Mexico

Oaxaca

Veracruz & Eastern Sierras Extension



Slaty Vireo by Adam Riley

Our comprehensive exploration of Oaxaca is jam-packed with specialties taking in the major birding sites of Teotitlan del Valle, Benito Juarez National Park, Cerro San Felipe, the archaeological spectacle of Monte Alban and Huatulco. With a high level of endemicity, we set out to find dry interior endemics such as Ocellated Thrasher, Bridled and Oaxaca Sparrows, Boucard's Wren, Dwarf Jay, and the diminutive Dwarf Vireo. Cerro San Felipe is expected to reward us with Russet Nightingale-Thrush and the piercing Red Warbler, possibly one of the most attractive birds in all of North America. As we marvel at the iconic Monte Alban, we will also be searching for the endemic Slaty Vireo, Ocellated Thrasher and Blue Mockingbird. Our time in Huatulco will be spent birding the endemic strewn Sierra de Miahuatlán for such delights as Long-tailed Wood Partridge, Blue-capped Hummingbird, White-faced Quail-Dove, Mexican Hermit, Long-billed and Plain-capped Starthroat, West Mexican Chachalaca, Citreoline Trogon and Red-breasted Chat.

As the tour draws to a close, we change tack and head out to the sea off the Pacific coast for a pelagic, with such headline species as the endemic Townsend's Shearwater (becoming increasingly rare). We shall also be on the lookout for Christmas and Galapagos Shearwaters, Nazca, and Red-footed Boobies and both the rare Black and Least Storm Petrels.

Our Veracruz & Eastern Sierras Extension takes in some of the major highlights of the Lower Gulf of Mexico, covering the towns of Xalapa for such delights as Strickland's Woodpecker, Rufous-naped Wren, Mexican Sheartail, and the elusive Bearded Wood Partridge before heading to Tuxtepec and Valle Nacional for Sumichrast's Wren, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, White-faced Quail-Dove, the incredibly rare Dwarf Jay, and Red Warbler.

