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Welcome!

We wouldn't be in this business if it weren't a whole lot of fun, and sometimes that fun involves laughing at ourselves. I hope that many of you joined me in a good snicker over a recent article in the birding press, "The ABCs of Birding Tours," a collection of humorous anecdotes illustrating the "various character types" encountered on a bird tour.

I laughed, as I always do at clever writing, but the more I thought about the piece, the less I found it matching my experience. WINGS clients are extremely various, and some of us are real characters, but I'd be hard pressed to identify any "types" among the many, many birders I've got to know in the field and on the phone here in the WINGS office. We're all different, variously difficult and delightful in our own ways, and that difference—those differences—are precisely what



Photo: Alison Beringer.

I enjoy most about the group birding experience. Join us, get to know us, and I can almost promise you'll have a good time—even if some of us are a little different.

— Rick Wright, Managing Director

New Tour Previews

China: Beidaihe and Manchuria

May 2-17, 2009

Beidaihe and Happy Island are among the best places in Asia to watch eastern Palearctic migrants on their way to and from the breeding grounds. Situated in eastern China on the shore of the Yellow Sea, these sites always have birds, and in the right conditions, fallouts of migrants can be truly spectacular. Even a "typical" day in this area can produce raptors, waders, thrushes, flycatchers, warblers, pipits, and buntings in profusion. We'll also

New Tour Previews



Yellow-billed Grosbeak is a strikingly beautiful member of the hawfinch group.

Photo: Blake Matheson.

Rose-colored Starling (here with its Common cousin) is among the east European specialties we can hope to see in Ukraine.

Photo: James Lidster.

is basic, but elsewhere we'll stay in modern, comfortable hotels. **Paul Holt** and **Wang Qingyu** lead.

visit Xianghai, a huge reserve in Jilin Province near the border with Inner Mongolia, for scarce breeders including the enigmatic Jankowski's Bunting, and Wulingshan, a wooded mountain northeast of Beijing, whose forests hold a number of species we are unlikely to encounter elsewhere.

China, while maintaining its allure and mystery, is now a very comfortable place to travel. Our accommodation on Happy Island

Ukraine: Birding the Crimea

May 5-13, 2009

Ukraine is the largest democratic state in Europe, a peaceful and politically stable country that occupies one of the key biogeographic regions in the western Palearctic. Thanks to its advantageous position between the Black Sea and the Russian taiga, the Carpathians and the Caucasus, Ukraine—drained by the mighty Danube, Dniester, and Dnieper Rivers—hosts a spectacular range of species, many of them difficult to find elsewhere in Europe.



New Tour Previews

Our tour visits freshwater marshes, riverine forests, coastal lagoons, rolling steppes, the rugged mountains of southern Ukraine, and above all the Crimean peninsula. Bounded by the Black and Azov Seas, Crimea—about twice the size of Connecticut—hosts among its 300 species such hard-to-see eastern European specialties as Demoiselle Crane, Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull, Paddyfield Warbler, and Rose-colored Starling. The sheer number of birds is hard to match anywhere else in Europe: colony after colony of Red-footed Falcons, flocks of Great White Pelicans, swarms of Calandra Larks, and ranks of European Rollers, Lesser Gray Shrikes, and Corn Buntings assure us of a truly memorable trip. **Bryan Bland** and **Dan Brown** lead.

Peru: The North

July 31 – August 9, 2009

Northern Peru is home to some of the country's most sought-after species, especially its most spectacular hummingbird, the Marvelous Spatuletail. The pass at Abra Patricia provides some of the most exciting birding in the Andes, including the possibility of the little-known Long-whiskered Owlet. Now that a comfortable eco-lodge has been built right at Abra Patricia—where the owlet has recently been seen—birding this remote portion of Peru has become both easy and comfortable. We'll bird the interesting Huallaga River Valley before traveling by paved highway to the Rioja area, then on to Abra Patricia for a multiple-night stay at the new lodge. The Abra Patricia road is perhaps the best in the Andes for tanagers, with the possibility of twenty

species in the genus *Tangara*! It is also home to a number of scarce endemics and near-endemics, from the diminutive Johnson's Tody-Tyrant and Royal Sunangel to such spectacular birds as White-capped Tanager and Red-ruffed Fruitcrow. **Gary Rosenberg** leads.



Genuinely cute, Johnson's Tody-Tyrant was first described to science from the road to Abra Patricia.

Photo:
Gary Rosenberg.

Colombia: Andean Endemics

August 8-24, 2009, with extension to August 28

Some 1,870 species have been recorded in Colombia, among them no fewer than 73 endemics. This rigorous, even challenging, tour concentrates on visiting reserves that protect the last remaining habitats of some of the most range-restricted—and in some cases, the most endangered—birds in the world. The optional post-tour extension adds the critically

New Tour Previews



The comical-looking Recurve-billed Bushbird is protected at one of the ProAves reserves we'll be staying at in Colombia.

