

# **SHORT WEST MEXICO**

**JANUARY 21-27, 2008**

**LEADER: BRIAN GIBBONS**

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**Leaders: Brian Gibbons**

*It was a close race, but the amazing endemic Orange-breasted Bunting won. An improbable combination of blue, green, yellow, and orange, it is not hard to see why it was victorious. The bird of the trip was trailed by many equally spectacular birds. Red-breasted Chat, Russet-crowned Motmot, Lilac-crowned Parrot, and Elegant and Citreoline trogons rounded out the list of front runners. This amazing combination could only be found in western Mexico. I think the Rosy Thrush-Tanager was forgotten, as it was seen early in the trip. The fruiting figs along the ranch entrance road provided hours of enjoyment. The figs brought in Rufous-backed and White-throated robins, both trogons, orioles, flycatchers, and tanagers. These fantastic birds, along with the hospitality of our Rancho Primavera hosts Pat Morrow and her daughter Bonnie Jauregui, made for a spectacular week in Mexico.*

*Our first morning on the Bioto Road was great. The highlight was a fruiting tree that held our attention for more than an hour. Here we enjoyed scope views of most visitors. Yellow Grosbeaks, Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers, Boat-billed Flycatchers, Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers, Grayish Saltators, and others gorged themselves. Elsewhere along the road, Lilac-crowned Parrots squawked as they patrolled for their favorite foods in the forest. Blue and Varied buntings fed in the roadside vegetation as a female Golden-crowned Emerald sipped nearby. The poinsettias were in seed and we saw only a few past peak “flowers.” We pulled ourselves away for lunch at Altamira and an afternoon on the ranch. Rosy Thrush-Tanager finally cooperated for everyone—a stunning male. Margaret exclaimed, “Ohhh, I see it!” as the bird flung dead leaves aside, searching for its prey. Hot pink in the dark forest can be hard to see, but we did.*

*On day two, dawn came as we were driving south to the irrigated agricultural fields around the town of Cruz de Loreto. Our early arrival allowed us to find a cooperative Bare-throated Tiger-Heron stalking slowly through the grass. We also had a fly-by Limpkin, a few Roadside Hawks, lots of ducks, a male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and more than one hundred species for the day.*

*The Mottled Owl pair came in while it was dark. This cooperative pair gave us some great looks as they perched overhead. In the light we found ourselves in another totally new habitat, the pines and oaks of La Bascula. This was the realm of several more endemics such as Gray-crowned Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreeper, and Black-headed Siskin. It is also inhabited by many widespread species like Painted Redstart, Berylline Hummingbird, Tufted Flycatcher, Blue Mockingbird, Grace’s Warbler, and the amazing songster, the Brown-backed Solitaire. In the evening we were lucky to see one of the local Laughing Falcons on the ranch.*

*The thorn forest and its endemic-rich environs hosted us the following day. We had great fortune with our first couple of endemics, the Red-breasted Chat and Flammulated Flycatcher. We had stopped along the road simply to escape the dust storm of a truck. It was a rewarding stop, as the chat appeared for good looks, and then the flycatcher called to alert us to its presence. Yellow-winged Caciques were always around. This raucous bird is common along the Pacific slope of western Mexico.*

*Soon we were in the thorn forest home of the Orange-breasted Bunting. The dry season was advancing, and the trees and shrubs were losing their leaves. Finally, a stunning male Orange-breasted Bunting sat up right in front of us. After the initial round of oohs and aahs and gasps, we were able to enjoy this bird fully. We saw many more throughout the day. The thorn forest, with its blooming and fruiting trees and vines, is a mecca for overwintering warblers and hummingbirds of all kinds. We saw Black-chinned, Broad-billed, Violet-crowned, Rufous, and Ruby-throated hummingbirds. After a leisurely lunch at Tehua enjoying the Heermann's Gulls and frigatebird antics, we headed for the estuary at Aquiles Serdan. There we witnessed a lethargic Reddish Egret and some active Collared Plovers.*

