

CHRISTMAS IN OAXACA

DECEMBER 20-29, 2009

**LEADER: HÉCTOR GÓMEZ DE SILVA
AND MÓNICA G. PÉREZ-VILLAFANA**

**COMPILED BY:
HÉCTOR GÓMEZ DE SILVA**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, Inc.

**CHRISTMAS IN OAXACA
DECEMBER 20-29, 2009**

**LEADER: HÉCTOR GÓMEZ DE SILVA
AND MÓNICA G. PÉREZ-VILLAFANA**

The city of Oaxaca is like a hub for birders in this birdiest state of Mexico. Different ecosystems are to be found to the north, east, west, and south of the city, and, as a consequence, hundreds of bird species, many of them endemic to Mexico (or even just the state of Oaxaca), are readily encountered in short to moderate-length day-trips from the city. The city is also one of the most culturally interesting parts of Mexico, and Christmas is one of the most culturally interesting times to visit. All of these ingredients make this, as a rule, an outstanding tour.

Our 2009 Oaxaca Christmas tour was no exception, with a very small group of amiable birders with different levels of interest and experience participating. On the first full day of the tour we went to the warmest and most tropical area on our itinerary, since the weather was extremely cold and cloudy in the immediate surroundings of Oaxaca City. We birded various locations on the road to Tehuantepec, and, as usual, found several interesting species that we don't have a chance to find throughout the rest of the tour, including Orange-breasted Bunting, Streak-backed Oriole, Green-fronted Hummingbird, Russet-crowned Motmot, Yellow-winged Cacique, and White-throated Magpie-Jay. The following day we visited the Tule tree and the birds and archaeological site of Yagul, the Mitla archaeological site, and a nearby mezcal factory. In the afternoon we went to see Monte Albán's treasures that are held in the Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca, as well as the ornate Santo Domingo church.

The next day started with a delightful bit of birding in a montane apple orchard at the village of Arroyo Guacamaya (including Steller's Jays of the "very different-looking" Oaxaca race) and ended downtown where the unique radish contest held every 23rd of December took place. On the 24th we visited the montane forest of La Cumbre, where we decided to spend some time again on the 25th and 28th, which gave us the opportunity to bump into Gray-barred Wrens, an Aztec Thrush, and a male Rose-throated Becard, to mention just a few of the highland specialties we saw.

The following morning we took in the spectacular ruins of Monte Albán and the special Oaxacan brunch buffet close to our hotel. On the mornings of both the 26th and 28th we visited the lower slopes of the mountains north of Oaxaca City, seeing Ocellated Thrasher, Dwarf Vireo, and, unexpectedly, a Red-headed Tanager. On the afternoon of the 26th we visited the village where alebrijes (fanciful carved animals) are made, and then the village of the black pottery, San Bartolo Coyotepec.

Most of the 24th was spent in several habitats near Teotitlán del Valle. And all those ornithological and cultural wonders were accompanied every day by special meals of typical Oaxacan or Mexican cuisine, including mole sauce made of many ingredients (such as dark chocolate), fried grasshoppers, strips of prickly pear stems, arrachera steak, and hot chocolate.

So, do come to Oaxaca to see its birds and experience its cultural traditions and rich typical foods.

ITINERARY:

Day 1, December 20. Travel to Oaxaca City, check-in at the Hotel Victoria. Evening met with guides Héctor Gómez de Silva and Mónica G. Pérez-Villafaña for a get-acquainted dinner at the Hotel Victoria restaurant.

Day 2, December 21. To sample the bird's of Oaxaca's Pacific slope thorn forest, we drove 179 km towards Tehuantepec and back, stopping at several places for birding and having lunch at Restaurant Tangerina in San José de Gracia.

