

Honduras - The Lodge at Pico Bonito

Inc. Highlands Extension

6 – 10 November 2015

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 – 19 November 2015



Pauraque at Rio Santiago Nature Resort



American Crocodile in Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge



Rufous-tailed Hummingbird at Pico Bonito

Report & images kindly compiled by tour participant Rosie Filipiak



Naturetrek

Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Alex Alvarado, Elmer Escoto & Olbin Bejarano (leaders) with nine Naturetrek clients

Day 1 (for Honduran Highlands Extension)

Friday 6th November

The Honduran Highlands tour extension started with a flight from the UK and an overnight stay in Houston.

Day 2

Saturday 7th November

Flight from Houston to Tegucigalpa – Honduran Highlands Extension

After a long one and a half days' travelling, it was good to finally arrive in Tegucigalpa in the early afternoon, where the sun was shining. Alex from Honduran Birds met Rosie, the only Naturetrek client on the Highlands Extension, at the airport. Later they would be joined by two of Alex's clients flying in from the States. From the airport we drove the windy road up out of Tegucigalpa to the hotel where, after checking in, it was straight out to do some birding. We went to the nearby United Nations Park which, since it was a weekend, was full of family groups noisily enjoying themselves. That didn't seem to put the birds off and we hadn't even left the car park before we saw our first flock of Bushy-crested Jays which live in the highland pine forests. The park was heaving with woodpeckers and in the three hours we spent there, we saw five different species including the comical looking Acorn Woodpecker and its acorn stores. We also saw some of the target species for the Highlands Extension: both Band-backed and Rufous-naped Wrens and Rusty Sparrow. We also saw four species of oriole. In the park some felling of the native pines was taking place and Alex explained this was due to an infection from a pine beetle disease which can only be controlled by felling and burning the infected trees in the hope of preventing further spread. From the park we drove to Las Gloriales for supper. During a little birding in the gardens we spotted another highland speciality, the Blue-and-white Mockingbird, and to round things off a quick sighting of a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl. At supper we were joined by Wade and Carol, Alex's American clients who had flown into San Pedro Sula and been driven down to join us.

Day 3

Sunday 8th November

We had an early start at 5.45am, and it was straight up to La Tigra National Park (NP) which is adjacent to Las Gloriales. We birded along the entrance road to the park and saw both Strong-billed and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers, House and Rufous-browed Wrens, and a host of warblers. Into the NP and a stop for breakfast included several cups of Honduran coffee (which became Rosie's morning 'wake-up' throughout her holiday), then we walked the Cloud Forest Trail which went up and up and up. An early detour had us serenaded by a small covey of singing quail which gave everyone great views and the chance for some photographs. Further up and we enjoyed seeing three Resplendent Quetzals; male, female and juvenile. These truly are beautiful birds. The cloud forest trees were covered in epiphytes (air plants) and thin clouds drifted in and out. After a bit of work we managed to see a Slate-coloured Solitaire, one of our target birds for today, a quick glimpse of a Scaled Antpitta, and we all got great views of Slate-throated Redstart. The bird that stole the show was the elusive Barred Forest Falcon which came incredibly close and gave good views for quite some time. Coming back down into the car park, ourselves and a number of other visitors to the park were shown a Resplendent Quetzal sitting quite calmly in a tree barely yards from the visitor centre.

After an excellent lunch provided in the picnic area by the Las Gloriales, we walked a small trail near the visitor centre and added Mountain Trogon and Pale-billed Woodpecker to our list. We finished off the day's birding at La Tigra on the track down out of the park with Green-breasted Mountain-gem, another highland speciality bird.

Day 4

Monday 9th November

We had another early start with coffee and breakfast at Las Gloriales, along with some birding in the grounds. Highlights were Blue-crowned Motmot and Lineated Woodpecker. We also saw Yellow-billed Cacique which was very elusive and stayed almost hidden inside the bamboo thicket that fences the property. Then it was on to the United Nations Park which was surprisingly quieter for birds than Saturday despite the fact there were no people around except the cleaning squad. But there were still plenty of new birds to be seen, and it seemed like all the small birds were out enjoying the peace and quiet. We saw Eastern Bluebirds and a lot of warblers including the beautiful Hooded Warbler, and also the dramatically coloured Painted Redstart. However the best bird of the morning had to be the Lesser Roadrunner which gave us a brief glimpse just as we were leaving.

