

CHRISTMAS IN OAXACA

DECEMBER 20-29, 2010

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

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The city of Oaxaca (pronounced “Wa-Haca”) 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. Consequently, hundreds of bird species, many of them endemic to Mexico (or even to just a small part of the country), 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. And the food is varied and tasty. All of these ingredients make this, as a rule, an outstanding tour.

Our 2010 Christmas in Oaxaca tour was no exception, with a small group of amiable birders with different levels of interest and experience participating. One increasingly common phenomenon of winter in Oaxaca that often surprises visitors from the north is that we get a few quite cold mornings (in the high 40s or 50s).

On the first full day of our tour we started with a one-hour drive followed by a delightful bit of birding in a montane apple orchard at the village of Arroyo Guacamaya, where birds seen included Steller’s Jays of the “very different-looking” Oaxaca race. Our drive ended in the village of San Antonio Arrazola where fanciful carved animals called alebrijes (pronounced “allay-breehess”) are made.

The following day of birding was in the several habitats near Teotitlán del Valle, and cultural highlights were the rug-weavers of Teotitlán del Valle itself and the famous Tule Tree. The next morning was one of the birdiest of the tour, with our visit to the cactus grove and archaeological site of Yagul, followed by cultural stops at Mitla archaeological site, a nearby mezcal factory, and downtown Oaxaca where the unique radish contest is held every 23rd of December.

On the 24th we visited the montane forest of La Cumbre, which we decided to visit again on the morning of the 28th, the highlights perhaps being the male Mountain Trogon in the scope, the Red and Crescent-chested warblers, Slate-throated Redstart, and the comparatively unattractive but rare Pine Flycatcher. The following morning we took in the spectacular ruins of Monte Albán and the special Oaxacan brunch buffet close to our hotel. In the afternoon we went to see Monte Albán’s treasures that are held in the Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca (which has windows overlooking the birdy Santo Domingo botanical garden), as well as the ornate Santo Domingo church.

On the morning of the 26th we visited the lower slopes of the mountains north of Oaxaca City, and in the afternoon we had free time, during which most participants explored the various shops and markets of downtown Oaxaca. The next day we went to the warmest and most tropical area visited during the tour. 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 closer to Oaxaca City, including Orange-breasted Bunting, Streak-backed Oriole, Russet-crowned Motmot, and Yellow-winged Cacique.

All of these ornithological and cultural wonders were accompanied every day by special meals of typical Oaxacan or Mexican cuisine, such as mole sauce made of many ingredients (including dark chocolate), fried grasshoppers, strips of prickly pear stems, arrachera steak, and hot chocolate (which is a Mexican invention, actually). So, do come to Oaxaca to enjoy its birds, cultural traditions, and rich typical food.

ITINERARY:

DATE	DAILY NOTES
December 20	Arrival day. In evening, met with guides Héctor Gómez de Silva and Mónica G. Pérez-Villafaña for a get-acquainted dinner at the Hotel Victoria restaurant.
December 21	Arroyo Guacamaya apple orchard and pines; lunch at trout cabins; alebrijes at San Antonio Arrazola, dinner at Los Danzantes
December 22	Teotitlán del Valle birds; lunch at Restaurant El Patio; Teotitlán del Valle rugs, Tule tree; dinner at Restaurant Colibrí.
December 23	Yagul birds and ruins, lunch at Beneval mezcal factory; Mitla, ruins and market, raddish festival, dinner at Restaurant La Catedral
December 24	La Cumbre with breakfast and lunch at roadside restaurants; dinner at Restaurant Marquez del Valle; calendas parade
December 25	Monte Albán birds and archaeological site, brunch at Hotel Misión de los Ángeles, Santo Domingo church, museum and botanical garden; dinner at Hotel Victoria.
December 26	lower slopes of Highway 175, Guendoláin reservoir, free afternoon; dinner at Los Danzantes by popular demand
December 27	road toward Tehuantepec, breakfast and lunch at roadside restaurants; dinner at Los Chavales Argentine restaurant.
December 28	La Cumbre, dinner at Restaurant Casa Oaxaca

LOCATION KEY

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

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

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.

BIRDS OBSERVED

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

SWANS, GEESE & DUCKS (Anatidae)

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – T

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) –T

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – T and reservoir at Guendolain

BITTERN & HERONS (Ardeidae)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)- 1 at seasonal wetland in Y

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)- 1 in reservoir at Guendolain

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)- 1 in reservoir at Guendolain

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – V

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)—singles in small wetlands

AMERICAN VULTURES (Cathartidae)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) mainly P

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – W

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES (Accipitridae)

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

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – seen by some flying over downtown Oaxaca being chased by a Great-tailed Grackle.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – mostly at Y

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*) – one at G

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – Y, L

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – V

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)—T and reservoir at Guendolain

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) – T, river at P

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) -- T

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – V; common in and around towns

Band tailed-Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*)- several at T

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – Y

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)– Y

Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – V. The common small dove of the valley

Common Ground-Dove –Y, Guendolain, P

SWIFTS

White throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)- Y

HUMMINGBIRDS (Trochilidae)

Dusky Hummingbird (*Cynanthus sordidus*) – Y. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.

