’s only endemic owl.

#18 • Inland Dotterel
(Peltohyas australis)
This well-marked shorebird prefers the arid, inland plains, where its chestnut underparts and streaked back provide perfect camouflage. It also has a black collar that extends in a line onto the breast and a vertical black bar through the eye. Inland Dotterels are difficult to spot during the day, even in the open habitats they prefer. They are instead much easier to see at night, when birds become more active—often standing in the middle of gravel roads! Birders driving slowly along outback roads at night, a practice recommended anyway due to jumpy kangaroos, may find a few pairs.

#19 • Rufous Bristlebird
(Dasyornis broadbenti)
This species is the easiest to see of a secretive trio that comprises another bird family restricted to Australia, the Dasyornithidae. It lives in dense coastal heath, where its loud call is easily heard. Being a relatively weak flyer, it scurries through thickets of dense vegetation. With luck and persistence, you may eventually see one pop into view and display its rufous crown, scalloped underparts, and long tail. For family listers, this is an important bird to target since the other two members of the family, Eastern and Western bristlebirds, are much more difficult to see. Searching for the species within its limited range likely means experiencing the dramatic coastline and seascape of the Great Ocean Road. The road follows the sinuous southern coastline, marked by steep, wave-battered cliffs and distinct rock formations such as sea stacks and natural arches, making a search for this bird a highlight of Australian birding.

#20 • Australian Owlet-nightjar
(Aegotheles cristatus)
This small, nocturnal species looks like a cross between...well, I’m sure you can guess. The owlet-nightjar family is restricted to New Guinea, the Molluccas, and Australia. This is the one non-endemic species on the list, but coming across a bird in the middle of night on an untraveled road in the Kimberly is one of my most cherished Australian birding moments, so it gets a pass. Just look at those eyes!

The 80 Best Birds of Australia would still be challenging to pick because the continent’s avifauna is so rich. I encourage readers to learn more about Australian birds and of course create their own top 20 list.
Our New Leaders

As Victor Emanuel Nature Tours enters its 5th decade of birding and natural history tours and cruises throughout the world, we are delighted to announce that four excellent tour leaders have joined our team, bringing with them many years of birding and tour-leading experience.

ERIK BRUHNKE has gained a national reputation as a result of the tours he has led in Minnesota and nearby states, as well as his participation in numerous birding festivals. Erik is known for his enthusiasm, his ability to find birds and show them to others, and his outgoing disposition. He is also a skilled bird photographer.

RAFAEL GALVEZ has traveled throughout the Americas and Eurasia. His several years in the Caucasus region recording folk songs and studying raptors led to a CD on the folk songs and a book on the raptors. He is director of the Florida Keys Hawk Watch. He is also a talented bird artist. Rafael loves sharing his knowledge and passion for birds.

MACHIEL VALKENBURG grew up in the Netherlands. He has traveled extensively the last 10 years to Central Asia and Siberia, and founded Rubythroat Birding Tours while living in Kazakhstan. Machiel speaks four languages, has a calm approach, and enjoys a good laugh. He has an excellent ear for bird sounds and a keen eye.

RICK WRIGHT’S birding skills and knowledge of European history and culture make him the perfect guide for our popular Birds & Culture tours. Rick is the author of ABA guides to New Jersey and Arizona, and has also published two books on Latin and German animal literature of the late Middle Ages.

Our success during the last 40 years is due to the excellence of our tour leaders, many of whom have made important contributions in science and conservation, the knowledge and experience of our office team, and the enthusiasm of our remarkable and adventurous clients.

Join us!
Newfoundland (along with Labrador) is the easternmost province in Canada. Affectionately known as “The Rock”, it is a rugged island in the North Atlantic and, at 42,030 square miles (108,860 km²), is one of the largest islands in the world. Landscape and habitat vary greatly. From the limestone barrens of the Great Northern Peninsula to the thick boreal forests of the island’s interior, and the tundra and sheer cliffs that face the raging Atlantic, Newfoundland is an amazing place to experience. It’s no wonder that the National Geographic Society rated it atop the best coastal destinations in the world multiple times!

Newfoundland has a long and storied cultural history. Its people have been shaped by a harsh land and a ruthless sea. The island was inhabited by indigenous peoples dating back more than five thousand years: the Dorset Eskimo, the Maritime Archaic Indians, and the Beothuck. Vikings visited the island a millennium ago, forging their way into a new and exciting land. John Cabot arrived in 1497, and fishermen from many countries worked its waters and eked out a living for hundreds of years, establishing some of the earliest settlements in North America. Despite

The historic city of St. John’s, on Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula, provides a great base for excellent birding all year long. Photo © Jared Clarke
Newfoundland
Birding Newfoundland

SPRING & SUMMER
Spring and summer in Newfoundland combine incredible scenery and mind-boggling numbers of seabirds. The island hosts some of the largest and most majestic breeding colonies on the continent, along with a rich variety of tundra, barren-
There is something for everyone at this time of year, whether novice or experienced birder, and even non-birding family and friends.

**Eastern Newfoundland (Avalon Peninsula)**

The Avalon Peninsula is the easternmost point of Canada (and North America, excluding Greenland). It has a stark beauty unique to this far-flung part of the continent. The provincial capital, St. John’s, is also located here and provides a convenient base for plenty of birding. One of North America’s oldest cities, it is steeped in history, culture, and plenty of charm. With a population of less than 150,000, St. John’s is large enough to provide all the amenities and conveniences of a modern city but small enough to remain quaint and easy to navigate.

Visitors to eastern Newfoundland will revel in the opportunity to visit two spectacular seabird colonies. Witless Bay Ecological Reserve is home to millions of birds, including North America’s largest colony of Atlantic Puffins with more than 250,000 breeding pairs. Several hundred thousand Common Murres also nest here and can virtually cloud the sky at times. Not to be overlooked, Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and the occasional Northern Fulmar dot the cliffs and water. Commercial boat tours offer birders the opportunity to enjoy these birds up close, often with a good chance of spotting whales and maybe even an iceberg along the way. The reserve also hosts the world’s second-largest Leach’s Storm-Petrel colony, with an estimated 620,000 pairs. Since these birds only come and go from their burrows under cover of darkness, they are rarely seen during tours. The best chances of spotting these enigmatic little birds are during windstorms, when strong onshore winds bring them closer to land.

Equally amazing is Cape St. Mary’s Ecological Reserve. Located at the southwestern corner of the Avalon Peninsula, it is touted as the North America’s most accessible seabird colony. Few places in the world can claim to combine such breathtakingly beautiful landscapes with an awe-inspiring show of nature. During the breeding season, more than 30,000 Northern Gannets nest atop a towering sea stack (aptly named “Bird Rock”) and neighbouring cliffs, making it the third largest colony in North America. Visitors can view these majestic birds from as close as twenty meters as they go about their business of making nests, raising young, and performing...
their beautiful “sword crossing” rituals during which pairs greet and bond with each other by touching bills. Thousands of Black-legged Kittiwake and Common Murre perch with amazing steadiness along the very same cliffs, making the most of this tough but beautiful landscape. The reserve is also home to the world’s southernmost breeding colony of Thick-billed Murre, hundreds of Razorbill, and many Black Guillemot. Both Great and Double-crested cormorants can be seen on the rocks below. The sheer number of birds and whirling activity can be overwhelming at times.

Visitors to the reserve also find themselves on the world’s southernmost subarctic tundra, making it one of the easiest places to experience this very special habitat. The so-called “barrens” are deceptively alive with beautiful wildflowers, cryptic Willow Ptarmigan, twittering Horned Lark, the aerial displays of American Pipits, and even an occasional woodland caribou. Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks, and Short-eared Owls keep a close eye on the happenings, waiting for a chance to grab a meal.

Summer can also be a great time to enjoy a variety of pelagic species from land. Huge schools of a small fish called capelin arrive every summer to spawn on Newfoundland’s beaches, providing an integral food source for most of the island’s nesting seabirds and drawing a number of wayward visitors. Great and Sooty Shearwaters arrive from their breeding grounds in the Southern Hemisphere and can often be seen in huge numbers as they feed on bountiful

Background image: **Common Murres.** Photo © Jared Clarke
Below, from left to right: **Northern Blue.** Photo © Jared Clarke **Black-legged Kittiwake.** Photo © Jared Clarke **Northern Harrier.** Photo © Brad James
schools of fish. Joining them are smaller numbers of Manx Shearwater, which has its only known North American colony on Newfoundland’s Middle Lawn Island. Pomarine, Parasitic, and occasionally Long-tailed jaegers are regularly spotted in the midst of these feeding frenzies, and a few lucky observers may even be able to pick out a much scarcer Great or South Polar skua. Of course, these events are also associated with the world’s largest gathering of humpback, fin, and minke whales, among other marine mammals, making for a spectacle like no other.

