



Guatemala Custom Tour, March 4 – 16, 2017

Report and photos by George Lin





This was a custom tour with a strong photography element.

3/4/2017

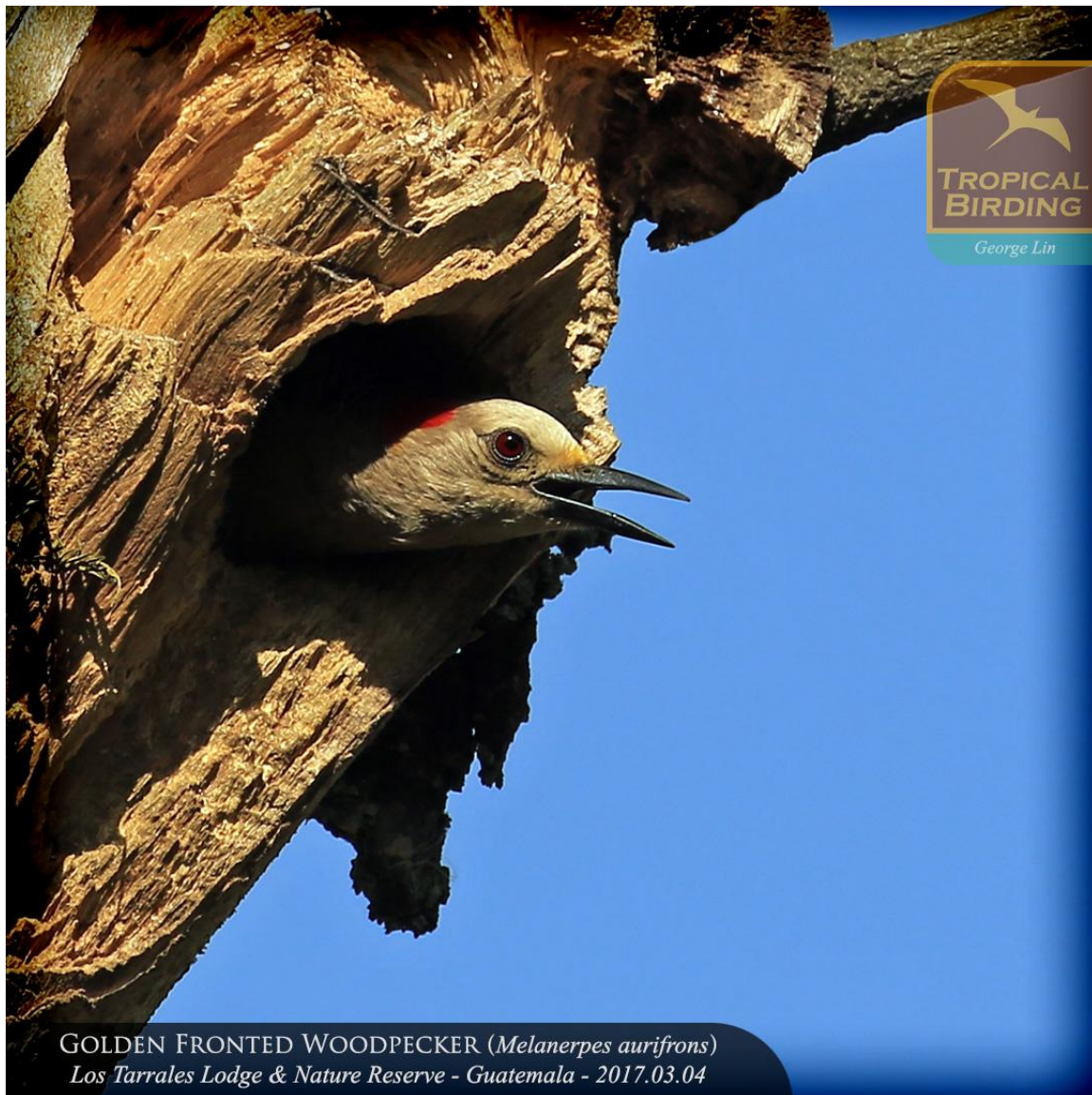
We had a very early start at 3:30 AM and started hiking up the slope of an extinct volcano. The first 30 minutes were through a plantation of coffee. The coffee plants were in bloom and filled the night air with sweet fragrance. With little light pollution in the area, the night skies were filled with stars. Eventually, the stars gave way to a fiery-orange sunrise over another volcano heralding the beginning of a new day. We stopped for breakfast before continuing to an old lava flow area which created a lush gully. There, we waited for the “unicorn bird” to show up.



The Horned Guan is a rare and endangered species native to the mountains of Guatemala and Southeast Mexico. Our local guide excitedly signaled a hooting call and we ran with our camera gear and were greeted with this strange looking bird perched high up in the canopy. We eventually found our way up the side of the hill and were able to get a more

eye-level view. This was the most difficult hike and most amount of time and energy I've ever spent on a single bird by far. It felt very rewarding afterward.

While we waited for the guan to show up, we also saw and heard several species like the Mexican Violetear, Green-throated Mountain-gem, Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Sabrewing, Black-throated Jay, and Hammond's Flycatcher. The beautiful melodious calls of a Brown-backed Solitaire echoed in the gully all morning. It was a very good start to this Guatemala trip.



