

BARRANCA DEL COBRE

(MEXICO'S COPPER CANYON)

OCTOBER 10-18, 2009

Leader: Brian Gibbons

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We began our 2009 Copper Canyon tour in the hot coastal town of Los Mochis. A Gray Hawk put in an appearance before we passed through the gate of Parque Sinaloa, where we got our first glimpse of the avifauna of Northwest Mexico. A mix of familiar northern and tropical species greeted us. Red-billed Pigeon, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Streak-backed Oriole, Ruddy Ground-Dove, and Great Kiskadee were all easy to find. Our main quarry for the park was Mexican Parrotlet. We eventually found a nice flock of more than 30 birds, but keeping them in the scope for more than a few seconds was challenging as they climbed around, eating their favorite fruits.

Our time in the park passed quickly, and we had to head inland to El Fuerte, a town in its fifth century of existence. After lunch, a town tour revealed the charming streets of this old colonial city. Rio El Fuerte still flowed past the west side of town. Social Flycatchers greeted us upon our arrival at the river. Green Kingfisher, Vermilion Flycatcher, Mangrove Swallow, and the afternoon prize—a juvenile Bare-throated Tiger-Heron—were all seen along the river. We meandered upstream and found another tiger-heron, even closer this time. Happy and Sinaloa wrens both sang from the brush, but neither would venture out for a look at us. Finally, the late afternoon showers pushed us back to the hotel after a great day.

Tropical Storm Patricia had settled off the tip of Baja and rained on us from dawn till dusk on our second day. However, we still managed a few sightings like Elegant Quail and Sinaloa Martin, both Mexican endemics. Russet-crowned Motmot was smarter than we were and stayed hidden during our efforts. The next day dawned with a sprinkle and I thought, here we go again. Much to my delight, it never rained on us during our full day of birding around the El Fuerte river valley. We were given this opportunity since the train was delayed a day by the rain, and we made good on it. Happy and Sinaloa wrens came out. A Crane Hawk clambered around an old snag. Rufous-bellied Chachalaca sat up, as did Common Black-Hawk. The motmot, which barely peeped the other day, came in calling and allowed scope views. There were warblers, vireos, flycatchers, sparrows, buntings, and swallows all over the place. The next morning, one day late, we were waiting for the train at the El Fuerte station. A male Yellow Grosbeak made for a great show during our wait.

As we started up the flank of the Sierra Madre Occidental, the scenic train ride up to Bahuichivo, always exceptional, was even more so; the rain-swollen streams made the waterfalls the most remarkable I have seen on this journey. We were shorted a day by Patricia, so we made an evening run out to Cerro Gallegos after a quick trip through Cerocahui and its Jesuit mission church. A Black-headed Siskin sat atop an oak near the rim. The thunderstorms beyond Urique Canyon were beautifully lit by the setting sun. In a tropical setting, thousands of feet below, the towns of Guapalina and Urique carried on without noticing us.

The crisp morning, our first and last at Paraiso del Oso, was for the White-striped Woodcreeper hunt, and we headed out for Arroyo Ranchito. Brown-backed Solitaires were singing early and we quickly heard a distant woodcreeper. It would take a while, but eventually the quarry came in and

we had good looks at a cooperative bird, another Mexican endemic. Buff-breasted and Tufted flycatchers, Painted Redstart, and Mexican Jays livened up our wait for the woodcreeper. The courtyard at Paraiso del Oso was prime for watching the hummingbirds visiting the feeders. White-eared, Berylline, Black-chinned, Anna's, and Magnificent hummers all came in for the sweet stuff. Red-naped Sapsucker and Arizona Woodpeckers also gave us great views in the yard. Unfortunately, we needed to get back on schedule and we had to leave Paraiso del Oso, so we were off to the Bahuichivo station.

This leg of the train voyage was scenic too, as we passed through high valleys with more Tarahumara farms tucked into the hills. Finally, in Creel, we took a van to the Cabanas Canon del Cobre. On our first evening, we took an exploratory hike down the Cascada Cusarare trail and were rewarded with excellent views of members of an Eared Quetzal family. After a great dinner of chili rellenos we headed off to our kerosene lamp-lighted rooms.

