**The World’s Best Birds and Where to See Them by Month**

The very nature of the earth and its ecosystems allows the traveller to experience memorable wildlife encounters all year round and none more so than birds. Apart from the oppositive breeding cycles of the two hemispheres, the spring and autumn periods witness migratory behaviour on a vast scale. At least 4,000 species of bird are regular migrants. That’s about 40 percent of the world’s total. (Although this number will likely increase as we learn more about the habits of birds in tropical regions.) In the right place, and at the right time, the birdwatcher can enjoy a multitude of different species as they pass through well-known hotspots. However, there are parts of the earth that are chockfull of birds at any time of the year due to their geographical location. This guide will illustrate the best places to see the world’s most charismatic birds during any month of the year.

**December – Pink-footed Goose**

**North Norfolk, England**

The shingle banks of RSPB Snettisham with extensive mudflats extending seawards are a safe roosting site for 40,000 Pink-footed Geese, which can be seen in the skies overhead at dawn and dusk after their daily feeding forays into the hinterland of rough grazing fields. Whether it is wild geese streaming across a Technicolor sunrise, or waders swirling across the mudflats as the tide rolls in, Snettisham is all about spectacular moments and breathtaking grandeur. These ‘Pink-foots’ truly put on a show to rival anything on earth.

Other possible sightings: (Dark-bellied) Brent Goose, Peregrine Falcon, Red Knot, Dunlin, Pied Avocet, Shore Lark, Twite.

RSPB Snettisham (01485 542689; www.rspb.org.uk/snettisham) is free and open every day of the year. Dinner, bed and breakfast at nearby Congham Hall (01485 600250; http://www.conghamhallhotel.co.uk) starts from £199.

**January – Wandering Albatross**

**South Georgia, Antarctica**

The remote island of South Georgia, east of the Falkland Islands and two days by ship, rises spectacularly to almost 3,000 metres at Mount Paget. It supports some very special birds including breeding colonies of Wandering Albatross. This legendary seabird has the biggest wingspan of any living species – perfect for the vast distances they travel on their polar peregrinations. They are also famously long-lived; rarely breeding until they are 11 years old.

Other possible sightings: Penguins, albatrosses, petrels, storm petrels, diving petrels, South Georgia Shag, South Georgia Pintail and South Georgia Pipit.

Quark Expeditions (quarkexpeditions.com) have an all-inclusive 23-day ‘Crossing the Circle’ tour via the Falklands and South Georgia to Antarctica from £9,400 per person, including a charter flight from Buenos Aires (£540 per person), leaving on 30th December 2016.

**February – Helmeted Hornbill**

**Taman Negara, Malaysia**

The largest tract of pristine lowland forest left on mainland Southeast Asia lies within the huge Taman Negara National Park. Hence, it is one of the finest birdwatching sites in the region with over 350 recorded species. Hornbills abound here - a sure sign of the forest’s unspoilt state. The critically endangered Helmeted Hornbill is an amazing-looking bird with highly unusual feeding and mating behaviour.

Other possible sightings: Pheasants including Great Argus, Crested Argus and Malayan Peacock-Pheasant, pittas including Garnet, Banded, Blue-winged and Giant, hornbills, Rail-babbler, woodpeckers, babblers.

Audley Travel (audleytravel.com) have an 18-day Grand tour of the Malaysian Peninsula from £3,390 per person. Price includes economy class scheduled return flights, accommodation, meals, ground transportation in Malaysia, services of guides and Audley representatives.

**March - Oilbird**

**Asa Wright Centre, Trinidad and Tobago**

This former plantation of 270 acres is the most popular base from which to birdwatch all the sites on Trinidad. The world-renowned lodge, complete with feeders which attract many birds including ten species of hummingbird, overlooks the Arima Valley in the mountains of the northern range. The centre is surrounded by forest and Oilbirds (an extraordinary nocturnal, echo-locating, fruit-eating troglodyte of a bird) are present in caves in the grounds.