Many northern songbirds can also be seen and heard during a visit to the Avalon Peninsula. The boreal forests are home to many sought-after species including Boreal Chickadee, Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Fox Sparrow, and Gray-cheeked Thrush among others. Heading west across the island, visitors will encounter more mixed and deciduous forests with an increasing diversity of songbirds. “Yellow” Palm Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Red-eyed and Blue-headed vireos, Lincoln’s Sparrow, and Alder Flycatcher become more commonplace, along with Swainson’s Thrush and the island’s endemic percna subspecies of Red Crossbill. These birds, which have distinct calls and thicker bills compared to other Red Crossbill subspecies, have experienced a steep population decline in recent decades and are currently endangered.

Central Newfoundland

Terra Nova National Park, Canada’s most easterly national park, is characterized by a combination of lush boreal forests, ponds, spruce bogs, rocky coastline and sheltered ocean inlets. The quiet roads and beautiful hiking trails in the park can be an excellent place to spot species such as Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Gray Jay. Raptors such as Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Boreal Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl nest in these largely coniferous forests, while Osprey and Bald Eagle are common in coastal areas. The park’s many wetlands are home to American Bittern, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Rusty Blackbird, as well as a number of breeding shorebirds.
Western Newfoundland

Gros Morne National Park is considered one of the gems of Newfoundland, and rightly so. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the park is known around the globe for its amazing geology, stunning scenery, and world-class hiking. It is also an excellent place for birding and general nature viewing. Located on the island’s west coast, it is the second largest national park in Atlantic Canada. A great variety of birds can be found in and around the park, owing to its diverse and well-protected habitats. The beautiful songs of warblers, vireos, and thrushes echo through the landscape on cool summer mornings. Common Goldeneye and mergansers fish the shallow estuaries, while elegant Harlequin Ducks nest along isolated sections of river. The Arctic-alpine habitat atop the Long Range Mountains provides breeding grounds for Rock Ptarmigan, White-crowned Sparrow, and American Tree Sparrow. Non-avian residents of these high elevations include arctic hare, black bear, and woodland caribou, which can also be seen near the low-lying coast during much of the year.

Southwestern Newfoundland is also home to some very special places. Stephenville Crossing sits beside a large estuary that provides important spring and fall staging habitat for a variety of waterfowl and migrating shorebirds. Importantly, it is one of North America’s only known breeding locations for Black-headed Gull, which nest in small numbers amid a larger Ring-billed Gull colony. Locally uncommon breeders such as Willet and Caspian Tern can often be spotted along the coast, and rare birds are reported regularly from this birding hotspot (including recent records of Ivory Gull, Bar-tailed Godwit, Little Egret, and even a Western Reef-Heron).

Nestled away in the southwest corner of Newfoundland, the Codroy

Newfoundland Valley is easily one of the island’s most beautiful places. Being much closer to the Maritime Provinces both geographically (it’s a mere 80 miles/130 km from Cape Breton) and ecologically, it is also home to the island’s greatest diversity of songbirds. A number of species wander there regularly that are otherwise very uncommon or rare in the rest of Newfoundland, and a few have pushed the limits of their breeding range to include this small region of the island. Birds such as Philadelphia Vireo; Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, and Cape May warblers; Northern Parula; and Eastern Kingbird give the region a very different flavor, making it a draw for both local and visiting birders alike. Endangered Piping Plovers nest on the vast sandy beaches of this coast, and an occasional Veery can be heard singing at higher elevations of the Long Range Mountains that surround the valley.

**FALL & WINTER**

Fall brings a major shift to the bird life of Newfoundland, with breeding seabirds and songbirds having left for another year. They are replaced by more than a dozen species of migrating shorebirds including Whimbrel and American Golden-Plover on the upland barrens and Ruddy Turnstone, Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling, Semipalmated, Least, and White-rumped sandpipers on the many beaches. Flocks of beautiful Snow Buntings arrive in late fall, contrasting with the often more drab birds of the barrens this time of year. Some years, Snowy Owls arrive in numbers and hunt along the coast.
A growing number of birders visit Newfoundland in winter, when many other tourists steer clear. That’s because the island is known for its winter bird specialties, most of which can be found in and around St. John’s. Sought-after seabirds such as Dovekie and Thick-billed Murre are often found feeding close to shore in winter. Ocean-loving ducks such as Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, and all three species of North American scoter can be found along the coast. European waterfowl such as Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, and Eurasian Green-winged (“Common”) Teal routinely winter alongside more local species and provide excellent opportunities for photography. Some years, northern finches—including White-winged

Left, clockwise from bottom:
■ Ferryland Lighthouse. Photo © Susan Clarke
■ Dovekie. Photo © Jared Clarke
■ "Kumlien’s"Iceland Gulls. Photo © Jared Clarke
■ Boreal Chickadee. Photo © Jared Clarke

Woodland caribou. Photo © Brad James
Crossbill, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and Pine Grosbeak—are present in large numbers. Bohemian Waxwings often descend on the island en masse, feasting on late-season berries that linger through the colder months. Thrilling species such as Gyrfalcon and Ivory Gull are more difficult to predict but are reported from locations around the island every year.

St. John’s is known as one of the world’s foremost “hotspots” for winter gulls, a highlight for many visiting birders. Thousands of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, numerous Black-headed Gulls, and usually a European Mew (“Common”) Gull or two are found amongst the very abundant Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. At least one Yellow-legged Gull regularly overwinters there, making Newfoundland the only place in North America where this species is seen on a regular basis. Slaty-backed Gull has also occurred in recent years.

GETTING THERE

There are plenty of flights arriving and departing from Newfoundland daily. The largest airport, offering the most national and international connections, is in St. John’s (eastern), while Gander (central) and Deer Lake (western) also provide daily connections to hubs such as Halifax and Toronto. Smaller airports in Stephenville and St. Anthony are used mainly for interprovincial flights but allow for easy transit to these more remote parts of the island.

A year-round ferry service between Newfoundland and Cape Breton (Nova Scotia) arrives and departs from Port-aux-Basques on the island’s southwest corner. Visitors should be aware that this location is approximately 560 miles (900km) from St. John’s and is most practical if planning a cross-island birding trip or visiting the west coast. Another ferry also connects to Argentia (just 1.5 hours from St. John’s) during the summer months. Summer can be busy in Newfoundland, so it is highly recommended to reserve ferry crossings, car rentals, and/or accommodations well in advance when possible. Winter visitors should remember that weather and road conditions can be challenging at times, so allotting an extra day or two and requesting snow tires on rental vehicles are both good ideas.

Phinizy Birding Weekend

at Phinizy Swamp Nature Park

See cypress swamps, creeks, constructed wetlands, open fields, and wooded trails at this International Audubon IBA with a 238 bird species list.

Come be a part of the 2016 Phinizy Birding Weekend, April 22-24, and welcome the arrival of the beautiful painted bunting at this remarkable birding hot spot!

phinizycenter.org/birding
winters, and even more unexpected species show up from time to time. Up to a dozen species of gull can sometimes be seen in the run of a day.

**EUROPEAN RARITIES**

Many birders also travel to Newfoundland for European rarities, mainly in spring and winter. Some European waterfowl and gulls now winter regularly in the province, while others pop in occasionally to give birders a thrill. Numerous species of European shorebirds and songbirds have been recorded in Newfoundland, including some that have been seen nowhere else in North America.

*Be sure to check out birdersguide.aba.org for more information on this phenomenon.*

Newfoundland offers excellent birding throughout the seasons set against stunning natural backdrops. Short visits are often enough to take in major sites in any given region, although the island is big and varied enough to keep visitors busy for much longer stays. Excellent online information to help plan your trip may be found at Bird•The•Rock (birdtherock.com) and eBird Canada resources (ebird.ca).
Elegance It’s the vision of American Avocets wading in the shallows – or the sight of 38 other shorebird species – in one of the world’s top 10 birding spots. There’s no place like Kansas for spotting spectacular shorebirds in the Central Flyway.

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Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area
owering high above the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert, three Texas mountain ranges draw a variety of birders, from the casual enthusiast to the hardcore lister. The Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park are the biggest attraction, as they are the only place in the ABA Area where Colima Warbler can easily and reliably be found. Meanwhile, the Davis and Guadalupe Mountains (along with the Chisos) offer birds more often associated with Southeast Arizona and the Rockies than Texas.