Next we had a long and mildly hair-raising road journey to Panacam Lodge (everyone seems to overtake with a passion here). En route we had a roadside sighting of the lovely White-throated Magpie-jay. At Panacam we did some birding in the grounds and added some speciality birds including Scrub Euphonia, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Keel-billed Motmot, Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Collared Trogon, Montezuma Oropendola, and as dusk was falling, a Central American Pygmy Owl which Alex said was an unusual sighting here. In the evening there was heavy rain.

Day 5 (Extension); Day 1 (Main Tour)

Tuesday 10th November

The day started damp with low cloud, and the morning was spent birding the 'Panacam lowlands'. We walked down the road from the lodge accompanied by two armed guards - not for us specifically but to guard the forest from illegal wood extraction. We saw motmots, Keel-billed Toucans, many pygmy owls, beautiful Green Jays and a Plain Chachalaca. We had a lesson in tanager identification with Crimson-collared and Passerini's Tanagers both being black and red but to different extents. We also saw a couple of difficult to see birds: Slate-headed Tody-flycatcher and Olivaceous Piculet, both tiny so hard to spot. Much of this area is rainforest with shade-grown coffee the secondary growth, and there was an abundance of birds. We walked down to the hydro-electric scheme reservoir and, on the way, saw the beautiful male White-collared Manikin and a pair of Bat Falcons.

We moved on to Lake Yojoa and had lunch at the lakeside at Cortijo del Lago. We saw Ringed Kingfisher, a pair of Northern Jacana, and lots of Snail Kites flying over the lake. Lunch was delayed as we watched Laughing Falcons - these beautiful falcons feed solely on snakes. After lunch it was on to Finca Las Glorias and a quick walk by the lakeside where we saw Pied-billed Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, American Coot and Common Gallinule (moorhen to us). After taking shelter from a brief, but heavy, rain shower we walked through the orange orchards which were full of orioles - very beautiful with their orange/yellow colours matching the ripe fruit. Then we took the track through the shade coffee plantation. There were just so many birds here: two species of tityra, parrots, tanagers, warblers, Collared Aracari and a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-owls. Then it was back to Panacam with a stop to photograph a Gartered Trogon on a roadside tree on the road in. In the gardens we saw the lovely Long-billed Starthroat with his shiny blue cap and maroon throat, and we had a quick walk up the nearest tower which gave good views over the rainforest with further sightings of Keel-billed Toucans as another

heavy rain shower ended the day. It had been a truly bird-filled day. The bird list for the Extension sits at 178 as the rest of the group start out from the UK for the Main Tour

Day 2

Wednesday 11th November

We had our usual early start and spotted two species of motmot and a Northern Waterthrush before breakfast. Then it was a walk up the trails to the two nearest towers which gave great views out over the rainforest. On the way up the trail we saw Crested Guans whose noisy calls we had been hearing. They are very large birds and one very obligingly sat on a cecropia, out in the open allowing good photographs. We also saw four species of woodcreeper and some more small birds for the list before it was time to head to San Pedro Sula to meet up with the arriving Naturetrek group. Along the way we stopped at a roadside stall for a delicious snack of sweet pineapple, and to look at Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks in a roadside marsh.

At San Pedro Sula we all met up, together with Elmer and Olbin, the Pico Bonito guides. We loaded the minibus and set off towards Pico Bonito. After about an hour the rain started and the torrential downpour did not let up until it was starting to get dark. We were welcomed to Pico Bonito by the friendly staff with umbrellas and fruit cocktails. With check-in completed, we went off to freshen up in our cabins. The cabins were great; all tucked away amongst the trees and bushes. The whole complex is so picturesque with wooden verandahs and walkways connecting the reception to the dining room and bar. The day finished with an excellent supper.