Other possible sightings: Bearded Bellbird, White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins, Channel-billed Toucan, Chestnut Woodpecker, Tufted Coquette and Red-legged Honeycreeper.

Ornitholidays (ornitholidays.co.uk) have a fortnight’s ‘Trinidad & Tobago at Leisure’ tour from £4,009 per person, leaving on 13th March 2017. The tour includes all flights, meals, accommodation (single room supplement £700), transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

**April - Resplendent Quetzal**

**Monteverde, Costa Rica**

Monteverde is one of the prime birdwatching locations in Costa Rica and Central America as a whole. The system of reserves totals about 20,000 hectares, straddling the Cordillera de Tilarán, with a maximum altitude of around 1,850 metres. A good trail network accesses superb habitat, where more than 450 bird species have been recorded. Despite this huge richness of species, there is no doubting Montverde’s star bird - the Resplendent Quetzal - a remarkable cultural icon once worshipped by both Mayans and Aztecs.

Other possible sightings: Three-wattled Bellbird, Coppery-headed Emerald, Violet Sabrewing, Emerald Toucanet, Black Guan and Prong-billed Barbet.

Naturetrek (naturetrek.co.uk) has a 15-day birdwatching holiday to Costa Rica from £3,995 per person departing on 2nd April 2016. The price includes flights, accommodation in comfortable hotels and lodges, and meals.

**May - Wallcreeper**

**High Tatras, Slovakia**

The beautiful and isolated Tatra Mountains in the snow-capped Slovakian Carpathians rise to 2,655 metres at Gerlachovsky Stit, near the border with Poland. The extensive forest, steep rocky outcrops and alpine pastures support a typical Central European upland fauna, topped by Wallcreeper. The cliff-inhabiting Wallcreeper, more lepidopterous than avian, is a big prize for any skilful and patient birdwatcher.

Other possible sightings: Black, Syrian, White-backed, Grey-headed and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Tengmalm’s, Eurasian Pygmy and Eurasian Eagle Owls, Spotted Nutcracker, Western Capercaillie and Alpine Accentor.

Lanius Bird Tours (laniusbirdtours.co.uk) have an eight-day ‘Owls & Woodpeckers’ tour leaving on 29th April 2016. Priced at £1,200 per person, the tour includes all flights, all ground transport once in Slovakia, a week’s full board accommodation (single room supplement £100), guiding services and entrance fees.

**June – Philippine Eagle**

**Kitanglad Mountains, Philippines**

The mountains in north Mindanao rise to nearly 3,000 metres and support remnant forests where a number of extremely rare birds occur. Most of the Mindanao montane specialists are present on Mount Kitanglad and this is the best place to see the magnificent Philippine Eagle. A flagship species for a severely threatened ecosystem (cultivation is progressively eating away at the priceless forests of Kitanglad), the critically endangered Philippine Eagle is one of the world’s largest birds of prey. Its huge bill enables it to tackle medium-sized mammals, including the occasional monkey.

Other possible sightings: Bukidnon Woodcock, Giant Scops Owl, Montane Racket-tail, Apo Sunbird and Apo Myna.

Sunbird (sunbirdtours.co.uk) have a three-week tour to the Philippines running in June 2017, priced at £5,020 per person including flights (single room supplement £520).

**July – Long-tailed Ground Roller**

**Spiny Forest, Madagascar**

The Long-tailed Ground Roller is a unique bird confined to one of the most astonishing habitats on the planet and considered by birdwatchers to be one of the world's most elusive birds. The coastal town of Toliara in southwest Madagascar is surrounded by lagoons, mudflats, freshwater marshes and, most importantly, bizarre *Didierea madagascariensis* thickets. These huge trees sprout from the sandy soil, giving an unearthly feel to the place.

Other possible sightings: Subdesert Mesite, couas including Crested, Red-capped, Giant, Running and Verreaux’s, vangas including Sickle-billed, Lafresnaye’s, Chabert and Red-tailed, Archbold’s Newtonia.

