

BORDERLAND TOURS NEWS

COLORS, IMPRESSIONS, AND COMMENT FROM THE WORLD OF BIRDS

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THE BORDERLAND PHOTO ALBUM

FRONT COVER PHOTO: CUBAN TODY BY JOHN YERGER



ZAPOTEC WEAVER DESCRIBES NATURAL DYES, OAXACA BY JOHN YERGER



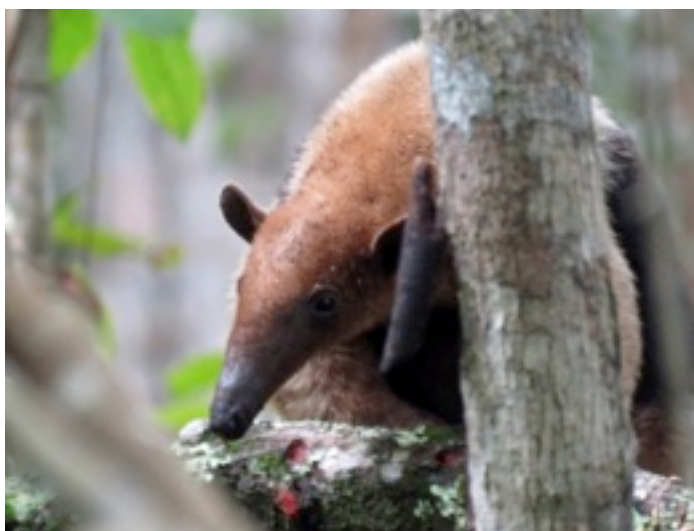
RED-BILLED STREAMERTAIL, JAMAICA BY RICK TAYLOR



GIANT ANTEATER, BRAZIL BY RICK TAYLOR



CHESTNUT-COLORED WOODPECKER,
THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO (HONDURAS) BY JOHN YERGER



SOUTHERN TAMANDUA, HONDURAS
BY JOHN YERGER

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FROM RICK'S DESK: WILD TURKEYS

Barbara and Bill Bickel saw them first. After a hiatus of 4 months, four hen “Mexican” Wild Turkeys filed past their cabin at dusk and headed downstream. The 100’ tall sycamore that spreads its immense white limbs over our roof, just 200 yards down canyon, has long been their traditional roost. The return of the turkeys seems like a good omen to me.

For starters it means spring is on its way. Four hens means that come May at least one glorious, turquoise-headed gobbler will be strutting around the lawn with its radiant tail wide-spread and its coppery wings seductively drooped, uttering bursts of a wild and throaty love song. By then the sycamore will be aflame with small, pastel leaves casting a subtle green translucence over our home. A half-dozen species of hummingbirds will be patronizing the yard, spilling wine-tinted thimbles of iridescence as they perform courtship jigs and describe a meteoric calligraphy of aggression.

These turkey hens are not afraid of me. The years have taught them to ignore my meanderings as I go about my chores, halting to yank up my binoculars at any given warbler, tanager, or oriole-shaped provocation. Occasionally they wander over to our kitchen or office windows and indulge some idle curiosity, standing with bill pressed to a pane of glass and staring inside with solemn indifference—or perhaps just at their own reflections.

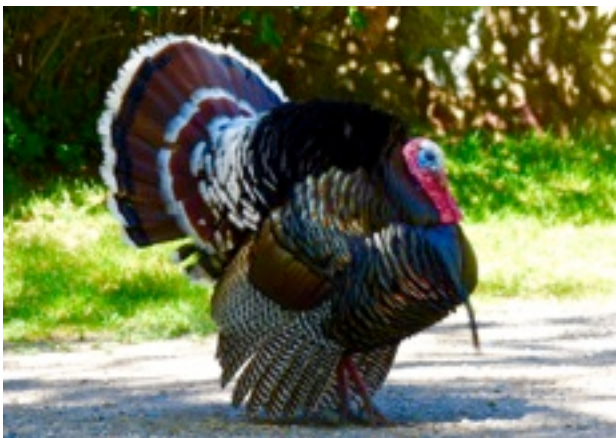
The house is a safe place for a turkey. Within the precincts of our yard predators are unlikely. Bobcats and coyotes—and an occasional mountain lion—patrol the leafy stream-side corridor across the road, but usually avoid our grassy inter-sanctum. When the mail carrier rolls up just before one, the hens simply gawk, although the male may gobble a challenge. And when company arrives for happy hour to watch the hummingbird show, the hens simply circle the lawn furniture before launching into the tree, sometimes from our guests’ very feet.