Day 3, December 22. This morning we traveled to Yagul in the eastern end of the Oaxaca Valley, stopping on the way to visit the Tule tree. After birding the driveway to Yagul and exploring the Yagul ruins, we stopped for lunch at Restaurant Rancho Zapata and saw a demonstration of mezcal making at the Beneval mezcal factory. In the afternoon, we visited the ruins and crafts market of Mitla and traveled downtown to visit the ornate Santo Domingo church and view the treasure from Monte Alban's Tomb 7 in the adjacent Santo Domingo museum (with a few minutes looking out over the Santo Domingo botanical garden from the windows of the museum). Dinner at Los Danzantes.

Day 4, December 23. In the morning we drove all the way up to the village of Arroyo Guacamaya where we had a delightful time birding the apple orchard and then drove on up to the pine forest. Lunch was at a rustic restaurant in Arroyo Guacamaya. In the late afternoon, *Noche de Rábanos* (Night of the Radishes). Dinner: Catedral Restaurant.

Day 5, December 24. This morning we drove up to the mountains north of Oaxaca City, where we had breakfast at a roadside restaurant. After breakfast we birded La Cumbre. Lunch was at nearby Café Colibrí and was followed by a bit of birding. Christmas eve dinner in the zócalo at Hotel Mesón del Marqués, allowing view of the passing *calendas* floats.

Day 6, December 25. We spent this morning birding in thorn scrub below Monte Albán, followed by a tour of the ruins. Brunch at the Hotel Misión de los Ángeles. In the afternoon, we birded La Cumbre.

Day 7, December 26 This morning we birded the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175 North. In the afternoon we went to see the *alebrijes* at San Antonio Arrazola and the black pottery at San Bartolo Coyotepec.

Day 8, December 27 We spent this morning birding in the reservoir, thorn scrub and pine-oak forest above Teotitlán del Valle. Lunch was near Teotitlán at Restaurant El Patio. In the afternoon, we again visited the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175 North.

Day 9, December 28. This morning we birded the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175 North for the third time, picking up a couple of species we had missed earlier. Lunch was at nearby Café Colibrí and after that we birded La Cumbre.

Day 10, December 29. Departing flights to Mexico City and the US.

LOCATION KEY

C = La Cumbre, Pine and pine-oak forest.

G = Guacamaya. Apple orchard, some high-elevation pine forest.

L = Lower slopes of Hwy. 175 North. Arid thorn scrub and scrub oak, with nearby perennial stream.

M = Monte Albán archaeological site. Disturbed thorn scrub/oak scrub.

T = Teotitlán del Valle and several habitats above the town.

V = Oaxaca Valley bottom. Includes roads, agricultural habitats and disturbed areas within the valley floor arid scrub zone.

W = Widespread at all elevations.

Y = Yagul ruins and vicinity. Valley thorn scrub.

P = Pacific thorn forest on road to Tehuantepec.

bold = endemic to Mexico—in some cases with portions of their ranges extending into northern Central America, or extreme SW USA.

Underlined = species are rare or unusual for the area of the tour.

BIRDS OBSERVED

SWANS, GEESE & DUCKS (Anatidae)

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – T

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)-T

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)—several males and females at T

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)—several males and females at T

GUANS, CHACHALACAS & ALLIES (Cracidae)

West Mexican Chachalaca (*Ortalis poliocephala*)-several at M, T

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) - T

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) -1 at T

BITTERN & HERONS (Ardeidae)

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)-T

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)- T

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)- T

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) - V

AMERICAN VULTURES (Cathartidae)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) - V

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) - W

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES (Accipitridae)

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) -1 at V

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) - P, L

Sharp-shinned/ Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter sp.*) - V

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) - 1 at Y

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) - 1 while driving to Oaxaca City

White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*)—1 at Y
Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – G, V, Y

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – Y, L
American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – V
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) - 1 at Santo Domingo botanical garden

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)—T

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) – T

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – V; common in and around towns
Band tailed-Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*)- several at C,M,T
Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – V
White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)– V
Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – V. The common small dove of the valley

