Mexico

Central – Colima to Mexico City



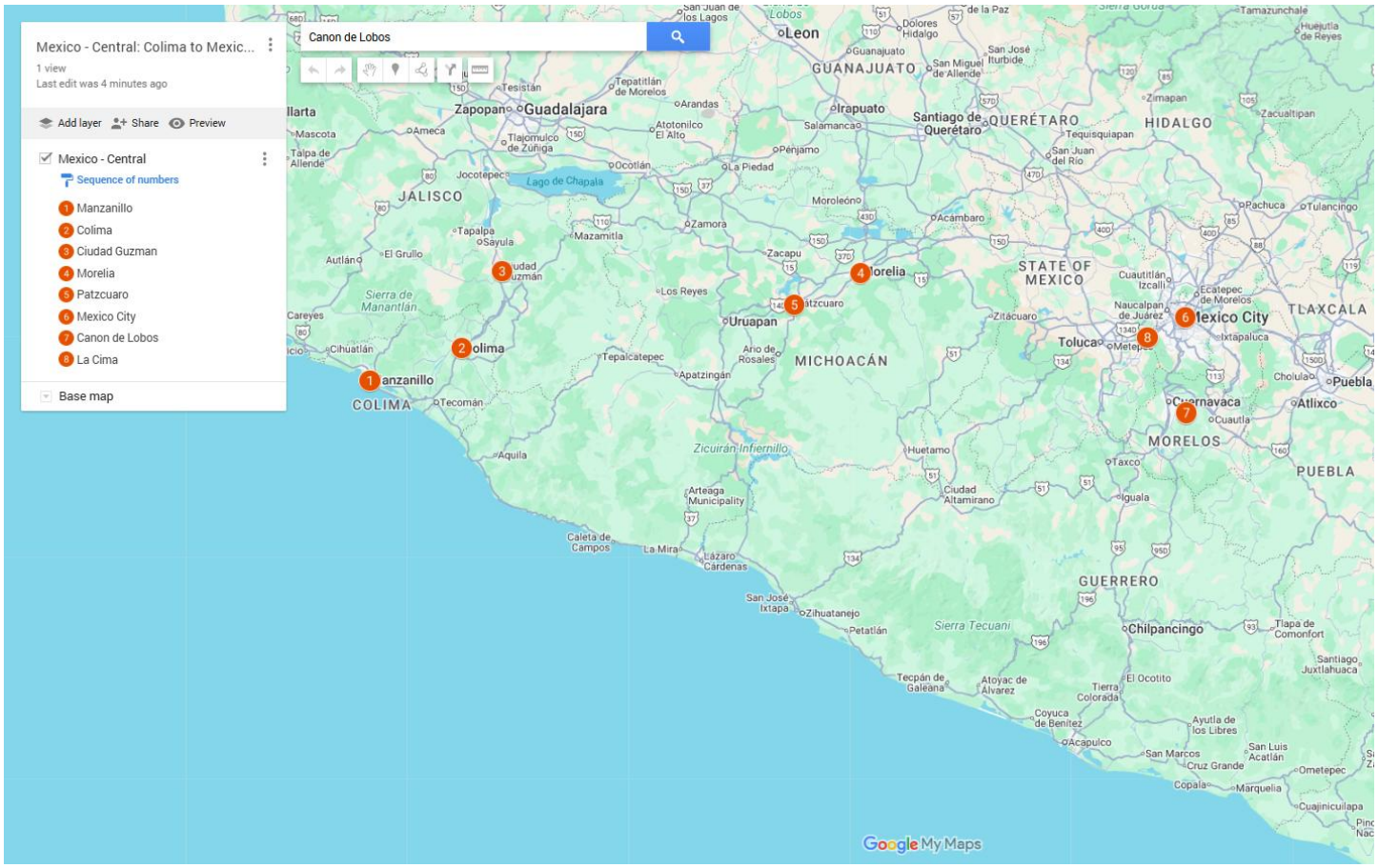
Citreoline Trogon by Adam Riley

Our tour starts in Manzanillo where we search for Citreoline Trogon, San Blas Jay, Happy & Sinaloa Wrens, Blue Mockingbird and Red-breasted Chat before heading to the volcanic slopes of Volcan de Colima for West Mexican Chachalaca, Banded Quail, Balsas Screech Owl, Colima Pygmy Owl, Long-tailed Wood Partridge, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Dwarf Vireo and Lesser Roadrunner. After making our way through the Northern Balsas Drainage, we'll spend time around Patzcuaro. A stop at Lago Cuitzeo will give us an excellent chance of finding the gorgeous, Black-polled Yellowthroat and Aztec Rail, followed by some time in nearby Pine-Oak forests for Transvolcanic Jay and Spotted Wren. The highlands surrounding the town of Morelia play host to Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo and a host of hummingbirds including Mexican Violetear and Rivoli's, Broad-tailed, Berylline, and White-eared Hummingbirds.

We then head to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), our base for the remainder of the tour. As we head out of one of the world's largest conurbations, we shall stop at roadside marshes to search for Black-polled Yellowthroat, Striped Sparrow and with a little luck, Aztec Rail. Heading out to Canon de Los Lobos we search for some of Mexico's most desirable endemics such as Banded Quail, beautiful Lesser Ground Cuckoo, scarce Colima Pygmy Owl, Beautiful Sheartail and Dusky Hummingbird.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Manzanillo (Colima)**
Day 2	**Camino Playa de Oro; transfer to Colima**
Day 3	**Volcan Colima & the Balsas Drainage to Ciudad Guzman**
Day 4	**Ciudad Guzman area, transfer to Morelia**
Day 5	**Morelia to Patzcuaro via Lago Cuitzeo**
Day 6	**Patzcuaro**
Day 7	**Patzcuaro to Morelia**
Day 8	**Morelia to Mexico City**
Days 9 to 12	**Mexico City & surrounds (La Cima, Lerma Marsh, Canon de Lobos)**
Day 13	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Lesser Ground Cuckoo by Bobby Wilcox

