

Antigua & Tikal, Guatemala

4-9 April 2009



La Gran Plaza at Tikal

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General

This was a family holiday as a result of the school spring break, although as usual I was able to chip in some significant birding at Tikal.

Touristic highlights were

- The old city of Antigua at the base of the classic volcano, especially as it livened up with ceremonial processions during the Holy Week. Quite spectacular!
- The Volcan Pocaya, where we climbed to the glowing and steaming lava streams.
- The ancient Maya ruins at Tikal and Yaxha

Birding highlights were Orange-breasted Falcon, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, Rose-throated Tanager, plus the Tapir that came out at dawn for a drink. Feeding Barred Forest-Falcon and Pheasant Cuckoo were also much enjoyed, with amazingly close-up encounters.

Itinerary

4/4

We left Panama City in the mid morning for a 2 hours flight to Guatemala City. Upon arrival we were punctually met by the driver, who took us to Antigua in less than an hour. We checked in at the centrally located hotel, which was very traditional colonial style. The rest of the afternoon and evening was spent walking the streets, parks and churches in the old city.



5/4

At 6.30 we were picked up for a one hour drive to Volcan Pocaya. Together with a guide we walked for more than an hour up the slopes of the active volcano. The forest got more stunted with altitude and eventually we arrived at the barren lava covered slopes. From there we continued across the dusty lava fields up to a point where we could see open fiery lava coming out of the mountain. In spite of the security distance that was required, it was quite spectacular and well worth the hike. Birdwise there was little of interest, as I had been to similar habitat in this area less than one month previously.



At 12.30 we were back in Antigua and right on time to watch the awesome Holy Week (Easter) procession. The cobbled streets were partly covered with flowers and it was full of people watching the procession. This is the highlight of a visit to Antigua and we were quite satisfied to have witnessed it.



At 15.00 it was time for us to go back to Guatemala City and catch the evening flight to Flores, in the north of Guatemala. The flight was more than 2 hours delayed so we were up for a late arrival at Tikal. When we eventually reached Flores airport, the pre-booked driver met us and one hour later we reached Tikal Jungle Lodge.

6/4

I was up at dawn around 06.00 and birded the area around the gate for a couple of hours. After breakfast we went on the included privately guided tours amongst the ancient Maya ruins. Birdwise I did not add much (especially not any Orange-breasted Falcons), although the forest looked really good. We had lunch back at the lodge and later went out again in search for the Falcon. The closest I got was a very distant view of a falcon perched in a tree near Temple IV.

7/4

This day I had booked some birding together with the local birdguide Luis Oliveros. We spent the full morning amongst the ruins and added a few lifers, although most frustratingly the Falcon remained heard only and we missed it with 5 minutes according to the local guards. The afternoon was spent along the dirt track along the old airstrip and the two small ponds at the end of this track. Before dusk the male Orange-breasted Falcon made a too brief flyby. We stayed out until dark and enjoyed three species of nightjars. Near the lodge we tried to pin down a calling Mottled Owl, but were unsuccessful.



8/4

I spent a couple of pre-dawn hours trying for some owls, and although I came up empty-handed on owls, I was lucky to find a Tapir coming to drink. The final morning was then dedicated to nail down the Falcon, so I went straight for Temple IV and after only 20 minutes the male flew in and landed on the scaffolding. After these walk-away views, I went looking for Black-throated Shrike-Tanager and soon got a response from a splendid male near Temple VI. The hoped for Tody Motmot proved harder. At one known territory I spoked an extremely likely candidate, but it vanished unidentified.

In the afternoon we hired Luis again for a trip to Yaxha ruins. This is another Maya city about 60 km (as the crow flies) away. It took us 1.5 hours to get there, but it was well worth doing. This site is much less crowded, in fact we saw very few other visitors. At sunset we were sat on top of the highest pyramid and had a 360 degree view of the awesome landscape. Upon return to the car-park, I called in a Mottled Owl for great views. The return drive was brightened up by a roadside Northern Potoo and a Gray Fox.

9/4

This morning we were scheduled to leave at dawn for the first morning flight out of Flores. However, with half an hour of day-light, I could not resist the temptation of some night-birding and a last try for Tody Motmot. Neither was successful and by 6.15 we left for the airport. The flight was on time and we then had a four hour waiting in Guatemala City before catching the flight bound for Panama. This flight took us via Managua in Nicaragua.

Weather

The weather was very pleasant. In the highlands at Antigua and Volcan Pocaya it was just a bit on the chilly side at the crack of dawn, but at sunrise the temperatures climbed to warm and comfortable. At Tikal, it was clearly hotter! We just experienced a very few drops of rain, so apparently the rains had not set in yet.