*Our final full day was spent in the pines and oaks and on the ranch. Our best discovery was a male Hooded Warbler along a stream on the ranch (thanks Margo). The next morning we headed down to Puerto Vallarta, but we had plenty of birding to do before our departure. Carol and Jean spotted West Mexican Chachalacas right along the road. These cooperative birds had found a fruit tree on the side of the highway. It was great to see them so close, as we had heard their cacophony a couple of days earlier. At the resort area of Nuevo Vallarta, the Elegant Quail came out to investigate us, with their rusty headdress plumes held high—another West Mexican endemic. Next was the set of fruiting fig trees where the Mexican Parrotlets had been feeding regularly for more than a week. They weren't there. Silence. I was a little concerned, as I was walking under the trees and all I could hear were distant chickens and grackles. Finally, I flushed a Cooper's Hawk; we would have to come back later. So we darted up to Laguna Quelele in Nayarit. As usual it was packed with birds; thousands of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, teal, and shorebirds loafed about. The star of this mangrove-lined lagoon was the roosting Boat-billed Heron.*

*We had a few minutes left and headed back to Nuevo Vallarta for one last shot at the Parrotlets. They were back. We walked under the fig and saw them feeding just overhead; our last endemic made the show before the curtain fell.*

#### **LOCATIONS:**

Bioto (Bioto Road); CDL (Cruz de Loreto, and adjacent farmland); 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 (Aquiles Serdan, estuary near Tehua); NV (Nuevo Vallarta area Elegant Quail and Mexican Parrotlet). Nuevo Vallarta and Laguna Quelele are in the state of Nayarit, all other locations from the airport south were 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:**

**21 January** – Puerto Vallarta arrival transfer to Rancho Primavera El Tuito, Jalisco

**22 January** – Km 9 bridge early AM, Bioto road until noon, lunch at Altamira, PM at RP

**23 January** – Cruz de Loreto area in the AM, lunch at El Habal, Presa Cajon de Pena PM

**24 January** – Owling early AM at RP, Bascula road AM, lunch at Hacienda el Divisadero, PM at RP

**25 January** – All day birding to Tehua through thorn forest, Aquiles Serdan after lunch at Cande's

**26 January** – AM Bascula road, lunch at Altamira, PM at RP

**27 January** – West Mexican Chachalaca in Puerto Vallarta, Nuevo Vallarta, Laguna Quelele and a return to Nuevo Vallarta for the Mexican Parrotlet

## SPECIES LIST

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** – Thousands seen, at the fish plant in CDL and LQ our final morning  
**Fulvous Whistling-Duck** – A couple seen at PCP  
**Gadwall** – One seen at the marshy pond near CDL, this pond was full of birds!  
**American Wigeon** – Several seen at the aforementioned pond CDL  
**Blue-winged Teal** – Most common at CDL area and LQ also at RP  
**Cinnamon Teal** – Seen on four days, most numerous at CDL and LQ  
**Northern Shoveler** – Seen on three dates most numerous at LQ  
**Green-winged Teal** – Seen on three dates most numerous at LQ  
**Ring-necked Duck** – A couple females seen on the ranch pond  
**Lesser Scaup** – A flock at PCP  
**Ruddy Duck** – Several seen in CDL area and AS ponds  
**West Mexican Chachalaca (E)** – Fantastic find by Carol and Jean, we saw several birds point blank on our last morning a quality find as it would have been frustrating to leave without seeing this endemic  
**Elegant Quail (E)** – Another great last day find, a handsome Endemic. This was the first year on the tour  
**Least Grebe** – Daily on the ranch, several seen in AS and CDL areas  
**Eared Grebe** – PCP and at the coast from Tehua  
**Brown Booby** – A fine adult sat on the floating buoys and flew by for us, my first this year Tehua  
**American White Pelican** – A beautiful soaring flock was our last sighting at LQ  
**Brown Pelican** – Common along the coast especially at Tehua during feeding time  
**Neotropic Cormorant** – Seen daily in small numbers  
**Double-crested Cormorant** – One with a flyby group of Neotrops at Tehua, a first for the tour  
**Magnificent Frigatebird** – Great looks at Tehua during fish cleaning/ bird feeding  
**Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** – Three adults seen, we had killer looks at one cooperative bird  
**Great Blue Heron** – At least one seen every day  
**Great Egret** – One-three seen daily  
**Snowy Egret** – Seen several days Tehua, CDL and RP  
**Little Blue Heron** – Seen almost every day, good looks at two immatures at the stream crossing  
**Tricolored Heron** – Singles seen on four days  
**Reddish Egret** – One lethargic (non-dancer) at the estuary AS  
**Cattle Egret** – Many seen daily, often with or on livestock  
**Green Heron** – Seen several days small numbers  
**Black-crowned Night-Heron** – Best seen at the RP ponds  
**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** – Great looks at LQ, distantly at AS  
**Boat-billed Heron** – Great scope studies at close range our last morning LQ  
**White Ibis** – A few seen on three dates  
**White-faced Ibis** – Hundreds seen in the CDL area, also seen in small numbers elsewhere  
**Roseate Spoonbill** – One briefly emerged from the fog NV  
**Black Vulture** – Common seen daily  
**Turkey Vulture** – Common seen daily  
**Osprey** – Seen at RP ponds and at the fish farm ponds on LB road  
**Sharp-shinned Hawk** – One bird flashed by the fig tree near the stream crossing  
**Cooper's Hawk** – One seen on the ranch, another foiled our first attempt to see Parrotlets  
**Common Black-Hawk** – Singles seen on four days  
**Harris's Hawk** – A couple birds in the CDL area eating something at the bird-filled marshy pond  
**Roadside Hawk** – Good looks at three birds in the CDL area  
**Gray Hawk** – A beautiful raptor that is common in Western Mexico  
**Short-tailed Hawk** – One dark morph near AS, usually more common  
**Zone-tailed Hawk** – Amazing studies of flying birds at PCP and CDL areas  
**Red-tailed Hawk** – Several seen in the CDL area singles seen on a couple of days  
**Collared Forest-Falcon** – HO distantly on a couple of occasions  
**Crested Caracara** – Common in the CDL area