In June the hens start slinking off to attend nests. In July or August the gobbler will disappear to join a bachelor flock on the west side of the Chiricahuas. Soon afterwards hens will begin to pay brief visits to the yard, sometimes accompanied by up to 10 buff-striped poults. Hens that have lost their nests or their own young, will be attacked furiously by the mother birds if they dare to approach the family. Foxes, skunks, hawks, and snakes join larger predators in paring down the size of the family. I’ve never seen a hen succeed in bringing more than two fully fledged young, brown and the size of chickens, up into the sycamore to roost.

In late autumn when gales lash the big sycamore and a million golden leaves are ripped from its branches, the last two hens will desert our yard and march over the mountain crest to join one of the big flocks in Pinery Canyon.

Like so many of you, all of my life I’ve wanted to be intimate with wildlife. Those big, beautiful Wild Turkeys are a symbol for me. After four months of fending for themselves in these mountains, I feel honored they have once again come to live at our home in Whitetail Canyon.

Rick



POSTCARDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Emerald Toucanet



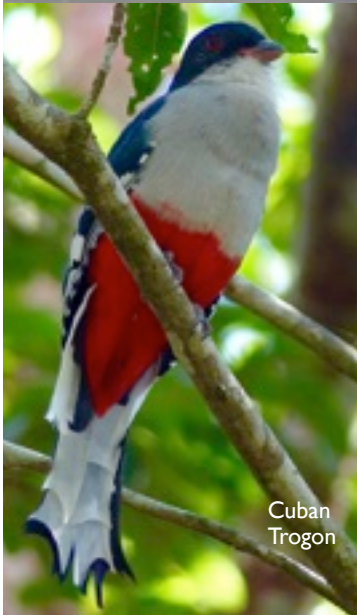
Jamaican Oriole



Atlantic Puffin



Jaguar



Cuban Trogon



Kirtland's Warbler

Honduras Highlands, Feb. 2016—The alarm clock rang early, but close encounters with Singing Quail, Slate-colored Solitaire and Green-breasted Mountain-Gem more than made up for it. Blue-and-white Mockingbird only a few steps from our bedroom doors at Gloriales Inn wasn't too shabby, either! -JY

The Lodge at Pico Bonito, Honduras, Feb.—One of the most memorable half hours of birding: Lovely Cotinga, Emerald Toucanet, White Hawk, Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Yellow-eared Toucanet. Whoa! When will the streak end, we wondered? We finally tore ourselves away; another gourmet meal beckoned. -JY

Oaxaca Valley, Mar.—Won't soon forget Eric Martinez's bear hug from behind my chair at our first dinner. Or the Ocellated Thrasher we scoped on the next ridgetop...or Dwarf Jays through chilly mountain mist...or ancient Zapotec temples atop Monte Albán... -JY

Jamaica, Apr.—Once again we saw all 27 of the endemic birds that inhabit this friendly island. Scoring the ordinarily reclusive Crested Quail-Dove in full sun in co-leader Ann Sutton's garden at Marshall's Pen was simply wonderful. -RT

AZ Owling Run, May—The most bizarre bird wasn't even an owl. In Willcox, I finally spotted the Scaled Quail – calling in a willow tree! To make matters stranger, the quail flew over the water on a collision course with our group, veering at the last second into *another* tree! After finding 4 species of kingbird in a single elm (including Thick-billed, a rarity here), we all agreed we had crossed into The (Birding) Twilight Zone. -JY

Maine, June—The lobster bisque and picturesque seascapes are reasons enough to visit Downeast Maine, but we found more: Roseate and Arctic Terns, Piping Plover, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, and Nelson's & Saltmarsh Sparrows. The North Woods offered up Black-billed Cuckoo, Gray Jay, and a Blackburnian Warbler serenading from a spruce treetop that is etched in my memory. -JY

Chiricahua Mountains, Aug.—A day-roosting Whiskered Screech-Owl and a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher with a lizard in its beak made this a special outing. Looking forward to leading the Bird Communities of the Sky Islands with Tucson Audubon again! -JY

“Alpine” Arizona, Aug.—Crippling looks at Williamson's Sapsucker, Lewis's and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. Point-blank views of MacGillivray's Warbler, Pinyon Jay and Clark's Nutcracker simply didn't feel like summer in Arizona! -JY

Brazil, Oct.—Perhaps nothing eclipsed watching the Jaguar catch a caiman on the bank of the river—and then having the bank collapse on them! The Jaguar bounded to safety in a blink, but the caiman disappeared under several tons of wet earth. Frustration glowed in the eyes of the sopping wet cat. -RT