Below, I offer a short guide to these three mountain ranges—or sky islands. Each offers something different, from Mexican Jay in the Chisos Mountains to Montezuma Quail in the Davis Mountains to Juniper Titmouse in the Guadalupes. At the beginning of each section, you will find web links to additional information.

When planning your next great birding adventure to the Southwest, don't overlook Texas's sky islands.

**Chisos Mountains**
A Colima Warbler was collected at Boot Spring by Frederick Gaige on 20 July, 1928. This represented the first...
U.S. record of the species. Four years later, breeding was documented in the Chisos Mountains.

On 12 June, 1944, Big Bend National Park was established, protecting 708,221 acres (now 801,163 acres). Located within a large bend in the Rio Grande, the park includes areas of the Chisos Mountains and surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. Colima Warblers begin to return in mid-to late March, with the bulk returning by mid-April. They nest widely in suitable habitat throughout the high Chisos but are most numerous along the upper Pinnacles Trail and in the vicinity of Boot Springs. Pinnacles Trail (known to birders as the “Colima Death March”) is a grueling 3.5-mile hike from the Chisos Basin parking lot up the side of the mountain. Start early, bring plenty of water, and don’t feed the Mexican Jays!
Colima Warblers are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to birds of the Chisos Mountains. Visitors are instantly surrounded by activity. Say’s Phoebes and Cactus Wrens dart around the parking lot, picking dead insects off parked cars. In summer, the melodic songs of Scott’s Orioles and Black-headed Grosbeaks seem to come from every direction. White-throated Swifts soar overhead. Hepatic Tanagers nest in some of the taller trees behind the lodge, but be aware that Summer Tanager also nests in the vicinity.

Peak spring migration in the Chisos Mountains is the first week of May. This is the best time to visit for target species. Elf Owls sing near the visitor center, and Common Poorwills and Western Screech-Owls also occasionally sing. Approaching Boot Springs at first light, Mexican Whip-poor-wills sing from every direction, and perhaps the soft hoot of a Flammulated Owl can be heard. Black-crested Titmice make their presence known, and before long, Hutton’s Vireos chime in. The past few years, Dusky-capped Flycatchers have been found around Boot Springs, and in 2013, a Flame-colored Tanager paired with a Western Tanager just up the trail toward the beginning of the Juniper Canyon Trail. Painted Redstarts and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds are likely in this stretch of trail. Be sure to listen for the warbler-like chip of Blue-throated Hummingbird, as this is an excellent location for this species.

When returning to the Basin from Boot Spring, head down Laguna Meadows Trail for a steady descent (this is a great trail to take to Boot Spring for a longer, easier ascent) or return via Pinnacles Trail. Either trail is birdy with year-round resident Acorn Woodpeckers and “Couch’s” Mexican Jays and a chance for any migrants. The United States’s southernmost grove of quaking aspens stands about halfway down Pinnacles Trail.

The Window Trail is an easy and pleasant hike from the Chisos Basin parking lot. This is one of the best trails to search for the federally threatened Black-capped Vireo.
Gray Vireo also breeds along this trail. Black-chinned Sparrow is likely to be encountered in weedier areas. Lucifer Hummingbirds frequent blooming agaves (century plants); the first U.S. record came from these mountains in 1901. The “window” itself is a spectacular view of the desert below. When returning, follow this trail to the campground.

At the campground, a service road leads to the Sewage Settlement Ponds. The trees and slopes along the path are good for migrants, and this is a great area for other wildlife. Mexican black bears often lumber through the scrub or right down the road, and a sighting of “Carmen Mountain” white-tailed deer is almost guaranteed.

For those who like a little more adventure, there is Pine Canyon. In fall of 2007,
this site hosted a Fan-tailed Warbler and a Northern (Mountain) Pygmy-Owl. An all-around great place for migrants and resident specialties, be warned that this site does not cater to the Prius-warrior. A 4.2-mile gravel road, maintained for high-clearance vehicles only, leads to a trail. An easy trail for a mile or so, it then begins a steep and rocky ascent ending in an ephemeral waterfall. To get to Pine Canyon from Marathon, take US-385 south 70 miles to Panther Junction Visitor Center.

From here, turn west and drive three miles to Chisos Basin Rd., where the ascent into the Chisos Mountains begins immediately. From Alpine, take TX-118 south 80 miles to Study Butte. Continue east into the park 23 miles before turning onto Chisos Basin Rd. Returning from the park, drivers are required to stop at U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints. Foreign nationals should carry adequate documentation.

The park entrance fee is $25 and is good for seven full days. Chisos Basin Campground has 60 sites, and there are several backcountry campsites up the mountain. Chisos Mountain Lodge is a great alternative to camping.

Davis Mountains

With more surface area above 5,000 feet than Texas’s other mountain ranges, the Davis Mountains are a smorgasbord of bird life, but much of the land is private or limited in access.

Davis Mountains State Park offers the most regular public access. It also happens to be an excellent place to view Montezuma Quail. With recently updated feeding stations, the state park offers the most relaxed birding atmosphere in the Texas mountains.

Acorn Woodpecker, White-winged Dove, Black-crested Titmouse, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Lesser Goldfinch are year-round mainstays at the feeders. In the winter, flocks of Dark-eyed Junco join the group.

Montezuma Quail require patience, but the park staff keep excellent tabs on the species and should have up-to-date information on the best viewing times.

Across from the main park, the state park maintains a primitive area that has trails along the cottonwood-lined Limpia Creek. Common Black-Hawk breeds in multiple locations along this creek, as do Zone-tailed Hawk and occasionally Gray Hawk.

Exploring the rest of the Davis Moun-
tains requires taking Texas 118, the elevationally-highest state-maintained road in Texas. This road winds through mountain prairie, juniper, and pinyon-juniper habitats. In winter, Phainopepla, Townsend’s Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, and Spizella flocks can be found on the side of the road. Eastern (Lillian’s) Meadowlark breeds in these grasslands.

State Highway 118 passes by the McDonald Observatory, and the road up to the observatory can be birdy in the mornings. “Star Parties” are offered many nights, which provide visitors opportunities to look through various telescopes to view the cosmos—a truly rewarding experience.

Lawrence E. Wood Picnic Area lies 8.5 miles west of the McDonald Observatory. In winter, this is the spot to find Williamson’s Sapsucker in Texas. In summer, Hepatic Tanager, Western Bluebird, Cassin’s Kingbird, and Plumbeous Vireo breed in the junipers and pines. During the monsoon season, Montezuma Quail can be quite common in the grasses.

Directly adjacent to L.E. Wood is Madera Canyon Trail, maintained by The Nature Conservancy. This moderate loop trail passes a water tank that occasionally has Mexican Mallard. Gray Flycatcher sometimes breeds along the trail, though it is much more common at higher elevation.

Just west of L.E. Wood is the entrance to The Nature Conservancy’s Davis Mountain Preserve. Open to the public only a few times a year, The Nature Conservancy owns or protects through easement 102,675 acres of the Davis Mountains including the range’s highest peak, Mount Livermore (8,382 ft.).

Spotted Owl is known to breed on the preserve, but devastating fires in 2011 and an ongoing drought have altered much of the pinyon-juniper habitat in the mountain range.

In 2013, two Long-eared Owl nests were found on the preserve, representing only a handful of nesting records for the state. Buff-breasted Flycatcher can occasionally be found in summer in Wolf Den Canyon. The impressive Tobe Canyon has Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Steller’s Jay, Orange-
crowned Warbler, Grace’s Warbler, and Virginia’s Warbler.

The Nature Conservancy biologists suspect Virginia’s x Colima Warbler hybrids to occur rarely in this area. Mexican Whip-poor-will and Western Screech-Owl are common at higher elevation. Golden Eagle can occasionally be found soaring overhead.

The visitor center has hummingbird feeders, and in fall, Calliope, Rufous, Broad-tailed and Black-chinned are abundant. Kelly Bryan, a local bander, has done extensive work with hummingbirds in the area.

Davis Mountain State Park is located on Texas 118, three miles west of the intersection with Texas 17. The entrance fee is $6 per day. Tent camping and RV hook-ups are available in the park. The Indian Lodge, built by the CCC and located in the state park, offers 39 rustic and comfortable rooms. Other lodging is available in nearby Fort Davis.

Guadalupe Mountains

Perhaps better known for its spectacular cave system and fascinating geology (the range is an ancient, uplifted reef), Guadalupe Mountains is one of the National Park System’s best-kept secrets.

Texas access is fully situated within the 86,367-acre Guadalupe Mountains National Park. With very few paved roads and more than 80 miles of trails winding through Chihuahuan Desert, riparian Big Tooth Maples, and pinyon-juniper, this is a paradise for both hikers and naturalists.

