

Honduras

Escape to Central America (Small Group)

1st December to 6th December 2023 (6 days)

Trip Report



Lovely Cotinga by Alexander Alvarado

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Alexander Alvarado



Tour in Detail

Day 1. Arrival in Honduras.

This morning, our tour began with a city exploration of San Pedro Sula. We visited some stores to purchase a few things for the tour. Afterward, we headed to the local market, where we had the opportunity to learn about the local souvenirs. Additionally, we visited some tortilla shops to observe a different way of making tortillas.

For lunch, we enjoyed the local food available in the San Pedro Sula market. Following that, we proceeded to the airport while awaiting the arrival of other guests. At around 1:00 pm, we strolled along some farmers' roads outside the airport in search of one of the region's most striking birds—the Lesser Ground Cuckoo, typically found in dry forest habitats.



Lesser Ground Cuckoo by Alexander Alvarado

Locating this bird took us approximately 15 to 20 minutes, and we delighted in observing it through the telescope. Other birds in the vicinity included Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Rufous-naped Wren, Indigo Bunting, Blue-Black Grassquit, and Blue Grosbeak. While there was a diverse array of birds, our focus was the cuckoo. Once spotted, we headed back to the airport to await the arrival of two more guests.

After their arrival, we set off for the northeast of Honduras towards Pico Bonito. The journey to the lodge took roughly 3 to 4 hours, during which we discussed Honduras's natural history and the direct impact of banana plantations and African Palm cultivation on the region.

At dinner, we took the opportunity to introduce ourselves and relish the delightful menu at Pico Bonito Lodge. We also discussed the upcoming plans for the following days and specific details about the birds that many in the group were eager to see.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155778836>

Day 2 Birding Pico bonito Lodge.

We began our day by visiting the bird watching tower. Upon arrival, our quest commenced for the most sought-after bird in the region, the Lovely Cotinga. These stunning birds typically perch high in the trees, making them easily visible to everyone from a considerable distance at our observation sites.

The electric blue hue of these birds is truly incredible. Oftentimes, their splendid colour allows sightings from distances of up to 1 km away. Although they occasionally come closer to the towers, finding them in proximity during this time of the year proves a bit challenging. They usually perch alongside many other species, such as the multi-coloured Keel-Billed Toucan or species of Aracari.



During this morning's expedition from the tower, we had the privilege of witnessing a plethora of wildlife, including Purple-crowned Fairy, Brown-hooded Parrots, White-crowned Parrot, Brown Jays, and White-browed Gnatcatcher.

Later, we headed to breakfast to revel in the avian sights from the restaurant. The gardens buzzed with activity, hosting flocks of Olive-backed and White-vented Euphonias, Magnolia Warblers, Green Honeycreepers, and an array of delightful hummingbirds, including the frequent visitors such as the amazing Crowned Woodnymph! Following breakfast, we ventured through the lodge gardens, strolling along the main entrance path in search of more bird species. We were treated to fantastic views of the Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Red-capped Manakin, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, Masked Tityra, Royal Flycatcher, and White-collared Manakin. Although we heard Middle American Screech Owl multiple times, locating it proved challenging due to its hidden position behind a log. Finally, after lunch, we found small openings in the foliage, allowing us a glimpse through the telescope for a delightful viewing.



Honduran Emerald by Alexander Alvarado

The diversity within these tropical rainforests is immense. In the afternoon, we ascended the main trails toward the mountains in pursuit of one of Honduras' key birds—the highly coveted Keel-billed Motmot.

After savouring our encounter with the motmot, we continued our quest, spotting other species along the way, including Green Honeycreepers, Red-throated Ant Tanagers, Grey-headed Tanagers, and more! The discovery of the elusive Grey-Headed Tanager on the north coast of Honduras was particularly rewarding. On our return, we were fortunate to observe a Tody Motmot, one of the smallest in its family, a highlight for the region. As we exited the mountain, a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper caught our attention, responding to our calls with enthusiasm. Subsequently, we hastened to the restaurant for an early dinner, anticipating our visit to the Aguan Valley the following day.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155779112>
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155803561>

Day 3 Birding the Aguan Valley.

This morning, we began our journey at around 4:00 am towards one of the rarest dry tropical forests in the region: the Aguan Valley, precisely within the Honduran Emerald Reserve. Stopping at a gas station for breakfast and a brief rest after a three-hour trip, we soon commenced our search for species in the dry forest of the Aguan Valley. Here, we had the opportunity to spot many migratory species, including Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, and some resident species like Altamira Oriole. Our first encounter with White-fronted Parrots was here. In addition, a significant population of Crested Caracara caught our attention; approximately 16 were either flying over the area or feeding on the ground. However, our primary goal was to find the region's endemic bird, the Honduran Emerald. After multiple stops along the way, observing several notable birds like the Painted Bunting, Least Grebe, and Cliff Swallows, we continued toward the reserve.



