



**HONDURAS: RARE MOTMOTS,
OCELLATED QUAIL AND PICO BONITO**

25 FEBRUARY - 11 MARCH 2018



Lovely Cotinga is one of our targets on this trip.

Honduras, still mostly off the beaten track, is a hidden birding gem in Central America. Many people do not realize that this small country is the regional leader in terms of the percentage of land set aside as national parks and preserves, surpassing even Costa Rica in this regard. Sitting astride the Northern Central America endemic region, this increasingly popular country also boasts an impressive diversity of regional endemics within its many ecosystems, such as **Bushy-crested Jay** and **Green-breasted Mountaingem**. In addition, several bird species are easier to see here than elsewhere in their range, such as **Lovely Cotinga** and **Keel-billed Motmot**. For those who love motmots, Honduras happens to be the center of diversity for this family. Our carefully designed itinerary targets most of the Northern Central America endemics as well as five species of motmots, including the rare and sought-after **Tody** and **Blue-throated Motmots**.

We begin this tour in the highlands above Lake Yojoa, targeting localized species such as **Rufous-breasted Spinetail** and **Prevost's Ground Sparrow**, while also hopefully enjoying our first sightings of the colorful and charismatic **Blue-diademed**, **Keel-billed**, and **Turquoise-browed Motmots**. The cloudforests in the southern part of the country offer chances to observe the rare **Fulvous Owl**, the hallowed **Resplendent Quetzal**, the obscure **Blue-throated Motmot**, and more. As we continue our journey northward, we make a special stop near the town of La Unión for a couple days to seek the elusive **Ocellated Quail**. Afterwards we target the only strictly endemic bird of Honduras, the endangered **Honduran Emerald**. Saving the best for last, we finish the trip at the luxurious The Lodge at Pico Bonito – a site famous for its unique combination of excellent amenities and exceptional birding. We can often see the lodge's signature species, the electric **Lovely Cotinga**, from the restaurant! Within the deeper forest trails we will keep a watch out for the fifth motmot species possible on this tour, the toy-like **Tody Motmot**. We schedule this tour in early spring, when bird activity is high and the weather generally dry.

This tour can be combined with our 24-day **Complete Costa Rica, Parts I and II 2018** (13 March – 5 April 2017) itinerary for a stunning Central American mega-tour.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (15 days/14 nights):

Day 1. Arrival in San Pedro Sula

The tour begins around noon at the airport in San Pedro Sula, from where we head south to PANACAM Lodge in the mountains above Lake Yojoa. After we arrive we will have time for some initial exploration of the lodge grounds. The feeders usually attract **Violet Sabrewing** and **White-bellied Emerald**, while the forest edge usually draws in feeding parties of the stunning **Keel-billed Toucan** and **Collared Aracari**. We even have a good chance of encountering the near-mythical **Keel-billed Motmot**, which is unusually common here, on our first afternoon.

Overnight: PANACAM Lodge

Day 2. Birding Lake Yojoa

We begin the day with some pre-breakfast birding near the lodge for the handsome **Prevost's Ground Sparrow** and the muted **Green-backed Sparrow**, the first of many endemics of northern Central America possible on this itinerary. Afterwards we descend to the shores of Lake Yojoa, a large lake in the heart of Honduras. Here we scan the edges for wetland species such as **Northern Jacana**, **Bare-throated Tiger Heron**, and **Ruddy Crake**. **White-throated Flycatcher**, an *Empidonax* flycatcher with poorly understood migratory movements, also occurs on the marshy banks of the lake. The boardwalk at Los Naranjos Ecological and Archaeological Park winds through some secondary forest and forest edge, where we can catch up with some delightful Mesoamerican species such as **Rufous-breasted Spinetail** and **Grey-crowned Yellowthroat**. In the evening we will try to locate **Mottled Owl**, which often calls right near the PANACAM Lodge restaurant.