The next morning we headed down the same trail to Cascada Cusarare. The waterfall was as spectacular as I have ever seen it, still gushing with tropical rains. That afternoon we crossed paths with the quetzal family again, including a brief scope view of the male. These amazing views captured "bird of the trip" honors for this great Mexican bird. Along the stream, American Dippers sang and disputed territory. Mexican Chickadee, Steller's Jay, and Hairy Woodpecker were also seen along the trail. In the evening we had yet another encounter with the quetzal family.

Our first stop the next morning was Lago Arareco. A great mixed flock was passing by right in front of us, at eye level: Grace's Warbler, Pygmy and White-breasted nuthatches, Mexican Chickadee, kinglets, creepers, and the star—a beautiful male Olive Warbler. Yellow-eyed Juncos and Canyon Wrens were cruising the boulders below us. Choguita is the magic Striped Sparrow spot, and they were there for our final Mexican endemic. In short order we were out on the plains of Chihuahua watching Chihuahuan Ravens on our way to Casa Carolina for lunch.

At the Pancho Villa Museum, our final destination for the tour, we learned about the life of the famous bandit, patriot, and hero.

ITINERARY

October 10th - Arrival in Los Mochis, trip introduction and dinner.

October 11th – Parque Sinaloa, Los Mochis, Sinaloa; Drive to El Fuerte, afternoon town tour and birding along the El Fuerte River until dusk.

October 12th – Birding the El Fuerte River Valley in the rain.

October 13th – Birding the El Fuerte River Valley, Brand Ranch, Ocolome and afternoon visit to Presa Miguel Hidalgo, much greater success without rain. This was of course the case because of the cancellation of today's train to Chihuahua.

October 14th – Birding around the El Fuerte Train Station, train to Bahuichivo and transfer to Paraiso del Oso in Cerocahui. Van to Cerro Gallegos and the Urique canyon overlook birding along the way.

October 15th – Birding behind the Paraiso del Oso along the canyon trail into Arroyo Ranchito. Transfer to Bahuichivo train station for the train to Creel with a stop to view Barranca del Cobre at the mirador Divisadero, van to Cabanas Canon del Cobre. Evening Eared Quetzal hike was a great success.

October 16th – Birding hike to Cascada Cusarare, Lunch on our return hike, again great Quetzal watching. The ladies went to Creel for a tour. Late afternoon another fruitless Trogon search but we did watch the Quetzal family again.

October 17th – First birding stop was at Lago Arareco, which was great. Next stop was the small community of Choguita (the Striped Sparrow spot) followed with a brief tour of a Mennonite colony. Lunch at Casa Carolina Orchards and continue on to Chihuahua and the Pancho Villa Museum.

October 18th – Departures for points north.

BIRD LIST: 179 Species seen and heard including 14 Mexican and regional endemics.

Unusual or especially memorable observations are underlined.

Mexican endemics and near-endemics are **boldfaced**.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – “Mexican” Duck a few seen around Guerrero

Rufous-bellied Chachalaca (*Ortalis wagleri*) – Distant views of one bird at Brand Ranch

Elegant Quail (*Callipepla douglasii*) – Three coveys seen near El Fuerte

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – One sneaky bird in the oxbow at Ocolome

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Four birds at Lago Arareco

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Several birds at Presa Miguel Hidalgo

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – One bird flying Rio El Fuerte

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – Several birds Rio El Fuerte

Bare-throated Tiger- Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) – Great views along the river

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – Several singles, widespread

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – Several in the lowlands around El Fuerte

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) – A couple around El Fuerte

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – A few around El Fuerte

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – Rio El Fuerte

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – One bird on Rio El Fuerte

Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) – A single bird flying along Rio El Fuerte

Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) – Several seen along the Rio El Fuerte

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – Common

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Common, seen daily

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Common along the Rio El Fuerte

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) – A few seen in the Chihuahuan grasslands

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) – Singles at El Fuerte and in the mountains

Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – A single from the Brand Ranch, El Fuerte

Crane Hawk (*Geranospiza caerulescens*) – Amazing views of a single bird clambering through a tree and a pair soaring overhead at Brand Ranch, Rio El Fuerte