Day 3

Thursday 12th November

The morning was dry and we had coffee at 6am with some birding before breakfast. After sorting ourselves into two groups, 'the orioles' went off with Olbin and 'the toucans' with Elmer. The toucan group wandered through the gardens before heading along the trail to the 'toucan tower' which gave great views over the forest with the Rio Coloradito below. From the tower we watched Keel-billed Toucans, Montezuma Oropendolas, Olive-throated Parakeets and Brown-hooded Parrots flying over the forest. Close by the tower we saw Purple-crowned Fairy and Stripe-throated Hermit feeding on the morning glory flowers.

Heading back along the trail we took a detour to the back of one of the cabins and there, looking just like a broken branch, was a Great Potoo, giving everyone great opportunities for photographs. This wasn't the only exciting bird to be seen around the cabins, as a rufous morph Guatemalan Screech Owl was dozing in a tree next to another cabin, again allowing great photographs. Back on the trail, flowering and fruiting trees at the river overlooks held Green Honeycreeper, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, warblers and tanagers. Three trogon species; Garter, Black-headed and Slaty-tailed Trogons, were all seen within a 100 metres of each other.

We could hear Ferruginous Pygmy-owl and Blue-crowned Motmot, but no matter how hard we tried to see it, the motmot proved just too elusive. Back at the lodge we had good views of Pale-billed Woodpecker before we went in for lunch, where we were able to watch White-necked Jacobin, Violet Sabrewing and Crowned Woodnymph at the hummingbird feeders as we ate. We met up again at 3pm but it had started to rain and it was just too heavy to contemplate going out again, so it was a quiet afternoon in for everyone. We completed the day's list before another excellent dinner in the restaurant in the evening.

Day 4

Friday 13th November

We had pre-ordered breakfast the night before and it was ready for us at 6am. Then it was off at 6.30am to catch the small train to take us down to Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge. This narrow-gauge train took us ten kilometres through old coconut plantations to the refuge, and the driver stopped whenever there were interesting birds to see. We saw Turquoise-browed Motmot, Roadside Hawk, Bare-throated Tiger Heron and White-tailed Kite amongst others. Arriving at the end of the track, we again split into two groups to get into small boats to explore the mangrove forest.

The sun was shining and the birds were numerous. Rosie's group saw four kingfisher species: Green, Belted, Ringed and Amazon. There were also Neotropical Cormorant, Anhinga, and a host of herons including the much sought after Agami Heron and a favourite, the Boat-billed Heron. The boat driver, Chepe, showed us a roosting Lesser Nighthawk and a Long-nosed Bat, beautifully camouflaged against a mangrove trunk. We also saw an Osprey, and went up a small side channel to see a small, but noisy, group of Mantled Howler Monkeys. Then it was back to the village for snacks before the return train ride. Also seen were at least six American Crocodiles, including one very large one which was hauled out on a bank. This led to tall tales on the return train ride as to which group had seen the largest crocodile - definitely 'the toucans' with a 10-footer!

We had lunch back at Pico Bonito with the hummingbirds coming and going to the feeders; the large Long-billed Hermit being a direct contrast in size to the little Stripe-throated Hermit. The afternoon rain stopped about 3pm letting us get out again for a little birding in the grounds, but it was cooler, and that coupled with the rain seemed to deter the birds as it was quiet and only a few were seen. However the morning had been so good that no-one minded the change in pace. The two birds which seemed to be the commonest almost everywhere; Clay-coloured Thrush and Brown Jay, were seen. After another excellent dinner in the restaurant it was early to bed in readiness for a very early start next day.

Day 5

Saturday 14th November

Today we had a 4am start to head up to the Rio Aguan Valley. It started raining not long after we left. After driving for two hours we stopped for breakfast. Then, with everyone more awake and the rain having stopped, we birded our way into the valley, stopping at the roadside as we went to look up and down the rivers and into the wetter scrubby areas. A Roseate Spoonbill flew over at one stop, and we got views of another spoonbill and a Wood Stork in a distant tree. Both Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers were seen at one of the rivers, as well as good views of Mangrove Swallows as they flew to and fro beneath one of the road bridges. Roadside Hawks and American Kestrels were regularly seen on the wires at the roadside, and we also saw two Meadowlarks and a White-lored Gnatcatcher, which was one of our target birds for today. The vegetation changed quite rapidly to dry and arid, and at our last roadside stop before our destination we all had good views of a Lesser Roadrunner, another target bird for this area.