Logistics

Almost all of the logistics were arranged through Cayaya Birding and this can be highly recommended as everything worked like a clock. Knut Eisermann and Claudia Avendaño can be contacted through info@cayaya-birding.com or www.cayaya-birding.com.

Site descriptions

Antigua

World famous old city with colonial style houses and cobbled streets, everything nicely set with a huge classic volcano as the backdrop. Regarded as a must visit place amongst the world's cultural sites. I had visited Antigua on my own less than a month previously, and we decided to pay a visit all of us.

Volcan Pocaya

We had not originally planned to visit Volcan Pocaya, but merely stumbled across the chance of joining a tourist group to get up into the gleaming lava fields. It is slightly more than one hour away from Antigua, southwest of Guatemala City.

Tikal

Tikal is world famous for its Maya ruins. It is certainly an awesome place to visit and for birders it has the additional attraction of staked out Orange-breasted Falcon (breeding on top of one of the ruins) and Ocellated Turkey. There are three lodges situated right at the entrance, which gives easy access to good birding. To get to Tikal, it is easiest to fly to Flores from Guatemala City. There is also the possibility of driving, either from Guatemala City (very long drive) or from Belize City (also quite long). There are lots of good trails and many of them are not at all crowded with tourists. For more dry forest birds, it is worth walking down the old airstrip to a couple of small ponds.



Yaxha Maya ruins

Yaxha ruins are situated about 1.5 hours drive from Tikal. This area is much less visited than Tikal and thus more relaxed. It is certainly worth visiting as a complement to Tikal, if not because of the possibility to stay on top of the ruins for the sunset.

Birds

Great Tinamou, *Tinamus major percautus*

Two heard at Tikal.

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*

One at Tikal and four at Yaxha.

Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*

Two at Tikal.

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, *Tigrisoma mexicanum*

One seen twice at the pond near the gate at Tikal.



Bare-throated Tiger-Heron

Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus brasiliensis*

Many around Antigua, Volcan Pacaya and Tikal.

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura ssp*

Many at Tikal.

King Vulture, *Sarcoramphus papa*

One at Tikal and two at Yaxha Maya Area.

Plumbeous Kite, *Ictinia plumbea*

Two pairs at Tikal.

Roadside Hawk, *Buteo magnirostris conspectus*

Two heard at Tikal.

Laughing Falcon, *Herpetotheres cachinnans chapmani*

One heard at Tikal.

Barred Forest-Falcon, *Micrastur ruficollis guerilla*

One seen nicely when it came in to playback at Tikal and another bird gave super views when it attended an antswarm.



Barred Forest-Falcon at an ant-swarm

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius tropicalis*

One near Antigua.

Bat Falcon, *Falco rufigularis petoensis*

One pair at Temple VI at Tikal and one bird at Yaxha Maya Area.



Bat Falcon, the little brother of the two...

Orange-breasted Falcon, *Falco deiroleucus*

Bird of the trip, but it took longer than expected to properly nail it down. Eventually I saw the male on the last morning at Tikal, after hearing it once, dipping it once with five minutes and seen a too quick flyby. The female was sitting on eggs in Temple IV. The male I saw flew in about 6.50 and landed on the scaffolding, where it offered mega walk-away views.



Orange-breasted Falcon, significantly larger and more powerful than Bat Falcon

Plain Chachalaca, *Ortalis vetula pallidiventris*

Two in the forest and two at the hotel at Tikal.

Crested Guan, *Penelope purpurascens purpurascens*

Two at Tikal.



Crested Guan

Great Curassow, *Crax rubra rubra*

One male at Tikal.



Great Curassow, just leaving the hair-dresser

Ocellated Turkey, *Meleagris ocellata*

About 20 on the grassy areas at the gate at Tikal. This must be the easiest place in the world to see this ugly wart-covered bird.



Ocellated Turkey, not sure if it is stunning or completely dreadful

Limpkin, *Aramus guarauna dolosus*

One at the pond near the gate at Tikal.



Limpkin

Ruddy Crake, *Laterallus ruber*

Two heard at the pond near the gate at Tikal.

Gray-necked Wood-Rail, *Aramides cajanea albiventris*

At least three regularly walking around on the grassy areas at the gate at Tikal.