After eating a small lunch, we hiked back down and found a feeding flock of migrants at mid-elevation. These included the wood warblers such as the Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Townsend's, and Black-throated Green Warblers. Rufous-capped Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a Red-legged Honeycreeper were also spotted with this flock.





We continued back to the hotel and took a short rest in our cabins. We headed back out in the mid-afternoon to look for Long-tailed Manakin, and along the way saw Cinnamon Hummingbird, Gray Hawk, Lesson's Motmot (formerly Blue-crowned), Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Orange-fronted Parakeet, and Yellow-olive Flycatcher. We eventually arrived at a fruiting tree and were treated with both the male and the female Long-tailed Manakins. Their beautiful calls can be heard in the distance. By this time, we were dead tired and headed back to the cabin for the evening.

GARTERED TROGON (*Trogon caligatus*)

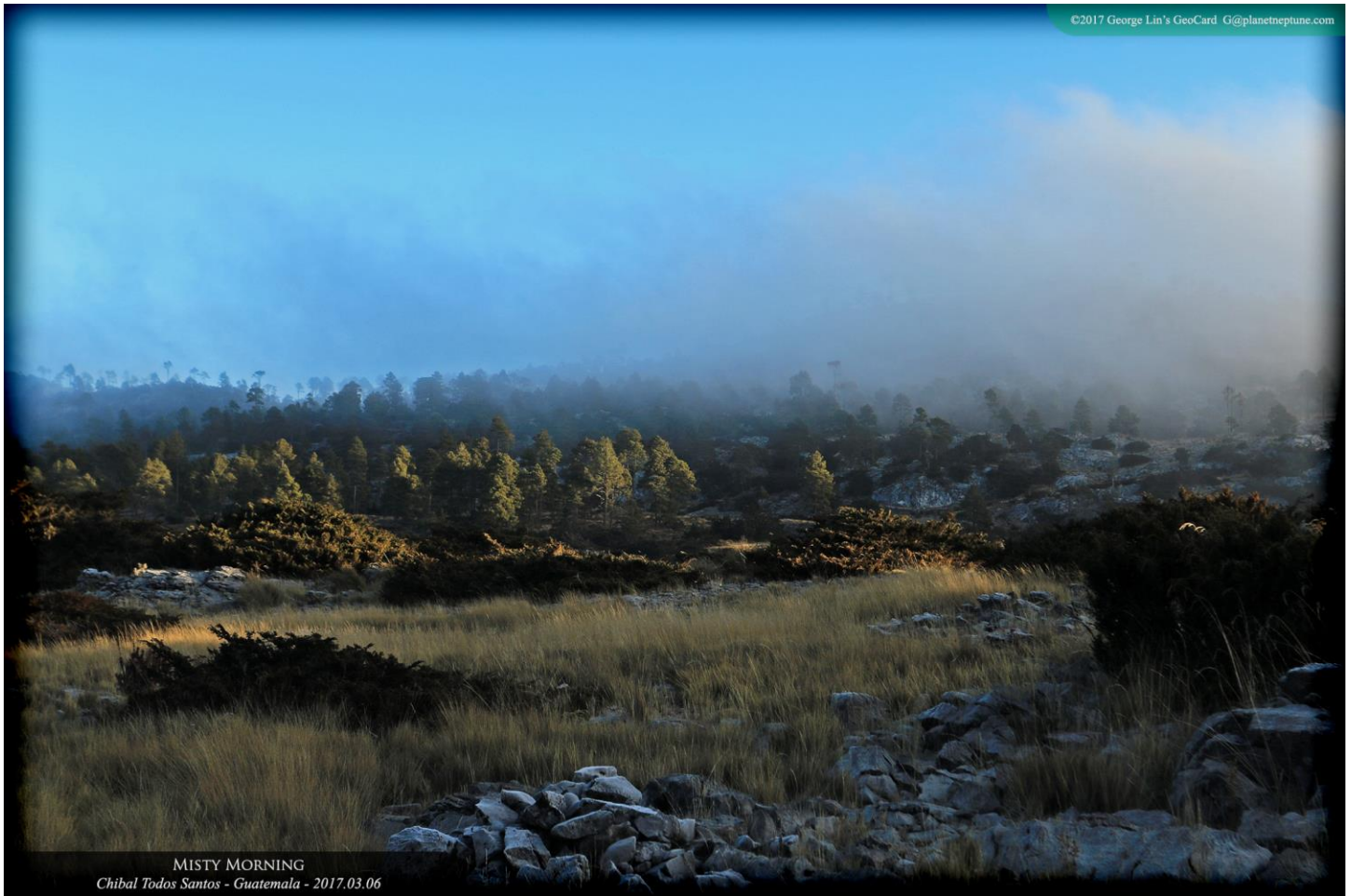
Los Tarrales Lodge &amp; Nature Reserve - Guatemala - 2017.03.04

**3/5/2017**

Thankfully, we had a later start than yesterday. After some coffee at 6am, we headed out on the trails around the lodge around 6:30. The rising sun cast a golden light on the trees along with birds warming up for the day. We saw some White-bellied Chachalacas, White-throated Magpie-Jays, the endemic Blue-tailed Hummingbird, and a roosting Mottled Owl along with a calling Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Gartered Trogon, and Lesson's Motmot. Flyovers included Pacific Parakeets, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Orange-fronted Parakeets, and Yellow-naped Parrots.

