



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Belize

### Highlights

8<sup>th</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023 (8 days)



Agami Heron by Dubi Shapiro

*Tiny Belize occupies the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula, the epicentre of the Ancient Mayan civilisation. Formerly known as British Honduras, it is the only English-speaking country in Central America. Several unique features make this a naturalist's paradise. It is blessed with the world's second largest barrier coral reef. The country is a core component of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor linking North and South America. It contains a high diversity of forest, woodland and wetland habitats within a relatively confined area. It is the most sparsely populated country in Central America, and this reduced population pressure translates into large contiguous blocks of intact vegetation including primary rainforest. Importantly, Belize is also a world leader in biodiversity and natural resource conservation, with 37% of the land territory under formal protection. This is an extraordinarily high proportion, and results in this small country supporting over 600 species of birds, as well as the highest Jaguar population density in the world.*

*Our birding & wildlife tour seeks to make the most of this biodiversity, visiting the key Belize birding and cultural sites such as Crooked Tree Sanctuary, where water-birds of all sorts abound, and there is a great chance to get up close and personal with the spectacular Jabiru, the largest flying bird in the New World! Time spent in the submontane pine forests of the Pine Ridge Mountains affords us the opportunity for several highland specials including Black-headed Siskin, Rusty Sparrow, Solitary Eagle and King Vulture as well as a good chance of finding the tricky Stygian Owl and regal Orange-breasted Falcon. Our exploration of rainforest sites at Caracol and Chan Chich offers unforgettable possibilities for Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Keel-*

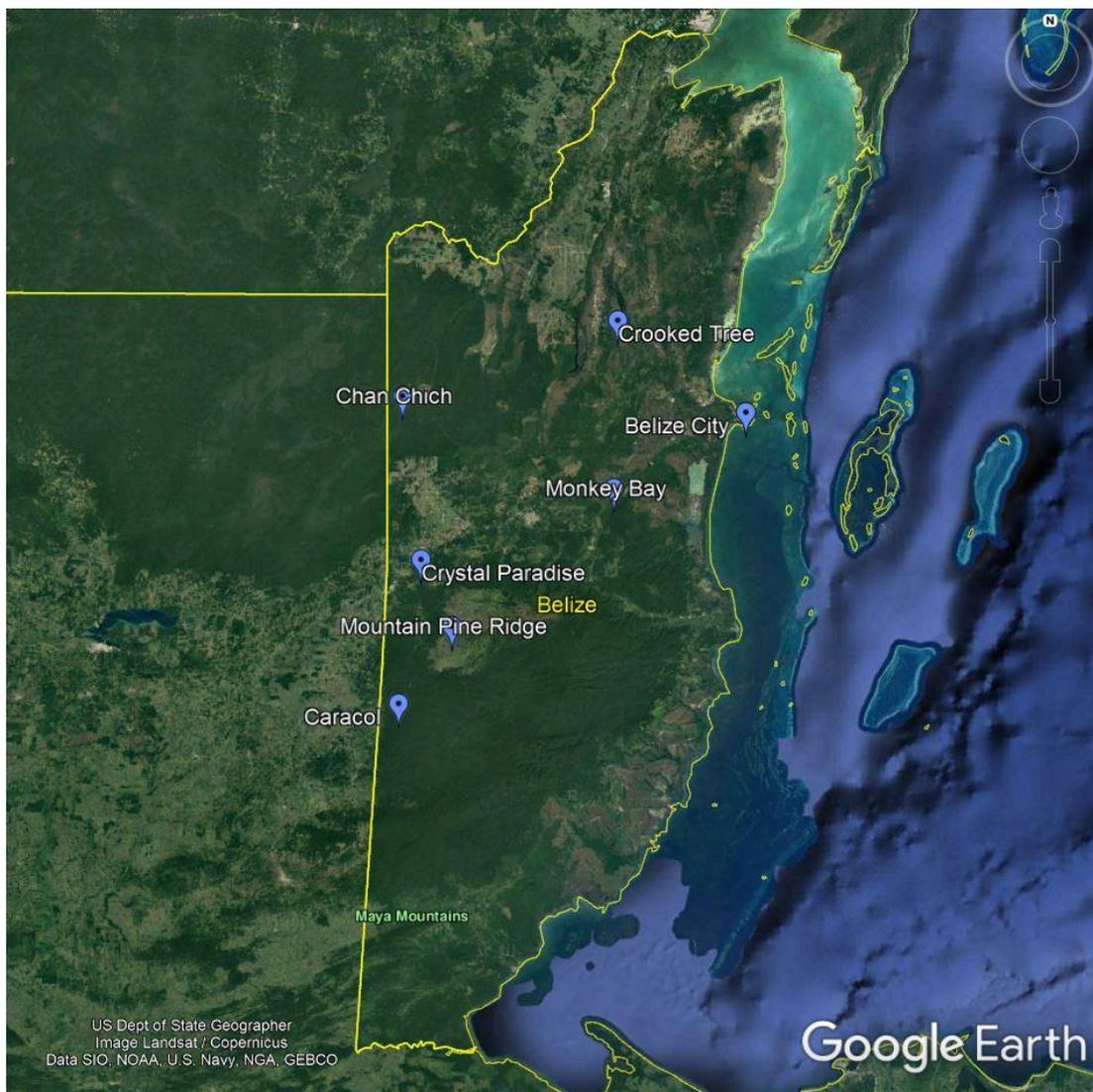
*billed Touca and Agami Heron. The awesome birdlife throughout the tour is augmented by the ease of travel, superb accommodation, friendly people and fine cuisine, making this a thoroughly enjoyable birding adventure for both hardcore and casual birders alike!*

**THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...**

**ITINERARY**

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Arrival in Belize City, transfer to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary</b>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary</b>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Crooked Tree to Crystal Paradise via Monkey Bay</b>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>Mountain Pine Ridge</b>
<b>Day 5</b>	<b>Laguna Aguacate and Chan Chich</b>
<b>Day 6</b>	<b>Caracol</b>
<b>Day 7</b>	<b>Crystal Paradise</b>
<b>Day 8</b>	<b>Crystal Paradise to Belize City and depart</b>

**TOUR MAP...**



## THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

**Day 1: Arrival in Belize City, transfer to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.** After arriving in Belize City, we shall embark on a group transfer to the world-famous Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.

Time permitting, we will start birding our immediate surrounds this afternoon.

**Day 2: Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.** Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary is a mosaic of lagoons, creeks, logwood swamps, broadleaf forest and pine savanna. The 8 000ha reserve is located on the shores of Belize's first Ramsar site, a wetland system with international protection under the Ramsar Convention, specifically because of its importance as a waterfowl habitat.

Depending on water levels and bird activity, we may spend the morning birding the lagoons for waterbirds, or turn our attention to the patches of surrounding broadleaf forest and pine savannah for the range restricted Yucatan specialties. A relaxed walk may produce Bat Falcon, Yucatan Bobwhite, the burly Great Antshrike, Yucatan Jay, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan and Yellow-headed Amazons, Canivet's Emerald, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, Yellow-tailed and Hooded Oriole, Green-breasted Mango, and endearing Rufous-browed Peppershrike. We also hope to see Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Limpkin, Black-collared Hawk, Tropical Mockingbird and Buff-bellied Hummingbird.

This evening after dinner, we will search for Northern Potoo, Yucatan Poorwill, various owls (such as the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl) and nighthawks during an evening birding expedition around the lodge.

**Day 3: Crooked Tree to Crystal Paradise via Monkey Bay.** Early this morning we embark on a boat trip through the maze of lagoons and creeks. We can expect to see large numbers of waterfowl, as well as South and Central America's tallest bird, the Jabiru. We expect to see some of these impressive locals as they begin nesting. With luck our boat trip will also produce much sought after and shy species such as Sungrebe, the unique Boat-billed Heron and the incomparable Agami Heron.