Gray-necked Wood-Rail, on the run

- Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus cachinnans*
One at the pond near the gate at Tikal.
- American Coot, *Fulica americana americana*
A few between Tikal and Flores.
- Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularia*
One at Tikal.
- Scaled Pigeon, *Patagioenas speciosa*
A few at Tikal.
- Short-billed Pigeon, *Patagioenas nigrirostris*
A few heard at Tikal.
- White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica asiatica*
Many in Antigua.
- Inca Dove, *Columbina inca*
One in Antigua.
- Gray-headed Dove, *Leptotila plumbeiceps plumbeiceps*
One heard and seen at Tikal.
- Olive-throated Parakeet, *Aratinga nana astec*
Four at Tikal.
- Brown-hooded Parrot, *Pionopsitta haematotis haematotis*
A few at Tikal.
- White-crowned Parrot, *Pionus senilis*
Several at Tikal.
- White-fronted Parrot, *Amazona albifrons nana*
Several at Tikal.
- Red-lored Parrot, *Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*
Many at Tikal, where it was the most frequently seen Amazona.
- Mealy Parrot, *Amazona farinosa guatemalae*
Many at Tikal.



Mealy Parrot

- Squirrel Cuckoo, *Piaya cayana thermophila*
Two at Tikal.
- Groove-billed Ani, *Crotophaga sulcirostris*
One near Yaxha Maya Area.
- Pheasant Cuckoo, *Dromococcyx phasianellus*
One was seen catching insects at point blank distance at the old airstrip at Tikal. It was also heard both at dusk and dawn.



Pheasant Cuckoo, feeding on the forest floor

Mottled Owl, *Ciccaba virgata centralis*

One was heard several times near the pond at the gate at Tikal, but never showed. Another more well-behaved bird was seen well at Yaxha Maya Area.



Mottled Owl

Northern Potoo, *Nyctibius jamaicensis mexicanus*

One was perched on a fence-post, when we drove back from Yaxha Maya Area to Tikal in the dark.

Lesser Nighthawk, *Chordeiles acutipennis littoralis*

One at the gate at Tikal and two at the old airstrip at Tikal.

Pauraque, *Nyctidromus albicollis yucatanensis*

Several at the old airstrip at Tikal.



Mr and Mrs Pauraque

Yucatan Poorwill, *Nyctiphrynus yucatanicus*

2-3 heard and seen twice at the old airstrip at Tikal.

Vaux's Swift, *Chaetura vauxi* ssp

Five at Volcan Pocaya and several daily at Tikal.

Western Long-tailed Hermit, *Phaethornis longirostris longirostris*

Two at Tikal.

Stripe-throated Hermit, *Phaethornis striigularis saturatus*

One at Tikal.

Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, *Campylopterus curvipennis pampa*

Two at Tikal.

Green-breasted Mango, *Anthracothorax prevostii prevostii*

One at Tikal.

Canivet's Emerald, *Chlorostilbon canivetii canivetii*

One female at Tikal.

Blue-throated Goldentail, *Hylocharis eliciae eliciae*

Two at Tikal.

White-eared Hummingbird, *Hylocharis leucotis leucotis*

Two at Volcan Pocaya.

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, *Amazilia tzacatl tzacatl*

Three at Tikal.

White-bellied Emerald, *Agyrtria candida candida*

A total of five at Tikal.

Purple-crowned Fairy, *Heliathryx barroti*

Two at Tikal.

Black-headed Trogon, *Trogon melanocephalus melanocephalus*

Two heard at Tikal.

Violaceous Trogon, *Trogon violaceus braccatus*
Several at Tikal.

Collared Trogon, *Trogon collaris puella*
One heard at Tikal.

Slaty-tailed Trogon, *Trogon massena massena*
Three at Tikal.



Slaty-tailed Trogon

Green Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle Americana septentrionalis*
One at the pond near the gate at Tikal.

American Pygmy Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle aenea stictopectera*
One at the pond near the gate at Tikal.



American Pygmy Kingfisher

Blue-crowned Motmot, *Momotus momota goldmani*
Several heard and seen at Tikal.

Rufous-tailed Jacamar, *Galbula ruficauda melanogenia*
One at Tikal.

Emerald Toucanet, *Aulacorhynchus prasinus virescens*
One at Tikal.

Collared Aracari, *Pteroglossus torquatus erythrozonus*
Several at Tikal.



Collared Aracari

- Keel-billed Toucan, *Ramphastos sulfuratus sulfuratus*
 Several at Tikal and Yaxha Maya Area.
- Golden-fronted Woodpecker, *Melanerpes aurifrons dubius*
 Many at Tikal.
- Golden-olive Woodpecker, *Piculus rubiginosus yucatanensis*
 A few heard at Tikal.
- Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, *Celeus castaneus*
 Four at Tikal.
- Pale-billed Woodpecker, *Campephilus guatemalensis guatemalensis*
 Three at Tikal.