Camino Playa de Oro. We kick off the tour with some fantastic birding just a few minutes from the city of Manzanillo! Near the airport, an amazing track leading to Playa de Oro beach will serve as a perfect introduction to western Mexico. The thorn forest, semi-deciduous scrub, and coastline here are characteristic of the varied habitats that range from neighbouring Nayarit, South hundreds of miles to Oaxaca and Chiapas. This area is thick with special endemic species, many of them beautiful to behold. Some of the more exciting possibilities the forests could reveal this morning include raucous West Mexican Chachalacas, amazing Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Golden-crowned Emerald, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Golden-cheeked and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Collared Forest Falcon, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Citreoline Trogon, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Nutting's and Flammulated Flycatchers, Golden and Black-capped Vireos, White-throated Magpie Jay, San Blas Jay, Happy, Sinaloa, and White-bellied Wrens, Rufous-backed Robin, Blue Mockingbird, Stripe-headed Sparrow, gorgeous Red-breasted Chat and the colourful Orange-breasted Bunting.

On the beach we might turn up Magnificent Frigatebird and, with great luck, perhaps even a Red-billed Tropicbird or Brown Booby.

Volcan de Colima. The lower flanks of Volcan de Colima provide ample access to oak forests and the endemic Balsas deciduous forests nearby. This quaint, historic mountain town has a great personality and we expect to have time here to soak up the colonial Mexican architecture and enjoy a laidback, yet delicious meal. The food in Mexico is legendary!



Russet-crowned Motmot by Lev Frid

Volcan de Colima and the Balsas Drainage to Ciudad Guzman. The entire day will be spent in search of the numerous Balsas drainage endemic species. The Balsas drainage is a general reference to a finite area encompassing a few tributaries to the Rio Balsas. These rivercourses run between towering volcanoes that make up the Sierra Madre Occidental in this part of Mexico. The steep canyons and ravines made by these rivers have created wide gaps between the volcanoes, and a broken divide to the mountains which allows Pacific moisture to escape eastward and inland. This complex geology and hydrology has

created a series of microhabitats which are home to an impressive number of endemic bird, reptile, and plant species.