Most visitors to the park come to summit Texas’s highest mountain, Guadalupe Peak (8,751 feet). This strenuous trail is largely devoid of wildlife, save the occasional Peregrine Falcon or Mountain Chickadee. While that trail can certainly be missed, the dramatic view of “The Rim” and “El Capitan” cannot.

There is a scenic pull-off a few miles west of the visitor center on U.S. Highway 62/180, offering the awe-inspiring experience of seeing the Guadalupe Mountains for the first time. The Pine Springs Visitor Center parking lot is always an excellent place to start birding. Phainopeplas sporadically light in the Texas madrone, colloquially known as “lady-legs” for their smooth trunks. Black-chinned Sparrows are year-round residents in the grassier areas. In winter, mixed flocks of Chipping Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos feed in those grassy areas.

From the parking lot, there are several trail options. Devil’s Hall is an easy and beautiful hike. Historically, Spotted Owl and Painted Redstart nested along this trail. Recent trips have not been successful for either species.

One of the only true western coniferous forests in Texas is found in these mountains. “The Bowl” can be accessed by either Tejas Trail or Bear Canyon Trail. Tejas Trail is a long and steady hike, while Bear Canyon is a little over two miles long.
Access points for Dog and McKittrick canyons are effectively very far apart. Map © Janet Mrazek
Texas’s Sky Islands

with 2,500 feet of elevation gain. I personally enjoy ascending Bear and descending Tejas, but most find the reverse more suitable.

Tejas will not produce many bird sightings until reaching Pine Top. Bear Canyon is steep, and birds are prevalent in the oaks and maples. During migration, Townsend’s Warblers are common along this trail.

Near The Bowl, the squawks of Steller’s Jays will be heard. The Bowl hosts two, possibly three, breeding species of nuthatch. Pygmy Nuthatch, reliably found nowhere else in the state, and White-breasted Nuthatch are year-round residents. Red-breasted Nuthatch is presumed to breed in The Bowl, but adequate documentation is lacking.

Band-tailed Pigeon, Western Wood-Pewee, Hepatic Tanager, Grace’s Warbler, and Virginia’s Warbler are fairly common breeders. At lower elevation, a quick visit to the historic Frijole Ranch offers the best chance to find Juniper Titmouse on this side of the mountains. Except for occasional irruptions, the Guadalupes are the only place to find Juniper Titmouse in Texas.

For those with less time to visit this range, Frijole’s 2.3-mile loop trail will provide a decent sampling of the avifauna of these mountains. Western Scrub-Jay, Townsend’s Solitaire (in cooler months), and Phainopepla are likely to be encountered.

McKittrick Canyon is located a few miles east of the visitor center and opens at 8 a.m. Mountain Time. Follow a long, winding, birdy road to a large parking lot. In late October, the canyon is ablaze in reds and oranges as the oaks and Big Tooth Maples take on their most photogenic appearance. The trail begins in scrub with Bushtit, Rock Wren, and Lesser Goldfinch. Soon, the canyon walls narrow, patches of water appear, and the pines, oaks, and maples begin. This is the best birding in the entire park and offers shelter when the early spring winds are at their most intense. In winter, Red-naped Sapsucker, Spotted Towhee, and Townsends Solitaire are abundant.

In spring, McKittrick hosts typical western migrants such as Dusky and Hammond’s Flycatchers. Western Tanager, Gray Vireo, and Ash-throated Flycatcher breed along the canyon. Canyon Wren, a year-round resident, hops along the steep canyon walls, delighting even the most seasoned birders.

Ten miles from the visitor center as the Golden Eagle flies, but more than 100 miles driving distance, Dog Canyon is one of the most secluded birding locations in Texas.

In New Mexico, near Carlsbad, take NM 137 until it dead ends at the TX/NM state line.

Thick alligator jumpers line the road, and Juniper Titmouse often calls from these trees. The Dog Canyon visitor center is best known for its hummingbirds. Magnificent Hummingbird is the main attraction and rarely disappoints.

Starting at 6,300 feet, “Dog” holds many of the higher-elevation species without the hike. Grace’s and Virginia’s warblers breed here, as do Gray and Cordilleran flycatchers. Acorn Woodpecker is a mainstay in the campground. Mexican Whip-poor-will and Western Screech-Owl are sure to serenade any camper in summer. As stunning as McKittrick in fall, tranquil Dog Canyon is the perfect place to reflect upon all that the Texas Sky Islands have to offer.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park is located on Highway 62/180 110 miles east of El Paso and 56 miles west of Carlsbad. The entrance fee is $5. Tent and RV camping are available at Pine Springs. Dog Canyon has nine tent-camping sites. Backcountry camping is available throughout the park.

Chisos Mountains
• nps.gov/bibe/index.htm

Davis Mountains
• tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/davis-mountains
• tinyurl.com/TNC-DavisMts
• westtexashummingbirds.com

Guadalupe Mountains
• nps.gov/gumo/index.htm
Southeast Arizona Birding Festival

August 11–14, 2016
Registration opens: March 15, 2016
Tucson, Arizona
(Based out of the Arizona Riverpark Inn)

Expert-Led Field Trips, Workshops, Nature Expo, Evening Programs
Keynote Speaker: Jeff Gordon, President, American Birding Association
Featured Speaker: Sheri Williamson, Director, Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory

For more details and registration, go to:

events@aba.org • 800.850.2473

Southeast Arizona in August is a birder’s paradise. In Serra Vista, known as “the hummingbird capital of the United States”, common sightings include Broad-billed, Broad-tailed, Violet-crowned and Magnificent Hummingbirds. Rarer hummers include Lucifer, White-eared and Be-rylline hummingbirds and even Plain-capped Starthroat. Visits to the Huachuca Mountains, San Pedro River and Patagonia routinely provide sightings of Gray Hawk, Vermilion Flycatcher, Abert’s Towhee, Greater Roadrunner, Phainopepla, Botteri’s and Cassin’s Sparrows, Varied Bunting, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Thick-billed Kingbird, Pyrrhuloxia, Zone-tailed Hawk and Lucy’s Warbler.

This rally is right after the Southeast Arizona Birding Festival so that you can enjoy both events back to back.

For more details and registration, go to:

events.aba.org

ABA Event

Sierra Vista, Arizona Birding Rally

When: August 15–20, 2016
Where: Sierra Vista, Arizona
Hosts: Jeff Gordon and Liz Gordon, Richard Fray, George Armistead, Jennie Duberstein, Homer Hansen, and more.

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Bird Like a Neotropical Pro

In the 2015 issue of Birder’s Guide to Gear, I shared a list of gear that will make your Neotropical birding experience more memorable and comfortable. In this article, I discuss how to build your tropical birding skills so you can make the most out of your limited vacation time.

Learning how to identify the thousands of species in the Neotropics, including all of those pesky flycatchers, can be challenging. However, with a little studying and some planning, you will be ticking lifers in no time.
Planning
If it is your first tropical birding experience, I recommend visiting well-known birding destinations in countries with published bird-finding guides. Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, and Colombia all have bird-finding guides or have ample information online that should help take the guesswork out of trip planning. Choosing which sites to visit within your chosen country is perhaps one of the most time-consuming parts of planning a birding trip, but, thankfully, numerous resources exist to help. Many bird-finding guides and online trip reports highlight popular birding destinations, provide species lists, and even provide sample itineraries to help you start planning. Cloud Birders (cloudbirders.com) is an online resource hosting thousands of trip reports from just about anywhere; it's a very useful and often more up-to-date resource than printed material.

When considering which destinations to visit, look at species lists for each location. Are the listed species those that you are interested in observing? Which sites will give you the most bang for your buck? You should also consider climate, access, and trail difficulty when choosing places to visit. Some locations may have amazing species lists, but access to the site requires a multi-hour boat trip and/or hours of hiking on steep and muddy trails. If you have any physical limitations, choose sites that are more your speed. Most bird-finding guides and trip reports describe the conditions at each site to help you decide if the location is right for you. One word of advice, though: make sure you allow for plenty of transit time and a little slack in your schedule, because things do not always go as planned. When traveling abroad, even if you are fluent in the language, things may take longer than you think. Expect the unexpected.

Once you have a general idea of where you want to go, it is time to start studying.

Birding Basics
To make the most of your trip, you need to study before you go. Even if you are going on a guided trip, you will get far more out of it if you put in a little time. But where to start? The number of birds in the tropics can be mind-numbing. A first flip through a bird guide may leave your mouth watering and your mind reeling. “How will I ever be able to remember all of those tanagers and flycatchers? And what exactly is a puffbird? A jacamar?”