CUCKOOS (Cuculidae)

Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) – V
Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*)-P

SWIFTS

Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) – P
White throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)- C

HUMMINGBIRDS (Trochilidae)

Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*) – T, C, Persistent "tick-tick" call
Dusky Hummingbird (*Cynanthus sordidus*) – V. Common at lower-elevations in the valley. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.
White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) – C, G. A very common high elevation hummer.
Berylline Hummingbird (*Amazilia beryllina*) – M, L.
Green-fronted Hummingbird (*Amazilia viridifrons*)- P
Blue-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*) – 2 at C. This species ranges to extreme SW Arizona in summer, but is otherwise restricted to the highlands of Mexico.
Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – C.
Beautiful Hummingbird (*Calothorax pucher*) – Y. Another highly local Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.
Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – M, Y
Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – L
Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – C
Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – L, C

TROGONS (Trogonidae)

Mountain Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) – 1 at G, and 1 at C.
Elegant Trogon (*Trogon elegans*)-1 at T

MOTMOTS (Momotidae)

Russet-crowned Motmot (*Momotus mexucanus*)-1 at P

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES (Picidae)

Gray-breasted Woodpecker (*Melanerpes hypopolius*) – M, P, Y. Another range-restricted Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.

Golden-fronted Woodpecker (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)- P

Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – Y,L,T

Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides vilosus*)– 1at C

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)-C

Smoky-brown Woodpecker (*Veniliornis fumigatus*)- 1 at C. Specie rare in Oaxaca!

OVENBIRDS AND WOODCREEPERS (Furnariidae)

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes affinis*)—1 at C

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES (Tyrannidae)

Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – 1 at T

Greenish Elaenia (*Myiopagis viridicata*)-heard at C

Pileated Flycatcher (*Xenotricus mexicanus*)- seen by one participant in M

Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) – G, T.

Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – G

Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*) – G, M, T

Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – Y

Pine Flycatcher (*Empidonax affinis*)-G

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*)-T

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)-M

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – W

Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – G,V

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – P, V

Nutting's Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingii*) – P, L.

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – W

Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – 1 at San Antonio Arrazola

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – W

Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – V. The commonest kingbird in the Oaxaca Valley in winter.

Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) – 1 at L.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Y

Generae incertae sedis

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – C. As usual there, seen following flocks of Gray-barred Wrens.

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – 1 on the way to San Antonio Arrazola

VIREOS and ALLIES (Vireonidae)

Slaty Vireo (*Vireo brevipennis*) –1 at the lower slopes below G

Dwarf Vireo (*Vireo nelsoni*) – 3at L

Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinis*) – G

Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – G,C
Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – W
Golden Vireo (*Vireo hypochryseus*) – 1 at T

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS (Corvidae)

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stellari coronatus*) – C, G. The distinctive *coronatus* subspecies.
White-throated Magpie-Jay (*Calocitta formosa*)—a flock at P
Dwarf Jay (*Cyanoliza nana*)- **Seen only by one of the leader**
Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) – T

SWALLOWS (Hirundinidae)

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – M, T, L
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – M,Y, T
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)-P

CHICKADEES & TITMICE (Paridae)

Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile sclateri*) – C
Bridled Titmouse (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) –T. In oak scrub, above the thorn scrub but below the tall pines.

