

CHRISTMAS IN OAXACA

DECEMBER 20-29, 2005

MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD
EUGENES FULGENS

LEADERS: ALICE BOYLE AND BRAD BOYLE

COMPILED BY: BRAD BOYLE

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ITINERARY

Day 1, December 20. Travel to Oaxaca City, check-in at the Hotel Victoria. In the evening, met with guides Alice and Brad Boyle for a get-acquainted dinner at the Hotel Victoria restaurant.

Day 2, December 21. We spent our first morning birding in thorn scrub and oak scrub below Monte Albán, followed by a tour of the ruins. After returning to the hotel for lunch, we 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. Dinner at El Naranjo.

Day 3, December 22. Headed up to La Cumbre West in the early morning. Cold, misty weather forced our retreat to the lowlands, where we headed west up the Oaxaca valley to bird the foothill thorn scrub, oak forest and riparian habitats along the Guacamaya River. After a picnic lunch, we had a brief look around the gardens and fields of the town of San Miguel Etla. Took the scenic shortcut behind Monte Albán to Arrazola, home of the whimsical *alebrije* carvings. Dinner downtown at Los Danzantes.

Day 4, December 23. This morning we traveled to the eastern end of the Oaxaca Valley, where we birded valley thorn scrub at Yagul. After exploring the Yagul ruins, we stopped for a relaxed Oaxacan lunch (*comida*) at El Patio. In the late afternoon, down to the town square (*zócalo*) for *Noche de Rábanos* (Night of the Radishes). Dinner at Restaurant Catedral.

Day 5, December 24. We spent this morning birding in thorn scrub and along the reservoir above Teotitlán del Valle. Returned to Teotitlán for lunch at Tlamanallí, followed by a demonstration of the centuries-old technique of rug making with natural dyes, and rug shopping. Christmas eve dinner at Restaurant Temple. Afterward, half the group stayed downtown with Alice to watch the *calendas* converge on the *zócalo*.

Day 6, December 25. Christmas morning we birded the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175. Afterward we headed east up the Oaxaca Valley toward the town of Mitla. Lunch at Rancho Zapata was preceded by a tour of the Benevá mezcal factory. After lunch we toured the ruins of Mitla, with its unique, mortar-less panels of complex geometric designs. Christmas dinner in downtown Oaxaca at the Camino Real, a converted 17th century convent.

Day 7, December 26. This morning we returned to the pine forests of Cumbre West, this time with excellent weather. A day of phenomenal birding, beginning with a parade of species foraging in an abandoned field at our first stop. We were treated to several mixed-species flocks of both migrants and local endemics, including Dwarf Jay and Gray-barred Wren. Picnic lunch in the pines. Dinner downtown at Hostería Alcalá.

Day 8, December 27. Having mopped up so successfully the day before, we decided to do something completely different. Instead of heading up to the pine forests of Benito Juárez as planned, we drove east toward the lowland tropical dry forests of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Saw an almost entirely new avifauna, including thirteen species new to the tour. Highlights included Sumichrast's Sparrow, Red-breasted Chat, Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Orange-fronted Parakeet and White-throated Magpie Jay. A long day but worth it!

Day 9, December 28. For our final day, we birded the pine-oak and cloud forests of La Cumbre East. Although it was a challenge to find new species after our Cumbre West experience two days before, we did manage to turn up repeated views of Bumblebee Hummingbird and surprise last-minute appearances by Chestnut-side Shrike Vireo and Mountain Trogon. Lunch at Carmen's Café Colibrí, high in the pines. Back in Oaxaca, our final afternoon meant last-minute shopping by some, a well-earned siesta for others. In the evening, we reunited for a farewell dinner at El Naranjo.

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

LOCATION KEY

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

G = Guacamaya Road. Thorn scrub, humid riparian habitat in oak scrub zone, some high-elevation pine forest. Also gardens and fields around the town of San Miguel Etla.

I = Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Stopped at three sites along Highway 19 from Oaxaca to the isthmus. Final stop, including lunch at the river, was the road to Sta. María Ecatepec. Tropical thorn scrub and dry forest.

