

Southern Mexico Trip Report 2025

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The number of species and of Mexican endemics and specialties was spectacular. A total of 357 species seen by the participants plus 16 additional ones heard-only; many of these are endemic or nearly endemic to Mexico, including the highly sought after Bumblebee Hummingbird, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, Rosita's (Rose-bellied) Bunting, and Giant Wren. All in all we saw 19 species of hummingbirds, 5 species of trogons, 11 woodpeckers, 6 species of jays, 15 wrens, 34 warblers and 7 species of orioles! Highlights included a variety of habitats and scenery, wonderful meals (including the opportunity to sample grasshoppers, arracheras, quesadillas, tlayudas, mole and other Mexican specialties), the Montealbán and Palenque ruins, the Sumidero Canyon (like the Grand Canyon but greener) and the "rock gardens" in the karst rainforest which are the habitat of Nava's Wrens (which belongs to a Mexican endemic genus). Birds seen every day or almost every day were Cattle Egret, Black and Turkey Vultures, Rock Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Great Kiskadee, and Great-tailed Grackle. The trip starts in the state of Oaxaca (pronounced "Wahaca"). This is the Mexican state with the largest number of bird species (around 770 species; 70% of the total for the whole country). While in the state of Oaxaca, we birded in cloud forest, pine woodland, semiarid scrub, tropical deciduous forest, middle-elevation humid forest, wetlands, and a beach with a rocky islet offshore. We also visited one of the trees with the greatest girth in the world, the "árbol del Tule", a Montezuma cypress that is not unusually tall but has a very thick trunk with a circumference of slightly over 117 feet (it's in the Guinness Book of Records). And the spectacular Montealbán archaeological site on a hill overlooking the Oaxaca Valley. After meeting in our Oaxaca hotel in the late afternoon of Day 1, on Day 2 we started out by having a field breakfast and birding on a road in a cactus grove near Yagul archaeological site, seeing Pileated Flycatcher (the first time we've seen it here!), Boucard's Wren, White-throated Towhee (already seen by most of the group in the grounds of our hotel), Dusky Hummingbird and others.



White-throated Towhee © Richard Thunen



Boucard's Wren © Richard Thunen



Pileated Flycatcher © Richard Thunen

Then we visited the Tule tree, followed by the reservoir above Teotitlán del Valle. After lunch and a weaving-and-dyeing demonstration we birded in and near a riparian grove in pine-oak forest above Teotitlán del Valle



Tule tree © Adam Timpf



Weaving demonstration © Adam Timpf



Gray Silky Flycatcher © Richard Thunen

We started the next morning with birds in the dry scrub of the Oaxaca Valley. Afterwards, we spent the rest of the day further up in the humid pine-oak forest at La Cumbre. Birds up at La Cumbre included Rufous-capped Brush-finch, Gray-barred Wren (also seen yesterday) and a brief view of Dwarf Jay.



Lunch at La Cumbre © Héctor Gómez de Silva

On Day 4 we visited the Montealbán archaeological site, which produced the trip's only Golden Vireo and we heard Ocellated Thrasher, as well as seeing the spectacular ruins while Jorge, our driver, provided a brief explanation of the archaeology.



Montealbán © Adam Timpft

Later we had lunch at a nice restaurant, had a short stop at a workshop specializing in carved wooden fanciful animals (alebrijes) and saw two White-tailed Hawks just outside the workshop, and in a pit stop at a gas station saw a flock of Gray-breasted Martins, which included one individual that

may have been of the poorly-known Sinaloa Martin. Then we said farewell to Oaxaca City and the dry central valley, making our way to the Sierra Madre del Sur where we'd spend the night in order to look for one of Mexico's toughest endemics, the White-throated Jay (as well as other birds) the following morning. We tried our favorite spot for White-throated Jay but did not see it, however, we saw many other birds in the process including great views of Red Warbler.



Red Warbler © Richard Thunen

Driving further toward Huatulco we had good luck with endemic and near-endemic hummingbirds, seeing Garnet-throated and the cute and tiny Bumblebee Hummingbird (which showed how the normally magenta gorget sometimes shines green!). After lunch we continued to Huatulco with a washroom stop and a very productive birding stop.