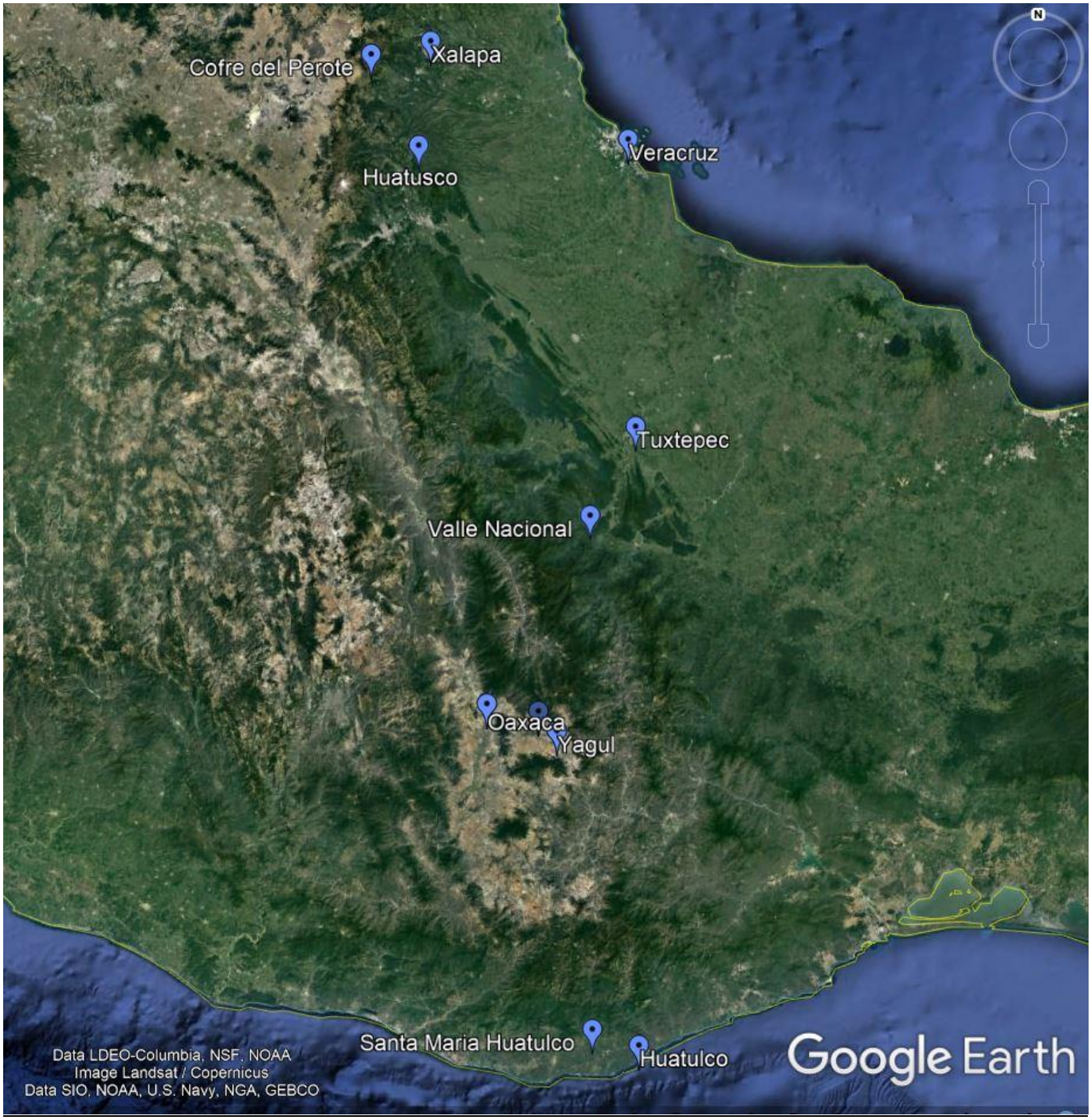
Itinerary & Map

Veracruz

Day 1	**Arrival in Veracruz, transfer to Xalapa**
Day 2	**Cofre de Perote & Xalapa area**
Day 3	**Xalapa to Huatusco**
Day 4	**Huatusco to Tuxtepec (Bearded Wood Partridge)**
Day 5	**Tuxtepec to Valle Nacional (Sumichrast's Wren)**
Day 6	**Valle Nacional to Oaxaca City & final departure**

Oaxaca

Day 1	**Arrival in Oaxaca City**
Day 2	**Teotitlan del Valle**
Day 3	**Benito Juarez National Park (Dwarf Jay)**
Day 4	**Yagul, & Central Valley clean-up**
Day 5	**Cerro San Felipe & Monte Alban; night in the Sierra Madre Occidental**
Day 6	**The Sierra Madre Occidental to Huatulco**
Days 7 & 8	**Huatulco area**
Day 9	**Pelagic off Huatulco & area clean-up**
Day 10	**Final departures**


Cofre del Perote
Xalapa
Veracruz
Huatusco
Tuxtepec
Valle Nacional
Oaxaca
Yagul
Santa Maria Huatulco
Huatulco
Data LDEO-Columbia, NSF, NOAA
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Google Earth

Birding sites in detail



Velasquez's Woodpecker by Adam Riley

Cofre de Perote. This inactive, perfectly conical volcano offers some great birding and wildlife opportunities, and the surrounding coffee plantations and humid cloud forests will supply an impressive list of birds for just our first day! A few species that we might find in the drier, high-elevation forests include Montezuma Quail (rare), Blue-throated, White-eared and Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Strickland's Woodpecker, Steller's and Transvolcanic Jay, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatch, Mexican Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird and our first chance for the endangered, range-restricted Bearded Wood Partridge. Garnet-throated and Bumblebee Hummingbird, Grey-breasted Wood Wren, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Black Thrush and Common Bush Tanager are a few of the species that stick to the upper elevation cloud forests of the Sierra Madre Oriental, and which are likely today.

