



Southern Mexico Birding Tour 2022 Trip Report

[Link: Southern Mexico Birding Tour 2022 Trip Report](#)

Day 1 - Arrival in Oaxaca

All the participants arrived on time and safely, and many were able to enjoy the grounds of the Hotel Victoria before we officially got started at dinner. The hotel sits on the flanks of Cerro Fortín, a park and prominent hill overlooking downtown that still retains much of its scrub woodland. Hotel Victoria would be our base for the next three days and before, between and after outings, it would provide us with extra opportunities to learn the local birds - Dusky and Berylline Hummingbirds, Rufous-backed Robin, Gray Silky-flycatcher, Black-vented Oriole, and White-throated Towhee; and catch up with many neotropical migrants - Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Warbling Vireo, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Wilson's and Virginia Warblers, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Day 2 - Oaxaca area

We start the day along the entrance road to Yagul, a Zapotec archeological site west of Oaxaca City. The ruins are nestled in a jumble of rocky hills, and the periphery of the park protects remnants of native scrub dominated by tree-like cacti of many varieties. One cactus in particular, *Myrtillocactus schenckii*, is in flower, and the tiny pale blossoms studding its tall columns is where we find our first target for the site, Beautiful Hummingbird. After a picnic breakfast, we find our other main target, a pair of Bridled Sparrows enjoying the warm sunshine atop massive prickly pears. Other new regional endemics we find include Gray-breasted Woodpecker and Boucard's Wren, and other "lifers" for many of us include Greater Pewee, Nutting's Flycatcher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Streak-backed Oriole, and Rufous-capped Warbler.



Bridled Sparrow © Chris Burney



Gray-breasted Woodpecker © Chris Burney

Before lunch, we make a quick stop at the Tree of Tule, a Montezuma cypress that is the widest tree in the world and thought to be over 1,400 years old. Though not a bird stop, we find a small flock of migrants - Blue-headed Vireo, Townsend's Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler - foraging in the tree, and really high above, Anuar spots a Peregrine Falcon. We then head to lunch in Teotitlán del Valle, and while we are waiting for our order, we get a fantastic demonstration of traditional Oaxacan weaving at the nearby "Bug in the Rug" workshop.



Montezuma Cypress © Chris Burney



Oaxacan weaving © Chris Burney



Brightly colored yarn © Chris Burney

After lunch, we head up into the hills above Teotitlán del Valle to explore the mid-elevation pine/oak forests. We make a quick stop at a reservoir and find an assortment of common (local here since water is scarce) waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds - Least Grebe is new for many. Climbing higher, the scrub becomes less "scrubbier" and oaks dominate. After a promising start, our afternoon here was annoyingly slow, and we had to dig hard for every bird. Notables included Mexican Violetear, Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, Crescent-chested Warbler, Hermit Warbler, Red-faced Warbler, and Painted Redstart.

Day 3 - Oaxaca area

Today, we head back up into the hills north of Oaxaca City, and our first stop is Pollo Nino. Here, we have some breakfast while we wait for more sunshine to bathe the hillside and increase the bird activity a bit. Gradually, we see a nice mix of birds with great looks at Golden Vireo, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Elegant Euphonia, Black-vented Oriole, and Rufous-capped Warbler. We then travel a short distance further up the road for a quick search for Oaxaca Sparrow - we see at least one and hear a few more, but the views are brief with White-throated Towhees and Lincoln's Sparrows making it more confusing as we look for anything hopping around in the underbrush. We spend the rest of the day in the humid pine/oak forests of Cerro San Felipe (La Cumbre), high within the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca. Very different from any habitat we've explored so far, the trees here are big, tall and laden with epiphytes, mostly bromeliads. Between our lunch spot and the trails we worked a few times, we find some fantastic birds including Mountain Trogon, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Dwarf Jay, Gray-barred Wren, Collared Towhee, Yellow-eyed Junco, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, and Red Warbler.

Day 4 - Monte Albán and drive to Sierra Madre del Sur

We start at Monte Albán, a popular Zapotec ruin and UNESCO World Heritage Site on the outskirts of Oaxaca City. Before the park opens, we try a trail off the entrance road, and get amazing looks at Pileated Flycatcher, other finds include Blue Mockingbird, Slaty Vireo, Gray Flycatcher, and an

uncommon Ovenbird. We then head into the park, and Jorge covers some of the history of the site while we continue to look for birds - new birds include Green-fronted Hummingbird and Rock Wrens looking down from the pyramids. Next, we start our long drive southward, making a stop for lunch and a demonstration of Alebrije which are elaborately painted Mexican folk art sculptures. We get to our hotel in the Sierra Madre del Sur with very little daylight left, but manage to find a few new birds - Chestnut-capped Brushfinch and American Robin.