A brief stop near the reserve allowed us to enjoy sightings of Amazon Kingfishers, Common Tody-Flycatchers, Morelet's Seedeaters, and White-lored Gnatcatchers—common sights along the forest edges. Moving towards the densest part of the forest, we spent about 20 minutes on the road's edge, searching for one of the region's striking birds, the Lesser Roadrunner. These birds are more active in hot temperatures with increased reptile activity on forest roadsides, feeding on lizards and large insects. After calling out for a few minutes, we heard a response from one of these birds. As we moved along the road to locate it, we found the roadrunner perched atop a tree, displaying impressively. Though it briefly disappeared, it reappeared about 10 to 15 meters away, near the road's edge, allowing us a cooperative view as it sang. The purple hue around its eyes was breathtaking. After this encounter, we continued towards the reserve where the Honduran Emerald resides.



Lesser Roadrunner by Alexander Alvarado

Despite an extensive walk through the reserve without a sign of the hummingbird due to fewer flowers than usual, we spotted other birds such as White-lored Gnatcatchers, Nutting's Flycatchers, Great Kiskadees, Brown-crested, and Great Crested Flycatchers, all very active within the forest. Finally, at the roadside, we located a female Honduran Emerald, though only a few managed a quick glimpse. As Steven, at the back of the group, was engrossed in observing Canivet's Emerald, he missed this sighting. Seeking permission from the army personnel guarding the reserve, we were allowed entry.

Once inside, we spotted another Canivet's Emerald at the visitor centre before moving about 100 meters into the reserve. Finding an open space with abundant flowers, I remarked to the group that it seemed a promising spot for the bird. Encouraging everyone to stay put, we anticipated the bird's arrival. Just as I finished speaking, a male Honduran Emerald appeared, gracefully flying over the flowers, affording everyone a sight of its flight. It briefly rested behind some cacti, giving us a chance to observe it closely through a scope. This marked our encounter with Honduras' only endemic species.

Around 11:00 in the morning, we explored further inside the reserve, expressing gratitude to the army personnel for granting us access, before heading towards Olanchito for lunch on our way back to Pico Bonito Lodge.

Over lunch, I suggested to the group a visit to a place where Black-and-white Owls roost along the route in Ceiba's center, called Credia. After a three-hour drive, we reached Ceiba and had the chance to spot one of these owls through a telescope, delighting everyone. Upon arrival at the lodge, I informed the group about our plan to search for other owls, particularly the Mottled Owl typically found in the lodge gardens, and possibly some reptiles and amphibians to experience the nocturnal wildlife.



Post-dinner, I promptly gathered my equipment to venture out for nocturnal animals. Near my room, a Mottled Owl's song caught my attention. Returning to the front desk, I waited for everyone to witness this magnificent creature.

After enjoying the owl, some guests retired to their rooms while the rest of the group continued searching for reptiles and amphibians. Arriving at the frog ponds, we found a Red-eyed Tree Frog, a *Plectrohyla* species, and Red Coffee Snake, *Ninia sebae*. One of the most intriguing finds was a lizard identified as a Smooth Helmeted Iguana, *Corytophanes cristatus*, spotted by Dave. These lizards are prevalent across the entire Atlantic Slope of Honduras and have a distinct appearance. After a couple of hours,



Smooth Helmeted Iguana by Alexander Alvarado

we returned to rest, preparing for an early departure the next day to Cuero y Salado.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155779504>

Day 4 Birding Cuero y Salado.

Today we departed just after dawn for Cuero y Salado. The local guides awaited us with a platform adapted from the railways (referred to as "burras"). This platform, a makeshift train due to the pandemic causing the original train to stop functioning, allowed locals to transport visitors who come to explore the wildlife-rich Cuero y Salado communities. The journey to Cuero y Salado was lined with living fences of *Gliricidia* trees, providing food for numerous bird species, including migratory ones. Recent rains had flooded the region, creating vast water bodies along the road's edge. We marvelled at Little Blue Herons, Great and Western Cattle Egrets, Blue-winged Teal, Roadside Hawks, flocks of Brown Jays, and the incredible Bat Falcon! The entire route was teeming with birds, including numerous seedeaters and doves, making the journey approximately an hour long.