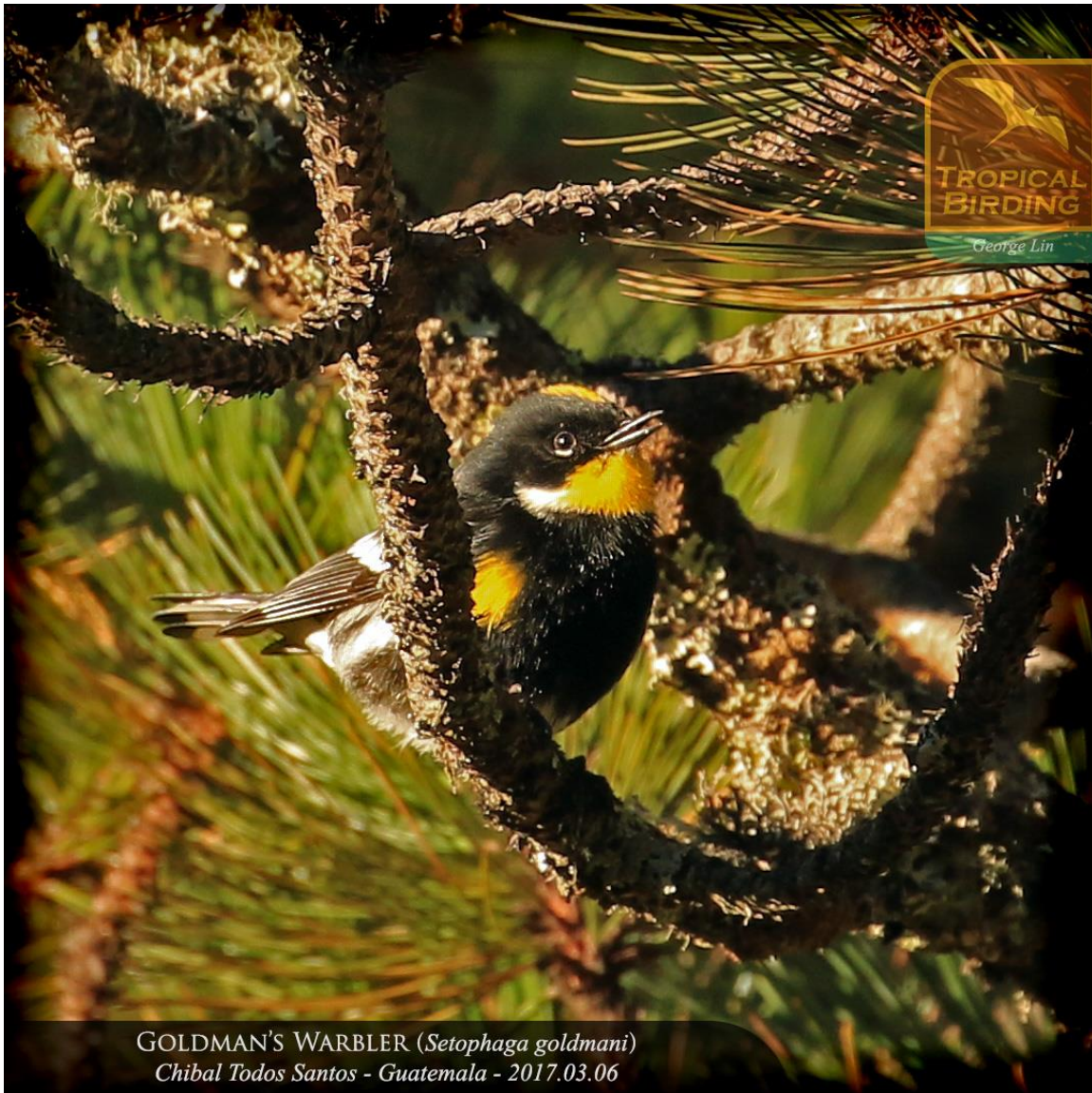
After a hearty breakfast, we left the lodge and continued to our next destination: Chiabal Todos Santos. It's located in the highlands at about 10,000 feet above sea level and I noticed both the altitude and the change of temperature. It was a long drive and we arrived in the late afternoon. With only an hour of sunlight left, we managed to get the regional endemic Rufous-collared Robin as well as Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Townsend's Warbler, and a few Eastern Bluebirds.