White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) – C, G. A high elevation hummer.

Berylline Hummingbird (*Amazilia beryllina*) – M.

Blue-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*) – T. This species ranges to extreme SW Arizona in summer, but is otherwise restricted to the highlands of Mexico.

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis amethystinus*) – T.

Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – 1 at C.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – V

TROGONS (Trogonidae)

Mountain Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) –1 at C.

MOTMOTS (Momotidae)

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

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES (Picidae)

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

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

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*)—1 seen in hotel grounds by one participant

Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – Y.

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES (Tyrannidae)

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

Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) – T.

Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – C

Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*) – C

Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – T

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) – P

Pine Flycatcher (*Empidonax affinis*)-C

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*)-T

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

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – W

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

Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – 1 at P.

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – W

Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – 1 at Y, 1 in botanical garden.

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*) – P.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – M, botanical garden.

VIREOS and ALLIES (Vireonidae)

Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinis*) – G
Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) --T
Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – G,C
Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – W

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS (Corvidae)

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stellari coronatus*) – C, G. The distinctive *coronatus* subspecies.
Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) – T, race *sumichrasti* which may be split.
Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*)—V,P

SWALLOWS (Hirundinidae)

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Y,P
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – 1 at reservoir at Guendulain.

CHICKADEES & TITMICE (Paridae)

Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile sclateri*) – G, C

LONG_TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – G. The distinctive *melanotis* subspecies.

CREEPERS (Certhiidae)

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

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Gray-barred Wren (*Campylorhynchus megalopterus*) – heard briefly at C.
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*) – Y
Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*)— Y
Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Y and in also seen by some in the hotel grounds
Brown-throated [House] Wren (*Troglodytes aedon brunneicollis*) – 2 at C. Restricted to high elevations, and considered a separate species by some taxonomists.
Northern House Wren –Y,P

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*) –heard at C. The tumbling song of this species is one of the characteristic sounds of the Mexican highlands.
Russet Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus occidentalis*) – C,G
Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)-C,T
Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) – grounds of Misión de los Angeles hotel

Clay-colored Robin (*Turdus grayi*) – grounds of Misión de los Angeles hotel
American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – G

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS (Mimidae)

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – most at Y.
Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – V

SILKY-FLYCATCHERS (Ptilgonatidae)

Gray Silky-Flycatcher (*Ptilgonys cinereus*) – G, M, 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*)—P

Virginia's Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*)— 1 briefly at Y

Crescent-chested Warbler (*Parula superciliosa*) – G, C

Yellow-rumped (“Audubon's”) Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) – W

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) P

Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendii*) – W in highlands

Hermit Warbler – (*Dendroica occidentalis*) – C,G

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – seen by one participant in grounds of Hotel Victoria

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichs*) – a male at the reservoir in Guendulain

Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – W

Red Warbler (*Ergaticus ruber*) – C, G. This striking warbler is entirely restricted to Mexican pine-oak forest.

Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – T

Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*) – C

Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) –1 briefly at Lower Slopes

Golden-browed Warbler (*Basileuterus belli*)— 1 briefly at C

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

White-collared Seedeater (*Sporophila torqueola*) –Y, Guendulain. The distinctive nominate subspecies.

Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa baritula*)-responded to pygmy-owling at T

Rufous-capped Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes pileatus*) – G

Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch (*Arremon brunneinucha*)-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, P. A handsome sparrow with a very restricted range.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) –mostly M, Y

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) – M, Guendulain.

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) –Y, Guendulain.

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

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

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & ALLIES (Cardinalidae)

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) – G
Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)-1 at G
Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – W.
Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – G
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)-G,C,L,T
Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)-Y
Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – Y
Oranged-breasted Bunting (*Passerina leclancherii*) – P
Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – P

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES (Icteridae)

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – V
Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – 1
Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*)— P
Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*)-seen by one participant in hotel grounds
Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) –G
Black-vented Oriole (*Icterus wagleri*) – very briefly at Y and Lower Slopes.
Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)—1 at Santo Domingo botanical garden
Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) – M
Yellow-winged Cacique (*Cacicus melanicterus*) – P

FINCHES (Fringillidae)

Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia (*Euphonia elegantissima*) – One female at T responding to pygmy-owling. This beautiful species is usually found at clumps of mistletoe.
House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – W, the central and southern Mexican subspecies is quite distinctive.
Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – V
Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) –a small flock at C. Very rare in Oaxaca!

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – V

Total: 141 species