

Southern Mexico

The Highlands and Lowlands of Chiapas

May 8-16, 2010

LEADER: HÉCTOR GÓMEZ DE SILVA

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DRIVER: JORGE HERRERA**

The southernmost Mexican state, Chiapas, is among the most appealing of all the states of this super-diverse country, with its varied landscapes, archaeological sites, and a bounty of natural wonders, including bird species rarely seen outside of Chiapas. This is why this tour attracts both casual birders and those searching for hard-to-find restricted-range species. We trace a circular route starting and ending in the city of Tapachula in the Pacific lowlands, taking in the pre-Hispanic pyramid of Chinkultic and breathtaking scenery at Sima de las Cotorras (a large limestone sinkhole), Sumidero Canyon, and Lagos de Montebello. All of these ingredients make this, as a rule, an outstanding tour.

Our 2010 tour was no exception. In the very first afternoon of the tour we birded the coast south of Tapachula and several spots on the way, seeing several species we were not to see again elsewhere on the tour, including Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Common Black-Hawk and Blue-black Grassquit.

The following day started with breakfast and an hour's drive to Finca Argovia looking for Blue-tailed Hummingbird (one lucky participant and I glimpsed it) and Prevost's Ground-Sparrow (a highlight of the drive was bumping into a flock of Pacific Parakeets, one of which resembled Central America's Red-throated Parakeet). Most of the afternoon was spent driving to our next destination, Arriaga, with a couple of productive birding stops, including one for a Yellow-winged Cacique that flew across the highway in front of us. Arriaga is the base for searching after the very local Rose-bellied Bunting, and this was the main pre-breakfast bird, although by no means the only one; here we saw our only Green-fronted Hummingbird, Golden-crowned Emerald, Alder and Willow flycatchers, and Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet too. From Ocozocuatla we headed to the impressive limestone sinkhole where dozens of Green Parakeets roost, before backtracking to Ocozocuatla again, seeing many birds on the drive to the sinkhole and at the sinkhole, not the least interesting being a Lesser Roadrunner that ran across the road. Then we headed to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital of Chiapas and our base for the next few days.

Based out of Tuxtla we first visited the magnificent Sumidero Canyon, which we usually have to visit twice to see its specialty birds, but this year one morning was enough to get all—the Gray-collared Becard, Red-breasted Chat, Fan-tailed Warbler, Belted Flycatcher, and the very rare Pheasant Cuckoo included! Our trip to the Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo was interesting with caged Horned Guan and caged Resplendent Quetzals, as well as free-roaming Great Curassows, Crested Guans, white-tailed deer, black howler monkey, and black agouti. At Laguna Bélgica we had superb views of a White-bellied Emerald and a pair of Red-throated Ant-Tanagers.

The other site visited out of Tuxtla Gutiérrez was the Nava's Wren locality; on our first morning, the star Nava's Wren gave everyone a good show in its rough limestone home, and we also saw a giant helicopter damselfly. On the second morning, a nearby area produced many birds not seen elsewhere on the tour, including rare good views of Blue-throated Goldentail and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush.

The morning out of San Cristóbal de las Casas produced Pink-headed Warblers, Yellow-backed Oriole, Mountain Trogon, and a Golden-browed Warbler, as well as the short-crested and blue-backed Chiapas form of Steller's Jay. The afternoon spent at Chinkultic archaeological site was interesting for the ruins and great views of Azure-crowned Hummingbird. A short side-trip to Lagos de Montebello gave us views of one of the beautiful lakes and a few Swallow-tailed Kites.

Our next morning of birding was in Lagunas de Montebello National Park, where we were lucky with sightings of Ruddy Foliage-gleaner, Blue-throated Motmot, and both Black-throated and Unicolored jays, all in a small patch of cloud forest. Then we headed to our pleasant lunch spot, Parador Santa María, where we saw a female Slender Sheartail.