**3/6/2017**

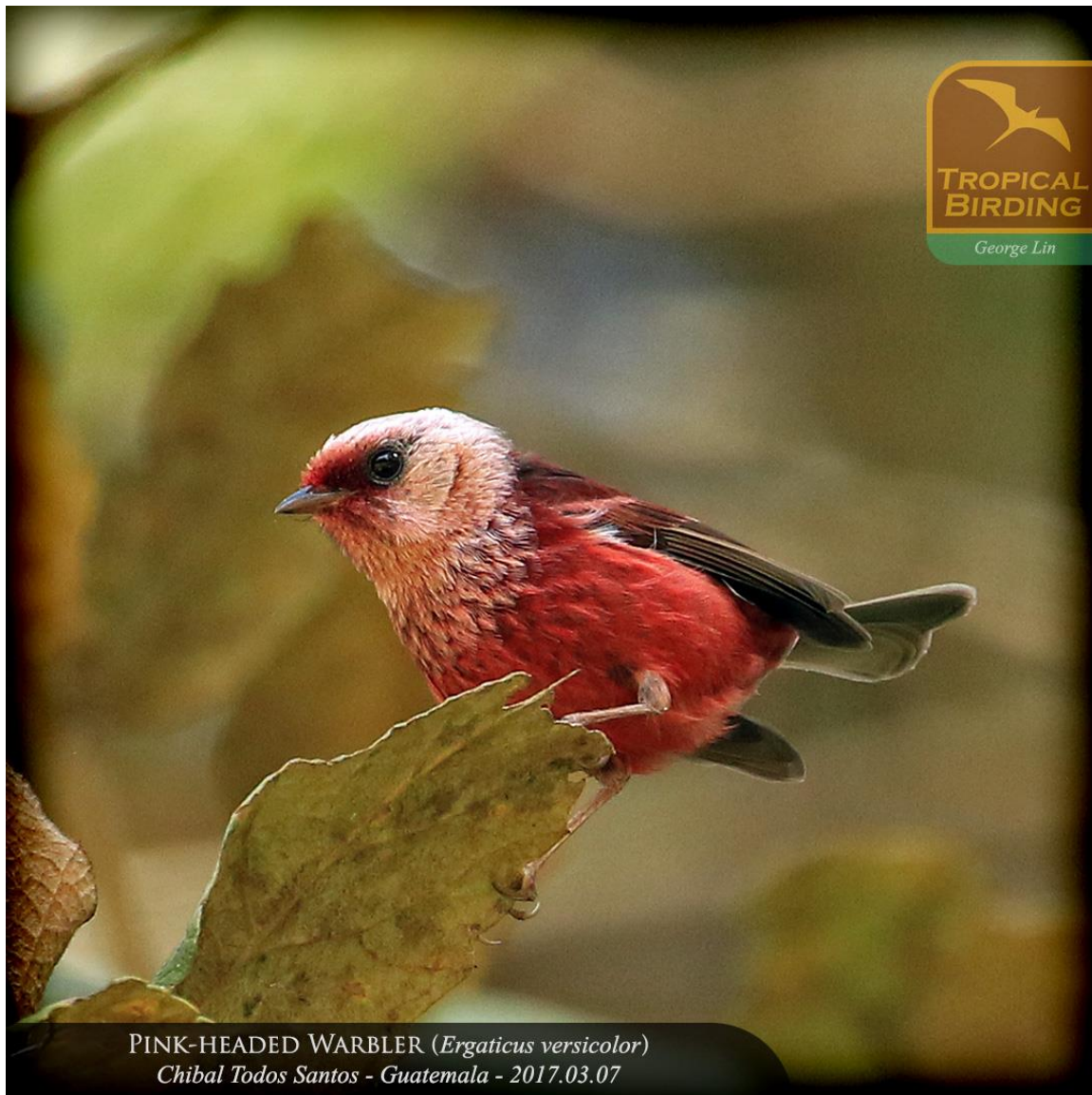
We had another early start today and headed up to about 12,000 feet above sea level to frost-covered park called Parque Regional Todos Santos Cuchumatán. Fog and clouds swept over the pines & junipers with the sun breaking over the horizon, illuminating a deep blue sky. We stopped at a stand of pine trees and within a few seconds of playing back a call, a Goldman's Warbler popped out and started singing back.



We snapped away as it flitted through the pine needles and branches. They created a lot of shadows and contrast which made photography rather difficult. We eventually managed to get some half decent photos and continued down the trail to see what else we could find. A “Guatemalan” Yellow-eyed Junco, Rufous-collared Robin, and some Steller's Jays were calling from the trees.

We called in another Goldman's Warbler at another stand of pines and got more chances to photograph this bird. On our way back to the car, our local guide Daniel spotted a pair of Ocellated Quail far ahead on the trail. We got a few glimpses of it before they flew away and disappeared.





We returned to the village for lunch and then went to look for Pink-headed Warbler in the nearby hills. A pair of these amazing birds were eventually located in a bush as they sallied forth and back for insects. We managed to get some halfway decent photos of them before they moved away. On the way back down, we spotted a pair of the Black-capped Siskins foraging in a bush; they were too far for photos, but we got a good look at them with our binoculars. We spent the night in Finca Caleras Chichavac. It's an old farm house built in the early 1900's and it's full of character and creaky floors.

**3/7/2017**

We started the morning with a hike from the farm house to a trail in the forest. Along the way, we saw a female Hooded Grosbeak calling from top of a pine and tons of Gray Silky-flycatchers waking up to the morning sun. Band-backed Wrens nosily called from the trees while they searched for insects.





We managed to find another pair of Pink-headed Warblers and got a few better photos of them than yesterday. On the way back, we had a nice look at an Olive Warbler. Even though it's called a warbler, it doesn't belong to the New World Warblers (Parulidae) family. Rather, it's placed as monospecific species in the Peucedramidae family.



BLACK CAPPED SISKIN (*Spinus atriceps*)  
Chibal Todos Santos - Guatemala - 2017.03.07

After lunch, we went back out on a different trail and found some more birds to observe and photograph along the way. This included the Steller's Jay, Brown Creeper, Blue-and-white Mockingbird, more Pink-headed Warblers, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Spotted Towhee, and the regional endemic Black-capped Siskin.