I recommend starting small. Look at your knowing the basic features of euphonias, dacnises, and Tangara tanagers will help you quickly classify birds to family or even genus when a fast-moving flock of frugivorous birds passes overhead. From left: male Orange-bellied Euphonia (© Andy Morffew), Speckled Tanager (© Josh Beck), male Blue Dacnis (© Dave Curtis).
field guides and try to understand the general differences between family groups. What features do euphonias share, and how are they different from tanagers, warblers, and dacnises? Euphonias are plump, tanager-like finches of the canopy that are generally yellow and black, with stubby bills and short tails; dacnises are warbler-like tanagers with pointed bills; and Tangara tanagers are brightly-colored species of the forest canopy. Understanding broad characteristics will really help when you see a bird you do not recognize, because it allows you to narrow down your choices to one group.

After you have a handle on the general characteristics of each family, give yourself a little bit of time each day to study. Studying just a little bit each day will prevent overload and increase the chances that you will remember what you learned. The best approach is to create lists of expected species for each of the places you plan to visit. Species lists can be gleaned from bird-finding guides, eBird, and trip reports. eBird also has a great tool called Target Species that will help you build a list of target species for several locations. These are wonderful resources for knowing which species to expect at a given location—essential information for winnowing down the list of species to study. In Costa Rica, for example, I knew to expect Yellow-bellied Tyrannulets on the northern Pacific slope and Brown-capped Tyrannulets on the Atlantic slope after reading A Bird-Finding Guide to Costa Rica by Barrett Lawson. These species are very hard to tell apart and vocally quite similar. If I had not done my research, I probably would have been staring at my field guide for far too long, trying to figure out which species I was looking at instead of focusing on all of the other cool birds around me.

Another important aspect of birding in a new environment is to know what birds are going to be common and to learn to recognize them. Again, species lists from trip reports, bird-finding guides, and eBird will help you determine which

Male Masked Trogons (left) have very fine barring on the underside of the tail, while male Collared Trogons (right) have thicker bars there. Knowing the difference before you travel will help you identify them without having to waste time looking at a book in the field. Photos © Josh Beck
species are likely to be most common. Even if you do not learn every bird you are likely to see, recognizing the common birds quickly will give you more time to look for new species.

With a species list in hand for the places you plan to visit, now it is time to start digging in and trying to learn key features for identification. Start simple with groups of similar species. Euphonias, for example, all appear superficially very similar, but they do have key features that will distinguish each species in the field. Using a combination of range, elevation, and physical characteristics, suddenly they do not seem so confusing.

I also try to think of sayings to help me remember bird names and key features. Masked Trogons and Collared Trogons overlap in some areas in South America, and they look remarkably similar upon first glance. For the life of me, I could not keep the features of each one straight in my head, until I created a saying to help me remember. At a masquerade ball, you wear a mask and some of your finest items, just like the Masked Trogon, which wears a black mask and has very fine barring on the underside of its tail. Creating your own sayings really does help, even if they are cheesy.

It can be helpful to look at photos of birds online, because sometimes birds look different in the field, where they might be seen in different postures and lighting, compared to how they are depicted in a field guide. Looking at photos online can also be a good way to quiz yourself and test your knowledge, but be careful to use reputable bird photography websites, as bird photos are frequently misidentified online.

Habitat and elevation can also be a useful clue to separate similar species. Read descriptions in the field guides to ascertain where to expect each species, and look for distinctive behaviors, such as the tail-wagging exhibited by this male Capped Conebill, will help you quickly recognize certain species at a glance, thereby allowing you to move on to the next bird in quickly-moving mixed-species flocks. That is, if you can look away! Photo © Francesco Veronesi
online for representative photos of different habitat types, especially if it is your first time in the tropics. While habitat characteristics are not always diagnostic, they certainly can help with identification. For example, Streak-headed and Spot-crowned woodcreepers may look similar, but Streak-headed is a lowland species, generally occurring in disturbed habitat below 3,300 feet (1,000 m), while Spot-crowned Woodcreeper is found in healthy highland forest mostly above 5,000 feet (1,500 m). You should still take a close look at each woodcreeper, but elevation and habitat can help with identification.

Knowing general behavior will also help you identify birds. For example, Gray-hooded Bush Tanagers and Capped Conebills wag their tails up and down. When I see this behavior in a mixed flock in the highlands, I instantly recognize them. Many large, understory antbirds such as Zeledon’s, Immaculate, and Bare-crowned pump their tails aggressively downwards—a behavior which can help with identification especially if you only get a quick look.

**Birding by Ear**

Of course, learning bird sounds can help with identification. Perhaps more importantly, it’s often crucial for finding birds. But don’t just learn the songs of the rare and sexy species. A better strategy, especially if you have limited time, is to learn the vocalizations of the common birds that you are likely to hear every day. Learning these will give you an advantage because your ears will be tuned in and you will likely be more able to pick out a song you do not recognize as potentially worth tracking down. Lesser Greenlets can sing all morning long, and if you did not recognize their song, you might be tempted to stop and investigate. Knowing to disregard it will leave you more time to chase down new birds.

Another good strategy is to focus your studies on the songs and calls of furtive birds—the ones that sing from thickets and rarely make an appearance in the open, like quail-doves and antpittas. Getting a handle on the songs of furtive species will help you know when one is around, so that you can start looking in earnest instead of just hoping to luck into a chance sighting.

It’s also a good idea to learn the calls of many woodcreepers are streaky to various extents, and their feeding habits (often hiding on the far sides of trunks or buried in bromeliads) can make them hard to observe before they fly off to the next tree. These Spot-crowned (bottom) and Streak-headed (top) woodcreepers may look similar, but knowing that each occurs in very different habitats will allow you to ID them with even brief or obscured looks. Photos © Raúl A. Vega
and songs of species that are considered leaders or core members of mixed-species flocks and/or are followers of army ants. Black-throated Shrike-Tanagers, Dusky-throated Antshrikes, and Cinereous Antshrikes are frequently core members of mixed-species flocks, so learning their calls can inform you that other cool but less vocal birds may be around. If you hear a Bicolored Antbird, which is an obligate army-ant follower, be on the look-out for army ants and other ant-following species.

Numerous strategies exist by which to learn bird sounds, but I think the best strategy is to create your own mnemonic or saying for each one. When my partner and I were preparing to head to the Amazon for the first time, we were overwhelmed trying to learn the songs of more than 50 species of antbirds. Every time we played a song, we tried to think of a saying to help us remember. Even though we came up with some seriously silly sayings, it really helped. When I heard “free-beer” coming from the understory in the Amazon, I remembered that I eat Dots (the gummy candy) when I have beer, and that I was hearing a Dot-backed Antbird. Other clever mnemonics we created helped us identify Spotted Antbirds (which excitedly sing “There’s ants, there’s ants, there’s ants!”) and Chestnut-backed Antbirds (which beckon you to come closer with every song: “Come here. Come right here”).

Xeno-canto and the Macaulay Library both have thousands of recordings that you can listen to for free online. Compact discs of bird songs and calls are also available for many countries at various stores online, such as Buteo Books.

Mastering Neotropical bird identification is challenging, but I hope the tips and tricks shared here will help make your birding experience even more amazing. Sitting down to plan a birding trip to the Neotropics is a rewarding way to learn more about this amazing area, and studying the bird species you are likely to encounter ahead of time will certainly make your trip more worthwhile and memorable!
Parasitic jaegers, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffn, Great and South Polar skuas, Pomarine and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels, Northern Fulmar, Great, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, phalaropes; Common Murre, Roseate and Arctic terns, Black-capped Petrel, gannets, phalaropes, gulls (including “Kumlien’s”), sea ducks.