Our afternoon was spent driving to Tapachula, but several stops on the way permitted us to pick up a few extra birds of the cloud forest such as Black Robin, Brown-backed Solitaire, and Black-capped Swallow. And our final morning drive up the slopes of Volcán Tacaná, which straddles the border between Mexico and Guatemala, produced a lovely cloud forest and second views of Blue-throated Motmot and Brown-backed Solitaire, and for one participant, a Rufous-browed Wren.

A very successful tour at the best time of year to find Chiapas's most interesting breeding species without getting rained on every day. So, do come to Chiapas to see rare and beautiful birds and awesome scenery.

ITINERARY:

- May 8, Day 1:** Arrival in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. Afternoon birding near coast south of Tapachula. NIGHT: Hotel Loma Real
- May 9, Day 2:** Morning birding Finca Argovia. Afternoon driving to Arriaga with a couple of birding stops on the way. NIGHT: Hotel Ik Lumaal, Arriaga.
- May 10, Day 3:** Morning near Arriaga and at Boca del Cielo. Afternoon driving to and visiting the limestone sinkhole known as Sima de las Cotorras. NIGHT: Hotel Howard Johnson's, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.
- May 11, Day 4:** Morning at: Sumidero Canyon National Park lookouts. Afternoon at Laguna Bélgica State Park. NIGHT: Hotel Howard Johnson's, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.
- May 12, Day 5:** Morning at Nava's Wren site. Afternoon birding at Tuxtla Gutiérrez Zoo. NIGHT: Hotel Howard Johnson's, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.
- May 13, Day 6:** Morning at rainforest near Nava's Wren site. Afternoon birding near San Cristóbal de las Casas, mostly thwarted by rain. NIGHT: Parador San Juan de Dios, San Cristóbal de las Casas.
- May 14, Day 7:** Morning at Pink-headed Warbler site near San Cristóbal. Afternoon birding at Chinkultic archaeological site and briefly at Lagunas de Montebello. NIGHT: Hotel Hacienda de los Ángeles, Comitán
- May 15, Day 8:** Morning at Lagos de Montebello, mid-morning Lunch at Hotel Parador Santa María. Afternoon: drive back to Tapachula with a few birding stops on the way. NIGHT: Hotel Loma Real.
- May 16, Day 9:** Morning: several birding stops on the drive up the slopes of Volcán Tacaná; Departure Home.

LOCATION KEY:

Sum = Sumidero Canyon.

B = Laguna Bélgica. Humid tropical forest

N = Nava's Wren site. Humid tropical forest.

S = vicinity of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Pine-oak forest.

M = Lagos de Montebello and nearby Chinkultic

A = foothills above Arriaga. Tropical dry forest.

T = Tapachula and vicinity.

Tac = slopes of Volcán Tacaná.

W = Widespread at all elevations.

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

BIRDS OBSERVED:

TINAMOUS

Thicket Tinamou – heard at Sum.

Slaty-breasted Tinamou – heard N, B.

SWANS, GEESE & DUCKS

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – on drive to Arriaga.

GUANS, CHACHALACAS & ALLIES

Plain Chachalaca – heard at Sum and M, seen Chinkultic and Sima de las Cotorras.

White-bellied Chachalaca. T

Crested Guan –a couple at Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo.

Highland Guan. One heard at M.

Great Curassow –a few at Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo.

NEW WORLD QUAILS

Northern Bobwhite –on the road to Sima de las Cotorras

GREBES

Least Grebe –one at Lake Pojoj in M.

PELICANS

Brown Pelican –along Pacific coast,also seen by the leader from lookout in Sumi.

CORMORANTS

Neotropical Cormorant – along coast.

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird –coast at Boca del Cielo

BITTERNS & HERONS

Great Blue Heron –one at Boca del Cielo

Great Egret – Small numbers in scattered locations, mostly T.

Snowy Egret – Small numbers in scattered locations, mostly T.

Tricolored Heron – 2 near Arriaga.