Xalapa. The forests and scrub right around Xalapa are home to more than 300 species of birds within a 10 mile-vicinity. Today, we will have a full day to explore the environs of this attractive colonial city. The habitat is a mixture of humid foothill forests and semi-tropical deciduous forest, as well as plenty of edge and secondary habitats. Some of the more important endemic species exemplary of the special habitats here include Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Blue-capped Motmot, White-fronted Parrot, Spot-breasted Wren, Yellow-winged Tanager. Other species new to the tour that we may encounter today should include Plain Chachalaca, Hook-billed Kite, Red-billed Pigeon, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, White-bellied Emerald, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Canivet's Emerald, Gartered and Collared Trogon, Smoky-brown and Bronze-winged Woodpecker, White-crowned Parrot, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Boat-billed and Social Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, White-eyed and Blue-headed Vireo, Brown Jay, Band-backed Wren, Golden-crowned Warbler, Black-headed Saltator, White-winged Tanager, Montezuma Oropendola, and both Yellow-throated and Elegant Euphonia. An amazing array of beautiful species right around town!

Mirador. These thorn forests extend northward into Central Texas, so some of the avifauna today will be shared with areas farther north. Here, many species reach the southern limits of their breeding range. Some of the species we will search for include Velasquez's Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Rufous-naped and White-bellied Wren, Black-crested Titmouse, Long-billed Thrasher and the endemic Mexican Sheartail and Bronze-winged Woodpecker.



Red Warbler by David Hoddinott

Huatusco area. We will devote time to finding one of the rarest and most sought-after birds in all of Central America: Bearded Wood Partridge. The shady ravines and dense brush around the coffee plantations are the preferred habitat of this spectacular bird. Many other species reside in the coffee plantations and humid mid-elevation forests,



Sumichrast's Wren by Eric Martinez

and we will certainly encounter a great many neotropical migrants and resident species alike. With luck, we will find our target bird early, freeing up some time for more exploration at higher elevations.

Valle Nacional. There are two species of wrens belonging to the genus *Hylorchilus*. Both are endangered species that inhabit ancient karst limestone outcroppings and rocky, forested, hills in Central Mexico. Sumichrast's Wren is found only in a tiny area of limestone foothills in southwestern Mexico.

We will dedicate our morning's birding effort to finding this species on a forested hill near town. This skulking species can often be located by listening for leaves being rustled or overturned on the forest floor or locating an individual by song. Other species of interest reaching the northern limit of their home ranges in the same forest include Thicket Tinamou, Stripe-throated Hermit, Lesson's Motmot, Red-lored Parrot, Red-legged Honeycreeper, White-winged Tanager and Red-throated Ant Tanager. Laughing Falcon, Altamira Oriole, Blue Bunting, Black-headed Saltator and both Scrub and Yellow-throated Euphonias are some of the more attractive, widespread birds that share the forest with the wrens.

In the afternoon, we will find ourselves birding one of the most productive roads in the whole of Central America as we work our way up the mountain to Valle Nacional. The forest becomes lusher as we cruise through the foothills into lower subtropics. A few side roads provide access to great forest where we can look for Grey-headed Dove, Black-headed and Gartered Trogon, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Spot-breasted Wren and the gorgeous White-winged and Crimson-collared Tanager, among many others!



Gartered Trogon by Clayton Burne

Valle Nacional to Oaxaca City. We will bird our way up and over the mountains, to the valley of Oaxaca. By transecting the Sierras, we will have access to subtropical, cloud and pine-oak forests. The list of birds recorded on this highway tops 300 species! With only 170km to travel, we will have more than enough time to bird the variety of habitats we cross.

In the middle-elevations and cloud forest we might encounter Crested Guan, Spotted Wood Quail, Black and Ornate Hawk-Eagle, White Hawk, White-faced Quail-Dove, Pheasant Cuckoo, Central American Pygmy Owl, Amethyst-throated Hummingbird (the localised subspecies *margaritae* is liable to being split in future), Emerald-chinned and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Emerald Toucanet, Barred Parakeet, Black-faced Antthrush, Tawny-throated Leaftosser, Scaly-throated and Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Green Shrike-Vireo, Azure-hooded and Unicolored Jay, Slate-colored Solitaire, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Chestnut-capped and White-naped Brushfinch, Red-crowned Ant Tanager, stunning Elegant Euphonia and beautiful Blue-crowned Chlorophonia. As we get higher into the Pine-Oak zone, the avifauna changes rather abruptly. Northern Pygmy Owl, Mexican Violetear, Rivoli's, Bumblebee and Berylline Hummingbird, Northern

Tufted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee and Hutton's Vireo, possibly the extremely rare Dwarf Jay, Grey-breasted Wood Wren, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, and the brilliant Red Warbler have all been regularly seen on this amazing road! Miles and miles of pristine forest and great habitat today will yield tons of great birds to finish off our Veracruz and Eastern Sierra Pre-Tour.