Overnight: PANACAM Lodge

Day 3. Birding Cerro Azul Meámbar National Park

Today we explore the trail system and new tower accessible from PANACAM Lodge, keeping a sharp eye and ear out for roving feeding flocks that may contain **Cocoa** and **Northern Barred Woodcreeper**, **Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner**, and **Golden-crowned Warbler**, as well as an assortment of migrant warblers. Afterwards we pack up and drive southward through a landscape of pine-clad mountains to arrive at our next lodge.

Overnight: Hotel La Casona, Marcala

Day 4. Birding Opatoro-Guajiquiro

The Opatoro-Guajiquiro highlands feature the highest-elevation forest accessible by road in Honduras, providing opportunities to observe several northern Central America endemics that are difficult to see anywhere else within their range. High on the list of priorities will be the stunning **Blue-throated Motmot**, a species which occurs only in a narrow strip of mountains that stretch from southern Mexico to Honduras. Other regional endemics that we shall seek here include **Fulvous Owl**, **Green-throated Mountaingem**, **Black-throated Jay**, **Highland Guan**, **Black-capped Swallow**, and **Brown-backed Solitaire**.

Overnight: Hotel La Casona, Marcala

Day 5. Transfer from Opatoro-Guajiquiro to La Tigra National Park

After another morning in the Opatoro-Guajiquiro highlands to target any species we may still be missing, we make our way to La Tigra National Park high above the city of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. In the afternoon we will focus our attention on the road leading to La Tigra National Park, a mosaic of pine forest, pastures, gardens, and cloudforest. Large and noisy family parties of **Bushy-crested Jay** commonly frequent this area. **Yellow-backed Oriole** and **Flame-colored Tanager**, two strikingly colored birds, often accompany them, while brushy roadside verges provide habitat for the perky **Rufous-browed Wren** and the dapper **Blue-and-white Mockingbird**. Flowering bushes attract a variety of highland hummingbirds, such as the near-endemic **Green-breasted Mountaingem** and the more widespread **White-eared Hummingbird**.

Overnight: Los Gloriales Inn, El Hatillo

Day 6. La Tigra National Park

Established in 1980 as the first national park in Honduras, La Tigra National Park protects a large tract of cloudforest right on the outskirts of the bustling capital of Tegucigalpa. Within this verdant forest cloaked in moss and blowing mist a varied assortment of Mesoamerican specialties occur, such as **Singing Quail**, **Mountain Trogon**, and **Black Thrush**. Forest clearings and brushy areas often feature an abundance of flowers, which may attract some of

the most distinctive and beautiful hummingbirds in Central America: **Garnet-throated Hummingbird**, **Amethyst-throated Mountaingem**, and the incredible **Wine-throated Hummingbird**. Finally, the spectacular **Resplendent Quetzal**, a bird venerated by the ancient Aztecs and Mayas due to its great beauty, also dwells in this forest. The subspecies found here is slightly larger with longer and broader 'tail streamers' than the one found in Costa Rica.

Overnight: Los Gloriales Inn, El Hatillo

Day 7. La Tigra National Park to Olancho

After some early morning birding near the lodge for any outstanding species, we continue our journey north to Olancho, where we will be in position to see one of the most poorly-known birds in northern Central America, the **Ocellated Quail**.

Overnight: Hotel La Muralla, La Unión

Days 8 – 9. Birding Olancho and La Muralla

Since the discovery of a large population in 2008 near La Unión, the rare and difficult **Ocellated Quail** is now perhaps easier to see in Honduras than anywhere else within its limited range. We will focus our time here on obtaining decent views of this shy inhabitant of pine-oak woodland, searching proven sites where this species is most often recorded. With a bit of luck and skill, we stand a good chance of seeing this grail bird. If we manage to see the quail well, we will explore the nearby cloud forest at La Muralla for species such as **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, **Unicolored Jay**, and the 'red-throated' subspecies of **Green Parakeet**.