Red-breasted Chat by Lev Frid

The lower elevations are drier, almost arid. In these desert-like habitats we hope to find the likes of Lesser Roadrunner, Banded Quail, Russet-crowned Motmot, Grey-barred and Happy Wrens, Rusty-crowned Ground Sparrow, Varied Bunting and a few species of Orioles. As we move upslope the habitat rather abruptly gives way to thorn forest, scrub, and lower oak forest habitats in the canyons and gentle slopes. The avifauna changes in equally abrupt fashion. We should start to see Acorn and Arizona Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreeper, Rose-throated Becard, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, White-throated Thrush, Blue Mockingbird, several species of migrant and resident warblers such as Fan-tailed Warbler, Canyon and Collared Towhees and much more.

The higher, steeper slopes of the volcanoes in the region receive the majority of the precipitation that falls in the area. While certain times of the year are dry, most of the year the mountain is shrouded in clouds. Oak diversity here is impressive, and the mixed pine and oak forests here are home to some of the more iconic west Mexican endemics. Among these, the headliners are surely the spectacular Long-tailed Wood Partridge, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo and Dwarf Vireo. Naturally, the elusive wood partridge is tricky, more often heard than seen, but the other two species often show well, especially amidst the impressive mixed flocks. Crested Guan, Colima Pygmy Owl, Mexican Violetear, Rivoli's, Amethyst-throated, Broad-billed, and White-eared Hummingbirds, Mountain Trogon, Northern Tufted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee, Pine Flycatcher, Grey-collared Becard, Transvolcanic Jay, Spotted Wren, Mexican Chickadee, Bridled Titmouse, Brown-backed Solitaire, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Aztec Thrush, Olive, Red, Red-faced, and Golden-browed Warblers, Green-striped and Rufous-capped Brushfinches, and Red-headed Tanager are all regularly found by birding the track and trails on the volcano's upper slopes. We should see an incredible array of colourful species today, at a relatively leisurely pace.



Rivoli's Hummingbird by Adam Riley

An early morning will be spent looking for a few nocturnal species that we might have missed to date such as Balsas Screech Owl and Buff-collared Nightjar. As dawn breaks, we will have a chance to look for any

remaining targets, in particular the most range-restricted endemic of the tour: Black-chested Sparrow.



Black-chested Sparrow by Adam Riley

Lago Cuitzeo. This site is host to two of most range-restricted species in Mexico: Black-polled Yellowthroat and Aztec Rail. The marshes that surround Lago Cuitzeo provide perfect habitat for both of these volcanic-belt endemics. This morning we will dedicate much of our time to the semi-arid scrub, riparian growth, and environs around the lake. The lakewater itself holds several species, including Fulvous Whistling Duck, Western and Clark's Grebes, and American White Pelican. The reedbeds and shores are home to Least Bittern, White-faced Ibis, Northern Jacana, Marsh Wren and, depending on the time of year, can produce many migrant shorebirds. The lakeside vegetation and washes can hold Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Bewick's and Cactus Wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, Scarlet (Vermilion) Flycatcher, Cassin's Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, White-collared Seedeater, Lesser Goldfinch and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Patzcuaro. Aside from being a stunningly picturesque lakefront village, the surrounds are very birdy. We'll spend time at a nearby cerro, where there is plenty of natural, intact scrub and semi-deciduous forest despite its proximity to civilization. Both Greater and Lesser Roadrunner have occasionally been recorded in the area, although the beautiful songster Blue Mockingbird will be one of the main targets for the afternoon. White-naped Swift, Broad-billed and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, Elegant Trogon, Hammond's, Dusky and Cordilleran Flycatchers, American Bushtit, Grey Silky-Flycatcher, Painted and Slate-throated Whitestart, Yellow-eyed Junco and Rufous-capped Brushfinch are all possible within a short distance of town. Should we decide to stay out after dusk, Whiskered Screech Owl and Mexican Whip-poor-will are both fairly common here too!



Elegant Trogon by Stephan Lorenz

Tacambaro. Today we will venture a little south of our Patzcuaro base, towards Tacambaro into more Pacific-affinity habitats. There is a degree of overlap here with some of the species

from the Balsas drainage, some from lower pacific deciduous forests, as well as more montane endemics only found here. Specifically, White-fronted Swift is a species only found – and seldom so – on the south side of the transvolcanic belt. There are a few areas where the species is seen during breeding season, coming out from behind the waterfalls and deep cliffs in which they nest. Generally speaking, swifts are amongst the least-understood species on Earth; the White-fronted Swift is especially so.



