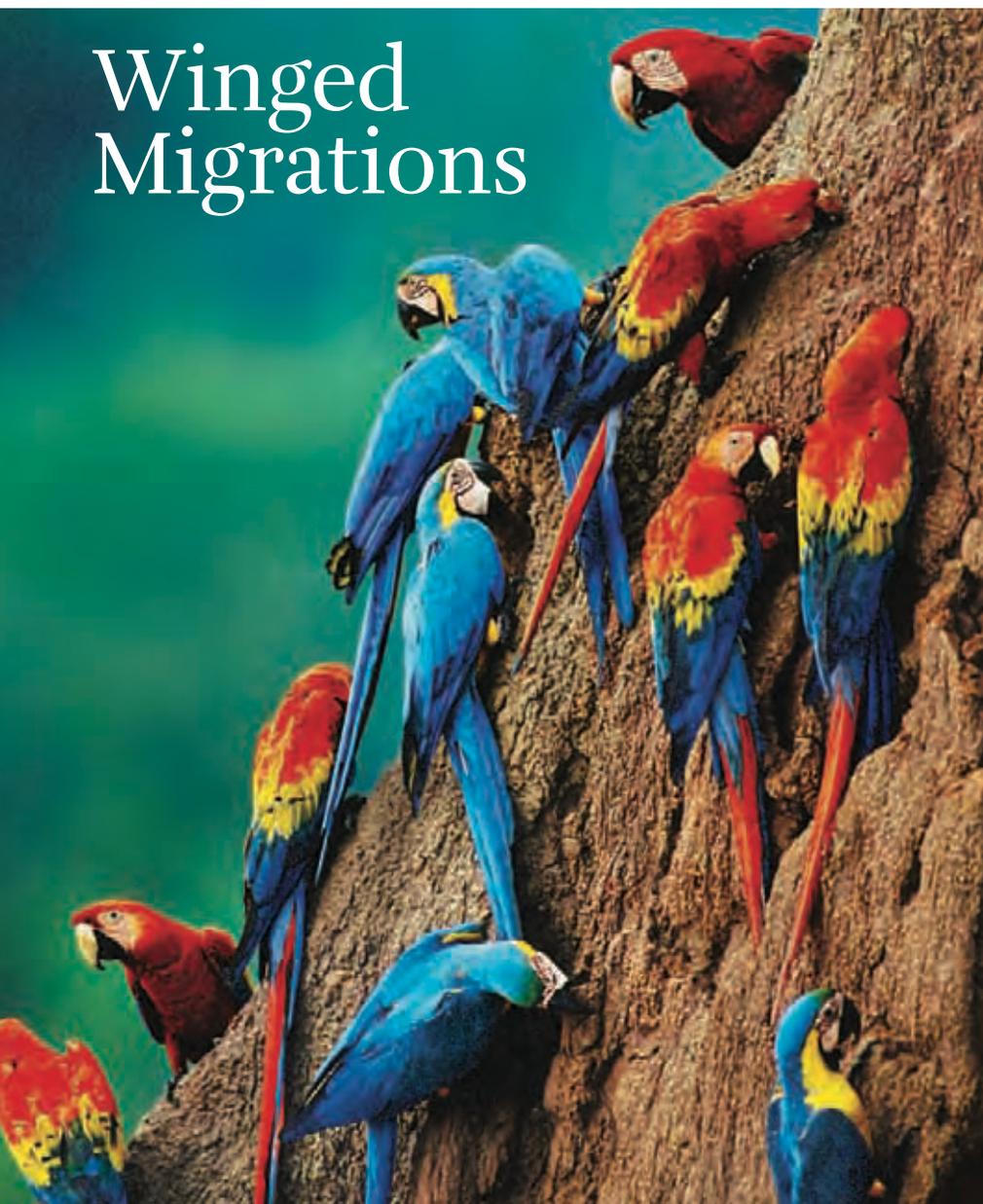




PERU

Winged Migrations



PERU
Earthwatch
(800) 776-0188, earthwatch.org

Years ago, I saw photographs in *National Geographic* magazine of all these colorful macaws hanging together on a cliff at the Tambopata National Reserve in Peru. That amazing place is where my 17-year-old son and I went with Earthwatch on their ‘Macaws of the Peruvian Amazon’ research expedition last year. So many parts of this trip were special, but what was really wonderful was going out and collecting data at the cliffside where the macaws gather.

You leave way before dawn. You walk along a trail down to the river, and then you take a boat across to a little island. All of this is in the dark, so you’ve got flashlights. It’s not hot yet—later it’s like a sauna. Everybody’s silent. You creep along another trail, get settled, and sit real still.

You don’t hear a thing. Then, as soon as the fingers of dawn come, you hear the first little cry of a parrot. Quietly, Alan, the team leader—who knows all the birds so well he can identify

them just by the call—says, ‘OK, that’s the first chestnut-fronted macaw.’ Your job is to keep track of this—the time that you hear the first one, and then the time you see the first bird actually alight on the cliffside. Sometimes there are two parrots wheeling around, calling to each other. They’re looking for predators, making sure it’s safe. It’s always the nervy macaw that will say, ‘OK, I’m game.’