Overnight: Hotel La Muralla, La Unión

Day 10. Birding La Muralla, transfer to Olanchito

After some early-morning birding in the cloudforest of La Muralla, we continue northward to the small town of Olanchito in the Aguán Valley. Lying within the rain shadow of the northern coastal mountains, this isolated interior valley features an arid thorn-scrub forest of acacia and cacti that is home to several disjunct bird populations, such as **White-lored Gnatcatcher** and **White-bellied Wren**. By keeping a careful eye on the roadside verges in the afternoon and the following morning, we also hope to encounter the endearing and charismatic **Lesser Roadrunner**.

Overnight: Hotel Beverly, Olanchito

Day 11. Birding Olanchito, transfer to The Lodge at Pico Bonito

No bird illustrates the relative isolation and uniqueness of this thorn-scrub habitat more than the endangered **Honduran Emerald**, the only bird species endemic to Honduras. Rediscovered in 1988 after going unrecorded for several decades, this highly localized hummingbird is entirely dependent on the nectar of blossoming cacti, bromeliads, and other flowering plants. Although it is fairly common in this unique ecosystem, the rapid conversion of thorn-scrub forest to ranching and farming continues to threaten its existence. While we search for this species we should also turn up the secretive **Lesser Ground Cuckoo**. In the afternoon we depart for the Lodge at Pico Bonito.

Overnight: The Lodge at Pico Bonito, La Ceiba

Days 12 – 14. Birding the Pico Bonito area

Nestled at the base of a mountainous national park on the northern coast of Honduras, the Lodge at Pico Bonito combines first-rate accommodations, excellent dining, and superb birding opportunities. An assortment of flowering plants and fruiting trees right around the cabins, restaurant, and reception area entice a rich profusion of birds, including

hummingbirds, warblers, tanagers, oropendolas, parrots, and orioles. Near the trailhead a strategically built tower offers prominent views of the forest, river, and mountains. From this lofty vantage point we will scan the forest canopy for the vividly blue **Lovely Cotinga**, the signature species of the lodge, as well as the immaculate **White Hawk**. Along the forest trails deep within the forest another suite of sought-after birds occur, including **Central American Pygmy Owl**, **Chestnut-colored Woodpecker**, **Slaty-tailed Trogon**, **Northern Royal Flycatcher**, **Red-capped Manakin**, and more. Owling around the lodge may allow us to observe **Middle American Screech Owl** and **Great Potoo**.

In addition, there are several sites away from the lodge that we visit during our stay. Reachable only via an 1890s train and rail line, the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge protects a tract of mature mangrove forest. Once we arrive, we navigate the maze of waterways in search of up to five species of kingfisher, **Sungrebe**, **Boat-billed Heron**, and maybe even the rare **Agami Heron**. Mantled howler monkey and white-headed capuchin also may be encountered in this forest.

The Rio Santiago Nature Resort boasts an incredible feeder setup, attracting hundreds of hummingbirds of more than twelve different species, such as **Green-breasted Mango**, **Scaly-breasted Hummingbird**, **Long-billed Hermit**, and maybe even **Band-tailed Barbthroat**. The trail that runs behind this resort offers one of our best shots at the fifth possible motmot species on this tour, the incredible **Tody Motmot**.

Finally, the Lancetilla Botanical Garden offers opportunities to observe an impressive mix of forest edge species, including **Great Antshrike**, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, **Black-headed Trogon**, **Blue Ground-Dove**, and others.

Overnight: The Lodge at Pico Bonito, La Ceiba

Day 15, Transfer to San Pedro Sula

Depending on flight departure times we may have some optional early-morning birding on the lodge grounds. Otherwise we transfer back to the international airport in San Pedro Sula, where the tour ends.

Duration:	15 days
Limit:	5 – 8
Dates:	25 February – 11 March 2018
Start:	San Pedro Sula
End:	San Pedro Sula

Price:	US\$5,641 per person sharing
Single supplement:	US\$983

Price includes:

- Meals
- Accommodation
- Guiding fees
- Entrance fees
- All transport while on tour
- Tolls

Price excludes:

- International flights
- Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
- Alcoholic drinks

Personal insurance

Gratuities