Iguazu Falls, Oct.—Walking back from the world's largest waterfall we spotted a pair of Surucua Trogons excavating their nest in the trunk of a nearby decaying tree. We watched for half an hour. Mesmerized scarcely described the reaction of the group! -RT

Cuba, Nov. & Dec.—The smallest bird on Earth was probably the bird of the tours for most, but for me the Cuban Trogon was hands-down the best bird in Cuba! From its purple crown to its crimson belly and uniquely scalloped, blazing-white undertail, it definitely ranks among the most beautiful birds in the world. Cuban Trogon was also the last unseen member of the trogon/quetzal tribe for me in the Western Hemisphere. -RT

San Blas, Jan. 2017—Atmospherics were perfect for the evening boat ride to the big, crystal-clear spring at La Tovar. Just before dusk we had superb views of Ringed Kingfisher, followed by Boat-billed Herons, then a Northern Potoo on a day roost at minimum focus. Next were the first of 3 Mottled Owls, and a Barn Owl circling the boat in our spotlight like a giant snowflake caught in an updraft. The orange-red eyeshine on an eye-level reed signaled a Common Pauraque that permitted Chencho to maneuver the boat to within 15'. Skating across the tranquil water with legs extended were literally thousands of Bulldog Fishing Bats, and blazing above was a field of a million stars. -RT

Bahamas, Feb. 2017—A career of chasing primarily tropical birds had foreclosed all options for a Kirtland's Warbler—until now. Within the next 24 hours we had four! Also seen were all of the endemics, and a Great Lizard-Cuckoo that tried to distract the group from the first Kirtland's. The cuckoo was so close that co-leader Ann Sutton had to settle for a portrait of its head and chest. Thankfully Ann also photographed a Black-headed Gull, a European vagrant scarcely ever recorded from the Bahamas. -RT

STAFF NOTES

JOHN YERGER and wife **MORGAN JACKSON** are thoroughly enjoying the antics of their two-year-old son, Benjamin. He is fond of imitating classic sounds of the desert Southwest, ranging from Cactus Wrens to coyotes. Benjamin is already taking an interest in his dad's binoculars, which we consider an encouraging sign!

In Whitetail Canyon, **RICK AND LYNNE TAYLOR** are thrilled to have received normal rainfall over the past year. Rejuvenated hackberries, junipers and sycamores around the homestead are filled with all manner of birds and other wildlife, a relief to see after the long-standing drought. Once again in 2016, according to eBird, the Taylors' had the birdiest yard in Arizona with some 147 species recorded.

THIS YEAR'S FAVORITE BIRDS

RICK & JOHN thoroughly enjoyed traveling the Americas with Borderlanders over the past year. A recent challenge issued in the office was to name top birds from our homes and another from abroad in the preceding months. Yes, it was exactly as difficult as it sounds. But here's what we came up with!

JOHN'S PICKS

Streak-backed Oriole – This Portal, Arizona rarity has been making birding headlines at the neighbor's place, but I was pretty excited when it showed up at OUR feeders! Morgan actually saw it several weeks earlier, much to my chagrin. I was the one who had to play "catch-up" on our yard list...

Bee Hummingbird – It may not have been in stunning breeding plumage, but this Cuban endemic was so impossibly miniscule, it floored me. Weighing no more than two paper clips, this is the world's smallest bird – depicted here at life size. But, like so many tiny critters, it possesses outsized charisma.

RICK'S PICKS

Common Black Hawk – This was not a yard bird for me, but it was the first time I've ever photographed this species in the Chiricahua Mountains. Better, it was an immature in a plumage I admire for its complexity! The bird was apparently using Whitetail Canyon for a migratory corridor, and it lumbered right past my position on the edge of the stream, offering an incredible photo op.

Bahama Woodstar – Of all of the Bahama endemics, this is the one I enjoyed the most. When this male flew in and perched within 10' of me, I was actually trembling so much I could scarcely hold my camera. What a beauty!



Streak-backed Oriole



Bee Hummingbird



Common Black Hawk



Bahama Woodstar

Have your own favorite from one of our trips? Share it with us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/BorderlandToursBirding

2017 BORDERLAND TOUR SCHEDULE

MARCH

CUBA (Wait list only; call for 2018 info) **March 11–21** at \$5795 with Arturo Kirkconnell & John Yerger
Home to the world's smallest bird (the endemic Bee Hummingbird), Cuban Trogon and two dozen others found nowhere else on Earth.

HONDURAS: THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO (2 spaces left) **March 23–29** at \$2695 with Elmer Escoto & John Yerger
Based at a single, luxurious eco-lodge with gourmet cuisine. Set in a verdant paradise with incredible birding, literally just outside the door.