L = Lower slopes of Hwy. 175 en route to La Cumbre. Arid thorn scrub and scrub oak, with nearby perennial stream.

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

T = Teotitlán del Valle, to a couple of kilometers above the reservoir. Thorn scrub and oak scrub.

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.

BIRDS OBSERVED

Birds with common names in **bold** are endemic to Mexico and adjacent Central America (as defined in Howell & Webb 1995: A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America). Birds with common names in ***bold italics*** are narrow endemics, restricted almost entirely to the state of Oaxaca plus one or two adjacent states. Underlined species are rare or unusual for the area of the tour.

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – T

BITTERN & HERONS (Ardeidae)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – T

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) – T

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – V

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – T

SWANS, GEESE & DUCKS (Anatidae)

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – T

Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) – T

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) – T

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – T

AMERICAN VULTURES (Cathartidae)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – V

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – W

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES (Accipitridae)

White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) – M, Y, T, L, V

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) – M

White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*) – M. One high above the ruins of Monte Albán.

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*) – G. Flying over fields near San Miguel Etla.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – W

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – V

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – W

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – I. Splendid views of two soaring above a hill; at our second stop on the way to the Isthmus.

GUANS, CHACHALACAS & ALLIES (Cracidae)

West Mexican Chachalaca (*Ortalis poliocephala*) – T. We heard briefly the raucous calls of this species but were never able to locate them.

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

American Coot (*Fulica americana*) – T

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) – T

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) – T

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – V

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – G, Y, T, L, C

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) – M, G, Y, T, L

Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) – Y

Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – M, G, Y, T, I.

White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*) – I. Glimpsed flying across the road by Alice and Elliot, from the van!

PARROTS (Psittacidae)

Orange-rumped Parakeet (*Aratinga canicularis*) – I. A flock flew past us at our stop along the Santa María Ecatepec road. A first for the tour.

CUCKOOS & ALLIES (Cuculidae)

Lesser Roadrunner (*Geococcyx velox*) – I. Another miracle fly-over spotted from the van by Alice and Elliot.

Lesser Ground-Cuckoo (*Morococcyx erythropygus*) – I. One individual, skulking quietly through the underbrush of leafless dry forest. A first for the tour.

NIGHTJARS (Caprimulgidae)

Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) – V. In downtown Oaxaca, hawking insects in early evening by the floodlights of the Santo Domingo church.

SWIFTS (Apodidae)

Vaux's Swift – M. With a flock of White-throated Swifts high above the ruins of Monte Albán. Probably more common than the few winter sightings would suggest.

White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Y, T

HUMMINGBIRDS (Trochilidae)

Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*) – C. Ubiquitous at high elevations. Its persistent "tick-tick" call is a characteristic sound of pine and pine-oak forest.

Dusky Hummingbird (*Cynanthus sordidus*) – V. Common at lower-elevations in the valley. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.

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

Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) – M, T, L. Common in thorn scrub.

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

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis amethystinus*) – C. Similar to the Blue-throated Hummingbird, with a more restricted range.

Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – C

Beautiful Hummingbird (*Calothorax pulcher*) – Y. Mostly seen feeding at flowers of the candelabra cactus (*Myrtillocactus geometrizans*). Another highly local Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – M, Y, T

Bumblebee Hummingbird (*Atthis heloisa*) – C

Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – C

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – L, C

TROGONS (Trogonidae)

Mountain Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) – G, C

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES (Picidae)

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

Golden-fronted Woodpecker (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) – I. Mostly restricted to the Gulf Slope lowlands; we were fortunate to see this species at its closest approach to the Pacific Slope along the dry forests of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. New for the tour.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – T

Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – W

Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides vilosus*) – C

WOODCREEPERS (Dendrocolaptidae)

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes affinis*) – G, C. Almost always seen travelling in mixed-species flocks at high elevations.

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES (Tyrannidae)

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – M, T, L, C, I. Heard at many locations.

Finally seen well at our second stop on our drive to the Isthmus.

Greenish Elaenia (*Myiopagus viridicata*) – L. Seen by a couple of people only at this locality.