Photo: ProAves.

endangered Yellow-eared Parrot and the recently discovered Chestnut-capped Piha to the impressively long list of species we can hope to see.

All of the areas we'll visit are safe, and have been thoroughly scouted in collaboration with scientists from the Colombian NGO ProAves. Our leader is one of the most respected and experienced birders in South America, familiar with all the sites we'll be visiting; the group will also be accompa-

nied by a professional driver and a Colombian travel coordinator. The openness and friendliness of the Colombians we'll meet, combined with the endemic birds we'll see, make this a can't-miss tour for any world birder with a sense of adventure and the eagerness to truly experience areas that very few have ever visited. **Barry Walker** leads.

Trip Reports

Costa Rica in Spring

March 2008 found Senior Leader Gary Rosenberg in Costa Rica for his 22nd year of tours to that diverse and scenic country—more than 50 tours so far! As Gary reports here, this year's trip turned up nearly 470 species in just twelve days:

I always like to start at seldom-visited Tapanti National Park, where the mixed-species flocks include such fancy tanagers as Silver-throated and Spangle-cheeked; among the specialties at this scenic site are Collared Trogon and Prong-billed Barbet. This year we also had scope views of a perched Green-fronted Lancebill, and it was here that we saw the only White-bellied Mountain-gem of the tour. On the way in we'd had our best views of Crimson-fronted Parakeets.

In two days of birding on Cerro de la Muerte we saw virtually all of the famous "Chiriqui" endemics. Everyone's favorite was the Resplendent Quetzal, up to seven in a day; we all had leisurely scope views of multiple males with their elongated plumes in a fruiting tree. After this show, we had great fun picking off the main target birds, among them White-throated Mountain-gem, Scintillant Hummingbird, Dusky Nightjar, Ruddy Treerunner, Black-capped and Yellowish Flycatchers, Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Timberline Wren, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, Collared Redstart, Flame-colored Tanager, Yellow-thighed and Large-footed Finches, and Volcano Junco.

Trip Reports

En route to Carara National Park in the Pacific lowlands, we made a brief birding stop outside San Isidro in the Valle de General, where we saw several species not found elsewhere on this itinerary, including nesting Pearl Kite, Smooth-billed Ani, Pale-breasted Spinetail, and Fork-tailed Flycatcher. We also saw a Fiery-billed Aracari. Our raptor tally on the drive included Gray Hawk, Yellow-headed Caracara, and King Vulture.

Carara is a transition between the wet forest to the south and the dry forest to the north, which means it has lots and lots of birds. We spent one morning along the park's River Trail, beginning with a close Great Tinamou, followed by all five of the trogon species found at Carara, including the endemic Baird's Trogon. Other specialties included Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, White-necked Puffbird, Costa Rican Swift (split from Band-rumped), Pale-billed Woodpecker, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Black-hooded and Barred Antshrikes, Dusky and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Royal Flycatcher, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Northern Bentbill, Black-bellied, Rufous-and-white, and Rufous-breasted Wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Orange-billed Sparrow. The Forest Loop Trail produced a slightly different set of birds, including such difficult-to-see species as Streak-chested Antpitta, Black-faced Antthrush, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, a stunning White-whiskered Puffbird, the very cute Golden-crowned Spadebill, Riverside Wren, and the endemic Spot-crowned Euphonia. On our last afternoon at Carara we enjoyed a mangrove boat trip, on which we found a Rufous-necked Wood-Rail (the leader's first in Costa Rica), Mangrove Hummingbird, Mangrove Vireo, and Mangrove Warbler.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar is just one of the flashy tropical specialties Costa Rica is famous for.

Photo:
Gary Rosenberg.

Our "mopping up" day for the Guanacaste specialties of the northwest was capped off by a stunning Jabiru nest at Solimar, but there were many other fun birds, including an amazing Lesser Ground-Cuckoo that sat in the open for us while we filled our memory cards with photos; other goodies included Double-striped Thick-knee, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Gray-headed Kite, Nutting's Flycatcher, Banded Wren, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles, and Stripe-headed and Olive Sparrows. The selection at Ensenada Lodge and at Solimar included several Muscovy Ducks, Harris's Hawks, and more Bare-throated Tiger-Herons than you could shake a stick at.

Monteverde is always beautiful, and we did very well in the stunning cloud forest, with more views of Resplendent Quetzal, close-up Black Guan, Orange-bellied Trogon, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Three-striped Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, and

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Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, to name just a few. The hummingbird gallery featured all the Monteverde specialties, among them Magenta-throated Woodstar, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Green-crowned Brilliant, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, and the amazing Violet Sabrewing. But perhaps the best birds were a small covey of Black-breasted Wood-Quail and “in-van” views of a Chiriqui Quail-Dove.