Dwarf Jay by David Hoddinott

Teotitlan del Valle. The town of Teotitlan del Valle is situated at the base of the eastern Sierras. It is nestled right in amongst a variety of habitats ranging from intermontane valley scrub up to pine forests in the high mountains nearby. Today, we will spend the day birding the valley scrub, thorn forests, and arid pine-oak zones surrounding the town.

Given the geology of the valley, with the central transvolcanic belt to the North, and Sierra Madre del Sur to the South, the degree of endemism in the area is incredibly high. There are fascinating endemic species in each one of the various habitat zones we will explore today! Among the highlights today we will search for West Mexican Chachalaca, Beautiful and Dusky Hummingbird, Pileated Flycatcher, Boucard's Wren, Blue Mockingbird, Ocellated Thrasher, White-throated Towhee and Oaxaca Sparrow. All are endemic species, a few of which have tiny ranges not even extending beyond the border of the state of Oaxaca!

The higher elevation forests and scrub, as we climb out of the valley, hold a different set of species more typical and widespread of the arid parts of the Sierra Madres. Berylline Hummingbird, Grey-breasted Woodpecker, Nutting's Flycatcher, Golden and Dwarf Vireo, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Grey Silky-flycatcher, and Black-vented Oriole are all likely.

Benito Juarez National Park. A bit further northeast of Teotitlan del Valle is the Benito Juarez area. On the far side of the continental divide here, the humid air of the Caribbean rises and comes back down as drizzle and rain on the higher elevations. Some of the best humid Pine-Oak and Cloud forests in the area can easily be accessed here, and this is the home of the exceptionally rare and striking Dwarf Jay. The forested slopes here also host the rare Long-tailed Wood Partridge, which we will put some effort into searching for, though there are more than a few other fabulous species here. Aztec Thrush is rare and unpredictable, Mountain Trogon occurs here, White-striped and Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Greenish Elaenia, Tufted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee, Cassin's and Thick-billed Kingbird, Rose-throated Becard, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Hutton's and Plumbeous Vireo, Bridled Titmouse, American Bushtit,



Long-tailed Wood Partridge by David Hoddinott



Ocellated Thrasher by Adam Riley

Brown-backed Solitaire, Olive, Crescent-chested, Red and Red-faced Warbler, Painted and Slate-throated Whitestart, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and Collared Towhee are all on the hit list today, too!

Yagul. With some 300+ species in the Central Valley region, there will be plenty for us to chase after, in terms of clean-up. Today will be mostly devoted to finding those hard-to-get species we might have missed, or even just getting better views of some of the numerous endemics we might not have enjoyed to our satisfaction, thus far.

Depending on our success in the mountains and our general timeframe, we might choose to visit the interesting archaeological site of Yagul in the evening. These pre-Colombian ruins are a well-kept, smaller version of what we'll be seeing at Monte Alban in a few days. Although the habitat here at Yagul is somewhat less preserved than at Monte Alban, a few species that frequent both are much more easily seen here. The main target at Yagul is the tiny, endemic Beautiful Hummingbird which is known only from the central valley of Oaxaca and surrounding scrubby hillsides. Other fun species here include Lesser Roadrunner, Loggerhead Shrike and the scarce endemic, Bridled Sparrow.

Cerro San Felipe & Monte Alban. The largest pre-Colombian ruins in Oaxaca are situated atop a tall cerro (hill/small mountain) overlooking the entire metropolitan area of Oaxaca and neighbouring cities. This site, Monte Alban is one of the most visited and iconic ruin sites in Mexico, and we plan on spending the better part of the day enjoying the ruins and the fantastic birding opportunities within the archaeological park.