**Laughing Falcon**– Heard several times, often during dinner, and seen from the pond area  
**Bat Falcon** – The pair was on post at their spot in PV our last morning  
**American Kestrel** – A few on the ranch and common in open country  
**Peregrine Falcon** – Two seen by some folks in the CDL area  
**Sora** – HO in the CDL area  
**Common Moorhen** – One close bird in the roadside ditch, CDL  
**American Coot** – Common seen almost everyday in ponds and ditches  
**Limpkin** – One high flyby, our only look at this elusive marsh bird  
**Black-bellied Plover** – One distant bird seen by a couple folks at LQ  
**Collared Plover** – Good looks at a couple birds in the AS estuary  
**Semipalmated Plover** – A few seen in the AS ponds and estuary  
**Killdeer** – CDL area, several seen in a plowed field  
**American Oystercatcher** – Three seen on the rocks across the bay at Tehua  
**Black-necked Stilt** – Common in flooded fields CDL, ponds and LQ  
**American Avocet** – A few seen at LQ on our final morning  
**Northern Jacana** – Good looks in CDL area in marshy ponds and ditches  
**Spotted Sandpiper** – One in the CDL area and three near AS  
**Solitary Sandpiper** – One in the CDL area  
**Wandering Tattler** – One on the rocks across the bay from Tehua  
**Greater Yellowlegs** – CDL area and also along the coast near AS  
**Willet** – A couple seen our last day at LQ  
**Marbled Godwit** – A distant bird at LQ  
**Least Sandpiper** – Good looks at the ponds at AS  
**Long-billed Dowitcher** – CDL area, AS ponds and LQ  
**Laughing Gull** – A couple of birds at the reservoir PCP  
**Heerman’s Gull** – Common on the coast at Tehua  
**California Gull** – Several immature birds at Tehua  
**Caspian Tern** – A couple in the estuary at AS  
**Royal Tern** – Common at Tehua  
**Rock Pigeon** – Common in towns  
**Red-billed Pigeon** – A couple high flyovers our first morning  
**White-winged Dove** – Common in open habitats and LB area  
**Mourning Dove** – Most numerous as a wintering bird at CDL  
**Inca Dove** – Common everywhere, particularly on the roads  
**Common Ground-Dove** – Common but most numerous in CDL area  
**Ruddy Ground-Dove** – Uncommon in open areas  
**White-tipped Dove** – Seen almost daily but hard to see well  
**Orange-fronted Parakeet** – Best looks were at Hacienda Divisadero, in the scope  
**Military Macaw** – Only distant flybys of pairs  
**Mexican Parrotlet (E)** – Great looks at the NV fig tree  
**Lilac-crowned Parrot (E)** – My best ever looks in a tree right overhead! Probably nesting  
**Squirrel Cuckoo** – One seen along the Bioto road  
**Lesser Ground-Cuckoo** – HO distantly in CDL area  
**Groove-billed Ani** – Common in open country, especially around livestock  
**Barn Owl** – The usual one bird in the church bell & clock tower, seen daily  
**Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** – Just one seen as it rocketed out of its hole, seen well later  
**Mottled Owl** – Amazing looks on the ranch, heard often in the early mornings  
**Lesser Nighthawk** – One quick flyby during an early morning departure  
**Common Pauraque** – Great looks in the driveway  
**Long-billed Hermit** – One came in for a good look, amazing this one location is it for this bird  
**Golden-crowned Emerald (E)** — Good looks at a female on the Bioto road  
**Broad-billed Hummingbird** – One of the most common hummers, at the feeders and in the woods  
**Berylline Hummingbird (RE)** – One sneaky bird at feeders, fairly common in the pines and oaks of LB