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

Cost: $215
Duration: 4 days, 6 nights
Dates: 14 (15)*, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 May; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 24, 25 June; 1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 29, 30 Jul; 5, 6, 12, 13, 26, 27

### Mid-Atlantic

**Port:** Brooklyn, New York
**Destination:** Hudson Canyon and waters off western Long Island
**Dates:** 5-6 Jun; 28-29 Aug
**Duration:** Varies
**Cost:** $130 (8 hours), $190 (14 hours), $250 (22 hours)
**Target species:** Black-capped Petrel, Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters, South Polar Skua, Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels, all 3 jaegers, Arctic Tern, Red-necked Phalarope.
**Organizer:** See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

**Port:** Cape May, New Jersey
**Destination:** Wilmington Canyons and waters off New Jersey and Delaware
**Dates:** 21–22 May; 10–11 Sep
**Duration:** 18 hours overnight
**Cost:** $215
**Target species:** SPRING: Cory’s, Great, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s and Leach’s storm-petrels, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Arctic Tern, phalaropes. SUMMER: Black-capped Petrel, Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters, South Polar Skua, Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels, all 3 jaegers, Arctic Tern, Red-necked 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
**Dates:** 3–4 Jun; 20–21 Aug
**Duration:** 18 hours overnight
**Cost:** $225
**Target species:** Black-capped Petrel, Cory’s, Great, Audubon’s, and Manx shearwaters, South Polar Skua, Wilson’s, Leach’s, Band-rumped, and White-faced storm-petrels, all 3 jaegers, Arctic Tern, Red-necked Phalarope.
**Organizer:** See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

**Port:** Hatteras, North Carolina
**Destination:** Gulf Stream, continental shelf and slope waters, aboard our own boat, Stormy Petrel II
**Dates:** 14 (15)*, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 May; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 24, 25 Jun; 1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 29, 30 Jul; 5, 6, 12, 13, 26,
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27, 28 Aug.; 3, 4 Sep; TBA Oct.; Feb 2017 dates TBA in fall 2016; additional dates may be added throughout, and private charters are available year-round. (*) – bad weather make-up date

Duration: 10–12 hours
Cost: most trips $165; discount for multiple trips paid by check; see website for details

Target Species: WINTER: Manx Shearwater, Northern Fulmar, Red Phalarope, Great Skua, Little Gull, Dovekie, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin. SPRING & SUMMER: Black-capped Petrel, Cory’s, Great, Manx, and Audubon’s shearwaters, Wilson’s and Band-rumped storm-petrels, Bridled Tern. SCARCE-TO-RARE: 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 3 jaegers, Sooty Tern.

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

Port: Port Aransas, Texas
Destination: Gulf Stream waters beyond continental shelf
Dates: 28, 29, 30 May
Duration: 11–12 hours
Cost: $155
Target species: Black-capped, Bermuda, Trindade, & Fea’s petrels, Cory’s, Great, Manx, and Audubon’s shearwaters, Wilson’s, Leach’s, & Band-rumped storm-petrels, White-tailed & Red-billed tropicbirds, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers.

Organizer: See Life Paulagics. (215) 234-6805; paulagics.com; info@paulagics.com

Port: Manteo, North Carolina
Destination: Gulf Stream waters beyond continental shelf
Dates: 23 Apr; 14 May; 18 Jun; 23 Jul; 27, 28 Aug; 3, 4, 10, 11, 24, 25 Sep; 1, 8, 22 Oct.
Duration: 9–10 hours
Cost: $145–$150
Target species: Expected: Black-footed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, phalaropes, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Sabine’s Gull, Cassin’s Auklet, European Storm-Petrel, Red-billed and White-tailed tropicbirds, Masked Booby; Bridled and Sooty terns; Pomarine Jaeger. RARE: Sooty and Manx shearwaters; Red-billed Tropicbird; Brown Booby; Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers; Brown Noddy; Marine mammals and whale shark.

Organizer: Texas Pelagics. (281) 684-5425; texaspelagics.com; garyhodne@gmail.com

Port: Westport, Washington
Destination: Grays Canyon and outer slope (35–40 miles offshore)
Dates: 23 Apr; 14 May; 18 Jun; 23 Jul; 6, 13, 21, 27, 28 Aug; 3, 4, 10, 11, 24, 25 Sep; 1, 8, 22 Oct.
Duration: 9–10 hours
Cost: $1,600
Target species: Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, Northern Fulmar, Black-footed Albatross, Buller’s, Sooty, and Pink-footed shearwaters, Rhinoceros and Cassin’s auklets, Marbled and Ancient murrelets, Tufted and Horned puffins, all 3 jaegers.

Organizer: Wilderness Birding Adventures. (907) 299-3937; wildernessbirding.com; info@wildernessbirding.com

*Tour begins and ends at different ports.

Gulf of Mexico

Port: Port Aransas, Texas
Destination: 50–60 miles offshore to 3,000’ depths
Date: 23 Jul
Duration: 16 hours
Cost: $220 early-bird fare if paid 3 months in advance; $240 otherwise

Target Species: REGULAR: Cory’s, Audubon’s, and Great shearwaters; Band-rumped and Leach’s storm-petrels (summer); Magnificent Frigatebird; Masked Booby; Bridled and Sooty terns; Pomarine Jaeger. RARE: Sooty and Manx shearwaters; Red-billed Tropicbird; Brown Booby; Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers; Brown Noddy; Marine mammals and whale shark.

Organizer: Texas Pelagics. (281) 684-5425; texaspelagics.com; garyhodne@gmail.com

Port: South Padre Island, Texas
Destination: 50–60 miles offshore to 3,000’ depths; 16-hour trip goes to Camel’s Head
Dates: 4 Jun; 27 Aug (16 hours); 17 Sep; 8 Oct
Duration: 12 or 16 hours; see website for details
Cost: $170–$200 early-bird fare if paid 3 months in advance; $190–$220 otherwise

Target Species: REGULAR: Cory’s, Audubon’s, and Great shearwaters; Band-rumped and Leach’s storm-petrels (summer); Magnificent Frigatebird; Masked Booby; Bridled and Sooty terns; Pomarine Jaeger. RARE: Sooty and Manx shearwaters; Red-billed Tropicbird; Brown Booby; Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers; Brown Noddy; Marine mammals and whale shark.

Organizer: Texas Pelagics. (281) 684-5425; texaspelagics.com; garyhodne@gmail.com

PACIFIC OCEAN

Alaska

Port: Juneau, Alaska
Destination: Whittier, Alaska* via the northern Gulf of Alaska
Dates: 21–25 Aug
Duration: 42 hours at sea with land time birding in Juneau and Whittier
Cost: $1,600
Target species: Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, Northern Fulmar, Black-footed Albatross, Buller’s, Sooty, and Pink-footed shearwaters, Rhinoceros and Cassin’s auklets, Marbled and Ancient murrelets, Tufted and Horned puffins, all 3 jaegers.

Organizer: Wilderness Birding Adventures. (907) 299-3937; wildernessbirding.com; info@wildernessbirding.com

*Tour begins and ends at different ports.

Washington & Oregon

Port: Westport, Washington
Destination: Grays Canyon and outer slope (35–40 miles offshore)
Dates: 23 Apr; 14 May; 18 Jun; 23 Jul; 6, 13, 21, 27, 28 Aug; 3, 4, 10, 11, 24, 25 Sep; 1, 8, 22 Oct.
Duration: 9–10 hours
Cost: $145–$150
Target species: Expected: Black-footed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, phalaropes, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, Sabine’s Gull, Cassin’s Auklet, European Storm-Petrel, Red-billed and White-tailed tropicbirds, Masked Booby; Bridled and Sooty terns; Pomarine Jaeger. RARE: Sooty and Manx shearwaters; Red-billed Tropicbird; Brown Booby; Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers; Brown Noddy; Marine mammals and whale shark.

Organizer: Wilderness Birding Adventures. (907) 299-3937; wildernessbirding.com; info@wildernessbirding.com

*Tour begins and ends at different ports.
Rhinoceros Auklet. **SEASONAL:** South Polar Skua, Flesh-footed, Buller’s, and Short-tailed shearwaters, Leach’s Storm-petrel, Long-tailed Jaeger, Arctic Tern. **INFREQUENT:** Laysan Albatross, Manx Shearwater, Scripp’s and Ancient murrelets. Also marine mammals.

**Organizer:** Westport Seabirds. (360) 268-9141; westportseabirds.com; pmand001@comcast.net

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**Port:** Newport, Oregon

**Destination:** Perpetua Bank, Stonewall Bank

**Dates:** 30 Apr (deepwater); 6, 27 Aug (deepwater); 3, 17 Sep; 1 Oct; 19 Nov

**Duration:** 7–12 hours (see website)

**Cost:** $125–$175; early-sign-up discounts available

**Target species:** **SUMMER & FALL:** Black-footed Albatross, Sooty, Pink-footed, Buller’s, and Flesh-footed shearwaters, Fork-tailed and Leach’s storm-petrels, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, phalaropes. **WINTER:** Laysan Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed Shearwater, Ancient Murrelet.

**Organizer:** Oregon Pelagic Tours.

(971) 221-2534; oregonpelagictours.com; tim@oregonpelagictours.com

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**Central and Northern California**

**Port:** Sausalito, California

**Destination:** Farallon Wildlife Refuge (passing under the Golden Gate Bridge)

**Dates:** 7, 14 Aug

**Duration:** 8–10 hours

**Cost:** $189

**Target species:** Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, Buller’s, Sooty, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels, phalaropes, Brown Booby, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Elegant and Arctic terns, Scripp’s Murrelet, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. Great trip for nesting seabirds (100% success rate with Tufted Puffin on Aug. trips) and marine mammals. Landing not permitted on the islands.