**3/8/2017**

Today we took a drive up into the cloud forest of Biotopo de Quetzal, just an hour south of the city of Cobán. Soon after lunch at the hotel, we went to a nearby private preserve and found a Resplendent Quetzal right away. The male was beautiful even though the breeding long tail feathers were just beginning to grow.

We also checked out a Unicolored Jay sitting on a nest, and a few other individuals came into the feeder for some food. Magnificent Hummingbird, Green-throated Mountain-gem, and Violet Sabrewing were coming into the lodge hummingbird feeders as well.

We went on a nice hike along a trail fringed by lush foliage and trees draped with orchids, bromeliads, and other epiphytes. Even though the forest was fairly quiet, we still managed to find a few birds like Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Wilson's Warbler, and a Spotted Woodcreeper. The trail ended at a waterfall where our brave local guide Daniel jumped into the cold water.





**3/9/2017**

It was raining this morning when we woke up, so we decided to head into Cobán for a break. The city flourished under a small colony of German coffee farmers in the early 1900's, and some remnants of their influence in the city architecture can still be seen. There were tons of street stalls and open markets in the city. We still managed to do some birding there in a garden outside our hotel, where there were some noisy Pacific Parakeets feeding. I was able to spot some American Redstarts, Tennessee Warblers, and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers around the city.





**3/10/2017**

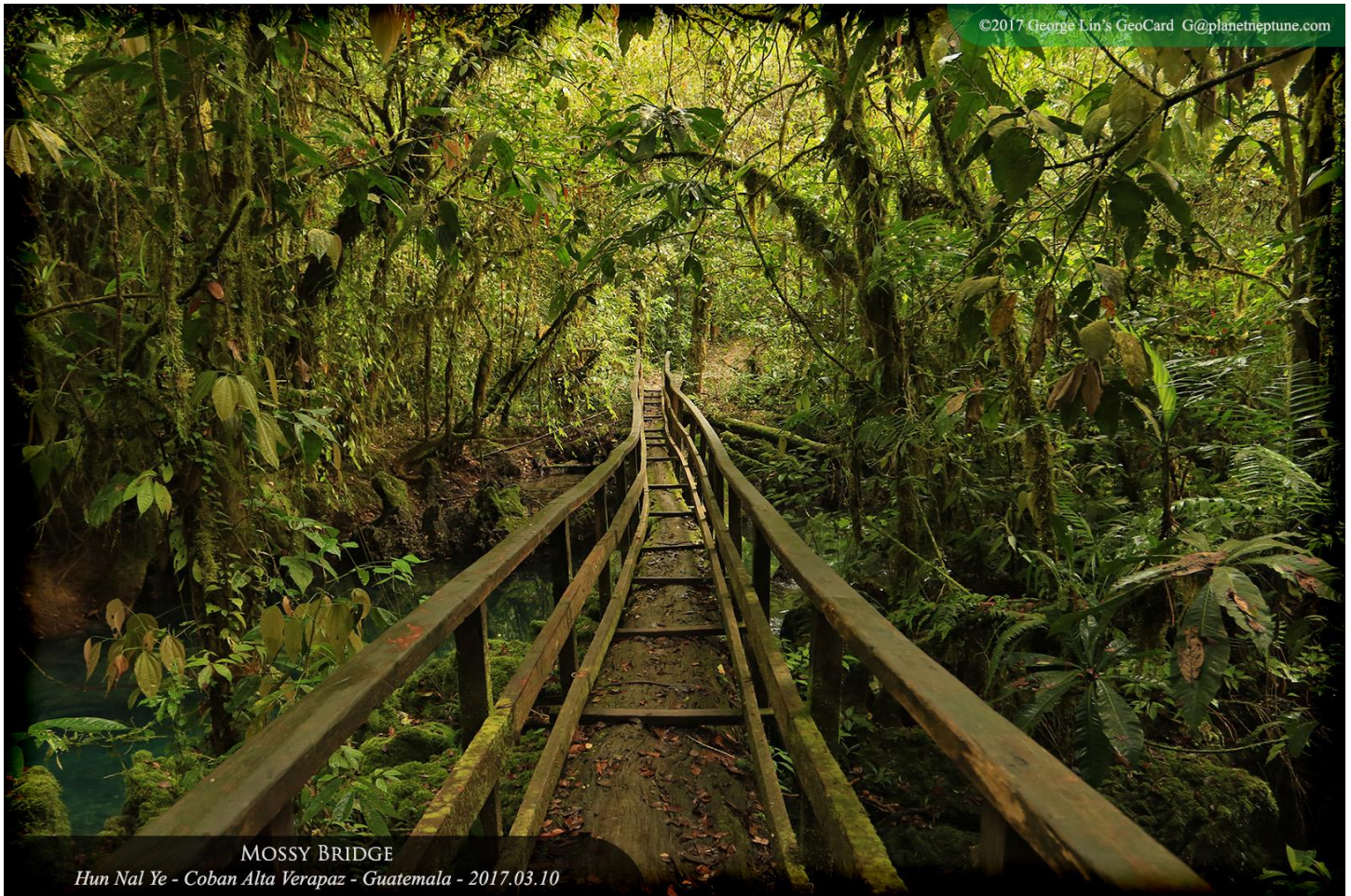
It was another full day of birding and photography as we started early morning at Las Nubes, just an hour north of Cobán. The enthusiastic owner and birder accompanied us on our 3 hour hike around his property.