It was then off to the Caribbean lowlands for a completely new set of birds. We spent a night in the Arenal Volcano area, and, for the second

year in a row, visited the Hanging Bridges, where we found some incredible birds along the trail, including Spotted, Dull-mantled, and Immaculate Antbirds, a Nightingale Wren, Broad-billed Motmot, and along a nearby road a pair of Bare-crowned Antbirds, as well as lots of toucans and parrots.

Our main destination on the Caribbean side was Selva Verde Lodge, with good access to La Selva Biological Station and Braulio Carrillo National Park. La Selva was fantastic as usual, especially the entrance road, for many of the group their favorite place to bird. We made



This Lesser Ground-Cuckoo filled our memories, and our memory cards, as it posed in the open for us.

Photo:
Gary Rosenberg.

three visits to the entrance road, encountering new and different birds each time. Some of our favorites included the female Snowy Cotinga, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Pied Puffbird, Bright-rumped Attila, White-ringed Flycatcher, Passerini's Tanager, and Black-headed Saltator. On our walk inside the biological station we saw an astonishing three Great Curassows, Great and Slaty-breasted Tinamous, Broad-billed and Rufous Motmots, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Bronze-tailed Plumeleeter, Western Slaty Antshrike, and the diminutive Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant. Nearby we stopped for Nicaraguan Seed-Finch and Olive-crowned Yellowthroat.

Our visit to Braulio Carrillo was a bit wet, but we managed to see many of the foothills specialties. Our best birds included Lattice-tailed Trogon and several foothills tanagers, such as Emerald, Tawny-crested, Olive, and White-throated Shrike-Tanager. We had incredible views of a Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, and at the nearby hummingbird garden we saw three male Snowcaps—what a bird!

We finished the trip with a visit to La Virgen del Socorro and the La Paz Waterfall Gardens. The feeders produced a couple of new hummers—Brown Violetear and Black-bellied Hummingbird—to bring the trip total to an amazing 37. The tanager feeders at the waterfall gardens produced in-your-face views of Silver-throated Tanager, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Baltimore Oriole, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Perhaps the birds of the day were the several Crimson-collared Tanagers.

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At the final dinner, Resplendent Quetzal took top honors for bird of the tour. Other favorites included the Common Tody-Flycatcher we watched building its nest at La Selva, the Sunbittern we saw at Monteverde, and, of course, the male Snowcap—one of the world's most stunning hummingbirds.

The 2009 WINGS program includes tours to the inexhaustible avian riches of Costa Rica in March, May, and November.

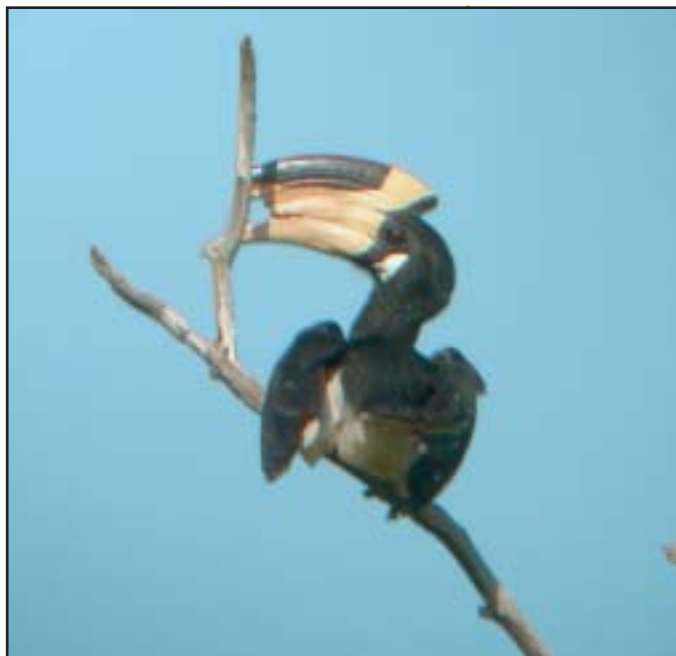
Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a magical island of mountains, undulating hills, open plains, and lush valleys. For the birdwatcher, islands have the added attraction of endemics; Sri Lanka has no fewer than 33 unique birds, joined in the winter by large numbers of northern migrants. Deepal Warakagoda reports on our 2008 tour to "The Teardrop of India":

The very first morning at our hotel produced most of the common garden birds, and it only got better from there! Our days at Kitulgala showed the rainforest to be very good for lowland endemics, and we had superb views of Green-billed Coucal, a male Serendib Scops Owl at its day roost, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Crimson-backed Flameback, Sri Lanka Magpie, Spot-winged Thrush, and an Indian Pitta.

