

SHORT WEST MEXICO

JANUARY 12-18, 2008

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Leaders: Brian Gibbons

We were greeted at Rancho Primavera by Pat and Bonnie, our fantastic hosts, and the buzz of hummingbirds. We were soon indoctrinated to the great food, birds, and kindness of Rancho Primavera.

Our first morning was a wonderful introduction to the birds of western Mexico. The highlight of the morning had to be the Black-throated Magpie-Jays. A couple of flocks screamed at us as they passed through. The Russet-crowned Motmot was more reserved and simply came out to see us after a little prompting. Blue and Varied buntings foraged along the roadside, sometimes popping out to give us a view. After great looks at some new birds, we headed to Hacienda el Divisadero for a filling lunch. The Ivory-billed Woodcreeper was the highlight, as it hitched up the giant fig in the middle of the courtyard. The Hacienda is a new establishment, but built with great care and workmanship to evoke the elegant haciendas of earlier centuries. We spent this afternoon on the ranch where most folks got great looks at the Rosy Thrush-Tanager.

During our stay at Rancho Primavera we made several trips to other habitats. We visited the thorn forest and its endemic-rich avifauna, the pines and oaks of La Bascula, the rich agricultural and marshy areas of Cruz de Loreto, the mangroves and estuaries of the coast and, of course, the forest, pasture, and ponds of Rancho Primavera. The fruiting fig trees are one of the highlights of any Rancho Primavera visit. This year, one tree along the entrance road was in fruit. On our first afternoon this tree hosted a pile of Rufous-backed Robins and a few White-throated Robins, as well as tanagers, orioles, flycatchers, and kingbirds. Dodie found our Red-breasted Chat, a prize of the thorn forest. Not to be outdone, the Orange-breasted Buntings put on a show too. Flammulated Flycatcher was another endemic that popped out for us during a stop which was intended for Nutting's Flycatcher. Our first Citreoline Trogon was in a fruiting fig at a little side road.

After our thorn forest birding we enjoyed a long, leisurely lunch at Tehua. Then we were off to Aquiles Serdan and a small estuary there. The Collared Plovers were running around on the sand as expected. In the town, just past the soccer fields, there was a color-banded Least Sandpiper running around with the other shorebirds. I haven't tracked its origin yet, but I will keep you informed.

In the pines and oaks it took two mornings, but we finally got all the good birds. The highlight had to be on our second morning when a female Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird was gnating in the early morning sun. Also on day two in the pines was a male Gray-collared Becard. Coming more easily on day one were Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Spotted Wren, Black-headed Siskin, White-striped Woodcreeper, and a Blue Mockingbird. Down in the hot country of Cruz de Loreto we had an amazing encounter with a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, which eventually tolerated our presence to allow for great scope views. Roadside Hawk and Mangrove Swallows made the list down in Cruz de Loreto.

Our final morning's drive was interrupted in southern Puerto Vallarta, a welcome interruption. A Citreoline Trogon, then two, sat on a wire over the road. We zipped in and parked, only to discover a tree full of birds. Our best discovery here was not the trogons, but a couple of West Mexican Chachalacas. Everybody had great scope views of yet another Mexican endemic. After several minutes of "oohs" and "aahs" we had to proceed north.

Our next stop was in the Nuevo Vallarta area. A little patch of scrub and a few trees produced two more endemics. We called in, for excellent views, several Elegant Quail with their amazing headdress of rufous feathers. Next, on cue, as if just released from a stagehand (VENT does not do that or condone it), the Mexican Parrotlets zoomed into the fruiting fig. From there they melted into the fig, and after several minutes we couldn't find one. A little further north we stopped at Laguna Quelele, a great birding lagoon. Here we heard yet another Collared Forest-Falcon, and a Peregrine and a Cooper's Hawk zipped through the sky, no doubt terrorizing the hordes of ducks and shorebirds. There was a tree full of Roseate Spoonbills and a couple of very cooperative, massively billed Boat-billed Herons. Into the mangroves we went on a crab hole riddled trail. Just after I pointed and said, "These small gaps are where you might see Rufous-necked Wood-Rail," a Rufous-necked Wood-Rail obligingly walked through! Most folks enjoyed decent silhouette views of this mangrove skulker.

We had nailed all our quality birds and it was time to return to the frozen north, except for me. I was fortunate to do it all over again the next week!