Little and Slaty-breasted Tinamous sang through the forest as we made our way around a beautiful loop trail. White-bellied Emerald and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird were seen feeding on the bromeliad flowers and both Gartered Trogon and Collared Trogon were seen in the forest. Others included Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Golden-olive Woodpecker, White-crowned Parrot, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Orange-billed Sparrow, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager. North American migrants were aplenty with the warblers including Magnolia, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Wilson's, Tennessee, and Black and White.



After the preserve, we continued on to Hun Nal Ye Ecological Park which is surrounded by a beautiful turquoise river. On the way to the river, we spotted a White-collared Manakin displaying at a lek. It was warm enough for all 3 of us to take a dip in the chilly waters. Maybe a Canadian would call it refreshing, but it was a little too cold for me. Nevertheless, it was a very nice experience to take a plunge.





We continued across a mossy bridge to a waterfall and back, and came across a feeding flock which proved to be very productive. We saw Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner, Lesser Greenlet, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hooded Warbler, Golden-hooded Tanager, and Black-faced Grosbeak.





**3/11/2017**

We started early this morning and it was productive both in terms of photography and birding. We managed to have a good look at White-collared Manakin and also watched a Red-capped Manakin do its breakdancing display. Olivaceous Woodcreeper and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper also made an appearance during our hike. Since we had a long drive to Tikal ahead of us, we left soon after breakfast.





We arrived at Tikal National Park in the late afternoon and were able to do a little bit of birding after check-in. We finally saw signs of monkeys in Guatemala for the first time. There was a troop of Central American Spider Monkeys making their way across several trees and Howler Monkeys hooting like racecars at a speedway in the distance.

We managed to spot Rose-throated Becard, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and Red-lored Parrot along with a mob of Montezuma Oropendolas before nightfall.



**3/12/2017**

It was a beautiful morning in Tikal as we reached the Grand Plaza just before the sunrise. There was a low level of fog in the area which gave ruins an even more mysterious and majestic feel to them. The sun slowly came up and lit up the fog like a glowing nimbus which made a very nice background to the silhouettes of the pyramids.





Not to be outdone by the ruins, the birds came alive too with the sun, including an Orange-breasted Falcon. The pyramids made a natural canopy tower and we were able to spot and photograph some feeding birds from the pyramids. Emerald Toucanet, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, and Great Crested and Brown Crested Flycatchers were also seen.

On the way to another pyramid we found Slaty-tailed and Gartered Trogons, Northern Schiffornis, Masked Tityra, and Wood Thrush. A Black-faced Antthrush was foraging in the shade, and then came across a feeding flock full of tanagers and warblers.



After lunch, we went back into the park and enjoyed seeing Pale-billed and Lineated Woodpeckers foraging in the same area. We were then greeted by a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys making a huge ruckus. Other species like Yellow-throated Euphonia, Indigo Bunting, Blue Bunting, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Olivaceous Woodcreeper were also around, and even a King Vulture was soaring in the distance.





OCELLATED TURKEY (*Meleagris ocellata*)  
Tikal National Park - Tikal - Guatemala - 2017.03.12

Finally we saw a flock of Ocellated Turkey s roaming the Grand Plaza area. The sun cast a beautiful light on the temples and we photographed both the temples and the turkeys. Afterward, we went up to Temple #4 and watched the forest as the sun set behind us. The forest became alive again in the last golden rays of the sun and birdsong was replaced by a chorus of insects. It reminded me of watching the sunset from a tower at Cristalino Lodge in Brazil.



**3/13/2017**

Daniel and I spent the morning birding other parts of the Tikal area. We saw a small group of Swallow-tailed Kites calling and vocalizing from the skies and then headed into scrubbier forest where we found Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, and Gartered Trogons. There were also Couch's Kingbird, Masked Tityra, Lesser Greenlet, Spot-breasted Wren, White-bellied Wren, and White-breasted Wood-Wren, and a nice feeding flock on the trail.





In the afternoon, we continued to another ruin about an hour away called Yaxha. We climbed one of the pyramids for the sunset, but a thick cover of clouds had other ideas for us. Even though we didn't see a sunset, we still managed to see some nice birds like Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, White-bellied Emerald, Roadside Hawk, Lesson's Motmot, White-crowned, Red-lored, and Mealy Parrots, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, and Wood Thrush.



**3/14/2017**

This morning we got up early and climbed up the tallest temple for the sunrise. The sun failed to materialize behind the dark clouds but we still managed to see some birds from the top of the temple like Bat Falcon, Collared Aracari, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker.





On the way to another temple, we found another Lesson's Motmot in the dark understory along with a Hooded Warbler. At the top of the temple, a flock of Olive-throated Parakeets flew in for some fruits. We headed back to the lodge, showered, packed up, and headed to the airport for our flight back to Guatemala City.





**3/15/2017**

This morning we headed to the colonial town of Antigua, which is a UNESCO World Heritage City. The city was at one point Guatemala's capital and it's a maze of absolutely beautifully restored buildings with lovely boutique hotels and B&B's. Cafes and indoor courtyards with water fountains are the standard features at many of these buildings. Although we didn't do any birding today, it was still a very nice cultural experience.