Bumblebee Hummingbird © Richard Thunen

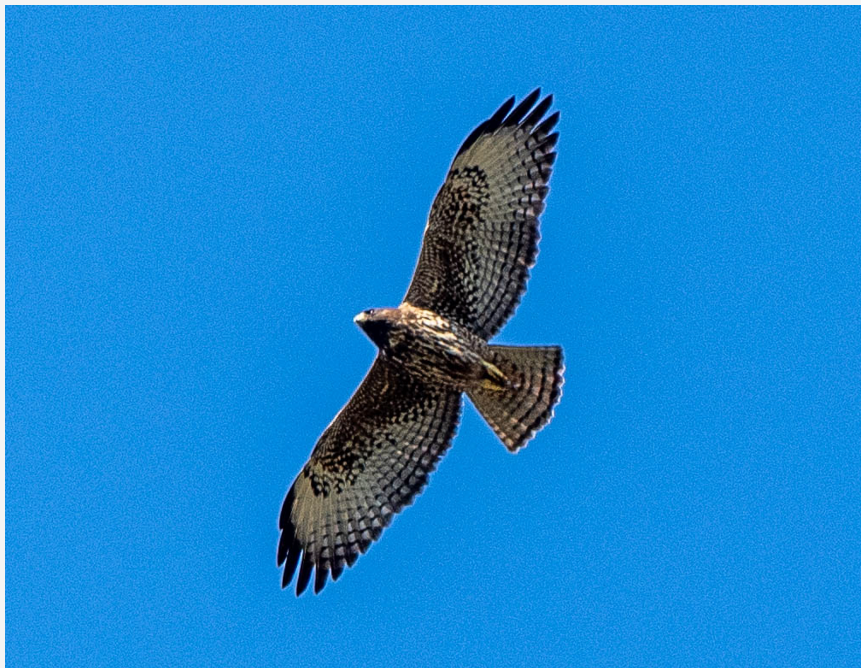
The next morning was spent in two sites in tropical dry forest near Huatulco, where after a picnic breakfast we found Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird, Citreoline Trogons, Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers, both Altamira Orioles, Russet-naped Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Groove-billed Ani (not just an all black bird, there is beautiful glossy scaling in the wing coverts and back), an interesting juvenile dark-morph Short-tailed Hawk, a male Red-breasted Chat and more.



Russet-naped Wren © Richard Thunen



Groove-billed Ani © Richard Thunen

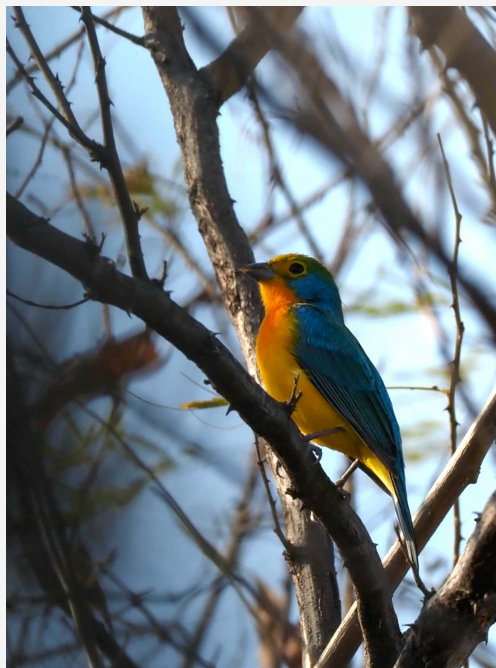


Short-tailed Hawk © Richard Thunen



Red-breasted Chat © Richard Thunen

After lunch we stopped at a place on the way between Huatulco and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, this latter stop including Orange-breasted Buntings, and looking out over the Pacific Ocean to a rocky islet surrounded by seabirds (with Blue-footed Booby and a surprise Elegant Tern).



Orange-breasted Bunting © Adam Timpf

In Tehuantepec we had a field breakfast and a cooperative Cinnamon-tailed Sparrow, then very productive shorebirding (including a few Collared Plovers and Reddish Egrets of both color morphs). After lunch we drove east into Chiapas, where we would spend 2 nights in the town of Arriaga. Next

to our hotel was a roost of around 500 Gray-breasted Martins. The next day we had another field breakfast at a birdy spot where we eventually found our main target, Giant Wren, and many other birds. Afterwards, we drove east to Mapastepec and then coastward to take a mangrove boat ride to look for Agami Heron and a few other special birds. The road from Mapastepec south was so birdy that we arrived a little later than planned to where the boats were waiting for us. One of the birds we saw in the last few kilometers of the drive was a pair of Southern Lapwing, a recent invader from Central and South America to this southeastern corner of Mexico. We were a large group and the water level in the mangroves was particularly low, so few people fit in each boat -we had to take 5 boats in tandem; however, the boatmen knew their job and most people were able to see most of the birds. We found a few Agami Herons, Boat-billed Herons, a roosting Northern Potoo, an American Pygmy Kingfisher, other birds and a Northern Tamandua Anteater!