Pale-billed Woodpecker

- Plain Xenops, *Xenops minutus mexicanus*
 Two at Tikal.
- Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, *Dendrocincla anabatina anabatina*
 Two at Tikal.



Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, attending an ant-swarm

- Ruddy Woodcreeper, *Dendrocincla homochroa homochroa*
 One at Tikal.
- Olivaceous Woodcreeper, *Sittasomus griseicapillus sylvioides*
 Two at Tikal.
- Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, *Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae sanctithomae*
 One at Tikal.
- Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus flavigaster eburneirostris*
 One at Tikal.
- Barred Antshrike, *Thamnophilus doliatus* ssp
 One pair at Tikal.
- Mexican Antthrush, *Formicarius monileger* ssp
 One seen and a few heard at Tikal.
- White-collared Manakin, *Manacus candei*
 One female at Tikal.
- Red-capped Manakin, *Pipra mentalis mentalis*
 One female at Tikal.
- Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet, *Ornithion semiflavum*
 One first seen and than called in at Tikal.

Greenish Elaenia, *Myiopagis viridicata placens*

One at Tikal.

Yellow-bellied Elaenia, *Elaenia flavogaster subpagana*

One at Volcan Pocaya.

Northern Bentbill, *Oncostoma cinereigulare*

A few at Tikal.



Northern Bentbill

Slate-headed Tody-Tyrant, *Poecilatriccus sylvia schistaceiceps*

One at Tikal.

Eye-ringed Flatbill, *Rhynchocyclus brevirostris brevirostris*

Three at Tikal.

Stub-tailed Spadebill, *Platyrinchus cancrminus ssp*

One heard at Tikal.

Northern Royal-Flycatcher, *Onychorhynchus mexicanus mexicanus*

One heard at Tikal.

Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, *Myiobius sulphureipygius sulphureipygius*

One nest-building at Tikal.

Tropical Pewee, *Contopus cinereus brachytarsus*

One probable at Tikal.

Bright-rumped Attila, *Attila spadiceus flammulatus*

One seen a frequently heard at Tikal and Yaxha Maya Area.

Rufous Mourner, *Rhytipterna holerythra holerythra*

Two at Tikal.

Yucatan Flycatcher, *Myiarchus yucatanenses yucatanensis*

One seen singing and calling at Tikal.

Dusky-capped Flycatcher, *Myiarchus tuberculifer ssp*

One at Volcan Pocaya and several at Tikal.

Brown-crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus tyrannulus cooperi*

At least one at Tikal. Several *Myiarchus* left unidentified.

Great Kiskadee, *Pitangus sulphuratus guatemalensis*

One at Tikal.

Boat-billed Flycatcher, *Megarynchus pitangua mexicanus*

One at Tikal.

Social Flycatcher, *Myiozetetes similis texensis*

Many at Tikal.

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, *Myiodynastes luteiventris*

One at Tikal.

Tropical Kingbird, *Tyrannus melancholicus satrapa*

A few at Tikal.

Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus*

One at Tikal.

Thrush-like Schiffornis, *Schiffornis turdinus veraepacis*

One seen and two more heard at Tikal.

Masked Tityra, *Tityra semifasciata personata*

One at Tikal and two at Yaxha Maya Area.

Black-crowned Tityra, *Tityra inquisitor fraserii*

One at Tikal.

Purple Martin, *Progne subis ssp*

15 at Tikal.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx serripennis fulvipennis*
Five in Antigua.

Ridgway's Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx ridgwayi stuarti*
Many at Tikal.



Ridgway's Rough-winged Swallow, nice close-up view with the diagnostic white loral spots

Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* ssp
Three at Volcan Pocaya.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*
One at Volcan Pocaya.

Gray Silky-flycatcher, *Ptilogonys cinereus molybdophanes*
Five at Volcan Pocaya.

Spot-breasted Wren, *Thryothorus maculipectus canobrunneus*
One at Tikal.

White-bellied Wren, *Uropsila leucogastra brachyura*
A few at Tikal.

Blue-and-white Mockingbird, *Melanotis hypoleucus*
One heard at Volcan Pocaya.

Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis guatemalae*
One at Volcan Pocaya.

Brown-backed Solitaire, *Myadestes occidentalis oberholseri*
Three at Volcan Pocaya.

Wood Thrush, *Hylocichla mustelina*
One at Tikal.

Clay-colored Robin, *Turdus grayi grayi*
Many around Tikal.

Rufous-collared Robin, *Turdus rufitorques*
One at Volcan Pocaya.

Long-billed Gnatwren, *Ramphocaenus melanurus ardeleo*
One at Tikal.

Brown Jay, *Cyanocorax morio cyanogenys*
Many at Tikal.