LOCATIONS:

Bioto (Bioto Road); CDL (Cruz de Loreto, and adjacent farmland); CO (Cienega de Ojuelos road, just north of LB); PCP (La Presa Cajon de Pena, a reservoir); LB (La Bascula Road); LQ (Laguna de Quelele, Nayarit); PV (Puerto Vallarta); Ranch & RP (Rancho Primavera); Tehua short for the town of Tehuamixtle which was on the coast where we ate lunch; AS (Aguiles Serdan, estuary near Tehua); NV (the Nuevo Vallarta area where we had Elegant Quail and Mexican Parrotlet). NV and LQ are in the state of Nayarit all other sites we birded are in Jalisco

INDEX:

(E) - Mexico endemics

(RE) - Regional endemic species whose main range is in Mexico but also occur in adjacent countries

(HO) - heard only

ITINERARY:

12 January 2008 – Puerto Vallarta arrival and transfer to Rancho Primavera, a brief relatively birdless stop at Cienega de Ojuelos road

13 January 2008 – Bioto road in the morning, lunch at Hacienda el Divisadero, afternoon at RP around the pond

14 January 2008 – All day along the Tehua road, lunch at Cande's, afternoon at Aquiles Serdan estuary

15 January 2008 – Owling early AM on RP, Bascula road in the morning, lunch at Altamira, PM on RP

16 January 2008 – Cruz de Loreto area AM, lunch at El Habal, afternoon at Presa Cajon de Pena

17 January 2008 – Bascula road AM, lunch at Altamira, afternoon on RP

18 January 2008 – Early departure for Vallarta, yet another magic fig, this one produced West Mexican Chachalaca, Nuevo Vallarta, Laguna Quelele and finally the Puerto Vallarta airport

SPECIES LIST:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – Thousands at LQ and the fish plant ponds near CDL
Fulvous Whistling-Duck – A couple among thousands of the previous species at the fish plant ponds CDL
Gadwall – A couple in a flooded field near CDL
American Wigeon – Several in the flooded field near CDL
Blue-winged Teal – Seen several places RP, LQ, CDL
Cinnamon Teal – RP, CDL seen a few times
Northern Shoveler – Seen several places
Northern Pintail – Several nice males at the fish plant pond CDL
Green-winged Teal – RP, CDL and most numerous at LQ
Ring-necked Duck – A single female at RP and a group with Lesser Scaup at PCP
Lesser Scaup – A flock at PCP
Ruddy Duck – AS and the fish plant near CDL
West Mexican Chachalaca (E) – Mostly heard only until a dramatic final day at the fig tree along the highway in PV
Elegant Quail (E) – A nice group of this beautiful endemic near Nuevo Vallarta
Least Grebe – RP and CDL area
Eared Grebe – Great looks at Tehua
American White Pelican – A small group at LQ on our last morning
Brown Pelican – Common along the coast
Neotropic Cormorant – Common, seen almost daily
Magnificent Frigatebird – Commonly seen along the coast
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron – Stunning study at CDL area
Great Blue Heron – 1-2 seen almost every day
Great Egret – A few seen almost daily
Snowy Egret – Tehua, CDL and PV a few seen at these locations
Little Blue Heron – Seen on a few days
Tricolored Heron – Our best study was the last morning in PV
Reddish Egret – A reluctant dancer at the AS estuary
Cattle Egret – Several seen every day
Green Heron – Seen several times RP ponds were a favorite hangout
Black-crowned Night-Heron – HO Leaving their daytime roost in the mangoes (Linda only)
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – Seen well at LQ
Boat-billed Heron – Great scope looks at this elusive nocturnal hunter
White Ibis – CDL area and LQ area
White-faced Ibis – RP ponds and hundreds in CDL area
Roseate Spoonbill – One dropped into a pond at RP and several more seen at LQ
Wood Stork – Soaring above RP and CDL
Black Vulture – Common and seen daily
Turkey Vulture – Common and seen daily
Osprey – Seen several times around RP
Northern Harrier – One coursed past in the afternoon around CDL
Sharp-shinned Hawk – One shot across the road to Tehua and another in the pines of LB
Cooper's Hawk – Best Looks at LQ
Crane Hawk – Two birds perched along the road to Tehua didn't let us get a good look
Great Black-Hawk – One bird along the highway our first afternoon
Common Black-Hawk – A couple soaring high along the road to Tehua, also seen at the stream crossing RP
Roadside Hawk – A few seen very well in the CDL area
Gray Hawk – Seen daily
Short-tailed Hawk – Light and dark morph birds seen well on RP
Red-tailed Hawk – CO our first afternoon and near El Tuito
Collared Forest-Falcon – HO every single day

