



## Birding for Conservation: Honduras 2016

*Are you a birder eager to explore one of Latin America's hottest emerging destinations, but also interested in helping ensure that the birds and habitats you visit will be around for others to enjoy in the future? Do you also want to learn about other aspects of Honduran nature, and experience Honduran culture? And, would you like to travel comfortably, yet save big over other birding/natural history tours? The Honduran Conservation Coalition offers you an ethical, affordable alternative.*

**DATES:** Feb. 17-28, 2016 \* **COST:** \$1500 + airfare

### LEADERS:



**Mark Bonta**, Penn State geography professor and recognized authority on Honduran culture and nature, with 25 years' experience in the country.

**Gilberto Flores-Walter**, bilingual Honduran birder and coffee farmer, vice-president of the Honduran Ornithological Association.



***WANT TO SIGN UP? TURN to page 9 for instructions***

Partners and Associate Groups: Honduran Conservation Coalition, Juniata Valley Audubon Society, SAVE the Golden-winged Warbler & Chipeco Alidorada, Aguilas Arpías chapter of the ASHO, Universidad Nacional de Agricultura

Habitats visited: Cloud Forest; Tropical Dry Forest; Pine-Oak Forest; Tropical Savanna; Cactus-Thorn Forest; Lowland and Mid-Altitude Rain Forest; Shaded Coffee Farms and other agricultural landscapes; Coastal environments – beach, lagoon, mangroves.

**SPECIES:** 300+ breeding residents and Neotropical migrants are to be expected, of the 760+ registered for Honduras. Target species include: Golden-winged Warbler; Golden-cheeked Warbler; Ocellated Quail; Resplendent Quetzal; Seven motmot species, including Keel-billed, Rufous, and Blue-throated; Prevost’s Ground-Sparrow; Green-breasted Mountain-Gem, Honduran Emerald, and 35 other Trochilids; Rufous-breasted Spinetail; Royal Flycatcher. Plus numerous antbirds, woodcreepers, toucans, parrots, trogons, flycatchers, and many others. Typical other vertebrate fauna include numerous reptiles and amphibians as well as three species of monkeys, common smaller mammals such as agoutis, pacas, and coatimundis, and the potential for sightings of jaguar, Baird’s tapir, and other shy species.

#### **GIVING BACK TO CONSERVATION:**

The [Honduran Conservation Coalition](#) (‘science-driven, community-focused’) is a network of scientists and conservationists dedicated to the proposition that local people are the best possible stewards of the environment, and as such need to be empowered to make the best conservation decisions possible, whether in their own backyards or as managers of national parks. This birding opportunity is conceived as a partnership between its

participants and local people, and we will spend the first and last part of the trip visiting some outstanding efforts Hondurans have made to protect the environment and educate their citizens on birds and conservation. In addition, we are partnering directly with the ASHO, a nationwide volunteer group with local clubs such as the “Harpy Eagles” that engage in birdwatching as well as bird education and conservation. Finally,

participants will be investing their money of the economy in a country that is  
in some of the best eco-lodges the country increasingly investing its future in  
has to offer, contributing to a growing part sustainable eco-tourism.

## SOME DETAILS:

### Parks and other natural places:

**Celaque National Park.** Honduras's highest peak, and now a Biosphere Reserve. We will access rich pine-oak forests as well as dry forests.

**Cerro Azul-Meambar National Park.** Mid-Altitude Rain Forest, and the best example of sustainable management of a protected area in Honduras, by Aldea Global.

**Copan Ruinas Archaeological Park.** Needs no introduction – one of the world's premier archaeological sites. We will tour the ruins and visit the amazing Sculpture Museum.

There is a wild, reintroduced population of Scarlet Macaws here now.

**Cycad Reserve, Gualaco.** Community-managed forest of *Dioon mejiae*, a tree cycad.

These 1,000-year palm-like plants are gymnosperms and “living fossils”, and the population we will visit constitutes a critical food source for local inhabitants.

**Jeannette Kawas National Park** – Laguna de los Micos and Garífuna communities. We will visit coastal habitats utilized sustainably for centuries by the Garífuna ethnic group.