Our next destination was Ratnapura, with visits on two days to the Sinharaja rainforest. It was here that we completed our tally of all the lowland endemics, including fine views of Sri Lanka Junglefowl, three Sri Lanka Spurfowl walking across the road, three Red-faced Malkohas, a pair of Ceylon Scaly Thrushes, a flock of White-faced Starlings, and a flock of Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes. We also had excellent views of Malabar Trogons and of a male Sri Lanka Frogmouth on a nest.

After our three nights in Ratnapura we went on to the dry country and the southeastern coast. We took jeep drives in three national parks—Udawalawe, Bundala, and Yala—and spent time exploring man-made reservoirs, lakes, lagoons, marshes, salt pans, and mud flats. These areas gave us superb views of Spot-billed Pelican, Yellow and Black Bitterns, Watercock, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Indian and Great Thick-knees, Small Pratincole, Gray-bellied Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha, Indian Scops Owl, Malabar Pied Hornbill, White-naped Woodpecker, Brahminy Starling, and many other species.



The Malabar Pied Hornbill uses its outlandish bill to eat fruit, fish, and even small mammals.

Photo: Paul Holt.

Trip Reports

We moved on to spend two nights in the high hills at Nuwara Eliya, “cleaning up” all the hill endemics. During our half-day visit to Horton Plains National Park we encountered a courting pair of Sri Lanka Whistling Thrushes and a couple of Sri Lanka Bush Warblers. We also had wonderful views of other specialties such as Pied Thrush and Kashmir Flycatcher.

We then climbed down to Kandy, where we visited the Udawattakele forest for Brown Fish Owl and other wet-zone forest birds. After a night in Kandy, our next destination was Polonnaruwa, an ancient capital in the north-central dry zone. Along the way we stopped briefly at a forest in Sigiriya. We were also able to visit the ancient ruins in Polonnaruwa before our tour came to an end. By the time we were through, we’d encountered all of the Sri Lanka endemics, most of the other Indian Subcontinent endemics, and many other Asian birds, bringing our trip total up to 224 species.

WINGS offers two departures to the exotic wonders of Sri Lanka in February and March 2009.

Jamaica

Once again, the WINGS 2008 tour to Jamaica saw all 27 of the island’s endemics—all of them well, most of them repeatedly, and always in relaxed comfort. Senior Leader Rich Hoyer writes about a tour characterized by easy White-tailed Tropicbirds, migrant warblers right at our hotel, and a genuine Boston Bay Jerk lunch:



Jamaica is a paradise for butterflies, too, such as this Thersites Swallowtail.

Photo: Rich Hoyer.

Our April tour is perfectly timed for migrating shorebirds, and the ponds behind Montego Bay airport and the sewage ponds are always worth a stop. Black-bellied Plover, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, and many herons and egrets were the main occupants this time. Our late morning visit to Rocklands Sanctuary produced extraordinarily good views of a handful of endemics, with Jamaican

Mango feeding from our hands within seconds of our arrival.

After a picnic lunch at Bluefields, where a White-crowned Pigeon posed in the sunlight, we made a quick stop for ridiculously easy West Indian Whistling-Ducks. At Marshall’s Pen, the intoxicating fragrances of the Allspice trees and endemic *Brunfelsia*, the haunting songs of White-eyed Thrushes, and the historical nature of our accommodations contributed to the charm of our three-night stay—not to mention the fact that we saw 19 of the Jamaican endemics with a short walk of our rooms.

Trip Reports

A Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo, often one of the harder birds to find, was among the first on our initial morning here. The Jamaican Owl took a little more patience, but we eventually had great looks from the spot where a Northern Potoo flew in and sang from a low perch. Fantastic hospitality, great food, and amazing birding made this area a highlight of the tour.

Another highlight was our morning spent in the Cockpit County. Our start in predawn darkness, driving past the Pickapeppa plant, through towns, and past yam-draped slopes, was worth the trouble when we arrived in the unique steep, forest-clad karst landscape. The rarest bird here was a heard-only Plain Pigeon (seen only once by us in ten years), but we eventually had great views of more endemics, such as Ring-tailed Pigeon, Yellow-billed Parrot, and Blue Mountain Vireo. Some orchids and a newly described species of anole with a blue tail were other highlights. We also had a good afternoon's drive to the coastal lowlands, where some herons, shorebirds, and Caribbean Coot were new.