Monte Albán © Chris Burney



Pileated Flycatcher © Chris Burney



Lunchtime © Chris Burney



Mexican folk art © Chris Burney

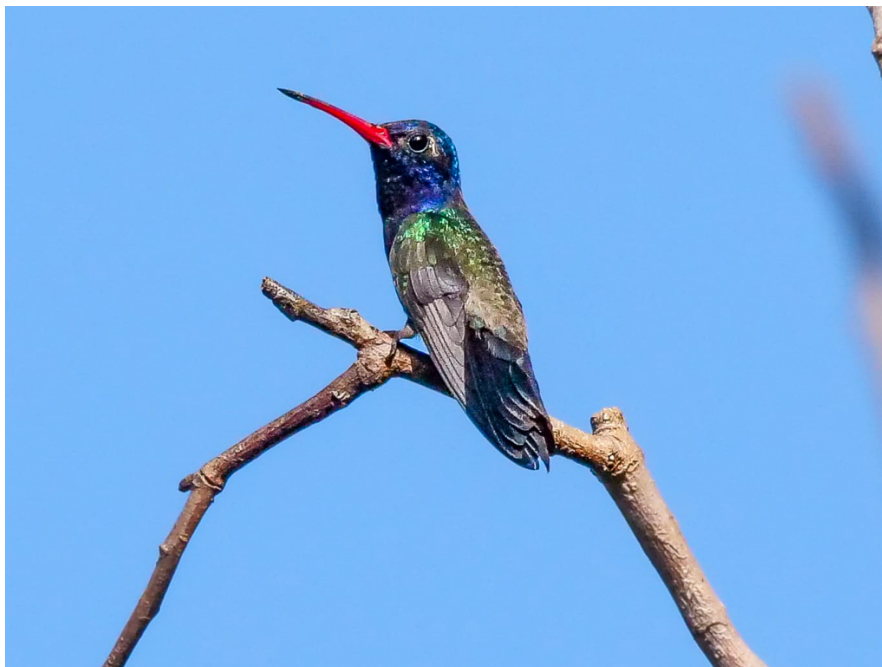
Day 5 - Sierra Madre del Sur

We spend much of the day high in the pine-oak woodlands of the Sierra Madre del Sur. Throughout

the day, we find several Mexican hand trees, *Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*, in bloom and the flowers are a magnet for various hummingbirds and mixed flocks. Also known as the árbol de las manitas or “tree of little hands”, this mallow has distinctive red flowers resembling open hands. Fortunately, the hummingbirds are repeatedly hitting the same flowers, giving us many opportunities to see them well. Species we find include Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Bumblebee Hummingbird, White-eared Hummingbird, Mexican Violetear, and several endangered Blue-capped Hummingbirds. Within the mixed species flocks, we only get a glimpse of a White-throated Jay, another target for the day. Most of us finally get views of Brown-backed Solitaire, a fairly common species in these high elevation forests but more often heard than seen. Other new birds for the day include Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Black-headed Siskin, Golden-browed Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Red-headed Tanager, White-throated Thrush, Audubon’s Oriole, and Red-legged Honeycreeper.

Day 6 - Huatulco National Park

We start pre-dawn in the coastal thornscrub of Huatulco National Park in order to beat the heat. Most trees are leafless during the dry season which should make it easier to spot the birds, and except for one mountain biker, it seems we have the park to ourselves. We find most of our targets and more importantly, most of us get decent views of all of them. Interesting finds include West Mexican Chachalaca, Plain-capped Starthroat, Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Crane Hawk, Citreoline Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, White-throated Magpie-Jay, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Rufous-naped Wren, Happy Wren, Scrub Euphonia, Olive Sparrow, Yellow-winged Cacique, Red-breasted Chat, Blue Bunting, and Orange-breasted Bunting.



Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird © Chris Burney



Plain-capped Starthroat © Chris Burney

After brunch, we head east along the coast and make a quick stop at Playa Las Coloradas, a large shallow lagoon fringed with mangrove and thornscrub. We add lots of shorebirds and seabirds to the trip list, and get amazing looks at a Laughing Falcon patrolling the beach. Further along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, we make another really quick stop at a toll booth, and quickly find another local endemic for southern Mexico, the near-threatened Cinnamon-tailed Sparrow. A gorgeous male Orange-breasted Bunting also puts on a show, but a shy Lesser Ground-cuckoo does not. We fit in a little more birding with another stop at another coastal lagoon - the wind is howling and the only new bird is a Caspian Tern.