**La Montañita.** The National Agricultural University's forest reserve, containing a rare example of valley-bottom seasonally dry tropical forest, and a small population of wintering Golden-winged Warbler.

**La Tigra National Park.** A cloud forest that was once a silver mine, and has now grown back to become a major water source for Tegucigalpa, the nation's capital.

**Lake Yojoa Multiple Use Area.** The wettest place in Honduras, a lake formed by volcanic cinder cones, with soaring cloud forest peaks all around. Habitat for Snail Kite,

Limpkin, and numerous other species similar to those in south Florida.

### **Las Orquídeas Ecological Park**

(<http://www.honduranconservationcoalition.com/#lorchids-field-station/c1111>). Best

example of a restored tropical dry forest in Honduras run by a local organic farmer and Coalition member. Contains the endemic and highly sought-after Honduran Emerald hummingbird.

**Pico Bonito National Park.** Coastal mountain range containing some of the most pristine rainforest in Central America, on some of its most spectacular peaks.

**Shaded Coffee Farm in Marcala.** Source for Pennsylvania's own Café Lenca – sustainable, bird-friendly coffee. <https://www.facebook.com/CafeLenca> .

**Sierra de Agalta National Park.** Part of one of the largest cloud forests in Latin America. We will visit a small patch of rain forest at its base and, depending on road conditions, may be able to access highland habitat that contains the iconic Three-wattled Bellbird.

Cities and towns: Tegucigalpa, Catacamas and the Universidad Nacional de Agricultura, Gualaco, Tela, San José de Copán Ruinas, Gracias, La Esperanza, Marcala.

Lodging: We hope to be able to reserve and stay at all of these places. If a certain place becomes unavailable, we will stay at a similar lodge.

- ✓ EcoAlbergue Jutiapa: <https://mocaph.wordpress.com/amitigra/>. (Scroll down)
- ✓ Honduras Shores Plantation: <http://www.hsphonduras.com/>
- ✓ Parque Ecoturístico Quiliz (3 nights): <https://www.facebook.com/Quilyz?fref=nf>
- ✓ PANACAM Lodge: <http://www.panacamlodge.com/?lang=en>
- ✓ Rio Santiago Nature Resort: <http://riosantiagonatureresort.com/>. One of the premier places ANYWHERE to see hummingbirds – hundreds of feeders attract a dozen or more species at any given time.
- ✓ Casa de Café: <http://www.casadecafecopan.com/>
- ✓ Finca El Capitán: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/FINCA-EL-CAPITAN/152501444814649>
- ✓ Los Pinos Mountain Resort: <https://www.facebook.com/LosPinosMountainResort>

Food and Drink: Typical cuisine consists of beans, rice, corn tortillas, plantains, avocados, eggs, milk products, grilled meat, fish, soups, and an abundant quantity of tropical fruits and juices. Restaurants we visit will also have other local specialties as well as some international cuisine. “Vegetarian” options will be provided, though strictly Vegan menus are harder to come by. Bottled water and soft drinks are easy to come by, and we will carry and prepare a sufficient amount of coffee and snacks to keep us going during those early-morning forays.

FAQs:

*But isn't Honduras the most dangerous country in the world?*

Umm, no. As Mark Twain once said, there are “lies, damned lies, and statistics,” and Honduras has suffered considerably from manipulation of the latter. Parts of Honduras do have a very high violent crime rate, it is true, at least for a country at peace: precisely the parts we will be staying away from, except when flying in and out. The rest of the country, and particularly the small towns and rural places we will be visiting and staying in, are characterized by a lack of crime targeting tourists, precisely the opposite of too many countries out there.

*Do I need to know Spanish?*

No, but it can never hurt! Both guides are fully bilingual. A bit of Garífuna could come in helpful, too 😊

*Will I get sick? What shots do I need?*

You might—just the change in intestinal flora, regardless of how hygienic your food is, could be enough to affect you. We will be recommending a range of medicines to take, and a list of suggested practices that will keep you healthy. The few tropical diseases you could possibly be exposed to do not have vaccines, per se, so, like the scourges of Lyme or West Nile diseases in the US, the best practices will be to follow the preventive measures that we will recommend.