Orange-breasted Falcon by Adam Riley



Jabiru by Markus Lilje

Other possible species include Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Purple Gallinule, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Rufous-necked and Russet-naped Wood Rails, American Pygmy Kingfisher and Laughing Falcon. Northern Jacanas abound on the lily-patch-covered lakes, while we'll scan patches of open water for



Lesser Scaup, Least Grebe, Masked Duck, Black-bellied Whistling Duck and the beautiful Blue-winged Teal. Western Osprey and Black Vulture may be seen quartering the skies above the lagoon, while with luck we'll see flocks of the endangered Yellow-headed Amazon flitting through the dense riparian forest.

En route to our next lodging at Crystal Paradise, we'll make a stop at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary in search of Crane Hawk, Golden-hooded and Scarlet-rumped (Passerini's) Tanagers, White-winged and Rose-throated Becards and the diminutive Stub-tailed Spadebill. We will enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before checking into our lodge for the rest of the tour.



Barred Antshrike by Adam Riley

Time permitting, we will explore the grounds for Band-backed Wrens, Red throated Ant Tanager, Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Green-breasted Mango, Black-headed and Gartered Trogons, Lesson's Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan and Velasquez's Woodpecker.

**Day 4: Mountain Pine Ridge.** The 43 000ha Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve was proclaimed in 1944 to manage and protect native Belizean Pine Forests. Occupying a granite massif, the landscape is one of beautiful rolling pine forest spread over smooth granite hillsides, and we have the chance to see half of all the species found in Belize. We have five main targets, all of them raptors: Orange-breasted Falcon; Stygian Owl; the montane Solitary Eagle; Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle and King Vulture.



Keel-billed Motmot by Adam Riley

Additional specials are the highly localized Rufous-capped Warbler and Rusty Sparrow, the insanely iridescent Blue and Indigo Buntings, Plumbeous Kite, Blue-black and Yellow-faced Grassquits, Yellow-backed Oriole and Golden-hooded Tanager. We'll spend the afternoon birding this unusual landscape, hoping to also connect with Aplomado Falcon, Crimson-collared Tanager, Lovely Cotinga, Eastern Bluebird and Red-legged Honeycreeper. After another action-packed day of birding, we shall retire to our comfortable lodgings.

**Day 5: Laguna Aguacate and Chan Chich.** We begin the day with an early morning birding trip to the Laguna Aguacate area. A mix of forest, marshland and rice paddies offer up some excellent species such as Laughing Falcon, Crested Guan, Great Curassow, Ocellated Turkey, Tody Motmot, Brown-hooded and White-crowned Parrots, Northern Mealy Amazon, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker and a number of hummingbirds.



We'll then continue onwards to Chan Chich where we'll spend much of the day. Chan Chich constitutes one of the largest tracts of intact, undisturbed and easily accessible lowland rainforest remaining in Central America. An astonishing 370-plus bird species have been recorded in this 15 000ha private reserve.

The open areas around the lodge facilities simulate natural forest gaps and clearings, and as such attract a different suite of species. Birding within the grounds, we can expect to see White-collared and Red-capped Manakin, an array of migrant warblers, White-collared Seedeater, Northern Royal Flycatcher (whose



**Montezuma Oropendola by Owen Deutsch**

whose flaming crown, when extended, transforms it from drab and innocuous to an avian wonder), the diminutive Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, Striped Cuckoo, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Yellow-winged Tanager and mixed flocks of Yellow-throated and Olive-backed Euphonias.

The lodge is situated in the plaza of an ancient Mayan ruin, the highest structure of which dominates the surrounding area. This vantage point will be used to scan for Wood Stork, perched and exposed Bat and Laughing Falcons, King Vulture, Northern Mealy Amazon, Collared Aracari, Pale-billed, Smoky-brown and Chestnut-colored Woodpeckers, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Barred Antshrike, the brash Band-backed Wren and soaring hirundines and raptors such as White Hawk and the elegant Swallow-tailed Kite. Enticing birds into the grounds is an integral part of the lodge design, and during lunch we can also view activity at the bird-baths and bird feeders dotted around the garden. Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogons and Rufous-tailed Jacamar are unperturbed by lodge activity, and Purple-crowned Fairy, White-necked Jacobin and Long-billed and Stripe-tailed Hermits feed between the cabins. A quiet session of armchair birding may also yield Bright-rumped Attila, Tropical Kingbird, Green-breasted Mango, conspicuous flocks of Montezuma Oropendola and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher.