Mangrove boatride © Héctor Gómez de Silva



Tamandua © Adam Timpf



Lunch after the mangrove boatride © Héctor Gómez de Silva

Early the following day was our only chance to see Rose-bellied Bunting but it was soooo windy that we didn't even have our planned picnic breakfast in the field -we had to have it in the hotel prior to leaving! Despite the wind, we stopped at a pasture on the roadside where we saw Rose-bellied Bunting and we saw a male and 2 females, a little distant but well seen through the scope.



Rose-bellied Bunting © Richard Thunen

After a short but productive birding stop and quite some driving, we stopped for lunch in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital of Chiapas, and finally continued driving just over an hour to San Cristóbal de las Casas, where we had a free afternoon to explore this town's cultural riches. After dinner, we hooked up with a local bird guide and had an optional owling trip in which we were successful in hearing a Bearded Screech-Owl (but sadly it didn't show). Most of the following day we birded the forest edge and forest at Montetik, where we saw San Cristóbal's most wanted bird, Pink-headed Warbler (lots of them, distant at first but eventually some prolonged views up close), as well as the beautiful Unicolored Jay, Rufous-collared Robin and others. Then we drove to another spot at the edge of town to look for Black-capped Swallows and we saw these and a surprise Sharp-shinned Hawk [White-breasted].



Pink-headed Warbler © Adam Timpf



White-breasted Hawk © Richard Thunen

After lunch we birded in another place at the edge of town but didn't add much new other than a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. In the late afternoon we drove back to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, where we'd stay for 2 nights in order to make the most of our time in the central valley of Chiapas before the long drive to Palenque. From Tuxtla we visited the Cañón del Sumidero National Park. The Sumidero canyon is a breathtaking sight from the lookouts. We had a field breakfast at the most spectacular of

the lookouts, but the low fog didn't dissipate and we had to drive half-way back to Tuxtla to where there was no mist and then drive back to the lookout for the view! (worth it, though)!



Group at Sumidero Canyon © Héctor Gómez de Silva

Half-way back to Tuxtla from the lookout we first stopped in the haunts of Belted Flycatcher, which most of the group saw after some time. Some also saw a pair of the rarely seen Blue Seedeater. Lower down the mountain, we stopped at another site in the national park where we had an amazing close-up, eye-level view of Russet-crowned Motmot and also saw Fan-tailed Warbler, Olive Sparrow and many other birds. After lunch in Tuxtla, we visited the Nava's Wren locality but it was raining and though we tried we didn't find the wren. We did see a few new birds for our growing list, though.



Russet-crowned Motmot © Richard Thunen

The next day was going to be the longest drive of the trip. After a field breakfast we drove to Navaland again and entered the haunts of Nava's Wren in a special karstic limestone/tropical rainforest combination, seeing a lot of birds including two encounters with the usually elusive Green Shrike-Vireo. We continued driving and at our favorite restaurant in off-the-beaten track Huimanguillo we found a Barn Owl that was roosting under the thatched roof. Then we continued driving to Palenque. On the following day, at and around Palenque, we were rewarded with a diversity of birds, many amid the breathtaking ruins. Some of the many birds seen include White-bellied Emerald, Keel-billed Toucan and the successfully reintroduced Scarlet Macaw.



Birding group at Palenque © Héctor Gómez de Silva



White-bellied Emerald © Richard Thunen



Keel-billed Toucan © Richard Thunen



Scarlet Macaw © Adam Timpf

Finally, we spent the last birding day driving the “long route” between Palenque and Villahermosa, visiting what I call “Mexico’s little Pantanal” at the junction of northernmost Chiapas, a bit of Campeche and the state of Tabasco. This route is always special. We added a number of species to the trip list in this last day, including Rufous-breasted Spinetail, Great Black-Hawk, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, and Pinnated Bittern (very rare throughout its extensive range in the Neotropics, but not so rare here), and heard a Gray-breasted Crake (not even known to occur in Mexico until quite recently).



Rufous-breasted Spinetail © Richard Thunen



Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture © Richard Thunen

[Southern Mexico 2025 species list \(eBird\)](#)