Upon reaching the entrance to the Honduran Emerald Reserve, we were checked in by the Honduran Navy who have responsibility for protecting this reserve. The habitat here was completely different to Pico Bonito lodge. The reserve sits in the rain shadow of the mountain and is very dry and arid with acacias and many species of cactus. It was also very hot and sunny. We went in to the reserve and it wasn't long before we spotted our first Honduran Emerald coming to its favourite flowers, those of the finger cactus. This hummingbird is the only endemic bird of Honduras. We saw several of these 'hummers' and it was good to see that the Honduran government is in the process of buying tracts of land to increase the size of the reserve. We also saw Cinnamon

Hummingbird in the reserve as well as Salvin's Emerald which is normally seen at higher altitudes, so it was a productive and interesting visit. Lunch was 'tipico' at a nearby homestead and we enjoyed rice, beans, chicken, pork and cheese, all prepared using their homemade clay ovens.

After lunch we set off back to the Lodge. Heading out of the valley, the rain came down in torrents again. We made a detour to La Ceiba, driving through streets flooded from the torrential rain to the old horticultural station where Jenna, who works there, showed us a daytime roost of Black-and-white Owls; two adults and a youngster. It was very dark under the trees and, with the rain, not ideal for photographs, but it was a good way to end another excellent day.

Day 6

Sunday 15th November

Today we had breakfast at 6am before setting off by 6.30am to the nearby River Santiago Nature Resort. On the driveway out of the Lodge the minibus flushed a Little Tinamou which flew across the road giving good views to those at the front. We stopped at the riverside to do some birding and walked a little way in on the track, getting sightings of Summer Tanager, Great Black Hawk, Rose-throated Becard (which don't have a rose-throat here so may be candidates for a future split) and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture amongst many others. Once into the Nature Resort their guide, Alex, took us round the trails. After seeing both Wedge-billed and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, we watched a couple of Red-capped Manikins go through their 'moon dance' display.

We continued on and Elmer and Olbin showed us a juvenile Spectacled Owl which still had downy white feathers on its head and looked a little cross at the intrusion. It was well hidden in the darkness under the trees so it took quite a while before everyone was confidently viewing it and getting down (kneeling on the muddy ground!), to do some photography. What a brilliant bird and our 'owl score' now stands at four. A little further along we had good views of the lovely Golden-hooded Tanager, and after some persistence we had decent glimpses of an Orange-billed Sparrow too.

We continued up the trail which was muddy and slippery after the overnight rain. Those at the front got a fleeting glimpse of a Common Parakeet as it flew off from where it was roosting beside the trail. After some effort we managed to find a pair of Keel-billed Motmots, but by then we were on the steepest and muddiest part of the trail so we slithered and slid until everyone had seen them through binoculars or telescope. We stopped at an open area to try to get a decent view of White-collared Manakin, and Alex our guide pointed out a Common Parakeet only about ten feet away and incredibly well camouflaged against the dead leaves on the forest floor. Its camouflage was so perfect it took some time before everyone could even see it, but finally we all did, and we also had plenty opportunity to take lots of photographs as it didn't fly off until we headed down the track towards it.

Next stop was in the gardens of the Nature Resort and all the hummingbird feeders. These tiny birds are truly numerous here and we spent a most enjoyable hour watching them, practising identifying which was which, and trying to get some decent photographs which would show off their iridescent feathers. Commonest were White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Violet-crowned Woodnymph; but we also saw both Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits, Green-breasted Mango, Brown Violet-ear, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird and Blue-throated Goldentail.

We returned to the Lodge for a late lunch. The rain started mid-afternoon bringing an excellent day's birding to a close.

Day 7

Monday 16th November

Today was a 'free' day which we spent at the lodge. After a quick coffee at 6am we headed up the tower to search for our target bird, the lovely Cotinga. Initially all was quiet but then, there it was - bright blue and almost glowing, right on the top of a distant tree. We all had excellent views with both binoculars and telescope as the bird stayed for quite some time. Keel-billed Toucans sat in the trees close to the tower and a Purple-crowned Fairy fed on the flowers at its base. On the track back were Wood Thrush and Ovenbird, and we made a stop so that we could look at the gorgeous Red-capped Manakin again. On the nearby feeder were both Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendola so we were able to contrast the two species.