Crested Caracara – Common in the CDL area and one at RP and a few on the road to Tehua
Laughing Falcon– One flyover seen well along the road to Tehua
Bat Falcon – Two in PV our first afternoon and a couple other singles, Divisidero and RP
American Kestrel – Seen every day
Peregrine Falcon – A good total of 6! CDL, AS and LQ
Rufous-necked Wood-Rail – Most of us got glimpses of this elusive Mangrove-dweller
Sora – HO RP and CDL
Purple Gallinule – CDL wastewater pond, several birds
Common Moorhen – One in CDL area
American Coot – Common, seen almost everyday
Black-bellied Plover – HO LQ
Collared Plover – Nice Scope views at AS
Snowy Plover – A single lurking in the flats with Collareds at AS
Semipalmated Plover – Several at AS and a couple more at PV
Killdeer – Heard and seen several places
American Oystercatcher – A couple distant birds from Cande's at Tehua
Black-necked Stilt – Near the coast and the CDL area
American Avocet – A few amongst thousands of birds at LQ
Northern Jacana – One at AS and several in the CDL area
Spotted Sandpiper – A few seen on three dates
Solitary Sandpiper – One at RP and one near CDL
Wandering Tattler – One distant bird at Tehua
Greater Yellowlegs – Several in the flooded fields of Tehua
Willet – A couple along the Rio Ameca our last morning
Lesser Yellowlegs – Several in the flooded fields of CDL
Whimbrel – A couple seen along the Rio Ameca in PV
Marbled Godwit – A couple distant birds at LQ
Western Sandpiper – A few at AS
Least Sandpiper – Common along the coast and in ponds, including a banded bird, no info yet
Long-billed Dowitcher – Hundreds in LQ and many in CDL area and a few at AS
Wilson's Snipe – A single bird disappeared before many folks got it, RP
Laughing Gull – One at Tehua
Heerman's Gull – This beautiful Gull was common at Tehua
California Gull – A couple youngsters were cruising around Tehua
Caspian Tern – AS and several seen along the Rio Ameca our last morning
Royal Tern – Seen at Tehua and on our last morning
Black Skimmer – Brief looks at a single distant bird
Rock Pigeon – Seen a few times in towns
Red-billed Pigeon – A few folks saw some our first morning
White-winged Dove – Seen three days, several individuals
Mourning Dove – CDL area and around Vallarta
Inca Dove – Common, seen daily often on the roads
Common Ground-Dove – Seen well in CDL area
Ruddy Ground-Dove – Seen well in CDL area
White-tipped Dove – Seen well along the road to Tehua, many seen on the road
Orange-fronted Parakeet – Seen as flyovers daily, best seen in the scope on our last morning
Military Macaw – Several flyovers, the pair seen on LB was the best look
Mexican Parrotlet (E) – Great scope views after a small flock arrived at the fig in Nuevo Vallarta
Lilac-crowned Parrot (E) – Seen in the lower elevations, all flyovers
Squirrel Cuckoo – Seen a few times, very well along the Tehua road
Lesser Ground-Cuckoo – HO including a close bird near Hacienda Divisadero never came out
Groove-billed Ani – Common in the open country
Barn Owl – One adult and an owlet in the clock-bell tower