Pileated Flycatcher (*Xenotriccus mexicanus*) – L. Most got good looks at one individual that flew in close in response to imitations of its call. Most individuals of this local endemic migrate down to the lowlands of Guerrero in winter.

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

Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – M, G.

Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*) – G

Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – M, G, Y, L. The common migrant flycatcher at lower elevations

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) – T

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – W

Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – M, T, L. Heard only; the mournful whistle of this species is its best field mark

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

Nutting's Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingii*) – Y, T, I

Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – M, I

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – V

Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – G. One small group observed in the town of San Miguel Etla. This species is expanding its range northward.

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – W. Unusually common this year.

Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – V. Less widespread than in previous years, but still common.

Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) – M, L

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – T

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – C. Winters in Mexican highlands. Usually seen following flocks of jays and Gray-barred Wrens.

SWALLOWS (Hirundinidae)

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – V

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – M, T

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) – T. Foraging at the edge of the reservoir.

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – W

SILKY-FLYCATCHERS (Ptilonotidae)

Gray Silky-Flycatcher (*Ptilonotus cinereus*) – W

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Gray-barred Wren (*Campylorhynchus megalopterus*) – C. This Mexican highland endemic travels in large, noisy flocks

Rufous-naped Wren (*Campylorhynchus rufinucha*) – I. At our first stop at the gas station on our way to the Isthmus. Another first for the tour.

Boucard's Wren (*Campylorhynchus jocosus*) – M, Y, T, L. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic, characteristic of cactus-dominated thorn scrub vegetation. Throughout the Oaxaca Valley, including the Rancho Zapata mezcal factory.

Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – M, Y. The “ruin wren”.

Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Y

Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – M, Y, T

Brown-throated [House] Wren (*Troglodytes aedon brunneicollis*) – C. Restricted to high elevations, and considered a separate species by some taxonomists.

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren (*Henicorhina leucophrys*) – C. Glimpsed by a few, we called this one up at a single location in a densely wooded, moist gully on our Cumbre W day. Mostly restricted to wet montane forests (cloud forest).

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS (Mimidae)

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Y, T

Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – Y, T, L

Blue Mockingbird (*Melanotis caerulescens*) – M, L. Normally very retiring, one individual popped up into plain view as we were leaving the ruins of Monte Albán.

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) – G, C. The tumbling song of this species is one of the characteristic sounds of the Mexican highlands.

Russet Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus occidentalis*) – C

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) – L

Black Robin (*Turdus infuscatus*) – C. We were fortunate to see one individual perched out in the open, along with an equally unusual Aztec Thrush—in the same binocular view!

Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) – M

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – M, C

Aztec Thrush (*Ridgwayia pinicola*) – C. One individual, perched in the same tree with the Black Robin.

GNATCATCHERS (Polioptilidae)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*) – V

White-lored Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila albiloris*) – I. Largely replaces Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in dry forest and thorn scrub at middle to low elevations. Another first for the tour.

LONG-TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – G, T. The “Black-eared” *personatus* subspecies.

CHICKADEES & TITMICE (Paridae)

Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile sclateri*) – C

CREEPERS (Certhiidae)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – C

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Y, T

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS (Corvidae)

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stellari coronatus*) – G, C. The distinctive *coronatus* subspecies.

Dwarf Jay (*Cyanolyca nana*) – C. These secretive jays associate with flocks of Grey-barred wrens, but are much harder to see and hear. Another very local endemic, restricted to the highest pine-oak forests of northern Oaxaca, Puebla, and adjacent Veracruz.

White-throated Magpie-Jay (*Cyanolyca mirabilis*) – I. A spectacular jay characteristic of lowland tropical dry forest. A first for the tour.

Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) – G, T, C

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – Y, T, I, C

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – V

VIREOS and ALLIES (Vireonidae)

Slaty Vireo (*Vireo brevipennis*) – L. This distinctive endemic vireo was seen by Michael in the thorn scrub above Teotitlán.

Dwarf Vireo (*Vireo nelsoni*) – T. Heard only along the road above Teotitlán, but never seen.

Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) – M

Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo casinii*) – G, L, C

Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – G, C

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – W

Golden Vireo (*Vireo hypochryseus*) – M, L. Great views of one foraging in the *Bursera* trees in the parking lot at Monte Albán.

Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo (*Vireolanus melitophrys*) – C. Almost the last bird of the tour, one individual flew in close at the end of our Cumbre East morning.

FINCHES (Fringillidae)

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – W

Black-headed Siskin (*Carduelis notata*) – C. A beautiful siskin of the highlands of Mexico and northern Central America.

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) – C. Most tours only heard flying high overhead, but this year we were treated to scope views, including close-ups of the crossed mandibles. Oaxaca is the southernmost limit of this species' range.

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – V

OLIVE WARBLER (Peucedramidae)

Olive Warbler (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – G, C

WOOD WARBLERS (Parulidae)

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – W

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*) - V

Virginia's Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*)– Y, T, L

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

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

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) – G, T, L

Townsend’s Warbler (*Dendroica townsendii*) – W

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

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – M, G

MacGillivray’s Warbler (*Oporornis tolmei*) – G, T

Wilson’s Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – M, G, T, C

Red-faced Warbler (*Cardelina rubrifrons*) – G

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

Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – G, T

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

Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) – M, T, L. Throughout in thorn-scrub habitat.

These noisy warblers commonly forage at knee height in dry thickets

Golden-browed Warbler (*Basileuterus belli*) – C. Mostly in the understory of cloud forest and humid pine forest. Not seen on every tour, but fairly common this year.

Red-breasted Chat (*Granatellus venustus*) – I. One individual, seen by several participants as it accompanied the mixed-species flock at our last birding stop down the Santa Maria Ecatepec road. A spectacular endemic of west Mexican tropical dry forests.

TANAGERS (Thraupidae)

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

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) – V. Spotted on the hotel grounds by Jocelyn and Lloyd.

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

Elegant Euphonia (*Euphonia elegantissima*) – T, L. This beautiful species was seen mostly commonly feeding at clumps of mistletoe.

SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

White-collared Seedeater (*Sporophila torqueola*) – G, Y

Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer (*Diglossa baritula*) – C. Seen well by Pauline.

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

Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch (*Buarremon brunneinucha*) – C

Collared Towhee (*Pipilo ocai*) – C. A pair popped into view at the highest point of our Cumbre West day.

Spotted (Rufous-sided) Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) – G, C. The unspotted southern race of southern and central Mexico.

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

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

Sumichrast’s Sparrow (*Aimophila sumichrasti*) – I. A highly local endemic, restricted to dry thickets along the west side of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. A first for the tour.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) – M, G, Y, T

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) - T

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Y

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) – C
Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*) – G, C

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & ALLIES (Cardinalidae)

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheuctitus melanocephalus*) – M, G, L, C

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) – Y, T

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – Y

Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – I. Lovely views of one individual perched in the open high in a bare tree.

Orange-breasted Bunting (*Passerina lechlancherii*) – I. Restricted to the tropical dry forests of southwestern Mexico. Another first for the tour.

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES (Icteridae)

Melodius Blackbird (*Dives dives*) – I. Perched in a tree with Yellow-winged Caciques at our first stop on the way to the Isthmus. In Mexico, mostly restricted to Gulf slope lowlands; we were fortunate to encounter this species at this location.

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

Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – M, G

Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) – C. Much less common than in previous years.

Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*) – I. New for the tour.

Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*) – I. New for the tour.

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) – W

Black-backed Oriole (*Icterus abeillei*) – C. Endemic to pine forests of central and southern Mexico. Seen during our Cumbre West day. Especially good views of one individual during our final stop. Also called Abeille's Oriole.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – M, Y, I

Black-vented Oriole (*Icterus wagleri*) – Y, T, L. This species ranges from southern Sonora to northern Nicaragua. Particularly lovely views at the farm on our approach to Yagul.

Audubon's Oriole (*Icterus graduacauda*) – I. Thanks to sharp spotting by Evelyn as we drove through the town of El Camarón on our way to the Isthmus.

Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) – M, L

Yellow-winged Cacique (*Cacicus melanicterus*) – I. A spectacular and noisy denizen of west Mexican tropical dry forest. Seen at our first stop on the way to the Isthmus. Another first for the tour.

173 species seen

3 species heard only

176 species total