Upon arrival, we boarded a boat to explore the rivers surrounding the Cuero y Salado communities. Alongside the diverse birdlife, we encountered mammals like howler monkeys, crocodiles, West Indian Manatees, and various iguanas. Notably, we discovered captivating Zapoton trees and red mangroves, significant attractions in the Atlantic coastal area. Our main aim was to spot American Pygmy Kingfisher, which provided breathtaking views, along with sightings of Russet-naped Wood Rails along the forest edge. We also encountered a White-necked Puffbird, a visually striking bird for the area. Navigating the rivers allowed us to observe bats resting in trees by the water, offering us glimpses of Belted, Amazon, Green, and Ringed Kingfishers.

Our guide, Eric, had arranged for lunch at the reserve. However, noticing a storm, we decided to leave the rivers and seek shelter. Lunch was graciously hosted at Eric's home instead, giving us the chance to interact with locals while sipping coconut water. Post-lunch, we returned to the hotel for a brief rest before heading to observation towers in search of more bird species.



Exploring the bird watching towers at Pico Bonito, we were treated to sightings of toucans, cotingas, Brown Jays, and various other birds in the upper canopy, alongside Geoffrey's Spider Monkeys! We rounded off the day with dinner at the hotel and ventured out once more at night to search for reptiles.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155803591>

Day 5 Birding Lancetilla.

We travelled to the west of the Atlantic coast towards the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens, one of the most incredible birding spots in Honduras. The records of species in this place are astounding. Without a doubt, it is one of the best destinations to enjoy birds throughout the region. Upon our arrival, we walked along the edges of the main path leading to the administrative offices and visitor centre in the park. Pausing for a few minutes, we had the opportunity to spot Baltimore Orioles, Great Antshrike, Variable Seedeater, and the very elusive Band-tailed Barbthroat, Long-billed Hermit, Stripe-throated Hermit, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, and many more.



American Pygmy Kingfisher by Alexander Alvarado

One of our main targets that day was to find the smaller species of woodpecker for the northern coast of Honduras, the Olivaceous Piculet. This tiny bird often flies in groups with warblers, vireos, and tanagers. Fortunately, we were very lucky to spot it within a couple of minutes after leaving the car. Meanwhile, various hummingbirds and other species were active in the area: Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Tennessee, American Yellow and Black-and-White Warblers were bustling about. Following this, we had the pleasure of sighting a Smoky Brown Woodpecker, also right along the path while we paused for a quick breakfast.

During our breakfast break, we heard a pair of Laughing Falcons, known for the immense noise they make while hunting in the forest. Calling out to them, we could easily see a couple of silhouettes moving in the forest. After a few minutes, one flew over the area, giving us a clear view. They perched just to the left side of the road. As we observed other bird species, we had another opportunity to call them, and the pair of Laughing Falcons flew over us, providing incredible views! Continuing along the path, we encountered Rufous-breasted Spinetails, Barred Antshrike, Worm-eating Warbler, and Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, a distinctive hummingbird for the northern region of Honduras. We observed it closely and enjoyed its presence for quite a while. Other birds in the area included Red-capped Manakins and Green Honeycreepers. Moving towards paths on the right side of the mountain, we discovered other species, including Sepia-capped Flycatcher, Grey Catbird, Spot-breasted Wren, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Black-headed Trogon, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Grey-headed Kite, Black Hawk-Eagle, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird.

We changed locations near the local school at Lancetilla and had fantastic views of Plain Xenops, Purple-crowned Fairy, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Yellow-winged Tanager, Rose-throated Becard, and Red-legged Honeycreepers, among many other species. After visiting this botanical garden, we continued our route to a place in Tela for lunch. Later, we headed to the seashore, where we had the pleasure of enjoying Laughing Gulls, Caspian, Royal and Black Terns, Sanderlings, Semipalmated Plovers, Spotted Sandpipers, and more!



<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155803128>

Day 6 Travel to the Airport.

We had an early breakfast at 6:00 am and then proceeded to bird along the entrance road to Pico Bonito Lodge. It was a very slow morning, but we managed to spot some flocks of Olive-backed Euphonias, Green Honeycreepers, Masked Tityras, Magnolia and Hooded Warblers. Following this brief walk, we boarded the van and headed to the airport for our final departures. Arriving on time, we had the opportunity to explore the area and spotted four Lesser Ground Cuckoos for the guests who had been unable to see them on the first day.



Laughing Falcon by Alexander Alvarado

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/177670>.

Rockjumper Birding Ltd

Labourdonnais Village
Mapou, Riviere du Rempart
31803, Mauritius

Tel: (USA & Canada) toll-free: 1-888-990-5552

Email: info@rockjumper.com

Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com