Oaxaca Sparrow by Adam Riley

Built atop an artificially levelled ridge rising over 1,000 feet from the valley floor, Monte Alban served as the socio-political centre of the Zapotec people for nearly 1,000 years. Founded about 500BC, the ruins are among the oldest known sites in Meso-America and are some of the most impressive in the Western Hemisphere. The hundreds of terraces and dozens of groups of monuments and structures that make up the site can be seen from nearly any direction in the valley. To maintain the integrity of the structures, the



Boucard's Wren by David Hoddinott

entire ridge was declared a national archaeological park. Save from a few trails through the scrub, forest, and site itself, the whole mountain is very much intact. For us, there will be more than just amazing ruins and history to be enjoyed today: the birding at this site is world class!

Raptors are commonly reported here and include White-tailed Kite, White-tailed, Red-tailed, Zone-tailed and Short-tailed Hawk (quite an array of "tailed" creatures!) as well as Northern Crested Caracara, American Kestrel, and Peregrine Falcon. The endemic Dusky Hummingbird, as well as Berylline, are numerous here, though there are many reports of the rare Beautiful Hummingbird in Spring. Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Dusky-capped, Ash-throated, Nutting's and Brown-crested Flycatcher, Rock, Canyon and Bewick's Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, White-collared Seedeater, Black-headed and Blue Grosbeak and Lesser Goldfinch are among the more numerous birds in the scrub here, but the quality and number of endemics here is the real attraction.

The two-star birds of this site, undoubtedly, are the dapper and surprisingly attractive Slaty Vireo, and the garrulous Ocellated Thrasher. Both endemic species are frequently seen here, and we hope to have great views of each! Blue Mockingbird is practically abundant here and, despite being a skulker, we plan to lure some out for good views. The list of great endemics here includes Grey-breasted Woodpecker, Pileated Flycatcher, Boucard's Wren, Rufous-backed Robin, Grey Silky-flycatcher, White-throated Towhee and Black-vented Oriole. After birding we will drive to the town of San Jose del Pacifico and overnight in cabins in pine oak forest.

The Sierra Madre Occidental. Early morning birding near the cabins where we will take time to look for a star species in the area, the gorgeous White-throated Jay. Adding to our mounting impressive list of rare and beautiful corvids, this species is found only in the neighbouring state of Guerrero and here, in this corner of Oaxaca. Inhabiting cloud forests and humid pine-oak forests in these mountains, the White-throated Jay shares its habitat with other interesting birds such as Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Hooded Yellowthroat, Yellow-eyed Junco, Red Warbler and Black-headed Siskin.



Red-breasted Chat by Lev Frid

Huatulco area. We will head back up the mountain a little way and begin birding in the heart of the range of our main target: Blue-capped Hummingbird. With a distribution of just over 150 miles of mountains, known as the Sierra de Miahuatlan, this little beauty has to be one of the most range-restricted species on Earth. We will spend the better part of today birding the lush subtropical forests that remain in the area, which span dozens of miles of road here, although human encroachment does pose a problem. With the expanding



Citreoline Trogon by Adam Riley

coffee interests and other agricultural concerns popping up in the Miahuatlan Mountains, the Blue-capped Hummingbird was recently categorized as endangered.

Other than the Blue-capped Hummingbird, some of our hoped-for species today include White-faced Quail-Dove, Colima Pygmy Owl (rare), Mexican Hermit, Long-billed and Plain-capped Starthroat, Grey-crowned Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner (rare) Greenish Elaenia, 'West Mexico' Squirrel Cuckoo (a probably future split), Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Masked Tityra, White-throated Thrush, Fan-tailed, Golden-browed and Golden-crowned Warbler, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Black-headed Saltator, Rusty Sparrow and the stunning Red-headed Tanager! We might be able to squeeze in some night birding before dinner, or just after, and there are many great species of owls in the area such as Pacific Screech Owl, while Mottled and Buff-collared nightjar are also possible.

The town of Santa Maria de Huatulco is yet another quaint, relatively new city, characteristic of this part of Mexico and a very enjoyable base of operations. The town sits at the base of the mountains, a few miles from the coast in the middle of prime pacific thorn forest and foothill riparian forests. Depending on our successes yesterday, we might work from the lower elevations higher, but we plan to spend most of the day birding the lower elevation habitats near to town.