Reddish Egret –one white morph bird at Boca.

Cattle Egret – scattered locations.
Green Heron –1 near Arriaga.

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

White Ibis- a couple at Boca.
Wood Stork –one flew accross road to Arriaga.

AMERICAN VULTURES

Black Vulture – every day
Turkey Vulture – every day
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture –one on drive to Boca.

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES

Osprey –one at Boca.
Swallow-tailed Kite –One at M
White-tailed Kite –one on road to Arriaga.
Plumbeous Kite –one perched near Finca Argovia.
Common Black-Hawk –one on coast south of T.
Gray Hawk –one adult near Arriaga, one imm at N..

FALCONS

Barred Forest Falcon –one heard at S
Crested Caracara –open areas in lowlands.
American Kestrel – heard at Chinkultic
Bat Falcon –one at Sima de las Cotorras.

LIMPKIN

Limpkin –a few on drive to Arriaga.

PLOVERS

Semipalmated Plover –one at Boca.
Black-bellied Plover –a few at Boca.

AVOCETS & STILTS

Black-necked Stilt –several near Arriaga.

JACANAS

Northern Jacana –a few near Arriaga.

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES

Spotted Sandpiper –coastal locations.
Willet –a couple at Boca.
Whimbrel –one at Boca.
Short-billed Dowitcher –a couple at Boca.
Marbled Godwit –a few at Boca.

GULLS & TERNS

Laughing Gull –coastal locations.
Franklin's Gull –a large group on sandbar at Boca.
Royal Tern –a few at Boca.
Black Tern –a few near Arriaga, some in full breeding plumage.

SKIMMERS

Black Skimmer—a small flock near Arriaga.

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Pigeon – Widespread; common in and around towns

Red-billed Pigeon – mostly near T.

White-winged Dove – Widespread in open areas

Ruddy Ground-Dove –near Boca.

Inca Dove – Widespread and numerous.

White-tipped Dove –Sum, near T, one at S.

Gray-headed Dove –heard at B.

PARROTS, MACAWS ETC.

Orange-fronted Parakeet –near A.

Green Parakeet –Sima de las Cotorras

Pacific Parakeet –on drive to Finca Argovia and on slopes of Tacaná.

White-fronted Parrot –mostly T and on slopes of Tacaná.

Yellow-naped Parrot –a distant perched bird south of T, also heard on slopes of Tacaná.

CUCKOOS & ALLIES

Squirrel Cuckoo –Sima de las Cotorras, heard Sum.

Pheasant Cuckoo –one seen, responded to playback at Sum

Lesser Roadrunner –ran accross road near Sima.

Groove-billed Ani –widespread.

OWLS

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl –heard near Arriaga.

NIGHTJARS AND ALLIES

Lesser Nighthawk –one near T.

SWIFTS

Chestnut-collared Swift –high-flying birds at S.

White-collared Swift – M, soaring with Swallow-tailed Kites.

Vaux's Swift – seen by the leader only between M and T.

White-throated Swift—Chinkultic.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Long-tailed Saberwing –N. A narrow-range endemic.

Violet Sabrewing –a male at N.

Canivet's Emerald –a female at Sum

Golden-crowned Emerald –a female near Arriaga.

White-eared Hummingbird – M.

Blue-throated Goldentail –one watched for a long time in the ´scope at N.

White-bellied Emerald –B

Azure-crowned Hummingbird –mostly Chinkultic and Santa María.

Blue-tailed Hummingbird –seen by one participant at Finca Argovia.

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird –N.

Cinamon Hummingbird –T, near Arriaga.

Green-fronted Hummingbird –A.

Slender Sheartail a female while having lunch at Parador Santa María.

TROGONS

Citreoline Trogon –heard at A.
Violaceous Trogon –heard at Sum
Collared Trogon –a male at N
Mountain Trogon –A couple at S.