APRIL

JAMAICA (Wait list only; call for 2018 info) **April 15–23** at \$3795 with Ann Sutton & Rick Taylor
This comfortable excursion to a vacation hotspot offers 27 endemics including Crested Quail-Dove, Red-billed Streamertail and Jamaican Owl.

MAY

SPAIN (Wait list only) **May 12–26** at \$4995 with Rob Williams and Rick Taylor
The Mediterranean cliffs, the snow-capped Pyrenees, and the spaghetti Western heartland, with the most charismatic birds in all of Europe.

SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA, OWLING RUN & TUCSON PRE-TOUR **May 14–21** at \$2395 with John Yerger
A focus on owls with hefty helpings of specialties. Spotted Owl & Whiskered Screech-Owl alongside Elegant Trogon & Red-faced Warbler.

JUNE

MAINE, DOWNEAST & NORTH WOODS **June 3–10** at \$2795 with John Yerger
Known for coastal scenery and (of course) lobster, we'll experience quintessential New England. Puffins and warblers are also sure to delight.

JULY

PANAMA: CANOPY CAMP (Limit 8 people) **July 15–22** at \$2795 with local leader & John Yerger
A rare opportunity to encounter Harpy Eagle, the world's largest. Canvas huts, real beds & ensuite bathrooms...this "camp" isn't "camping!"

PANAMA: CANOPY TOWER & LODGE (Limit 8 people) **July 22–31** at \$3595 with local leader & John Yerger
Enjoy your morning coffee within arm's reach of the top of the rainforest, eye-level with toucans, honeycreepers, sloths, and monkeys.

AUGUST

ALPINE ARIZONA, GRAND CANYON & CONDORS **August 14-20** at \$2295 with John Yerger
Explore Arizona's White Mountains, witness two billion years of geological history laid bare, and behold the biggest bird on the continent.

SEPTEMBER

CAPE MAY, MIGRATION ILLUSTRATED **September 16–23** at \$2795 with John Yerger
One of our nation's greatest migration spectacles. Experience avian inundation.

OCTOBER

PERU, AMAZON & MACHU PICCHU **October 7-20** at \$5695 with Rob Williams & John Yerger
An unparalleled journey from the most bird-rich ecosystem on the planet to the heights of Inca civilization – and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock.

NOVEMBER

AUSTRALIA & TASMANIA **October 28-November 13** at \$9195 with Rick Taylor & Steve Davidson
One-third of Australia's birds are endemic, such as the exquisite Superb Lyrebird. And we won't overlook wallabies, wombats or bandicoots!

DECEMBER

ARIZONA WINTER SPECIALTIES **December 3-9** at \$2195 with John Yerger
Hawk Alley: 14 species of raptors, sunset skies with thousands of Sandhill Cranes, and annual rarities like Rufous-backed Robin.

To register for a tour, or to request printed materials (including travel itineraries, maps, bird checklists and previous trip reports), please contact us at:

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VIOLET-CRESTED PLOVERCREST, BRAZIL BY RICK TAYLOR



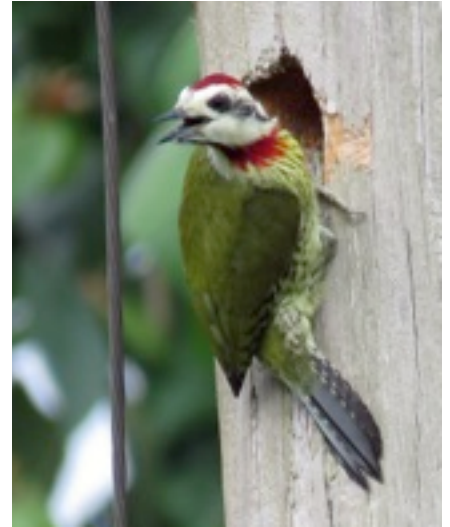
IGUAZÚ FALLS, ARGENTINA BY RICK TAYLOR



HYACINTH MACAW, BRAZIL
BY RICK TAYLOR



THE CLASSIC CUBAN MOJITO
BY A CAREFREE BIRDER IN CUBA



CUBAN GREEN WOODPECKER
BY JOHN YERGER



MONTEZUMA QUAIL, SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA BY JOHN YERGER



WESTERN SCREECH-OWL, SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA BY JOHN YERGER

BACK COVER PHOTO: "OLD BLUE EYES," A YELLOW-RUMPED CACIQUE, BRAZIL BY RICK TAYLOR