Though not as lush or necessarily as attractive as the forests higher up, the level of endemism around Huatulco and down to the coast is equally, if not more, impressive. Some of the sites we visit include parts of Huatulco National Park or some tracks around the small town of Pluma Hidalgo. In recent years, local farmers and ranchers have begun to appreciate the economic impact that birders and eco-tourists can have on the area and they have begun inviting people to bird their properties. We might visit one or two of the more productive Fincas in the area, as well.



Blue-capped Hummingbird by Eric Martinez

Starting off in the lowlands, we will look for Thicket Tinamou, West Mexican Chachalaca, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Colima and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Citreoline Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Golden-cheeked, Lineated, and Pale-billed Woodpecker, Lilac-crowned and White-fronted Parrot, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Flammulated Flycatcher, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Sclater's, Happy and Banded Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Olive Sparrow, Red-breasted Chat, Blue and Orange-breasted Bunting, Yellow-winged Cacique and Streak-backed, Spot-breasted and Altamira Oriole and Scrub Euphonia.

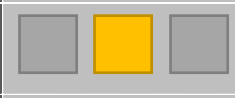


Wedge-tailed Shearwater by Adam Riley

Once we've had our fill of the lowlands, and as the day heats up, we may decide to head back up into the foothills for a bit of clean-up for any species missed yesterday. The foothill transitional zones are preferred habitat for a few species not mentioned so far in the itinerary, including several nice endemics. Long-billed and Plain-capped Starthroat, Golden-crowned Emerald, Green-fronted Hummingbird, Wagler's (Emerald) Toucanet, Grey-crowned Woodpecker, Bell's, Cassin's and Plumbeous Vireo, Red-crowned Ant Tanager, Audubon's Oriole and both Varied and Painted Bunting all prefer the foothill areas here.

Huatulco Pelagic. We'll embark on an early morning pelagic adventure! Our main target is the endemic Townsend's Shearwater. Additionally, we hope to see Black-vented, Christmas and Pink-footed among the more expected Wedge-tailed and Galapagos Shearwaters. Black, Least and Wedge-rumped Storm Petrels all occur in the deep waters just offshore, where we even have a chance of finding a petrel. Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, Black and Elegant Terns, and possibly Sabine's Gull could turn up near shore, as well as skuas harassing the terns and gulls. Closer to shore still, we should see Red-billed Tropicbird, Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown, Nazca, and Red-footed Boobies.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Endemic and target focussed trip. Not suitable for dedicated photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease		Most species provide decent visuals in open conditions. But some skulkers and low-density targets.
Accommodation		Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Average walking, mostly on flat ground with variable substrate. Higher altitude walking is mostly downhill or kept to short distances.
Vehicles / Roads		Several drives, some long. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas. Mountain passes and eroded dirt roads can be bumpy.
Photography		Average to good.
Annoyances		Can be hot & humid in the costal lowlands.

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 lunch on day 6 for those on the Veracruz & Eastern Sierras Extension;
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 10 of the Oaxaca tour;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- 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.**

- The coastal lowlands can be quite hot, while mornings and evenings in and around higher elevations can be chilly to cold. Overall, the climate is very pleasant.
- This Mexico tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time (always at a slow pace). There will also be a few lengthy drives, and several early mornings and optional nocturnal owling.
- The vehicles we use are comfortable, although we should expect bumpy roads in some areas.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Veracruz & Eastern Sierras Extension will depart from Veracruz on day 1 with a group transfer to Xalapa. The tour will conclude in Oaxaca City in the late afternoon on day 6.

The Oaxaca tour will depart from Oaxaca City on day 1 (day 6 of the pre-tour extension). As this day is scheduled as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude in Huatulco after breakfast on day 10.

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.

General Heriberto Jara International Airport, Veracruz (IATA: VER), Xoxocotlán International Airport, Oaxaca City (IATA: OAX) and Bahías de Huatulco International Airport, Huatulco (IATA: HUX) are the main ports of entry and departure for these tours. Where direct international flights are not possible, it is generally advised to fly via Mexico City International Airport, Mexico City (IATA: MEX).

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.