The Portland Ridge area gave up its Bahama Mockingbirds pretty easily, and a Mangrove Cuckoo sat out in the open for us. The Stolid Flycatchers were particularly responsive this time, and this is also where we saw lingering Palm and Prairie Warblers. An amazing sight here was the largest concentration of shorebirds I'd ever seen in Jamaica: 250 Lesser Yellowlegs and a few thousand Least Sandpipers on one mudflat.

We arrived in the Port Royal Mountains and at our hotel in dense fog, so our afternoon birding opportunities were limited. But an early morning foray—still in heavy fog—turned up a Crested Quail-Dove walking on the road; with a truckful of workers behind us eager to get by and some schoolgirls walking towards the dove from the opposite direction, we were lucky to see that bird at all. When we reached the bottom edge of the fog later in the morning, we lucked into a Jamaican Blackbird, our 27th endemic, and then spent time watching a Northern Potoo on a nest, something this tour had seen only once before.

The rest of the tour was spent in one of the most beautiful habitats on the island, the lush wet forest of the Drivers River Valley. Vines, bromeliads, moss-covered rocks, and our drenched picnic tablecloth all attested to the moistness of the climate here. We revisited some of the birds seen earlier on the tour, such as Arrowhead Warbler, Black-billed Parrot (great scope views), and Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, while we soaked up the unique experience of several pairs of Jamaican Todies and swarms of



Jamaica's national bird, the endemic Red-billed Streamertail is locally known as "Doctor Bird" for its long black "coattails."

Photo: Rich Hoyer.

Trip Reports

Orangequits. We finally caught up with a full-tailed male "Black-billed" Streamertail at our hotel while watching some migrant warblers, including two very rare Blackpolls and an uncommon Magnolia. The final additions to our very satisfying list came on the final approach to our hotel at Port Royal, where a few write-in Sanderlings and a Western Sandpiper joined a flock of Semipalmated Plovers and Least Sandpipers.

Join WINGS on our April 2009 Jamaica tour in search of a beautiful Caribbean island's endemics.

Some Recent Tours Briefly Noted

The feeling that no other birder has visited since our last tour always adds to the sense of adventure in **Mongolia**. This year's tour started with the ever-popular Azure Tit and a small flight of *Phylloscopus* warblers includ-



Our leafy campsites in Mongolia are a great place to find Amur Falcons.

Photo: James Lidster.

ing Arctic, Two-barred Greenish, and Dusky. We saw Oriental Plover on four days, twice in stiff-winged rocking display. Passing through the Gobi Altai, we had extra looks at Henderson's Ground Jay, Saker Falcon chicks at the nest, and Golden Eagles. The saxaul scrub hosted Asian Desert Warbler and our first Saxaul Sparrows, plus more than 1,000 Pallas's Sandgrouse. At one of our ger camps—each one different, but all offering nice beds, fires, and space to spread out—we saw Lammergeiers and Black Vultures, while the camp's trees hosted Eye-browed Thrush, Chestnut-eared Bunting, two Hawfinches looking very out of place, a couple of Amur Falcons, a Booted Eagle, a Daurian Jackdaw, two Carrion Crows, six Common Rosefinches, and Asian Brown Flycatcher, as well as the "usual" Dusky, Pallas's, and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers. On a single day at Yolyn Am we recorded Altai Snowcock, Oriental Plover, Lammergeier, Wallcreeper, Great and Beautiful Rosefinches, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Himalayan and Black Vultures, Steppe Eagle, Golden Oriole, Kozlov's and Brown Accentors, and Blyth's Pipit. Our camp at Jalman Meadows gave us an amazing display of half a dozen Amur Falcons—quickly acclaimed "bird of the trip." Ending our adventure at Gun Galuut, we pulled an eleventh-hour Relict Gull out of the bag. **Gambell and Nome** produced all of the regular species, including Emperor Goose, all four eiders, four loon species including Arctic and Yellow-billed, all of the regularly occurring alcids including Dovekie, Common Ringed Plover, Slaty-backed Gull, Northern Wheatear, Bluethroat, and Red-throated Pipit. At Nome we had good views of Bristle-thighed Curlew. Other highlights

Some Recent Tours Briefly Noted

included Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, Bar-tailed Godwit, Aleutian Tern, and singing Bluethroats and Arctic Warblers. More unusual were a Gray-tailed Tattler, multiple cooperative Ivory Gulls, a male McKay's Bunting, and a briefly seen Siberian Rubythroat. But the best birds of all were Alaska's first springtime Little Bunting and a cooperative Jack Snipe, only the third or fourth ever for the state. Our **Alaska in June** tour experienced cooler-than-usual temperatures (and no mosquitoes!), but was a great success with numerous high-