Common Black Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – Rio El Fuerte, scope views

Gray Hawk (*Asturina nitida*) – Common in the lowlands

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) – A couple high singles in the El Fuerte area

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Mountains and several in Chihuahuan plains

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – Common around El Fuerte

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – Common along roadsides

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – A fast flyby along Rio El Fuerte

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Rio El Fuerte

American Coot (*Fulica americana*) – Rio El Fuerte

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Along the road to El Fuerte
 Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) – Along streams in the lowlands
 Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – Seen daily
 Red-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas flavirostris*) – Best looks at Parque Sinaloa
 Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – High flyovers at Arroyo Ranchito
 Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Chihuahua
 White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Common in most places
 Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – El Fuerte area and Chihuahua grasslands
 Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – Common most locales
 Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) – Seen well near Presa Miguel Hidalgo
 Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa
Mexican Parrotlet (*Forpus cyanopygius*) – Great looks at Parque Sinaloa
 Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) – I saw one of our birds that I believe was a Greater Roadrunner
 Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) – Common in the lowlands
 Whiskered Screech-Owl (*Megascops trichopsis*) – Heard only at Paraiso del Oso
 Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) – Two birds heard only at the Brand Ranch
 Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) – El Fuerte area
 White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Fairly common in the mountains
 Broad-billed hummingbird (*Cyanthus latirostris*) – Common in the lowlands
White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) – A single female at Paraiso del Oso
 Violet-crowned Hummingbird (*Agyrtia violiceps*) – Common in El Fuerte
Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) – A couple at Paraiso del Oso
Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – A nice male at Paraiso del Oso
 Plain-capped Starthroat (*Helimaster constantii*) – A few at the feeders in El Fuerte
 Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Achilocus alexandri*) – A single at Paraiso del Oso
 Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) – A few at Paraiso del Oso
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – Along the road to Cerro Gallegos
 Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – A young male at the Urique Canyon rim
Eared Quetzal (*Euptilotis neoxenus*) – Beyond words, a family group was studied well on three occasions, catching large caterpillars and feeding young
Russet-crowned Motmot (*Momotus mexicanus*) – Good looks at a cooperative bird in the thorn forest of the Brand Ranch, even more rewarding after our rainy attempt
 Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) – Singles in many locations
 Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*) – Great looks along the El Fuerte riverwalk
 Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Common in the mountains
 Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte
 Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – Paraiso del Oso and Cascada Cusarare
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – El Fuerte area and Casa Carolina
 Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) – A couple near Cascada Cusarare
 Arizona Woodpecker (*Picoides arizonae*) – Great looks at Paraiso del Oso
 Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) – “Red-shafted” form In the mountains
 Gilded Flicker (*Colaptes chrysoides*) – Thorn forest around El Fuerte
White-striped Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes leucogaster*) – Good looks at a bird in Arroyo Ranchito behind Paraiso del Oso
 Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – Briefly on the Brand Ranch
Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) – Briefly behind Paraiso del Oso
 Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) – Migrants in the lowlands

Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – Heard only in the mountains
 Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii*) – One singing bird, HO near the river Ocolome
 Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*) – Several seen near Paraiso del Oso
 Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*) – Briefly seen in the thorn forest Brand Ranch
 Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) – Wintering bird in the lowlands
 Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) – Common along streams
 Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) – One bird at Choguita, the Striped Sparrow spot
 Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A great bird, fairly common
 Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – A few birds in the El Fuerte area
 Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – A couple seen in the El Fuerte area
 Nutting's Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingi*) – Scope views at the Brand Ranch
 Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – Seen best in Parque Sinaloa
 Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – Parque Sinaloa and lowland areas
 Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – El Fuerte area
 Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – Small numbers in many locales
 Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – Lowlands around El Fuerte
 Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) – Scoped bird at the Brand Ranch
 Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – The Common kingbird in the lower elevations
 Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Paraiso del Oso and Casa Carolina
 Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte area
 Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) – Best looks at Parque Sinaloa
 Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – Paraiso del Oso
 Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – A couple at Parque Sinaloa
 Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Common around Creel
Black-throated Magpie-Jay (*Calocitta colliei*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte areas
Purplish-backed Jay (*Cyanocorax beecheii*) – Seen briefly Brand Ranch, mostly heard
 Mexican Jay (*Aphelocoma ultramarina*) – Common around Paraiso del Oso
 Sinaloa Crow (*Corvus sinaloae*) – Abundant around El Fuerte
 Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) – Several seen in the plains of Chihuahua
 Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – Fairly common around Creel
 Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) – Five rain-soaked birds waiting out Patricia
Sinaloa Martin (*Progne sinaloae*) – One well-marked male with other *Progne* Martins
 Mangrove Swallow (*Tachycineta albilinea*) – Common along Rio El Fuerte
 Violet-Green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – A few seen in the mountains
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Common near El Fuerte
 Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few seen along the El Fuerte river
 Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile scalaris*) – Common around Cascada Cusarare
 Bridled Titmouse (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – One seen briefly at the Bahuichivo station
 Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – Parque Sinaloa and Brand Ranch
 White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Fairly common in the mountains
 Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*) – A great flock at eye-level, Lago Arareco
 Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – A few seen in the mountains
 Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – A couple seen in the mountains
 Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Great looks at a pair, Lago Arareco
Happy Wren (*Thryothorus felix*) – Seen well several times, El Fuerte area
Sinaloa Wren (*Thryothorus sinaloa*) – One popped out at the Brand Ranch
 House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – A few migrants seen in the lowlands
 American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Great looks at Cascada Cusarare stream

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – Common in the mountains
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polyoptila caerulea*) – Common in the lowlands
Black-capped Gnatcatcher (*Polyoptila nigriceps*) – Seen and heard at Parque Sinaloa
 Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) – Around Creel
Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) – Heard at Paraiso del Oso
 Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) – Cascada Cusarare area
Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatu*s) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte area
 American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – One bird made the list near Cascada Cusarare
 Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common in the lowlands
 Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – One or two seen or heard every day
 European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Los Mochis area and Chihuahua
 Olive Warbler (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – Amazing views at Lago Arareco
 Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – Parque Sinaloa and lowlands
 Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*) – El Fuerte area
 Lucy's Warbler (*Vermivora luciae*) – Common around El Fuerte
 Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) – Fairly Common in lowlands
 Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) – El Fuerte area and in the mountains
 Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) – El Fuerte area
 Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*) – One seen in Arroyo Ranchito
 Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*) – One seen on the Cascada Cusarare hike
 Grace's Warbler (*Dendroica graciae*) – Decent view at Lago Arareco
 MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*) – Seen well several times, Parque Sinaloa
 Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte area
Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – Paraiso del Oso and Cascada Cusarare
 Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa
 Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Fairly common around El Fuerte, migrants
 Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*) – Seen in many places, small numbers
 Rufous-winged Sparrow (*Aimophila carpalis*) – Singing near El Fuerte
Striped Sparrow (*Oriturus superciliosus*) – Cascada Cusarare area and Choguita
 Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) – Casa Carolina
 Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Common around El Fuerte
 White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – A few seen around El Fuerte
 Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) – Gray-headed form Arroyo Ranchito
 Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*) – Great looks in the Creel area
 Grayish Saltator (*Saltator coerulescens*) – Good looks in Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte
 Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – El Fuerte area
 Yellow Grosbeak (*Pheucticus chrysopleus*) – A nice male posed in the scope at the El Fuerte train station, a first for me in seven years
 Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – El Fuerte area and mountains
 Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) – Paraiso del Oso corn patch
Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – El Fuerte area, post rain
 Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) – Good looks at numbers in the El Fuerte area
 Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – El Fuerte area
 Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Plains around Chihuahua
 Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Choguita and at the toll booth
 Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Common in the lowlands and around Chihuahua
 Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – A female along the Rio El Fuerte
Black-vented Oriole (*Icterus wagleri*) – Three individuals seen in the El Fuerte area

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – Parque Sinaloa and Brand Ranch

Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte area

Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Feeding at La Choza, like us

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – Common

Black-headed Siskin (*Carduelis notata*) – One great bird sitting near the Urique Canyon overlook

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – Common

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in towns

OTHER FAUNA:

Antelope Jackrabbit

Rock Squirrel

Chipmunk sp

Spiny-tailed Iguana

Green Iguana

Mexican Leaf Frog

Canyon Tree Frog