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl – Seen very well a few times
Mottled Owl – Amazing looks at a pair of birds on the ranch
Lesser Nighthawk – One evening at RP, only a couple folks saw it
Common Pauraque – In the evenings there were two birds that sat in the circle drive
Vaux's Swift – Seen a few times, best looks right over RP
Long-billed Hermit – Nice looks at a single bird that came into the red flowers, like it was supposed to
Golden-crowned Emerald (E) — Seen well on the porch at RP also seen in a couple locations along the Tehua road
Broad-billed Hummingbird – The most common hummer at the feeders and in the lower elevations
Berylline Hummingbird (RE) – One sneaky bird at the feeders and several in the pines and oaks of LB
Cinnamon Hummingbird – Common at the feeders and in the lower elevations
Violet-crowned Hummingbird (RE) – One sneaked into the feeders a couple times, seen well along the road to Tehua
Plain-capped Starthroat – Along the Tehua road, best looks at the feeders
Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird (RE) – A single female above Provinica along LB, excellent find
Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Common at the feeders
Black-chinned Hummingbird – A few at the feeders and a few more at lower elevations
Calliope Hummingbird – A few seen along the road, LB
Rufous Hummingbird – A single bird along the road to Tehua
Citreoline Trogon (E) – A single bird along the road to Tehua, a couple more at the fig tree in town!
Elegant Trogon – A pair of males along the road at LB, distant looks
Russet-crowned Motmot (RE) – Great looks along Bioto, RP and in Provincia
Belted Kingfisher – RP and CDL area
Green Kingfisher – One bird in CDL area, usually common
Acorn Woodpecker – In the pines and oaks of LB and at RP
Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (E) – Common at RP and all lower elevations
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – One bird along the road above Provincia, LB
Ladder-backed Woodpecker – A pair seen on fence posts, CDL area
Arizona Woodpecker – A couple birds came in to taped calls, LB
Gray-crowned Woodpecker (E) – Great looks at this rare species on both days, LB
Lineated Woodpecker – HO a couple of times
Pale-billed Woodpecker – A couple seen along the road into El Tuito
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper – Best seen at the huge tree in the courtyard of Hacienda de Divisadero
White-striped Woodcreeper (E) – Good looks above Provincia, LB
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet – Common in lower elevations of the Tehua road
Greenish Elaenia – Finally seen LB, often heard
Tufted Flycatcher – Amazing looks at this great little bird, LB
Greater Pewee – Common in almost all habitats we visited
Willow Flycatcher – Seen well CDL
Hammond's Flycatcher – Seen well in Provincia
Pacific-slope Flycatcher – Common in all habitats
Cordilleran Flycatcher – One seen in the moist drainage above Provincia
Black Phoebe – A single bird popped up for us in Provincia, LB
Vermilion Flycatcher – Common in the open country, finally we saw some males
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – Heard many times seen along LB
Ash-throated Flycatcher – Seen in CDL area, one was four feet from the car
Nutting's Flycatcher – Great comparisons with a nearby ATFL in CDL area
Brown-crested Flycatcher – A few seen and heard along the Tehua road
Flammulated Flycatcher (E) – Great looks at a tough bird along the road to Tehua
Great Kiskadee – Common in open habitats
Boat-billed Flycatcher – HO for most folks
Social Flycatcher – Common at RP and in most open areas
Tropical Kingbird – Common in open country

Cassin's Kingbird – A few distant birds in CDL area, calling distinctively
Thick-billed Kingbird – Common in all habitats, small numbers
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – Great looks at a great bird CDL, the “Oklahoma bird-of-paradise”
Gray-collared Becard – Decent looks at a challenging male, only my second with this tour
Rose-throated Becard – A couple females along Bioto road, others saw them at RP too
Masked Tityra – A the fig at RP and a couple on LB
Bell's Vireo – A couple on the day to Tehua
Black-capped Vireo – Amazing looks at a very cooperative bird at RP, only 3 folks got to see this one
Cassin's Vireo – A couple of birds in the pines and oaks of LB
Plumbeous Vireo – More common than the preceding Vireo and in more habitats
Golden Vireo (E) – A couple on the Tehua day but finally seen well at RP
Warbling Vireo – Several seen in a variety of habitats
Black-throated Magpie-Jay (E) – Great luck with this usually challenging species, Bioto
Green Jay – Good looks up LB without me
San Blas Jay (E) – Great looks at the ranch
Tree Swallow – Some flyovers at the fish ponds in CDL
Mangrove Swallow – Finally some distant views in CDL area
Violet-green Swallow – Common at RP, especially around the ponds
Northern Rough-winged Swallow – The most common and widespread swallow
Bank Swallow – Fairly common around CDL, usually rare
Barn Swallow – Common in the CDL area
Spotted Wren (E) – Great looks at a social group near Provincia, LB
Canyon Wren – Scope views of a singing bird in Provincia, LB
Sinaloa Wren (E) – Seen on Bioto road and a few other times, RP
Happy Wren (E) – Along the road to Tehua
House Wren – A couple seen around Provincia
White-bellied Wren (RE) – Several seen in drier thorn forest, Tehua road
Ruby-crowned Kinglet – A couple seen in the pines and oaks of LB
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – Common in a variety of habitats
Black-capped Gnatcatcher (RE) – One female seen, looks the same as Blue-gray, sounds different
Brown-backed Solitaire (RE) – Distant scope views from Provincia
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush – A few of us saw one on the ranch
Swainson's Thrush – Sheila may have been the only one to see this on the ranch
White-throated Robin – Fairly common at the fruiting fig at the stream crossing to RP
Rufous-backed Robin (E) – Common at the stream crossing to RP
Northern Mockingbird – CDL area and one at Hacienda Divisadero, PV too
Blue Mockingbird (E) – Seen well near Provincia, LB
Cedar Waxwing – A small flock flashed past on Bioto road
Orange-crowned Warbler – Common in a variety of habitats
Nashville Warbler – The most common warbler in a variety of habitats
Tropical Parula – Seen a few times along the road to Tehua
Yellow Warbler – Best looks were in the CDL area
Yellow-rumped Warbler – Fairly common, especially in the pines and oaks, LB
Black-throated Gray Warbler – Common in a variety of habitats
Townsend's Warbler – Several seen along the road, LB
Black-throated Green Warbler – A few seen with warbler flocks in LB
Yellow-throated Warbler – One came in with a mob briefly
Grace's Warbler – Fairly common in the pines of LB
Black-and-white Warbler – Common in small numbers everywhere
American Redstart – A couple seen around LQ
Northern Waterthrush – One seen briefly in CDL area
Louisiana Waterthrush – One resident bird along the stream at RP, tough to see well
Common Yellowthroat – Several seen around the ponds at RP and in cattails of CDL