lights. The rarest species seen was a Rufous-tailed Robin at Saint Paul, but not even that "mega" could eclipse such other incredible birding experiences as the wonderful seabird cliffs at Saint Paul, our successful search for Bristle-thighed Curlew, our eleventh-hour Emperor Geese at Nome, the American Three-toed Woodpecker nest in Anchorage, and a very productive boat trip at Seward,

where we saw thousands of puffins and had excellent studies of Kittlitz's Murrelet. Perhaps even more exciting were the numerous Grizzly Bears and fabulous Muskox views at Nome, and the Humpback Whale show on the Kenai Fjords boat trip. **Maine and New Hampshire** were cool and green and full of birdsong. We heard and saw more than 20 species of warbler including Cape May and Bay-breasted, some deliciously well, and of course the icons of the north woods, the thrushes and White-throated Sparrow. In recent years we had only heard Bicknell's Thrush, but this year, after putting us through a nail-biting wait, one flew to the top of a tall spruce in evening light and sang and sang. Our boat trips were excellent, with many Common Puffins and a thousand or more Razorbills on Machias Seal Island; some of us might have been tempted to forget about the birds when a Finback Whale surfaced right next to us off Bar Harbor. On any early summer trip to northern forests, the pristine woods, where every leaf is perfect and wildflowers carpet the forest floor, are a backdrop to each day, and of course we explored the age-old question of how many ways you can eat a lobster. This year's

Southeastern Arizona in May tour saw more than 210 species, including virtually all of the specialties found in the region. Among the nine species of owls we saw, the close (from ten feet!) eye-level view of a pair of Spotted Owls was among the favorite experiences. Arizona is always good for hummingbirds, but eleven species in May, including Berylline, White-eared, and Lucifer, was extraordinary. We had wonderful views of lots of fun species, including stunning birds such as Gray Hawk, Elegant Trogon, Red-faced Warbler, and Pyrrhuloxia. This year's tour had a touch of Mexico, with great views of Flame-colored Tanager—an individual returning for a seventh year—but the bird of the trip was the Tufted Flycatcher that showed up just before our tour and was nice enough to stick around for us! Our tour of California's **Southern Sierra and Kern River Valley** was most productive, with eight species of woodpecker



Only the third or fourth ever found in Alaska, this Jack Snipe was a highlight of our 2008 tour of Gambell and Nome.

Photo: Jon Dunn.

Some Recent Tours Briefly Noted

including Williamson's Sapsucker and White-headed Woodpecker. Other highlights included Calliope and Costa's Hummingbirds; two Black Swifts; Willow, Hammond's, Gray, and Dusky Flycatchers; Hutton's, Plumbeous, and Cassin's Vireos; Le Conte's Thrasher; and Black-chinned Sparrow. Our night birding produced outstanding views of Common Poorwill, and we had good looks at Western Screech- and Spotted Owls. And the non-bird highlight? A scrambling Black Bear near Sherman Pass! This year's **Arizona: Second Spring** tour encountered early and heavy monsoon rains, a welcome change for the drought-ravaged region. These monsoons are magic when the lowlands turn green and birdsong is in full



The shaded canyons of south-east Arizona are home to the tame but inconspicuous Spotted Owl.

Photo:
Gary Rosenberg.

swing. Highlights on this year's tour included twelve species of hummingbird, including two Berylline, a female Lucifer, and two White-eared Hummingbirds; a nesting Elegant Trogon; a daytime-perched "Mexican" Whip-poor-will; nesting Elf Owls with a fledged begging youngster; a pair of Gray Vireos; two Black-capped Gnatcatchers; multiple Black-chinned Sparrows; and the returning adult male Flame-colored Tanager. Notable mammals included a male and female Bighorn Sheep in Aravaipa Canyon, our first encounter with this species, and a Bobcat. Notable reptiles included three Texas Horned Lizards and a spectacular Gila Monster seen, appropriately enough, along the Gila River in New Mexico. The mainly warm, settled weather we had this year on the Greek island of **Lesvos** was great to be out in, and made for much more pleasant picnic lunches than might otherwise have been the case. There was more than enough migration going on to make every day interesting, and by the end of the week almost all of the

migrants we were hoping to see had put in an appearance. A couple of days of heavy rain at the beginning of April meant that the all-important rivers and pools were brimming, while the subsequent warm weather resulted in probably the best show of wildflowers ever on this trip. Our **Northeast Peru** tour to the Iquitos region was fun as usual. At the Mishana White Sands Forest Reserve we saw a number of the specialties this unique habitat is famous for, including the rare Allpahuayo Antbird, and such difficult-to-see gems as Pompadour Cotinga, Brown-banded Puffbird, and Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin. Our stay at Explornapo Lodge and the Canopy Walkway was equally exciting. Our total of more than 300 species for the week exemplified just how good the birding is here. We had excellent luck with cool-looking puffbirds such as Collared and Spotted, as well as many Amazonian species, including Hoatzin, Sungebe, Sunbittern, numerous jacamars, and at least 40 species of antbird. The male Black-necked Red-Cotinga was one of the group's favorites, along with stunning close-up views of Black-bellied Cuckoo and Many-banded Aracari from the Canopy Walkway. **Abra Malaga and**