Birding at Playa Las Colorada, Mexico



Cinnamon-tailed Sparrow © Chris Burney

Day 7 - Pacific coast

We head back to the Pacific coast, making a quick stop along the way for more sparrows and Lesser Ground-cuckoo - once again, heard only. We spend the remainder of the morning at windy Playa Santa Maria Xadani, and the vast tidal flats here are covered with shorebirds and seabirds. Nice finds here include American Oystercatcher, Collared and Snowy Plovers, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, lots of Red Knots, Stilt Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, hordes of Black Skimmer, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Mangrove Swallow, Stripe-headed Sparrow and Painted Bunting. After lunch, we continue east through the windswept scrub and grasslands of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, making a few quick stops for birds. Finding a sheltered patch of habitat is tricky, but we eventually find a spot and are rewarded with great looks at the local and near-threatened Rose-bellied Bunting. We finally see Lesser Ground-cuckoo as well. Other good birds include Green-fronted Hummingbird and Banded Wren.



Birding in Southern Mexico



Rose-bellied Bunting © Chris Burney

Day 8 - Chiapas boat trip

Our first full day in Chiapas revolves around a boat trip further to the south, and we make several random stops along the way to find birds. The first bathroom break at a gas station quickly becomes a productive spot as we get amazing views of our first Giant Wrens, Green-breasted Mango, Yellow-

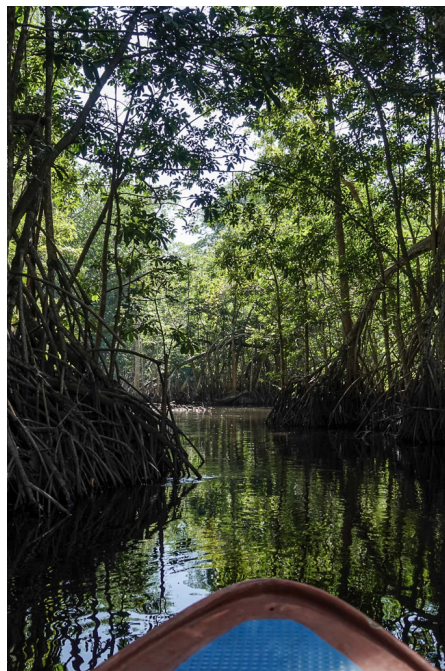
winged Tanager, Ruddy-breasted and Morelet's Seedeaters, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator. Turning off the Pan-American Highway, we descend into marshy lowlands which have mostly been converted to pasture - new birds along this stretch include Northern Jacana and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. Next, we take our boat trip through the La Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve, and find many fantastic birds including Russet-naped Wood-rail, Sungrebe, Limpkin, Agami Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Snail Kite, Common Black Hawk, Ringed Kingfisher, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Amazon Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, White-necked Puffbird, Bat Falcon, Mangrove Vireo, and Yellow-billed Cacique.



Morelet's Seedeater



Bare-throated Tiger-Heron © Chris Burney



Boat trip in La Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve © Chris Burney



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Chris Burney

Day 9 - Arriaga

Today is mostly driving as we switch regions and head to central Chiapas. We make a quick stop early on for another look at Rose-bellied Bunting, but no luck - we see a beautiful dark morph Short-tailed Hawk, another shy Banded Wren, and an even shyer Lesser Ground-cuckoo. We spend the afternoon relaxing and exploring beautiful San Cristóbal de las Casas, and after dinner, visit Montetik Park to do some owling - seeing Bearded Screech-owl and hearing Whiskered Screech-owl.

Day 10 - San Cristóbal de las Casas

Today, we are joined by local guide Alberto Martinez and start the day where we ended last night at Montetik Park. We're back in the pine-oak highlands and the morning starts out chilly as we explore small agricultural plots at the base of the mountains we'll climb later. It's birdy and interesting ones we find here include the masked variety of Bushtit, Band-backed Wren, Rufous-collared Robin, White-naped Brushfinch, and Yellow-backed Oriole. After an amazing breakfast, we head higher finding Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Strong-billed Woodcreeper, Unicolored Jay, Black-capped Swallow, Rufous-browed Wren, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Red Crossbill, and Pink-headed Warbler. After lunch, we try another park north of San Cristóbal de las Casas in search of Blue-throated Motmot, and eventually find one with an impressive mixed flock.

Day 11 - San Cristóbal de las Casas

Just as we were about to continue on to the ancient Mayan ruins of Palenque, much of the group came down with Covid-19 and went into quarantine forcing us to suspend the tour. Fortunately, our symptoms were mild, and everyone made it home safely. Not the ending we'd hoped for, but we still managed to tally nearly 350 species.