**Cinnamon Hummingbird** – Common at lower elevations and at the feeders  
**Violet-crowned Hummingbird (RE)** – One at the feeders and common in the thorn forest  
**Plain-capped Starthroat** – Great looks at the feeder bird, this was the first year at the RP feeders  
**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** – Common at the RP feeders  
**Black-chinned Hummingbird** – Uncommon at feeders and common in thorn forest  
**Calliope Hummingbird** – Common in the pine-oak zone of LB  
**Rufous Hummingbird** – One at the feeders was unusual, also one in the thorn forest  
**Citreoline Trogon (E)** – This great endemic really came out for your group, several birds seen well  
**Elegant Trogon** – Great scope views of a female at the fig, JW and I saw a male very well here too  
**Russet-crowned Motmot (RE)** – This stunner came out in Provincia, the small community up LB  
**Belted Kingfisher** – One to three seen on four dates  
**Green Kingfisher** – RP at the stream crossing and the ponds  
**Acorn Woodpecker** – RP and in the pine-oak zone of LB, common  
**Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (E)** – A common endemic, striking bird  
**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** – One seen on the ranch entrance road  
**Ladder-backed Woodpecker** – Seen along Bioto and the road to Tehua  
**Arizona Woodpecker** – Seen well up the LB road  
**Gray-crowned Woodpecker (E)** – Finally good looks at a male LB, the next morning a female was on the ranch, rare at RP, just my third sighting here  
**Lineated Woodpecker** – Great scope views at the “corner bridge” where we also had a pair of Lilac-crowned Parrots and a female Pale-billed Woodpecker  
**Pale-billed Woodpecker** – Great looks at a female at the “corner bridge”  
**Ivory-billed Woodcreeper** – Good looks above Provincia, LB  
**White-striped Woodcreeper (E)** – Great looks at a great West Mexican mountain endemic  
**Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet** – Most numerous on the trip to Tehua  
**Greenish Elaenia** – Seen well on the ranch and up LB road  
**Tufted Flycatcher** – Great looks up LB road  
**Greater Pewee** – Common bird in many habitats  
**Willow Flycatcher** – A couple seen in the CDL area  
**Least Flycatcher** – A couple singles seen on the ranch  
**Hammond’s Flycatcher** – Fairly common in the pines and oaks of LB  
**Pacific-slope Flycatcher** – Common bird in most forested habitats  
**Vermilion Flycatcher** – Seen daily, a great bird to have so common  
**Bright-rumped Attila** – HO a couple times LB and RP  
**Dusky-capped Flycatcher** – Seen well in Provincia  
**Ash-throated Flycatcher** – Seen well in CDL area  
**Nutting’s Flycatcher** – A couple vocalizing birds along the road to Tehua  
**Brown-crested Flycatcher** – Several along the road to Tehua  
**Flammulated Flycatcher (E)** – Great looks at the same place as the Red-breasted Chat, we stopped here just to escape the dust of a large truck, what luck  
**Great Kiskadee** – Common in most habitats  
**Boat-billed Flycatcher** – Seen at the amazing fruiting tree along Bioto road  
**Social Flycatcher** – Common in open country  
**Tropical Kingbird** – Commonest flycatcher in the open country  
**Thick-billed Kingbird** – Best scope looks at a bird near CDL  
**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** – Distant looks at a nice male, rare on the Pacific slope  
**Gray-collared Becard** – HO above Provincia, LB  
**Rose-throated Becard** – Bioto road, near the fruit tree and along the road to Tehua  
**Masked Tityra** – Best looks early on Bioto road  
**Bell’s Vireo** – Several in the CDL area  
**Cassin’s Vireo** – A couple seen along LB  
**Plumbeous Vireo** – A single seen along Bioto road  
**Warbling Vireo** – Singles seen on four days