Some Recent Tours Briefly Noted

Machu Picchu was a brand-new Peru tour this year, and our visit to the incredible Inca ruins of Machu Picchu and the high Andean pass of Abra Malaga was a great success. This tour is not designed for a huge species list, but we still managed to tally an impressive 200 species in just six days—for a combined total with our Iquitos-area tour of more than 500 species in two weeks! At Machu Picchu we saw numbers of Torrent Ducks, as well as many local specialties including the endemic Inca Wren. Abra Malaga was fantastic, both for its snow-capped peaks and glaciers and for its birds, with incredible species such as Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Andean Condor, White-tufted Sunbeam, Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, and the endemic Parodi's Hemispingus. We finished with some birding along the Pacific coast, where a concentration of more than



1,000 Gray Gulls on the beach was a real highlight. April's **Southern and Central California** tour recorded a record-tying 279 species, among them such favorites as Mountain Quail, Gray Vireo, Le Conte's Thrasher, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Xantus's Murrelet, Island Scrub-Jay, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Yellow-footed Gull, California Gnatcatcher, Hermit Warbler, Tricolored Blackbird, Yellow-billed Magpie, White-headed Woodpecker, four species of shearwater including Black-vented, all the usual "rocky" shorebirds, Elegant Tern, Cassin's Vireo, Western Screech-Owl, Allen's Hummingbird, "Thick-billed" Fox and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Ross's and Cackling Geese. One great thing about Southern and Central California in spring—in addition to the greenery and bird song—is the great diversity of habitats in a compact area: offshore waters and an island, coastal marshes, rocky coasts, saltbush and creosote desert, an inland sea, gorgeous rolling hills of oak savanna, isolated desert oases, and pine-clad mountains. Our spring tour on the **Upper Texas Coast** produced no major fallouts this year, but we still managed to see 26 species of wood warbler, including Golden-winged and Cerulean, plus breeders like Prairie and Swainson's Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush. Color was added by many Scarlet Tanagers, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, and Indigo and Painted Buntings. Our rail walk at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge produced multiple Yellows and a single Black Rail. In Louisiana we found a single Great Kiskadee (one of fewer than 10 records there) and a Cave Swallow. Other highlights included two Pacific Loons with some 25 Commons at Galveston, and a wide variety of shorebirds, including excellent views of Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Despite the unusually cool and moist spring, this year's **Oregon in Spring** tour was a list-filling, mind-expanding, memory-etching experience. Every day had multiple highlights: rarities or specialties of the region; the spectacle of tremendous numbers of birds; outstanding mammals, butterflies, or wild-

Many-banded Aracaris are a colorful treat in northeastern Peru.

Photo:
Gary Rosenberg.

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The buzzy whistles of Varied Thrush haunt the forests of Oregon.

Photo: Rich Hoyer.

flowers; or simply intimate views of the more common species that one often tends to ignore. Examples of the latter were a Western Meadowlark perched by the van for a feather-by-feather analysis as its song blasted through the window, Lesser and Greater Scaup males posing for perfect comparison, and a Wrentit approaching curiously within feet of the group. In the "sought-after" category were last-minute appearances by Mountain Quail and Dusky

Grouse, a Great Gray Owl landing only yards away, and an unforgettable—and successful—Flammulated Owl search. These experiences, in some of the most scenic and varied landscapes in the country, made for a tour that we expect will continue to be a popular one. Weather more delightful than ever (not too hot, as it can sometimes get), a late spring that resulted in an impossibly more stunning wildflower show and more birdsong than usual, a variety of very good restaurants, and consistently excellent productions of seven plays by a world-class theater company all added up to a wonderful extended week in southwestern Oregon on our 2008 **Birds and Shakespeare** tour. Dazzled by Elegant Terns and stunning vistas on the coast, we arrived in Ashland for the plays and mountain birding. A Great Gray Owl, meadows alive with Rufous Hummingbirds, Clark's Grebe, and a Northern Pygmy-Owl were some of the highlights among the birds, while performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A View From the Bridge* were particularly notable. Rounding out the experience were our delicious grilled fajita dinner in the fresh air of Fort Klamath and the full morning exploring every view of fabulous Crater Lake National Park. What **Iceland** lacks in total number of species it more than makes up for in quality—and in sheer numbers of birds. During this year's ten-day tour we recorded all of the specialties and had incredible views of some stunning birds: an adult female Gyrfalcon, approached to within 50 yards; a Snowy Owl on a warm sunny afternoon in the middle of nowhere; an adult female Steller's Eider and a distant King Eider; Ring-billed and Little Gulls, both scarce in Iceland; three adult Long-tailed Jaegers; a flock of drake Harlequin Ducks at close range; rafts of Barrow's Goldeneye; Red Phalaropes; and Red-necked Phalaropes too close to focus a camera on! Nearby we had large flocks of Arctic Terns; it's always humbling to think how far these birds travel to their wintering grounds in Antarctica. The seabird cliffs at Latrabjarg were spectacular again, with an eerie quality cast over them by low-lying mist. It's difficult to imagine a more varied and awe-inspiring birding location than **Georgia**. Within the Western Palearctic, yet home to Himalayan-like 16,000-foot mountains and endless Asiatic steppe, this compact country produced an outstanding week of birding. From our first day out it was clear that there wouldn't be a dull moment: our first