**Organizer:** Shearwater Journeys, Inc.

(831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.com

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**Port:** Half Moon Bay, California

**Destination:** 100 fathom line/Continental Shelf, Pioneer Canyon and canyons near Farallon Islands

**Dates:** 6, 13, 19 Aug; 4, 16, 18 Sep; 2, 9 Oct

**Duration:** 8–10 hours

**Cost:** $198
Pelagic Directory

Target species: Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed (later), Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels, Brown Booby, phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all 3 Jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Elegant and Arctic terns, Scripps’s, Guadalupe, and Ancient murrelets, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin.

Organizer: Shearwater Journeys, Inc. (831) 637-8527; shearwaterjourneys.com; shearwaterjourneys.blogspot.com; debi@shearwaterjourneys.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 Islands.
Dates: 27 Feb; 30 Apr; 9, 16, 23 Jul; 13, 14, 20 Aug; 10, 12, 17, 18 Sep; 1, 8 Oct
Duration: 9-10 hours
Cost: $135

Target species: WINTER: Black-footed Kittiwake, Ancient Murrelet, Short-tailed Shearwater, wintering gulls. SPRING: breeding-plumaged Sabine’s Gull, phalaropes, Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet, Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, arriving Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters. SUMMER & FALL: Sooty, Pink-footed, Buller’s, Black-vented and Flesh-footed shearwaters; all 3 Jaegers; South Polar Skua; Sabine’s Gull; Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses; Marbled and Scripps’s murrelets; Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets; Tufted Puffin; phalaropes; Brown Booby now regular. Consistently good for storm-petrel flocks, including Ashy, Black, Fork-tailed, and Wilson’s. FARRALLON IS. (Jul, Aug): breeding Tufted Puffin, Cassin’s Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot, whales and up to 5 species of pinnipeds.
Organizer: Alvaro’s Adventures. (650) 504-7779; alvarosadventures.com; info@alvarosadventures.com

Port: Fisherman’s Wharf, Monterey, California
Destination: Monterey Bay
Dates: 27 Aug; 24, 25 Sep
Duration: 5-8 hours
Cost: $130

Target species: Great numbers of birds from the first hour of birding. Amazing abundance of Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters, all 3 jaegers, South Polar Skua, Black-vented and Manx shear...
waters more likely here than farther north. Great for good views and photography, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Pigeon Guillemot, Buller’s Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater (rarely), phalaropes, Sabine’s Gull, Black-footed Albatross, and nice potential for fall storm-petrel flocks. Lots of marine mammals and general abundance of sea life. Sea otter common!

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: 29 Jul; 26 Aug; 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23, 24, 25 Sep; 1, 8 Oct
Duration: 8 hours (10 Sep is 12 hours)
Cost: $168
Target species: Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, Buller’s, Sooty, Short-tailed (later), Black-vented, and Manx shearwaters, Wilson’s, Fork-tailed, Leach’s, Ashy, and Black storm-petrels, phalaropes, South Polar Skua, all 3 jaegers, Sabine’s Gull, Elegant and Arctic terns, Scripps’s, Guadalupe, and Ancient murrelets, Cassin’s and Rhinoceros auklets, Tufted Puffin. Excellent opportunities photographers on all fall trips. Lots of marine mammals.

Book by 1 July and save $40!

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

* operated in conjunction with Monterey Bay Birding Festival

Port: Monterey Fisherman’s Wharf, Monterey, California
Destination: Monterey Canyon and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

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Southern California

Port: Dana Point, California
Destination: Lausen Sea Mount and waters off Orange County
Dates: 30 Apr; 16 Jul; 17 Sep
Duration: 8 hours
Cost: $60
Organizer: Sea & Sage Audubon. (949) 786-3160; tinyurl.com/cv7vrsf; nancykenyon@cox.net

Port: Fisherman’s 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, points past the continental shelf area, and around the Channel Islands
Dates: 5-9 Sep
Duration: 5 days
Cost: $1300
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, 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
Puerto Rico Birding Rally

When: October 2–8, 2016
Where: San Juan and La Parguera, Puerto Rico
Hosts: Gabriel Lugo, George Armistead and others
Hosts: 42 people (trips in groups of up to 14 people)
Cost: $2495

From the tiny Puerto Rican Tody, to the ornate Puerto Rican Woodpecker, to the bizarre and wonderful Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo, it’s easy to see why Puerto Rico is a fabulous birding destination—despite being so close to the U.S. mainland, it’s got a rich assortment of endemics. And it certainly doesn’t hurt that Puerto Rico is an island of beautiful beaches, wetlands, and forests, including the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest system, El Yunque. Join us for what promises to be a fantastic birding getaway, whether you’re just getting your feet wet in tropical birding, or a veteran hoping for some snazzy, rarer specialties.

For more details and registration, go to:

events.aba.org
events@aba.org • 800.850.2473
Seattle is one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States and a center for many medical and tech companies. It’s also an excellent place for urban birding. Birders who travel to Seattle for work can easily snag a few lifers if they’re new to the Pacific Northwest, even without a car. For others, just knowing good places near downtown for a few hours of birding is a boon.

King County, where Seattle sits, is ecologically diverse. It spans from true alpine habitat at just under 8,000 feet to Puget Sound at sea level, and it has a respectable Big Day record of 170. Theoretically, one could see White-tailed Ptarmigan and Long-tailed Duck in the same day. However, if you don’t have more than a few hours to bird, you can’t visit both alpine peaks and coastal expanses. Still, there is plenty to see.

I present here a quick and dirty list of places to hit if you show up with no plan, little time, and the desire to see a few new birds or know the best places to bird within spitting distance of downtown Seattle (possibly without a car). All the sites mentioned are in heavy use year-round. Don’t expect solitude or your time in the field to be free of dogs, runners, and other urban distractions. Fall through early spring is best for the majority of waterbirds and some of the native songbirds that disperse to higher elevations during the summer months to breed. Check eBird or the local birding listserv, Washington Tweeters, for the latest sightings. Access information within this article assumes a starting point in downtown Seattle.
Birding in Seattle

Myrtle Edwards Park
(Seattle Waterfront)

If you are in downtown Seattle and want to see waterbirds, check Myrtle Edwards Park. With 1.25 miles of paths that stretch along Elliott Bay, there are good opportunities for a variety of sea ducks, loons, and alcids. Even along the heavily altered shoreline, you can find Pigeon Guillemot and Barrow’s Goldeneye with relative ease. Bring your scope, and maybe score a Long-tailed Duck or Pacific Loon farther out. Anna’s Hummingbird and Golden-crowned Sparrow (October–April) are possible at every location on this list, but the landscaping in the park is as good a place as any.

If you really want to scope saltwater, you could extend your search beyond the park and explore the piers south to the Washington State Ferry landing. Likewise you could hop the ferry to Bainbridge Island from there. The ride each way is 30 minutes, and Parasitic Jaeger (September–November), Ancient Murrelet, and even orca are possible.

Bottom, left to right:
- Alki Beach and West Seattle waterfront.
- Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Photo © budgora

Map © Janet Mrazek
**Access:** A five-minute walk from a number of downtown Seattle hotels. Many bus routes run along the waterfront or nearby. Parking can be difficult.

**Alki and West Seattle Waterfront**

The waterfront drive, Harbor Ave SW, which becomes Alki Ave SW, is a nice stretch to bird between October and April, when wintering waterbirds are at their peak. Brant are fairly common along the sandy beaches, and deep water is easier to scope, with opportunities for Marbled Murrelet, Harlequin Ducks, and other ducks, grebes, and loons that winter. Any bit of rocky shoreline is also an excellent place to look for Surfbirds and Black Turnstones (both October–April), this being essentially the only

Top to bottom:
- Barrow’s Goldeneye. Photo © Andrew A. Reding
- “Sooty” Fox Sparrow. Photo © Charlie Wright
- Lincoln Park. Photo © Kevin Kerrick
Jack Block Park, a 15-acre Port of Seattle parcel at the east end of Harbor Avenue, is a good place to see a few songbirds while scoping Elliot Bay. Bald Eagles regularly nest in the area, and Peregrine Falcons nest on the bridge over the nearby Duwamish River. Jack Block is also a great place for the California Sea Lions and Harbor Seals that hang out in Elliot Bay.

Access: By car, you can efficiently drive and park all along the waterfront to scan for waterbirds. By bus, take King County Metro route 37 from downtown, and plan to walk along the shore. A unique and quick transport is the West Seattle Water Taxi, 10 minutes each way, running regularly between downtown Seattle’s waterfront and West Seattle.