Red-faced Warbler by Stephan Lorenz

Of course, there are many other species of interest in the area to keep us busy! West Mexican Chachalaca, Banded Quail (rare), Lesser Roadrunner, Dusky Hummingbird, Thick-billed Kingbird, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, Stripe-headed, Black-chested and Rusty Sparrows, and a few species of Orioles and Buntings will be on the menu today, as well.

Morelia highlands. We turn our efforts up-slope, to the high pine-oak forests home to Transvolcanic Jay, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo and, with great luck, Dwarf Vireo (rare). The higher, cooler climes that make up the western/southern divide are a paradise for hummingbirds. Mexican Violetear, Rivoli's, Broad-tailed, Berylline and White-eared Hummingbirds are all relatively common. The lovely Mountain Trogon is also regularly seen here! Mixed flocks at this elevation (especially during migration when neotropical warblers, vireos and flycatchers are around) can be impressive. Combing through the flocks, we could turn up White-striped Woodcreeper, Greater Pewee, Tufted, Hammond's, Pine and Buff-breasted Flycatchers, Hutton's, Cassin's, and Plumbeous Vireos, Crescent-chested, Nashville, MacGillivray's, Grace's, Black-throated Grey, Townsend's, Hermit, Red-faced, Red and Golden-browed Warblers, Slate-throated Whitestart, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and Hepatic, Flame-colored, Western and Red-headed Tanagers!



Chestnut-headed Shrike-Vireo by Adam Riley

There are plenty of other exciting birds that reside in the mosaic of canyons, forested slopes and open fields that we will bird. Grey-barred and Spotted Wrens are high priorities, as are both Green-striped and Rufous-capped Brushfinches, both of which are especially numerous here. Orange-billed and Russet Nightingale-Thrushes are regularly seen in the undergrowth and foraging along the tracks here, along with Yellow-eyed

Junco. After some quality time spent at elevation we will descend to Morelia for the evening, or opt for another attempt at some night birding.



Happy Wren by Lev Frid

Morelia to Mexico City. We will return to some lower thorn forest for a bit of clean-up for any specials we may have missed, plus an opportunity to pick up an addition or two. The Paso Ancho area is a good site for Banded Quail, Lucifer Sheartail, Golden Vireo and Happy, Sinaloa and Banded Wrens. It'll also be our last chance for Black-chested Sparrow and the stunning Orange-breasted Bunting. Other species of interest this morning may include Bright-rumped Attila, Bell's Vireo, Virginia's and Rufous-capped Warblers, Botteri's Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak and up to 4 more species of Buntings including both Varied and Painted!

The remainder of the day will be dedicated to traveling to Mexico City, where we will be based for the rest of the tour, outside the metropolis of Mexico City. With over 22 million inhabitants, the central valley of the Distrito Federal (DF as locals call it) is an impressive, somewhat daunting experience. Our accommodations, located outside the main population centre, will be central to the birding activities we will enjoy near the city. Despite its immensity, and the continuing sprawl, there are amazing birding opportunities and wonderful natural areas within a short drive.

La Cima and Sierra Madre Sparrow. The Sierra Madre Sparrow is not necessarily uncommon within its range. It just so happens that the species' range is less than 300mi2 and almost entirely contained within the Central Valley mountain slopes. This endangered passerine is one of the prize species in the Mexico City area. We will spend most of the morning, if not the day, in this species' prime habitat. Preferring tall bunch grass meadows amidst pine-oak forests and savanna at an elevation of 2,500 – 3,000m, the sparrow shares its habitat with Blue-throated, Rivoli's and White-eared Hummingbirds, Strickland's (rare) and Hairy Woodpeckers, Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Western Bluebird, Steller's and Transvolcanic Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Sedge



Sierra Madre Sparrow by Adam Riley

Wren, Brown-backed Solitaire, Olive and Crescent-chested Warblers, Striped Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill and the gorgeous Elegant Euphonia, among others.