HOODED GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes abeillei*)  
Cerro Paquisis - Guatemala - 2017.03.16

**3/16/2017**

This morning I got up at 4:30 to go birding with 3 local guides trained by the Guatemala government as an initiative to improve Guatemala as a birding destination as they strive to become a must-visit country amongst the birding world.

We climbed up the slope of another volcano which was as difficult as the first day, maybe just an hour shorter. It was very rewarding though as we were greeted with a beautiful sunrise. The 3 local guides were great with their abilities to listen & identify / spot birds on the trail and point them out to the guests.

Although we didn't see the Horned Guan this time, we managed to see Band-tailed Pigeon, Green-throated Mountain-Gem, White-eared Hummingbird, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Crescent-chested Warbler, Elegant Euphonia, and had a very good look at a pair of Hooded Grosbeaks foraging for food.

All in all, it has been a lovely experience in Guatemala where tons of resident and migrant birds were seen and photographed. It is a beautiful country with amazing archeological sites, and the Guatemalan people, as well as our hosts, were friendly and welcoming. I hope to return to the country in the future.

- George Lin

## BIRD LIST

### TINAMOUS: TINAMIDAE

Great Tinamou

Little Tinamou

Slaty-breasted Tinamou

Thicket Tinamou

### GUANS, CHACHALACAS, AND CURASSOWS: CRACIDAE

Plain Chachalaca

White-bellied Chachalaca

Crested Guan

Highland Guan

Horned Guan

### NEW WORLD QUAIL: ODONTOPHORIDAE

Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge

Singing Quail

Ocellated Quail

### CORMORANTS AND SHAGS: PHALACROCORACIDAE

Neotropic Cormorant

### ANHINGAS: ANHINGIDAE

Anhinga

### PELICANS: PELECANIDAE

Brown Pelican

### HERONS, EGRETS, AND BITTERNS: ARDEIDAE

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron

Little Blue Heron

Cattle Egret



**NEW WORLD VULTURES: CATHARTIDAE**

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture

King Vulture

**HAWKS, EAGLES, AND KITES: ACCIPITRIDAE**

Swallow-tailed Kite

Double-toothed Kite

Plumbeous Kite

Roadside Hawk

Gray Hawk

Broad-winged Hawk

Short-tailed Hawk

**RAILS, GALLINULES, AND COOTS: RALLIDAE**

Ruddy Crake

Russet-naped Wood-Rail

**PIGEONS AND DOVES: COLUMBIDAE**

Rock Pigeon

Pale-vented Pigeon

Scaled Pigeon

Red-billed Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon

Short-billed Pigeon

Ruddy Ground-Dove

Ruddy Quail-Dove

White-tipped Dove

Gray-chested Dove

Gray-headed Dove

White-faced Quail-Dove

**CUCKOOS: CUCULIDAE**

Groove-billed Ani

Squirrel Cuckoo

**OWLS: STRIGIDAE**

Northern Pygmy-Owl

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

**NIGHTJARS AND ALLIES: CAPRIMULGIDAE**

Common Pauraque

**SWIFTS: APODIDAE**

Vaux's Swift

Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift

**HUMMINGBIRDS: TROCHILIDAE**

White-necked Jacobin

Long-billed Hermit

Stripe-throated Hermit

Mexican Violetear

Magnificent Hummingbird

Green-throated Mountain-gem

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird

Broad-tailed Hummingbird

Canivet's Emerald

Emerald-chinned Hummingbird

Wedge-tailed Sabrewing

Rufous Sabrewing

Violet Sabrewing

Stripe-tailed Hummingbird

White-bellied Emerald

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird

Cinnamon Hummingbird

White-eared Hummingbird

**TROGONS: TROGONIDAE**

Resplendent Quetzal

Slaty-tailed Trogon

Black-headed Trogon

Gartered Trogon

Mountain Trogon

Collared Trogon

**MOTMOTS: MOMOTIDAE**

Blue-throated Motmot

Lesson's Motmot

**KINGFISHERS: ALCEDINIDAE**

Ringed Kingfisher

Amazon Kingfisher



**JACAMARS: GALBULIDAE**

Rufous-tailed Jacamar

**TOUCANS-BARBETS: SEMNORNITHIDAE**

Emerald Toucanet

Collared Aracari

Keel-billed Toucan

**WOODPECKERS: PICIDAE**

Acorn Woodpecker

Black-cheeked Woodpecker

Golden-fronted Woodpecker

Smoky-brown Woodpecker

Golden-olive Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Chestnut-colored Woodpecker

