Guatemala – A Conservation Journey
With Community Cloud Forest Conservation & Audubon Naturalist Society
October 3-11, 2020
Leaders: Rob Cahill and David Farner

Our trip to Guatemala will combine the opportunity to study the bird life of Guatemala while learning about the work of the Community Cloud Forest Conservation organization. We’ll take some time to participate in projects designed to protect cloud forest habitat through restoration and helping to improve the lives of local Q’eqchi’ Maya people.

Although our emphasis will be on birding in Guatemala, our journey will allow plenty of opportunities to discover the natural history of the Central Highlands of Guatemala while learning about Q’eqchi Maya culture. Among the bird species we’ll hope to see are resplendent quetzal, blue and white mockingbird, ocellated quail, golden-cheeked warbler, and Guatemalan tyrannulet.

The following represents a planned itinerary. Note that weather conditions may cause changes and new opportunities may arise. Details and specifics may be changed at the leaders’ discretion for any reason that they determine to be in the best interests of the group.

Saturday, Oct. 3, Day 1: Flights into Guatemala City
Guatemala City is about 5 hours of flying time from Washington D.C. airports. Arrivals around midday will allow us to head north to our overnight destination at Hotel Posada Montana del Quetzal with a stop along the way along in the Motagua Valley. Here we may see the russet-crowned motmot and white-throated magpie-jay.

Sunday, Oct. 4, Day 2: Baja Verapaz
Before sunrise we’ll make a short drive to Los Ranchitos private reserve where we hope to see resplendent quetzal as well as emerald toucanet, unicolored jay and black-headed and spotted...
nightingale thrush. We’ll also visit the Chicoy wetlands where we’ll look for ruddy crake, white-throated flycatcher and rufous collared robin. At the end of the day we’ll head back to Posada del Quetzal where it’s possible to see resplendent quetzal on the hotel grounds.

**Monday, Oct. 5, Day 3: Baja Verapaz**
We’ll begin our day at the upper Salama-Pantin Road where our target bird is the belted flycatcher. In the afternoon we’ll continue through the Central Highlands to Finca Rubel Chaim, home to Community Cloud Forest Conservation. Lodging for the next 5 nights will be here at CCFC’s lodge.

**Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Oct. 6-9, Days 4 to 7: Finca Rubel Chaim - Home of Community Cloud Forest Conservation**
Rob and Tara Cahill, Directors of Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC), are our hosts for the next 5 days. Situated in the Central highlands adjacent to cloud forest, CCFC works with the Q’eqchi’ Maya community to alleviate poverty and to protect forests through education, reforestation, sustainable development, leadership training, and ecological improvements to agriculture. CCFC believes that holistic human / community development through education and capacity building is the key to conservation and development in Guatemala’s central highlands. Education, especially for young women, is key to building peace in this region.

Our days here will allow us to learn about CCFC’s work, meet local Q’eqchi Maya school children and study cloud forest ecology and bird life. Among the possible work projects we’ll assist with include reforestation (tree planting); agroecology planting; and working with Maya youth as they learn about birds of the cloud forest. In addition there will be opportunities to participate in other activities that may include visiting the vibrant local market; a night hike/owl prowl; visiting a Maya archeological site; hands-on traditional Q’eqchi” cooking; visiting an orchid plantation; and a visit to Q’eqchi’ Maya village and school.

You’ll always want to have your binoculars and camera ready. The bird list from Finca Rubel Chaim is extensive and includes Guatemalan tyrannulet, slender sheartail, azure-crowned hummingbird, ocellated quail, ferruginous and Northern (Guatemalan) pygmy-owls, highland guan, bushy-crested jay and many more.

We’ll also have plenty of opportunities to explore the trails on site as well as short excursions to nearby birding spots such as Laguna Chichoj, home to spotted rail, ruddy crake, white-throated flycatcher and gray-crowned yellowthroat.
Please note that Finca Rubel Chaim is “off the grid”, with electricity supplied by solar and hydro generation. Conserving electricity is vital here. Wi-Fi is not available. (see Important Information page)

Saturday, Oct. 10, Day 8: Finca Rubel Chaim to Guatemala City
In the morning we’ll say goodbye to the cloud forest and drive to Guatemala City. Possible stops along the way include the pine-oak forest of Rio Escondido with possible sightings of the hepatic tanager and painted redstart, and the Morazan back road with the Amazon kingfisher, orange-fronted parakeet and Altamira Oriole. Overnight in Guatemala City.

Sunday, Oct. 11, Day 9:
We’ll have time for a morning walk in the city before traveling a short distance to the airport for mid-day flights home.

Leaders:

**Rob Cahill** is Director of Community Cloud Forest Conservation and one of the eBird coordinators for Guatemala. Rob began birding while growing up in California. He and his family have resided in Guatemala since 2001, and he has led or co-led birding forays throughout Guatemala. Since coming to Guatemala, Rob and his wife Tara have specialized in environmental education and agroecology in the Q’eqchi’ Maya context.

**David Farner** works for Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation and is a past Senior Naturalist for ANS. He has led or co-led ANS Nature Travel trips to Nova Scotia, Maine, Quebec and Honduras. He first visited Guatemala on a trip similar to this in 2018 and has since volunteered to help raise funds for awareness of CCFC’s work and birding in Guatemala.