CREEPERS (Certhiidae)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – G, C

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Gray-barred Wren (*Campylorhynchus megalopterus*) – C. This Mexican highland endemic travels in large, noisy flocks
Rufous-napped Wren (*Campylorhynchus rufinucha*) – P
Boucard's Wren (*Campylorhynchus megalopterus*) –Y. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic, characteristic of cactus-dominated thorn scrub vegetation.
Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – M, Y
Happy Wren (*Thryothorus felix*)-heard at L
Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*)—heard at M and Y
Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – V
Brown-throated [House] Wren (*Troglodytes aedon brunneicollis*) – 2 at C. Restricted to high elevations, and considered a separate species by some taxonomists.
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren – heard at C and G

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – C,G, T

OLD WORLD WARBLERS (Sylviidae)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*) – V
White-lored Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila albiloris*)—a few at P

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) – C,G. Also seen above T. The tumbling song of this species is one of the characteristic sounds of the Mexican highlands.
Russet Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus occidentalis*) – C,G
Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)-C

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)-C,T
White-throated Robin (*Turdus assimilis*) – G,C
Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) – P
American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – G, C
Aztec Thrush (*Ridgwayia pinicola*)- 1 at C

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS (Mimidae)
Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – M, Y
Ocellated Thrasher (*Toxostoma ocellatum*) – L.
Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – V
Blue Mockingbird (*Melanotis caerulescens*) –L,G,M

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)
American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*)— T

SILKY-FLYCATCHERS (Ptilonotidae)
Gray Silky-Flycatcher (*Ptilonotus cinereus*) – G, T, C

OLIVE WARBLER (Peucedramidae)
Olive Warbler (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) –G, C

WOOD WARBLERS (Parulidae)
Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – W. Widespread in highlands.
Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*)—Y,L
Virginia’s Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*)– Y,M,T
Lucy’s Warbler (*Vermivora luciae*)-P. Specie rare in Oaxaca!
Crescent-chested Warbler (*Parula superciliosa*) – G, C
Yellow-rumped (“Audubon’s”) Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) – W
Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) – L
Townsend’s Warbler (*Dendroica townsendii*) – W in highlands
Hermit Warbler – (*Dendroica occidentalis*) – C,G
Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – M
MacGillivray’s Warbler (*Oporornis tolmei*) – heard at M
Wilson’s Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – M, P, T, C,G
Red-faced Warbler (*Cardellina rubrifrons*)-seen one close to G
Red Warbler (*Ergaticus ruber*) – C, T,G. This striking warbler is entirely restricted to Mexican pine-oak forest.
Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – G,T
Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*) – T,C
Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) –M, V, L
Golden-browed Warbler (*Basileuterus belli*)— C

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)
Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa baritula*)-heard at C
Rufous-capped Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes pileatus*) – G, 3 at restaurant el Colibrí one of them was an immature
Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch (*Arremon brunneinucha*)-G
Collared Towhee (*Pipilo ocai*) – G
Spotted (Rufous-sided) Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) – G

White-throated Towhee (*Pipilo albicollis*) – M, T, V, L Common throughout the valley at lower elevations, this species is almost entirely restricted to the state of Oaxaca

Bridled Sparrow (*Aimophila mysticalis*) – Y. A handsome sparrow with a very restricted range.

Oaxaca Sparrow (*Aimophila notosticta*)-L

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) –M,L

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) – G,C

Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*) –G

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & ALLIES (Cardinalidae)

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) – G,C

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)-L

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – M, G, L.

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – G, L

Red-headed Tanager (*Piranga erythrocephala*)- An immature male seen briefly in L

Black-headed Grosbeak(*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)-G,C,L,T

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)-Y,L

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – V

Oranged-breasted Bunting (*Passerina leclancherii*) – P

Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – P

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES (Icteridae)

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – V

Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – Y

Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*)- P

Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*)— a few at P

Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*)-P

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) – M,G, L,C

Black-vented Oriole (*Icterus wagleri*) – L, M. A near-endemic; this species ranges from southern Sonora to northern Nicaragua.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)—3 at Santo Domingo botanical garden

Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) – G

Yellow-winged Cacique (*Cacicus melanicterus*) – P

FINCHES (Fringillidae)

Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia (*Euphonia elegantissima*) – Y, L, M. This beautiful species is usually found at clumps of mistletoe.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – W

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostre*)-G

Black-headed Siskin (*Spinus notata*)-G

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – V

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – V

Total: 175 species