Strickland's Woodpecker by Adam Riley

UNAM. The Universidad Nacional campus is a huge complex of buildings interwoven with green spaces. The Botanical Garden maintained by the agriculture and horticulture department of the university is impressive, expansive and an amazing place to bird, perhaps the most popular birding area within the DF city limits. Despite having birded much of the valley and belt already, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Warbling Vireo, Green Jay, Canyon and Bewick's Wrens, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Blue Grosbeak and Bullock's and Scott's Orioles might all be new species for our tour! Although remarkably resembling the avifauna of the southwestern US, many of these species are near the southern terminus of their ranges. Two very important endemics are commonly encountered here: Hooded Yellowthroat and Black-backed Oriole. Both of these species' ranges are confined to the central valley area, and will be the main targets, along with many of the species listed above.

Lerma Marshes. Cienaga de Lerma, or Lerma Marshes are gargantuan marshes and wetlands, near to Toluca. It is maintained strictly as a natural wetland reserve, and has been studied closely by university students and wildlife biologists alike. The swamp is home to the *gubernator* subspecies of Red-winged Blackbird, which has recently been proposed as a full species. Black-polled Yellowthroat also breeds in the marsh and, should we have missed it near Morelia, this will be an opportunity to catch up with this rare endemic. Several species of waterfowl, herons and grebes reside in the open water, and there is an outside chance for both Virginia Rail and Sora, to boot.



Hooded Grosbeak by Adam Riley

Cuernavaca & the Canon de Los Lobos. Near Cuernavaca, just to the South of Mexico City, is the Canon de Lobos. Given the east-west orientation of the canyon, which is more of a steep, riparian, wooded arroyo, this spot receives just a bit more precipitation.

Despite being very close to a great many people, it constitutes a large tract of slightly lusher West Mexican thorn forest than other areas we've focused on. Today's birding offers us the best opportunity to date to see the ornate endemic Banded Quail, beautiful Lesser Ground Cuckoo, scarce Colima Pygmy Owl, Beautiful Sheartail, Dusky Hummingbird, Russet-crowned

Motmot, Greenish Elaenia, Pileated Flycatcher, Fan-tailed Warbler, Black-chested Sparrow and Rusty-crowned Ground Sparrow.



Rusty-crowned Ground Sparrow by Lev Frid

Mexico City Cleanup. We have a full day devoted to hunting down any specialty species we might not have encountered thus far, or spending time on some more cultural activities, should we choose. While Mexico City is full of opportunities to see exceptional works of contemporary and historic art (such as the UNAM contemporary art museum or the famous Frida Kahlo Museum of Art), and there are plenty of fascinating neighbourhoods and squares in which to admire the architecture, we might still be missing a few key species. These may include tricky species such as Banded Quail, Strickland's Woodpecker, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Colima Pygmy Owl, Pileated Flycatcher, Golden Vireo, Banded Wren, Black-chested Sparrow, Rusty-crowned Ground Sparrow, Yellow Grosbeak and the spectacular, enigmatic Hooded Grosbeak.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderate. Suitable for most birding interest levels. Target driven tour.
Birding Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderate. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. Several target species that can be tricky or require repeat efforts. Optional night birding
Accommodation	■ ■ ■	Medium to good
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	Mostly short walks on flat ground/roads/sandy trails.
Vehicles / Roads	■ ■ ■	Minibus vehicle. Reasonably good quality roads. Some roads are dirt & can be bumpy. Mountain roads are winding. Several long drives.
Photography	■ ■ ■	Reasonable to good, harsh lighting in some areas.
Annoyances	■ ■ ■	Sun can be harsh at times.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- All lodgings;
- Bottled water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase or duffel bag (20 kg / 44 lb) and one carry-on bag, as space in the vehicles is limited.
- Generally pleasant. The lowlands can be warm to hot, with high levels of humidity along the coast. Can be much cooler at high elevations. Rain is not expected.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be present at times and it's advisable to pack a good supply of effective insect repellent.
- Accommodation varies from comfortable to good.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour has been set aside as an arrival day into Manzanillo. The tour will conclude in the morning of day 13 in Mexico City.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Playa de Oro International Airport, Manzanillo (IATA: ZLO) is the main port of entry for this tour, whilst Mexico City International Airport, Mexico City (IATA: MEX) is the main port of departure.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.