After breakfast it was out again and along the trail to Los Pinos and the pool in the river. We saw Tawny-crowned Greenlet and Black-throated Trogon on the trail which runs up a ridge between the Rio Coloradito and Rio Corinto. We also spotted White-breasted Wood-wren, a pair of Blue-crowned Motmots, and had very close views of the lovely little Tropical Gnatcatcher. It was very humid under the trees and after a break enjoying the scenic pool down at the river, we headed back up to the lodge. Along the way we found a ripe cocoa pod so our guide, Elmer, picked and opened it so we could enjoy the juicy flesh which covers the cocoa beans inside.

Lunch was enjoyed watching the hummingbirds from the restaurant deck, particularly the way the Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds 'danced' in the rain, splaying all their feathers to catch a free shower. After a post-lunch rest we visited the Serpentarium where our guides showed us a few of Honduras' snakes, the Fer-de-lance which is the most poisonous one, the Jumping Viper, and Rattlesnakes with youngsters. For those brave enough, there was the chance to hold a couple of the non-poisonous ones: the Rat Snake and the Milk Snake, the latter's colour mimics the poisonous Coral Snake. We made a quick visit to the butterfly house but as it was starting to get dark the butterflies had stopped flying for the night. We did checklists before dinner as usual, and then made our plans for tomorrow, our last full day at Pico Bonito and Honduras.

Day 8

Tuesday 17th November

Today was another early start for the drive of just over an hour to Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. We walked along the forest edge at the entrance to the gardens and got excellent views of a Passerini's Tanager; this beautiful male seemed determined to show off his bright scarlet back and rump to us. New birds on this walk were Thick-billed Seed Finch, Zone-tailed Hawk and Smoky-brown Woodpecker. There was also a Black-headed Trogon pair, close by a lovely male White-collared Manakin, and a Magnificent Frigatebird was spotted flying high above. We heard Yellow-billed Cacique and one of these secretive birds flew across the road giving us a clear view of its yellow bill. The target bird was Rufous Jacamar and one sat obligingly in a 'window' in the vegetation, letting everyone get good views with the telescope. Our guide, Olbin, declared this his "best bird in the world - ever".

Next stop was down a very muddy track to a little stream fringed with large bamboo thickets. Here we saw both Barred and Great Antshrikes, although only the barred gave decent views with a male, female and juvenile to spot. Our next target was Ruddy Crake and this one really toyed with us. There were several calling on one side

of the track down to the rambutan plantation, so we all lined up some 12 feet away hoping to watch one go from one side to the other. We waited and waited but there was not a sight of them. The sun was hot, the mosquitoes were biting, the firecracker butterflies were clacking away doing their mating dance around the tree trunks, and still we waited. A skinny dog sauntered down the track, lunchtime was approaching, and we were in danger of ending up like the 'tourist tree' with red and flaky skin. We had agreed to wait just 'three more minutes' when suddenly, like a chicken thrown out of the coop, a bird exploded out of the waist high undergrowth barely six feet away from us and dropped into the equally thick undergrowth on the other side of the track. That was it – a Ruddy Crake - we had seen it!

After that, lunch seemed the obvious conclusion and we enjoyed a seafood lunch overlooking the Caribbean at Tela. There were Royal and Sandwich Terns fishing out to sea, a Wood Stork flew by, and we could see a large flock of Laughing Gulls which had obviously found a shoal of fish to feed on. After lunch we walked along the beach a little way and saw several Willets and a sight from home, a flock of Sanderling. Then it was back to Pico Bonito and packing in preparation for our flight the next day.

Day 9

Wednesday 18th November

There was only time for a very quick bit of birding this morning. 6am saw us up the toucan tower and yes, there were Keel-billed Toucans in the nearby trees. We enjoyed our last breakfast at Pico Bonito on the terrace with the hummingbirds coming to and fro the feeders as usual. Then it was off to San Pedro Sula for the flight home after a fantastic two weeks birding in Honduras.

Day 10

Thursday 19th November

Our flight landed back in the UK where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!