

Belize - part1

Gail and I visited the small Central-American country of Belize in October 2007 for a week. It is the only English-speaking country there, though Central American Spanish is also used throughout. There are a few minority languages as well. It used to be the colony called British Honduras. Its capital was moved from Belize City on the eastern coast to the centrally-located Belmopan, which is less vulnerable to occasional hurricanes.



The next map shows in white lines the small network of major roads, usually narrow 2-lane, though a few are not paved. The yellow bar at the bottom is 50 kilometers long, for scale.



Off the coast is a major collection of barrier reefs and small islands. They were said to be the second best in the world, though there are recent suggestions of update to first best with the deteriorations in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. We have now visited both reefs twice.

The gray areas are open savannah habitat with medium-sized trees or agricultural areas. The country is self-sufficient in most food items. It is also very protective against the global banana disease that is harming other countries. The dark green areas are solid tropical forests of tall trees on usually higher terrain, providing needed habitat for much wildlife. National Parks preserve much of this tropical rain forest, similarly to those in Costa Rica.

Gail and I chose a vacation in Belize in partial celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary on 21 December. We selected a duration of 10 days, 9 nights, spanning 10 to 19 December, just before the more expensive annual tourist season. Our general route was similar to 2007, being restricted to the limited road network. Instead of the nice Hopkins Beach in the middle of the coast, we spent two nights at the more southern Placencia, with a short boat trip to an off-shore snorkelling area. Instead of the small reef island of Caye Caulker in the northeast, we visited San Pedro on the large island of Ambergris Caye, slightly farther north. Inland in the central and western parts we visited some former and new locations. This and the rest of this Trip Report series for Belize will show by lots of photos some of what we enjoyed.

In most countries the immigration forms ask where foreigners are going to stay for their first night, expecting a hotel name and address or a residential address. We truthfully put down Belize Zoo, puzzling the immigration agent who might have been thinking of some cage. I showed her my contact details. She was not aware that accommodation was available across the road at the Tropical Education Center (TEC) of the Belize Zoo.





Pond House at TEC

We were assigned to the Pond House, reachable by a board walk. Cattle Egrets rested overnight in the trees of a small nearby island in the pond. A crocodile supposedly was below in the water.

The main building housed the office/receptionist in the lower right, dining center in the lower left, and library and classrooms



Main TEC building

above. From 6 to 7 AM I went on a walk within the TEC with two local bird experts and saw 23 species, photographing many of them. During the next hour Gail and I together saw many of the same species plus some additional ones.

We had visited the Belize Zoo twelve years ago and were impressed, though we did not have time to explore all of it. We left the TEC area, paid the zoo entrance fee, and spent the rest of the morning enjoying the Zoo. It is within the outlined square in this satellite image. As can be seen, it is tightly packed with tropical rain forest. The cages and pathways are nearly invisible, so the animals live in a nearly natural habitat.



Satellite view of Belize Zoo



Sleeping jaguar



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

Wild birds and animals were dropping into some enclosures to steal free food. Chachalaca birds and Brown Jays grabbed some of the Tapir food for lunch. Agouti (large rodents) were running free in the zoo.



Tapir



Spider Monkey



Crocodile



Northern Waterthrush



Yellow-headed Parrot



< Summer Tanager male



Ruddy Ground-Dove



Harpy Eagle



Keel-billed Toucan



turtles



Coatimundi



Twelve years ago we had lunch at the Cheers Restaurant along the main highway on our return to the coast. We liked it then. So after the Zoo visit we had lunch there again and some bird-watching. It was only a few miles to the west, seemingly in the middle of nowhere (no nearby towns). On 17 December the next week we stopped there again for more birds and an early lunch, getting much better food than at the airport, our next destination then. Rufous-tailed



Rufous-tailed Hummingbird

Hummingbirds were drinking from feeders only a foot from our faces. Great-tailed Grackle >



Clay-colored Thrush

Russet-naped Wood-Rail

From there we drove to Belmopan and then southeastward along the Hummingbird Highway to near the coast. We stopped along the way for some more birds.



Collared Aracari



Melodious Blackbird



female Orchard Oriole tasting an orange



Roadside Hawk

Our destination was the Bokawina Rainforest Resort. There we were eagerly welcomed and had dinner, for a pleasant end to our busy day of 11 December.

Dr. Ed Holroyd
27 December 2019



Red-legged Honeycreeper



Tropical Mockingbird