Wilson's Warbler – Common in most habitats
Painted Redstart – A few seen in the pines and oaks of LB
Slate-throated Redstart – Great looks at a bird that sang for us in response to my tape
Rufous-capped Warbler (RE) – Seen a few times, Bioto, and LB
Yellow-breasted Chat – One bird seen by a couple folks at the pond on RP, one seen in Nuevo Vallarta
Red-breasted Chat (E) – One beautiful male seen on the Tehua road, first spotted by Dotie
Rosy Thrush-Tanager – Great looks at an elusive bird RP
Hepatic Tanager – Seen a few times in the pines of LB
Summer Tanager – A male at the stream crossing at RP a couple females seen in various localities
Western Tanager – Best look was at the fruiting fig along the highway near PV
Blue-black Grassquit – A few folks saw some at the RP and most folks saw them around CDL
White-collared Seedeater – The endemic *torqueola* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species the “Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater”. We had our best looks at the fish plant, CDL
Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow (E)– Decent looks at RP, interestingly this species often hangs around Rosy Thrush-Tanager
Stripe-headed Sparrow – Common in the open country, usually at lower elevations
Rusty Sparrow – A few glimpsed on the road by some lucky folks, LB
Lark Sparrow – A flock in CDL area and several seen in PV area
Savannah Sparrow – A couple birds seen in the CDL area
Grasshopper Sparrow – A few birds seen in the CDL area
Lincoln's Sparrow – RP and CDL areas
Grayish Saltator – Common in a variety of habitats
Black-headed Grosbeak – A couple seen in the Provincia area, LB
Blue Bunting (RE) – Seen well a few times at the lower elevations
Blue Grosbeak – A common overwintering bird in the CDL area
Varied Bunting – Several seen in a variety of habitats
Orange-breasted Bunting (E) – Amazing bird, common in the thorn forest
Painted Bunting – Great looks at males in the CDL area
Dickcissel – Common wintering bird in CDL area, we saw one well and heard 100's
Red-winged Blackbird – Several seen in the fields of CDL area
Eastern Meadowlark – Just a couple seen in the fields around CDL
Great-tailed Grackle – Common around RP and all open country
Bronzed Cowbird – Best looks at Rancho Altamira restaurant, also seen in CDL area
Brown-headed Cowbird – A small flock seen in CDL area
Orchard Oriole – A male seen in CDL area and a female at RP
Hooded Oriole – RP and along the road to Tehua
Black-vented Oriole (RE) – Amazing views at RP feeders
Streak-backed Oriole – The most common oriole at RP and everywhere
Baltimore Oriole – A couple nice males seen, RP and Provincia
Bullock's Oriole – Good looks at a male coming to the feeders, RP
Yellow-winged Cacique (RE) – Common in a variety of habitats
Scrub Euphonia – The endemic *godmani* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species “Godman's Euphonia”. Good looks at a male along the road to Tehua
Black-headed Siskin (RE) – Great looks in the pines and oaks around LB
Lesser Goldfinch – The road to Tehua and LB area
House Sparrow – Seen in towns