MOTMOTS

Blue-throated Motmot –one at M and one on Tacaná.
Russet-crowned Motmot –Sum and Tuxtla Gutiérrez Zoo.
Blue-crowned Motmot –Sum.
Turquoise-browed Motmot –one at Finca Argovia.

KINGFISHERS

Green Kingfisher –near A, Boca.

TOUCANS

Keel-billed Toucan –3 at N.

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES

Golden-fronted Woodpecker –seen on most days (except at S).
Smoky-brown Woodpecker –1 at N.
Golden-olive Woodpecker –N and Chinkultic.
Northern Flicker –heard at S.

OVENBIRDS

Ruddy Foliage-gleaner –one well seen at M taking food to nestlings on a dirt bank.
Strong-billed Woodcreeper –one seen only by the leader at M.
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper –heard at a few places.
Spot-crowned Woodcreeper –one at M.

TYPICAL ANTBIRDS

Barred Antshrike –a male responded to tape at N.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Northern Beardless Tyrannulet –one at A responded to pygmy-owl tape.
Greenish Elaenia –one at B.
Yellow-bellied Elaenia –one at Sima.
Yellow-olive Flycatcher –heard at N.
Stub-tailed Spadebill –seen by the leader only, N
Belted Flycatcher –one at Sum.
Olive-sided Flycatcher –one at Chinkultic.
Tropical Pewee –one N and one between M and T..
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher – heard at B.
Willow Flycatcher – 1 at A.
Alder Flycatcher –one at A.
Pine Flycatcher –heard at S.
Black Phoebe –near Argovia and between M and T.
Vermilion Flycatcher – most near Ocozocuatla en route to Sima de las Cotorras.
Bright-rumped Attila –heard N.
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – 1 at Sum.
Nutting's Flycatcher –A, Sima, Sum.
Great Kiskadee – several in the first 4 days of tour.
Boat-billed Flycatcher –small numbers, most Sum.

Social Flycatcher –Widespread.
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher –ones and twos in most places except S.
Piratic Flycatcher –near Sima de las Cotorras.
Tropical Kingbird – widespread in first half of tour.
Couch’s Kingbird –near Ocozocuaula.
Eastern Kingbird –flocks near A.
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher –one near T.

GENERA INCERTAE SEDIS

Gray-collared Becard –a fine look at a pair at Sum.
Rose-throated Becard –Argovia.
Masked Tityra –Argovia, Tacaná.

VIREOS and ALLIES

Brown-capped Vireo –3 heard singing at M.
Yellow-green Vireo –A, Sum.
Lesser Greenlet- N.
Rufous-browed Peppershrike –heard and glimpsed near Sima.

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS

Steller's Jay – S
White-throated Magpie-Jay –Sum, T, A.
Green Jay –Sum
Brown Jay – B, N.
Unicolored Jay – M.
Azure-hooded Jay – heard at M.
Black-throated Jay – M.

SWALLOWS

Gray-breasted Martin --mostly near T
Mangrove Swallow –beach near A.
Black-capped Swallow –between M and T, Tacaná.
Northern Rough-winged Swallow – Sum (Ridgway’s), between M and T (Northern)
Cave Swallow –Chiapa de Corzo.
Barn Swallow – near Ocozocuaula.
Bank Swallow – near Ocozocuaula.

LONG-TAILED TITS

Bushtit – S; the "Black-eared" (*personatus*) subspecies

WRENS

Band-backed Wren –S.
Giant Wren –T.
Rufous-naped Wren –near A.
Rock Wren –Comitán.
Nava’s Wren –Responded to tape at N by approaching, though silently. Few people have been able to see this very restricted-range species!
Spot-breasted Wren –heard at N.
Rufous-and-white Wren --heard and glimpsed on Tacaná.
Banded Wren –Sum, Tuxtla zoo.
Plain Wren –heard several places, 1 seen Tuxtla zoo.
House Wren – ones and twos at several places.
Rufous-browed Wren –Tacaná.