Bushy-crested Jay, *Cyanocorax melanocyaneus melanocyaneus*
One at Volcan Pocaya.

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus* ssp
Many in Antigua.

White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus* ssp
Three at Tikal.

Yellow-throated Vireo, *Vireo flavifrons*
Two at Tikal.

Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus olivaceus*
A few at Tikal.

Tawny-crowned Greenlet, *Hylophilus ochraceiceps ochraceiceps*
One at Tikal.

Lesser Greenlet, *Hylophilus decurtatus decurtatus*
One at Yaxha Maya Area. More were probably heard at Tikal.

Blue-winged Warbler, *Vermivora pinus*
One at Tikal.

Golden-winged Warbler, *Vermivora chrysoptera*
One at Yaxha Maya Area.

- Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina*
Many at Tikal.
- Yellow Warbler, *Dendroica petechia* ssp
Two at Tikal.
- Chestnut-sided Warbler, *Dendroica pensylvanica*
One at Yaxha Maya Area.
- Magnolia Warbler, *Dendroica magnolia*
Two at Tikal.
- Black-throated Green Warbler, *Dendroica virens*
Two at Tikal.
- Townsend's Warbler, *Dendroica townsendi*
Two at Volcan Pocaya.
- Black-and-white Warbler, *Mniotilta varia*
Two at Tikal.
- American Redstart, *Setophaga rutinilla*
One at Tikal.
- Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapilla* ssp
A few at Tikal.
- Northern Waterthrush, *Seiurus noveboracensis*
A few at Tikal.
- Kentucky Warbler, *Oporornis formosus*
A few at Tikal.
- Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas occidentalis*
One at Tikal.
- Hooded Warbler, *Wilsonia citrine*
A few at Tikal.
- Wilson's Warbler, *Wilsonia pusilla* ssp
One at Tikal and one at Yaxha Maya Area.
- Yellow-breasted Chat, *Icteria virens* ssp
One at Tikal.
- Common Bush-Tanager, *Chlorospingus ophthalmicus postocularis*
One at Volcan Pocaya.
- Gray-headed Tanager, *Eucometis penicillata pallida*
One at Tikal.
- Black-throated Shrike-Tanager, *Lanio aurantius*
Eventually I got response from one gorgeous male on my last morning at Tikal.
- Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, *Habia rubica rubicoides*
Several at Tikal.
- Rose-throated Tanager, *Piranga roseogularis tincta*
One female showing all the characteristics and responding to the call in near the old airstrip at Tikal.



Female Rose-throated Tanager, a restricted range species

- Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra rubra*
Three at Tikal.
- Yellow-winged Tanager, *Thraupis abbas*
A few at Tikal.
- Scrub Euphonia, *Euphonia affinis affinis*
One at Tikal.

Yellow-throated Euphonia, *Euphonia hirundinacea hirundinacea*
Several at Tikal.

Elegant Euphonia, *Euphonia elegantissima elegantissima*
One at Volcan Pocaya and two at Tikal.

Red-legged Honeycreeper, *Cyanerpes cyaneus carneipes*
A few at Tikal.

White-collared Seedeater, *Sporophila torqueola morelleti*
A few at Tikal.

Green-backed Sparrow, *Arremonops chloronotus chloronotus*
A pair at Tikal.



Green-backed Sparrow

Blue Bunting, *Cyanocompsa parellina parellina*
A total of about five at Tikal.



Blue Bunting

Blue Grosbeak, *Passerina caerulea* ssp
One male at Yaxha Maya Area.

Indigo Bunting, *Passerina cyanea*
Many at Tikal.

Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris pallidior*
One at Tikal.

Melodious Blackbird, *Dives dives*
Many at Tikal.

Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus mexicanus*
Common around Guatemala City, Antigua and at Tikal.

Bronzed Cowbird, *Molothrus aeneus aeneus*
Two at Volcan Pocaya.

Giant Cowbird, *Molothrus oryzivorus impacifica*
One at Tikal.

Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*
A few at Tikal.

Orchard Oriole, *Icterus spurius spurius*
Many at Tikal.

Black-cowled Oriole, *Icterus prothemelas prothemelas*
Two at Tikal.

Montezuma Oropendola, *Gymnostinops montezuma*
Many at Tikal.



Montezuma Oropendola

Mammals

Mantled Howler

Commonly seen and heard at Tikal and Yaxha Maya Area.

Central American Spider Monkey

Commonly seen at Tikal.

Gray Fox

One ran away from us along the entrance road to Tikal in the late evening.

Tapir

One came right out in the open at dawn at the water-hole at the far end of the old airstrip at Tikal.



Tapir, record shot...