*Should I get travel insurance and/or emergency evacuation insurance?*

Once you register, we will provide a list of recommended vendors for these.

*What will the weather be like?*

February is the transition month from cool to hot in Honduras, and rain is likely to be scarce. However, you will need to come prepared for the country's range of microclimates—cool, wet cloud forests, steamy hot tropical rain forests, parched, hot lowland valleys. A travel umbrella, light sweater, and rain jacket should be sufficient for bad weather and cooler nights where temperatures may go as low as the 50s. Daytime highs can reach to 90 in the shade but remember that the tropical sun is very hot, so it will seem warmer.

*What about field guides?*

Guides to Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica all exist, and together, they cover the species we can expect to find. In addition, we will provide a full field checklist. We will provide specific field-guide reviews to you once you register.

### *Optics?*

We need no more than two or three scopes; it is good practice to bring two pairs of binoculars, if you have them, in case one gets fogged up.

### *Recordings and Playback?*

We have most species on our smart phones, and recording equipment for those calls no one can identify. Playback is permitted in most cases, but please bear in mind that the Ethics of the American Birding Association govern our actions, particularly in the case of breeding species.

### *What will our daily schedule be like?*

We will have coffee and pastries (and, sometimes, breakfast) between 4 and 5 AM, and begin listening for birds at 5. On some days, we will bird between 5 and 7 or 8 right around our accommodation, or a short van ride away. On other days, we will travel two or three hours (leaving at 5 AM) before arriving at our first stop. Tropical forest bird activity tends to die down considerably after 10:30 AM, so we will wrap things up around then, get full breakfast/brunch/lunch, and be on our way to the next spot. Given the uncertainties of travel and the locations of good restaurants and eating places, expect mid-day meal times to vary considerably. We will carry extra snacks to tide you through. Late-afternoon birding, up until 6 PM, is also generally good. We will tend to eat dinner between 6 and 8, go over the checklists, and then, on some days, have an optional night walk.

*Will I get to see all of my target birds?*

We will guarantee some species, and give you a very high percentage of certainty for others. We may have more than one opportunity for some missed species. Please bear in mind that we will not be doing ONLY birding—we are also interested in other aspects of natural history, as well as culture. To the best of our abilities, we will attempt to accommodate the wishes of each participant, but we also always keep the interests of the whole group in mind.

*What if X species gets sighted in a place not on our itinerary?*

We have a certain leeway for flexibility, and two guides, so if it is agreed upon by the group, and not disruptive to the schedule, we will be able to vary our course to get a Great Potoo, Crested Owl, Crested Eagle, Red-throated Caracara, or other high-value species a bit off the route.

*What about tipping?*

Tipping is optional, but will certainly be appreciated by local guides. Appropriate amounts can be discussed with tour leaders.

*Any suggested websites?*

We recommend familiarizing yourself with *eBird*, if you are not already, and visiting hotspots and regions that are on our itinerary to get a better idea of what to expect. Beyond that, the most valuable resource could be *xeno-canto*, where you can download vocalizations for free.



*I'm a bird photographer. Is this trip right for me?*

We will do our best to accommodate you; some days will be more slow-paced than others, and some sites will be ideal for photography.

***I WANT TO SIGN UP – what is the next step?***

Contact [markabonta@yahoo.com](mailto:markabonta@yahoo.com) right away! The tour is limited to ten paying participants and is based on double-room occupancy rates. You can fill out and send in the registration form, and reserve your spot with a \$250 down-payment. The full amount will be due by November 1, at which point the \$250+ \$1250 will not be refundable. After you register, you will be provided with a packing list, suggested reading list, a detailed itinerary, and a bird checklist.

The fee includes everything but optional tips, personal items, airfare, and airport exit tax in the case that the tax is not already incorporated into the ticket price. The least expensive tickets from the Pennsylvania area are from the Washington, DC region or New York City, and can range as low as \$500, though are typically in the \$650 - \$750 range during low season. Some of us will probably be able to carpool to the airport and travel down together to save costs. Flights are to Tegucigalpa (TGU) on Delta, American, United, or Avianca, and all arrive by early afternoon. Note that international flights typically include a personal item, a carry-on, and one free checked bag.