One will land. Then two or three more. And then, all of a sudden, you’ll have hundreds and hundreds of birds come whooshing in and whooshing out. The cliff face just gets covered by all of these shimmering, iridescent wings. And of course, being parrots, they’re raucous. You’re trying to count how many birds are on the cliff side, so you take a quadrant and very quickly estimate. It’s exciting because it’s changing all the time.

The macaws gather big lumps of reddish-gold clay from the cliffside in their beaks—the theory is that they eat it for the mineral content. Sometimes the birds fly into the trees directly over where you’re sitting collecting data—and then these big lumps of clay start raining down around you, because the parrots are chewing them up! It’s incredible.

It gives me such joy that places like this still exist and are still undisturbed. There’s something magical about it. And there are people working to point out how important this is and trying to help keep places like this preserved. We got to see and do things that we wouldn’t have been able to do if we hadn’t been part of a research project. We were not there just to be tourists.

—Berta Medicus-Moore, *Earthwatch* participant

FROM LEFT: FRANS LANTING/CORBIS, RICHARD MCMAHUS

WINGS TO CLEAN: The BP oil disaster is the largest in U.S. history, threatening thousands of birds that nest in the wetlands along the Gulf of Mexico. The National Wildlife Federation, Audubon, and other organizations are working together to connect volunteers with recovery efforts in Louisiana. Register to help at lagulfresponse.org.

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Opposite, rainbows of macaws collect minerals from a cliff at Peru’s Tambopata National Reserve. Above, African penguins waddle onto South Africa’s shores; a green honeycreeper touches down in Trinidad; and a wreathed hornbill emits a doglike yelp in Borneo.

OTHER BIRDING TRIPS WORTH TAKING

SOUTH AFRICA

Aviva
[277\(0\) 21-557-4312](http://277(0)21-557-4312), aviva-sa.com

Learn how to catch, hold, and feed endangered African penguins at the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), a rehabilitation center for oiled, sick, or injured seabirds in Cape Town. Five days a week, you’ll help SANCCOB staff prepare fish for the birds, clean the pens and pool, and release penguins back into the wild. In your free time, tour vineyards in the Cape Winelands region, go paragliding off Table Mountain, or relax on the nearby beaches. From \$1,274 for a six-week trip, including dormitory lodging and some meals. Homestay lodging with a local family is available at additional cost.

TRINIDAD

Caligo Ventures
[800\) 426-7781](http://(800)426-7781), caligo.com

As you sip your morning coffee on the veranda of the Asa Wright Nature Centre & Lodge in Trinidad, listen to the clattering calls of crested oropendolas and watch copper-rumped hummingbirds zip by. The center is a wildlife sanctuary dedicated to promoting conservation through education and research in the island’s northern mountain range. With a local birding expert, you’ll explore the Centre’s 1,500 acres in search of green honeycreepers, rufous-browed pepper shrikes, and channel-billed toucans, and then visit the island’s many other birding hot spots. From \$1,295 for a seven-day trip, including lodging at the Centre.

COSTA RICA

Caribbean Conservation Corporation
[800\) 678-7853](http://(800)678-7853), cccturtle.org

In Costa Rica’s Tortuguero National Park—a 47,000-acre refuge of waterways and forests that’s home to tiger herons, long-tailed manakins, macaws, and some 300 other winged species—you’ll help biologists catch birds in delicate mist nets, collect data on the birds’ appearance, and band them. When you’re not volunteering, take a hike along one of the park’s nature trails to spot spider monkeys and three-toed sloths; tour Tortuguero’s canals, home to manatees and river otters; or wander along Tortuguero’s black-sand beach, a nesting ground for sea turtles. From \$1,399 for a nine-day trip, including dormitory-style lodging and meals.

MALAYSIA

Borneo Eco Tours
60/88-438300, borneoecotours.com

“The Amazing Birds of Borneo” trip begins with a visit to the island’s annual bird festival (October 15–17), where experts offer birding workshops and guided walks through the virgin rain forest of the Kabili-Sepilok Reserve. Next, watch for orangutans, proboscis monkeys, and pygmy elephants while you boat down the Kinabatangan River to the Sukau Rainforest Lodge. Built on stilts next to the river, the 20-room lodge has won awards for its efforts to promote conservation and community development. From Sukau, a Bornean bird guide leads cruises and hikes to see blue-headed pittas, Asian paradise flycatchers, wreathed hornbills, and many more of Borneo’s 622 bird species. From \$2,753 for a 12-day trip, including lodging and most meals.

ANTARCTICA

Audubon Nature Odysseys
[800\) 967-7425](http://(800)967-7425), travel.audubon.org

Cruise from Ushuaia, Argentina, to Antarctica aboard the *National Geographic Explorer*, a polar vessel with space for 148 guests and a staff that includes ornithologists, marine biologists, historians, and penguin researchers. Surrounded by icebergs and glaciers, you’ll view albatrosses, skuas, snowy sheathbills, and petrels; kayak to a rookery to look for blue-eyed shags; and ride a Zodiac boat past hundreds of gentoo, chinstrap, or Adélie penguins. A portion of the profits from the trip—run in partnership with the travel company Lindblad Expeditions—supports Audubon’s mission to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for birds and other wildlife. From \$10,270 for a 13-day trip, including lodging in a ship cabin and meals. **A**