After an incredible day's birding, we'll make our way back to our lodge for a well-deserved dinner and rest.



**Keel-billed Toucan by Adam Riley**

**Day 6: Caracol.** The ancient Mayan ruin of Caracol and its surrounding 60 000ha national park is the first destination on this day. The reserve protects an expansive mosaic of primary and ancient secondary rainforest where jungle and ruin have melded together over the preceding centuries to form a unique habitat. We'll have the surreal experience of walking through the ruins of a once-bustling city, looking for the rare Keel-billed Motmot in overhanging branches while flocks of endangered

Scarlet Macaw flit across the open areas.



Crested Guan, Great Curassow and the kaleidoscopic Ocellated Turkey are to be seen strolling about the network of pathways. Black-and-white Owl has been seen roosting in the surrounding trees, and we'll keep an eye out for soaring Ornate Hawk-Eagle and King Vulture. Other possibilities include all four species of Trogon (Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, Gartered and Collared), Rose-throated Tanager, Dot-winged Antwren, Squirrel Cuckoo, the confiding White-whiskered Puffbird, Masked and Black-crowned Tityras and a range of wintering warblers, including Hooded, Kentucky and Golden-crowned Warblers.

We will also spend time birding the pristine rainforest habitat surrounding the ruins. The national park itself is nestled within a complex of protected areas dominated by the Chiquibul Forest Reserve, a vast contiguous block of rainforest. This will hopefully provide the opportunity to connect with the skulking Little and Great Tamarous, Green Honeycreeper, hyperactive Stripe-throated and Long-billed Hermits, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Barred and the impressive Collared Forest Falcons, Keel-billed Toucan, Crimson-collared Tanager, and the gorgeous Emerald Toucanet. We may also encounter the endangered Central American Red Brouette, raucous Guatemalan Howler Monkey, Black-handed Spider Monkey and any of five species of Belizean jungle cat.



**White-whiskered Puffbird**  
by Adam Riley



**Lovely Cotinga** by Adam Riley

**Day 7: Crystal Paradise.** As the tour winds down, we'll be taking it easy today – mostly birding the grounds of Crystal Paradise. We'll take a short drive on some back roads near macaw bank to find Rose-throated Tanager, White-bellied Wren, White-breasted Wood Wren and a number of trogons.

Some may wish to take an optional canoe trip on the Macal River to search for Amazon Kingfisher and Russet-naped Wood Rail amongst others.

For those who require COVID tests to re-enter their home countries, we will head to the nearby town of San Ignacio today for testing, helping avoid the more congested airport facilities tomorrow.

**Day 8: Crystal Paradise to Belize City and depart.** All good tours must come to an end. After breakfast this morning, we will head to Belize City Airport where the tour will conclude.



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**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

**Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.**

**This includes:**

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 8;
- All lodgings as per itinerary;
- Purified water;
- Ground transportation mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Gratuities for local guides and services; and
- All guiding services.

**This excludes:**

- Any airfares;
- Tips for local guides and services;
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Any optional activities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement:** The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.**
- b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.**
- c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

**Tippling:** As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour.

**Please note:**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- It can be hot and humid with harsh sun in the lowlands, so please come prepared with hats and sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are high for much of the tour.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times and it is advisable to pack a good supply of DEET or another effective insect repellent.



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- Accommodation throughout the trip is quite comfortable and a variety of western and local cuisines are available throughout the tour.

**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:**

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will begin with a group transfer from Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport, Belize City to our lodge in Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. The tour will conclude after a morning group transfer from Crystal Paradise back to Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport, Belize City on day 8.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**FLIGHTS:**

Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport, Belize City (IATA: BZE) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights to and from Belize. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