Lincoln Park
If you want to extend your time in West Seattle, from Alki, head to Lincoln Park for songbirds. The park also sits on saltwater, so for a one-stop shop for Pacific Northwest specialties, it’s a good option. You can expect to find Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Spotted Towhee, as well as Bewick’s and Pacific wrens on a year-round basis. From October through May, Varied Thrushes lurk in the forest. A good day could also drum up Pileated Woodpecker, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hutton’s Vireo, and Townsend’s Warbler. There’s no wrong place to bird here, so walking the 4.6 miles of trails is a good bet for many species, though forest edges offer a better vantage than the depths of the forest. Barred Owls have taken over the second- and old-growth forest patches, but the park historically had Western Screech-Owl (Mee-kwa Mooks Park closer to Alki might still have some hold-outs, but they’re most likely gone).

Access: Parking is mostly on the east side of the park, which means that you’ll have to plan on walking. The best bus from downtown is King County Metro Rapid Line C, which takes you right to the park.

Seward Park
While not as close to downtown, Seward Park offers many of the species a visit to Lincoln Park could. This park occupies a peninsula that juts into freshwater Lake Washington out of South Seattle.

Above, from left to right:
- Pigeon Guillemot. Photo © Michael Klotz
- Golden-crowned Sparrow. Photo © Tim Lenz
- Hairy Woodpecker. Photo © Charlie Wright

Background image:
- West Point Lighthouse, Discovery Park. Photo © Tracie Howe
Holding one of the last chunks of old-growth forest, the park is where Washington Audubon has chosen to locate their base of operations, which is a good place to check for recent sightings. Bald Eagles nest in the park, and walking the 2.4-mile trail that runs along Lake Washington will offer good opportunities for both dabbling and diving ducks, loons, grebes, and gulls. In particular, look for Red-necked and Western grebes with the potential for Clark’s Grebe.

The interior of the park has about 120 acres of remnant old-growth, which is great for Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Townsend’s Warbler, and other forest species. There are access points to the interior interspersed along the waterfront loop, so a good walk could combine both water and forested trails.

**Access:** Car access is easiest because Seward is relatively far from downtown. Parking is at the base of the peninsula or along an interior loop road. Taking public transit requires a transfer; I recommend a combination of the Link Light Rail and a transfer to King County Metro Route 50.

**Interlaken Park**

Many Seattle birders might balk at sending a visitor to this small greenbelt on the north side of the Capitol Hill neighborhood, but if you are short on time and staying nearby, it has some forest habitat. Logged 100 years ago, the only native mature trees left are a few fire-scarred western red-cedars, but there’s plenty of second growth. This doesn’t seem to stop Band-tailed Pigeons, Pacific Wren, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees from frequenting the park. You might be hard-pressed to find a Varied Thrush, but for first-time visitors to the West, it shouldn’t
be hard to find a Steller’s Jay. For some of what must be the most inner-city owling possible, Barred Owls are year-round residents.

The park is a series of ravines with a former road running across them east to west, now a walking and biking trail. I find that’s the easiest place to bird from, as it provides vantage below and room for excursions onto side trails. A few blocks further north are the Montlake Playfields along Portage Bay, a stretch of freshwater between Lake Union and Lake Washington. It isn’t spectacular habitat, but it can yield a few waterbirds.

Access: If you are on foot from Capitol Hill, it could be only a matter of blocks to the park. Parking is fairly easy around the greenbelt, especially along residential streets. King County Metro Bus Route 49 gets you within a couple blocks of the west end of the park.

Discovery Park

The crown jewel of Seattle Parks, Discovery is the largest greenspace in the city, with many habitats included in 534 acres. Birding is great year-round, and if you have one place to visit within the city, this should be it, as the park boasts both a large species list (270 species total) and beautiful views of the Sound and nearby mountain ranges. Because so many birders visit the park, many rare species have been found here, including a Eurasian Hobby in 2001.

The park mostly sits on a bluff above Puget Sound, with a mix of meadows and mixed coniferous and deciduous forest. A walk of the loop
Birding in Seattle
trail (starting at either main parking area) will take you through meadows good for Golden-crowned Sparrows, “Sooty” Fox Sparrows, and Lincoln’s Sparrows. The forest holds opportunities for Chestnut-backed Chickadees in winter feeding flocks with kinglets, nuthatches, and creepers. Additionally, there are many Varied Thrushes, every woodpecker Seattle has to offer and, in good years, every common finch species. It’s not uncommon to find a Barred Owl while in the open forests, and with luck, Northern Saw-whet Owls may be found in winter months. Other raptors are also numerous, from Red-tailed and Cooper’s hawks to Merlins and Peregrine Falcons. Hutton’s Vireos are residents, and in warmer months, the songs of many Neotropical migrants echo through the forests, including Black-throated Gray and Townsend’s warblers, Western Tanagers, and Pacific-slope Flycatchers. Band-tailed Pigeon are commonly seen flying overhead year-round but are especially visible during spring when they’re displaying.

Access to the shores of the Sound is best at the Westpoint Lighthouse (parking permits are available for free from the Visitor Center; first come first served), where you can scope a large expanse. Every loon, grebe, and diving duck one could expect on Puget Sound can be seen from this vantage. It’s a good place to try for Parasitic Jaegers (September–October), as well as Heermann’s (July–December) and Bonaparte’s gulls (July–December and March–May). A perusal of the beach can turn up various shorebirds depending on the season. During fall and spring migrations, Western Sandpipers show up, and Sanderlings like the sandy stretches in winter. It’s a few miles of hiking to get to the beach without obtaining a parking permit, and a scope is essential for waterbirds.

From left to right:
- Male Harlequin Ducks. Photo © Jerry McFarland
- Female Varied Thrush. Photo © Skip Russell
- Band-tailed Pigeon. Photo © Skip Russell

Background image:
- Myrtle Edwards Park shoreline. Photo © vmax137
Access: Parking is easy, with two main lots in the East and South and a smaller permitted lot for waterfront access. By bus, take King County Metro route 24 or 33.

Union Bay Natural Area

The Union Bay Natural Area, also known as the Montlake Fill, is a parkland abutting the University of Washington’s Center for Urban Horticulture that offers some of Seattle’s best birding. The natural area sprang from a site the University of Washington previously leased to the City of Seattle as a dump, which had been covered and left to its own devices until it was recognized as an urban nature haven. The 74 acres aren’t “natural” in many respects, but don’t let its former status fool you. A total of 210 species of birds have been recorded there. It’s also the only site with an extensive wetland on this list. It may not be the best place for Northwest specialties, but if you are visiting the University of Washington’s campus, this is a close and easy spot to bird with lots of species.

Except for afternoons in the dead of summer, you’ll generally find something good between meadows, deciduous woodlands, wetlands, and the open water of Lake Washington. Spring and fall migrations can be exciting, with lots of songbirds passing through. The various small ponds are great for dabbling ducks, including Cinnamon Teal (May–September), and the muddy shores attract shorebirds in good variety, as it is one of only a few good places for migrating shorebirds within city limits. Most marshy areas are also good for both Sora and Virginia Rail.

Looking out onto the open freshwater of Union Bay on Lake Washington is a

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Birding in Seattle

Continued from page 70

good idea. In winter, ducks congregating here include Canvasback, scaup, goldeneyes, and all three mergansers. Near-shore is a good place to look for Wood Ducks foraging among lily pads. Bald Eagles are easily seen hunting the waterfowl, especially when raising chicks on a nearby nest.

Access: Parking is easy nearby, including some free lots at the Center for Urban Horticulture, but be sure you aren’t in a restricted lot. By bus, King County Metro route 25 is the only straight shot, as this is a bit more out of the way than the other locations.

Honorable Mentions

A few spots are too far to include or don’t offer enough chances at special Pacific Northwest species—but are too good to not mention.

Magnuson Park is located in North Seattle along Lake Washington. The park has a good mix of open meadow and woodlands as well as a series of freshwater ponds and the shore of Lake Washington to explore. Introduced California Quail still hold on here in decent numbers, despite urban pressures. Bullock’s Oriole and Lazuli Bunting breed, and it’s the most reliable place to see them in the city. With 197 species and lots of regular birders, plenty is reported at Magnuson.

Carkeek Park: Also in North Seattle but along Puget Sound, the park has a good mix of forest and coastal species. Bring a scope for this alternative spot to see Brant, sea ducks, grebes, loons, gulls, and lots of alcids from October through April. Peruse the forest trails for the majority of forest species mentioned elsewhere.

Left: Male Western Tanager. Photo © Peter Pearsall/USFWS

Below: Aerial view of Union Bay Natural Area. Photo © Brendan McGarry
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