White-bellied Wren –heard and glimpsed at N.
White-breasted Wood-Wren –heard and glimpsed B and N.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

White-lored Gnatcatcher –A, Sum.

THRUSHES & ALLIES

Eastern Bluebird –S.

Brown-backed Solitaire – heard S, seen between M and A and on Tacaná..

Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush –heard S

Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush –N

Swainson's Thrush –mostly N.

Black Robin –seen between M and T.

Clay-colored Robin –Widespread.

White-throated Thrush –N.

Rufous-collared Robin – S.

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS

Tropical Mockingbird –near Ocozocauitla and S.

Blue-and-white Mockingbird – heard S.

WOOD WARBLERS

Crescent-chested Warbler – S.

Yellow Warbler –A, Sum.

Chestnut-sided Warbler –B, Sum, N.

Magnolia Warbler –1 at N. leader only.

Black-throated Green Warbler –Sum.

Blackburnian Warbler –Sum, N.

Canada Warbler – 1 at B.

Pink-headed Warbler – S.

Fan-tailed Warbler -- Sum

Golden-crowned Warbler—heard B, N.

Golden-browed Warbler –S.

Rufous-capped Warbler –1 at N, 1 on Tacaná.

BANANAQUIT

Bananaquit –2 at N.

TANAGERS

Common Bush-Tanager –1 at M.

Crimson-collared Tanager —1 at N.

Yellow-winged Tanager –seen on most days.

Red-legged Honeycreeper –scattered locations, mostly N.

SALTATORS

Grayish Saltator –near A.

Buff-throated Saltator –one at N.

Black-headed Saltator –N, Tacaná.

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES

Blue-black Grassquit –T.

White-collared Seedeater –scattered locations in lowlands.

Ruddy-breasted Seedeater –several, some in breeding plumage, on drive to A.

Olive Sparrow –heard and glimpsed at Sum
Prevost's Ground-Sparrow –Finca Argovia.
Spotted Towhee –S.
Stripe-headed Sparrow –near beach at T, near A.
Rusty Sparrow – N.
Rufous-collared Sparrow –S.
Yellow-eyed Junco --S

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS

Red-throated Ant-Tanager –Sum, B.
Flame-colored Tanager –M.
White-winged Tanager –a beautiful male at Argovia.
Black-faced Grosbeak – N.
Yellow Grosbeak –Sum, near Sima.
Red-breasted Chat –Sum, one pair that responded to playback.
Blue Grosbeak –near Ocozocuatla.
Varied Bunting –Sum.
Rose-bellied Bunting –A.

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES

Red-winged Blackbird –drive to A.
Eastern Meadowlark –grassy field on road to Sima de las Cotorras.
Melodious Blackbird –practically every day.
Great-tailed Grackle – Widespread in towns
Red-eyed Cowbird –one or a few every day.
Bar-winged Oriole –Sum.
Orchard Oriole –near Sima.
Yellow-backed Oriole—S.
Streak-backed Oriole –Sum.
Spot-breasted Oriole –south of T, Argovia.
Altamira Oriole –first 4 days of trip.
Yellow-billed Cacique –Sum, N.
Yellow-winged Cacique –drive to Arriaga, Tuxtla zoo.
Montezuma Oropendola –near N.

FINCHES

Scrub Euphonia –one male at N.
Yellow-throated Euphonia –Sum, N.
House Finch –S.
Lesser Goldfinch –Parador Santa María near M..

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow – towns.

Also:

basilisk –Argovia, Tuxtla zoo

black iguana –T.

Mexican gray squirrel (*Sciurus aureogaster*) –scattered locations.

Deppe's squirrel –N.

white-tailed deer—Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo.

black howler monkey—Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo.

black agouti—Tuxtla Gutiérrez zoo.

Artibeus fruit-eating bats—T and Chiapa de Corzo (also another bat sp. in Chiapa de Corzo).

blue morpho—Sumi, N.

Megaloprepus giant helicopter damselfly—N.