Lineated Woodpecker

Pale-billed Woodpecker

**FALCONS AND CARACARAS: FALCONIDAE**

Barred Forest-Falcon

Collared Forest-Falcon

Bat Falcon

Orange-breasted Falcon

**NEW WORLD & AFRICAN PARROTS: PSITTACIDAE**

Orange-chinned Parakeet

Brown-hooded Parrot

White-crowned Parrot

Red-lore Parrot

Yellow-naped Parrot

White-fronted Parrot

Mealy Parrot

Olive-throated Parakeet

Orange-fronted Parakeet

Pacific Parakeet

**TYPICAL ANT BIRDS: THAMNOPHILIDAE**

Barred Antshrike

Dusky Antbird

**ANTTHRUSHES: FORMICARIIDAE**

Black-faced Antthrush

**OVENBIRDS AND WOODCREEPERS: FURNARIIDAE**

Olivaceous Woodcreeper

Wedge-billed Woodcreeper

Northern Barred-Woodcreeper

Strong-billed Woodcreeper

Ivory-billed Woodcreeper

Spotted Woodcreeper

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper

Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner

Rufous-breasted Spinetail

**TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: TYRANNIDAE**

Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet

Greenish Elaenia

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher

Sepia-capped Flycatcher

Paltry Tyrannulet

Northern Bentbill

Yellow-olive Flycatcher

Stub-tailed Spadebill

Tufted Flycatcher

Greater Pewee

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

Least Flycatcher

Hammond's Flycatcher

Yellowish Flycatcher

Bright-rumped Attila

Rufous Mourner

Dusky-capped Flycatcher

Great Crested Flycatcher

Great Kiskadee

Boat-billed Flycatcher

Social Flycatcher

Tropical Kingbird

Couch's Kingbird

Western Kingbird

**MANAKINS: PIPRIDAE**

White-collared Manakin



Red-capped Manakin
<b>TITYRAS AND ALLIES: TITYRIDAE</b>
Masked Tityra
Northern Schiffornis
Rose-throated Becard
<b>VIREOS, SHRIKE-BABLERS &amp; ERPORNIS: VIREONIDAE</b>
Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo
Green Shrike-Vireo
Tawny-crowned Greenlet
Lesser Greenlet
White-eyed Vireo
Hutton's Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Warbling Vireo
<b>CROWS, JAYS, AND MAGPIES: CORVIDAE</b>
Black-throated Jay
White-throated Magpie-Jay
Brown Jay
Bushy-crested Jay
Steller's Jay
Unicolored Jay
<b>SWALLOWS: HIRUNDINIDAE</b>
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Purple Martin
Mangrove Swallow
<b>TREECREEPERS: CERTHIIDAE</b>
Brown Creeper
<b>WRENS: TROGLODYTIDAE</b>
House Wren
Rufous-browed Wren
Band-backed Wren
Rufous-naped Wren
Spot-breasted Wren
Cabanis's Wren

White-bellied Wren
White-breasted Wood-Wren
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren
<b>GNATCATCHERS: POLIOPTILIDAE</b>
Long-billed Gnatwren
<b>KINGLET: REGLIDAE</b>
Golden-crowned Kinglet
<b>THRUSHES AND ALLIES: TURDIDAE</b>
Eastern Bluebird
Brown-backed Solitaire
Slate-colored Solitaire
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush
Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
Mountain Thrush
Clay-colored Thrush
Rufous-collared Robin
Blue-and-white Mockingbird
<b>MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS: MIMIDAE</b>
Gray Catbird
Tropical Mockingbird
<b>SILKY-FLYCATCHERS: PTILOGONATIDAE</b>
Gray Silky-flycatcher
<b>OLIVE WARBLER: PEUCEDRAMIDAE</b>
Olive Warbler
<b>NEW WORLD WARBLERS: PARULIDAE</b>
Ovenbird
Worm-eating Warbler
Louisiana Waterthrush
Northern Waterthrush
Black-and-white Warbler
Crescent-chested Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville Warbler



MacGillivray's Warbler
Kentucky Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler
American Redstart
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Townsend's Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Rufous-capped Warbler
Golden-crowned Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
Pink-headed Warbler
Slate-throated Redstart
<b>TANAGERS AND ALLIES: THRAUPIDAE</b>
Crimson-collared Tanager
Blue-gray Tanager
Red-legged Honeycreeper
Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer
Blue-black Grassquit
White-collared Seedeater
Yellow-faced Grassquit
Black-headed Saltator
Grayish Saltator
<b>BUNTINGS AND NEW WORLD SPARROWS: EMBERIZIDAE</b>
Common Chlorospingus
Green-backed Sparrow
Orange-billed Sparrow
Chestnut-capped Brushfinch
Yellow-eyed Junco
Rufous-collared Sparrow
Rusty Sparrow
Spotted Towhee
White-naped Brushfinch
<b>CARDINALS AND ALLIES: CARDINALIDAE</b>
Summer Tanager
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager

Red-throated Ant-Tanager
Black-faced Grosbeak
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Blue-black Grosbeak
Blue Bunting
Indigo Bunting
Painted Bunting
<b>TROUPIALS AND ALLIES: ICTERIDAE</b>
Eastern Meadowlark
Melodious Blackbird
Great-tailed Grackle
Bronzed Cowbird
Black-vented Oriole
Black-cowled Oriole
Orchard Oriole
Hooded Oriole
Altamira Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Yellow-billed Cacique
Montezuma Oropendola
<b>FINCHES, EUPHONIAS &amp; ALLIES: FRINGILLIDAE</b>
Scrub Euphonia
Yellow-throated Euphonia
Elegant Euphonia
Olive-backed Euphonia
Blue-crowned Chlorophonia
Black-capped Siskin
Hooded Grosbeak
<b>OLD WORLD SPARROWS: PASSERIDAE</b>
House Sparrow