Birdquest (birdquest-tours.com) has a 12-day ‘Best of Madagascar’ tour, leaving on 26th July 2016, priced at £3,180 per person. Price includes all transportation (including specified flights inside Madagascar), accommodation (single room supplement £385), meals, entrance fees and leader services.

**August – Snowy Owl**

**Churchill, Canada**

The frontier town of Churchill lies in the transition zone between tundra and taiga. It is one of the few conurbations on the planet where Polar Bears are found ambling down the high street. The feline-faced Snowy Owl is another great white hunter found in these icy environs. Unlike most other owls, Snowy Owls are mainly diurnal hunters. They are highly nomadic and their movements are tied to the abundance of their favourite prey - lemmings.

Other possible sightings: Ross’s Gull, 15 species of breeding wader including Hudsonian Godwit, Spruce Grouse, Smith’s Longspur.

Wildlife Worldwide (wildlifeworldwide.com) has a 9-day ‘Canada’s Big Five’ tour, departing on 2nd August 2016, priced from £5,295 per person. Included in the package is a week’s accommodation (single supplement £710), most meals, transfers and guided activities.

**September - Greater Flamingo**

**Rift Valley Lakes, Kenya**

‘The Pink Lakes’ would be a suitable alternative moniker for these saline lakes northwest of Nairobi, for they are often covered in a shimmering pink spectacle of hundreds of thousands of these rosy-coloured birds. The flamingos of the Rift Valley have been attracting tourists for over half a century. Their bent bills allow them to feed on small organisms and it is these shrimplike crustaceans that are responsible for the flamingos’ salmon colouring.

Other possible sightings: Lesser Flamingo, Great White Pelican, African Spoonbill, waders, ducks, African Fish Eagle, hornbills including Eastern Yellow-billed, Jackson’s and Hemprich’s.

Sarus Bird Tours (sarusbirdtours.co.uk) have a 10-day tour of the Rift Valley from £2,850 per person. Price includes all flights (both external and internal), most meals, all ground arrangements, accommodation and the services of leaders.

**October - Marvellous Spatuletail**

**Abra Patricia, Peru**

The amazing Marvellous Spatuletail is a very rare hummingbird with a wonderful mobile tail. The species is unique among birds in having only four tail feathers, which can be moved independently to boot. These remarkable ‘spatules’ are frantically waved by the male, as he attempts to impress a female during his hovering display flight. To stand a chance of glimpsing a male showing off his astonishing tail feathers, one must explore the epiphyte-laden canopy of the cloud-forest near Abra Patricia in Northern Peru.

Other possible sightings: Royal Sunangel, Long-whiskered Owlet, Lulu’s Tody-Flycatcher and dozens of species of tanager.

Heatherlea (heatherlea.co.uk) have a 10-day tour of Northern Peru, from £4,295 per person, leaving on 2nd October 2016. Price includes accommodation (single supplement £190), food and return flights between Amsterdam and Lima.

**November - Blue Bird-of-Paradise**

**Tari Valley, Papua New Guinea**

The Tari Valley claims to be the best birding area in Papua New Guinea, where no less than 15 birds-of-paradise have been recorded. Most of these great birds, including the gloriously iridescent Blue Bird-of-Paradise that hangs upside down to display, inhabit the mossy oak and southern beech forests of Mount Kerewa and the fringes of the intensively cultivated Tari Valley, home of the Huli Tribe, the ‘Wigmen’ who decorate their wigs with birds-of-paradise plumes.

Other possible sightings: Birds-of-paradise including Superb, Raggiana and King of Saxony and Princess Stephanie’s and Ribbon-tailed Astrapias, bowerbirds.

WildWings (wildwings.co.uk) have an 11-day tour of Papua New Guinea from £4,899 per person based on two persons travelling together (single supplement £929). Price includes ground transport, guiding services, accommodation, most meals, domestic flights and river boat trips.