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lunch was in the shade of a hornbeam woodland with an accompanying Hawfinch, while nearby a smart male Redstart of the race *samamisticus* and an obliging Rock Bunting showed very well. The tour ended with a superb banquet in Tbilisi, where every form of local delicacy was on offer—all complemented with a fine glass of Georgian wine. There were so many highlights in between that it was difficult to single out any species or occasion, and the tour's "top ten" reflected the country's diversity very well: Gldenstdt's Redstart, Great Rosefinch, Lammergeier, Red-necked Phalarope, Caucasian Black Grouse, Red-fronted Serin, Bee-eater, White-winged Tern, Wallcreeper, and Snowfinch. This year's tour to the **Edwards Plateau and West Texas** produced nearly all the hoped-for species. Highlights included Black-capped Vireo (our best views ever) and Golden-cheeked Warbler, along with Green and Ringed Kingfishers, plus a splendid variety of eastern and western species, plus some southern species at the northern edge of their range, such as Long-billed Thrasher and Olive Sparrow. At Big Bend we had Lucifer Hummingbird, Gray Vireo, and Colima Warbler; many migrants were in evidence, and Common Black-Hawks were nesting. In the Davis Mountains we were treated to at least four Buff-breasted Flycatchers and a pair of Montezuma Quail. Our September tour to **Northern Arizona and Southwestern Utah** took in some of the most scenic canyons and national parks the US has to offer, including the Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce, Monument Valley, and Canyon de Chelly. Birding our way across this glorious landscape, we saw nearly 200 species of birds in eleven days. Some of the highlights included Rocky Mountain specialties such as Dusky Grouse; Williamson's Sapsucker; Plumbeous and Gray Vireos; Gray, Western Scrub-, and Pinyon Jays; Mountain Chickadee; Juniper Titmouse; Pygmy Nuthatch; Grace's and Black-throated Gray Warblers; Western Tanager; Green-tailed and Spotted Towhees; and Brewer's and Vesper Sparrows. Add to that a nice variety of western migrants, plus unusual birds such as Sabine's Gulls on inland lakes, and this tour provided something for everyone.



The rare Golden-cheeked Warbler breeds nowhere in the world but the cool, green Hill Country of Texas.

Photo: Rich Hoyer.

Private Tours

WINGS offers customized tours for individuals and groups to destinations all around the world. Recently, Gary Rosenberg guided a group in Ecuador and another in Alaska, Gavin Bieber accompanied a birding couple to west Mexico, Rich Hoyer led a group on their first trip to Australia, Paul Holt showed off India and northern China, Stuart Tingley took a group to Grand Manan, and David Fisher led a private "safari" through Kenya. Please contact the WINGS office about turning your dream trip into bird-filled reality!

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Tour Updates

September's Hurricane Ike reshaped many of the best-known birding sites in Texas and Louisiana. We're happy to report that Jon Dunn's tour of the **Upper Texas Coast** will run in 2009 as scheduled. Gavin Bieber's **Whooping Cranes and the Rio Grande** will take place as announced, while his springtime **Rio Grande Valley** tour has been rescheduled to mesh with the April 2009 ABA Convention in Corpus Christi.

With Bryan Bland approaching his three-score-and-ten this coming January, we'd announced that after more than 30 iterations, last year's **Great British Experience** would be the last ever. But with so many requests to revive the tour, we've persuaded Bryan to conduct this unique birds-and-history experience again, June 7-30, 2009.

WINGS leaders are always on the lookout for new and exciting birding destinations around the world—some of the fruits of their labors are described on the first pages of this newsletter. Other tours “in the works” include **Guyana** with Gavin Bieber, **Hawaii** with Narca Moore-Craig, and **Tuscany: Birds and Art** with Rick Wright.