**Black-throated Magpie-Jay (E)** – Jim was the lucky one to see a single fly across the road to Tehua  
**Green Jay** – Good looks along the road, LB, tough bird to see well  
**San Blas Jay (E)** – Common around the ranch  
**Gray-breasted Martin** – A nice group around the hotels on the south side of PV, last morning  
**Mangrove Swallow** – Several seen in CDL area, finally seen well sitting on a fence post and flying over  
**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** – Common swallow, seen almost everyday  
**Barn Swallow** – Several seen in the CDL area  
**Canyon Wren** – Great looks at the bird in Provincia  
**Sinaloa Wren (E)** – Seen on LB road and RP  
**Happy Wren (E)** – Seen at RP and along the Tehua road  
**House Wren** – One seen in Provincia LB  
**White-bellied Wren (RE)** – Finally seen by a few folks along a two-track in thorn forest  
**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** – HO along the road LB  
**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** – Common overwintering bird most habitats  
**Black-capped Gnatcatcher (RE)** – One well seen winter-plumaged male along the Tehua road  
**Brown-backed Solitaire (RE)** – Good scope views along the road, LB  
**Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush** – Margo and I had great looks at one on the ranch  
**Swainson's Thrush** – One by Margo on the ranch  
**White-throated Robin** – Common at the fig tree and a couple seen away from this tree  
**Rufous-backed Robin (E)** – Common at the fig tree, also seen in other locations  
**Northern Mockingbird** – Common in the open country of CDL  
**Blue Mockingbird (E)** – Great looks in Provincia  
**American Pipit** – HO in CDL area  
**Orange-crowned Warbler** – Common in mixed species flocks in a variety of habitats  
**Nashville Warbler** – The most common overwintering warbler in all habitats  
**Tropical Parula** – Four seen in lower forests and thorn forest  
**Yellow Warbler** – A few seen on five dates  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler** – Common in most areas  
**Black-throated Gray Warbler** – Common in most forested areas  
**Townsend's Warbler** – A single nice male seen in Provincia  
**Black-throated Green Warbler** – One nice female-plumaged bird above Provincia, LB  
**Yellow-throated Warbler** – One bird near Provincia, LB  
**Grace's Warbler** – Seen well in the pines and oaks of LB  
**Black-and-white Warbler** – Seen a few times in forest areas  
**American Redstart** – Common wintering warbler on the ranch  
**Northern Waterthrush** – HO at LQ in the mangroves  
**Louisiana Waterthrush** – One regular at bird at the stream crossing  
**MacGillivray's Warbler** – A couple seen on the ranch, common bird, hard to see  
**Common Yellowthroat** – Common around cattails, RP and CDL areas  
**Hooded Warbler** – A beautiful male on the ranch, spotted by Margo  
**Wilson's Warbler** – Common warbler in forest habitats  
**Painted Redstart** – Seen a few times along the road, LB  
**Rufous-capped Warbler (RE)** – Two frustrating birds along the road, LB  
**Yellow-breasted Chat** – Seen on the trip to Tehua  
**Red-breasted Chat (E)** – Great looks at a beautiful male, closer looks at a young male too  
**Rosy Thrush-Tanager** – Good looks at the male on the ranch, always a challenge  
**Red-crowned Ant-Tanager** – Good looks at a male and a few females coming to feed on the fruit tree along Bioto road, a very tough bird to get in the scope, which we did!  
**Hepatic Tanager** – A male seen by some, female seen by everybody  
**Summer Tanager** – A male seen along Bioto road was the most memorable  
**Western Tanager** – A couple seen at the fruit tree of Bioto road, also seen at the fig tree at RP  
**Red-headed Tanager (E)** – HO above Provincia, LB  
**Blue-black Grassquit** – Seen along the road to Tehua, also seen along the RP entrance road

**Ruddy-breasted Seedeater** – A couple winter-plumaged birds at the fish plant ponds

**White-collared Seedeater** – The endemic *torqueola* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species the “Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater”. Common in open country

**Olive Sparrow** – A few folks saw one on the side road in thorn forest, very close but hard to see

**Stripe-headed Sparrow** – A common fence-line bird of open country

**Lark Sparrow** – A flock of birds flushed from the brushy fields of NV

**Savannah Sparrow** – Two birds in the CDL area

**Grasshopper Sparrow** – Fairly common in the CDL area

**Lincoln’s Sparrow** – Seen on the ranch and in the CDL area

**Grayish Saltator** – Common bird in a variety of habitats

**Yellow Grosbeak (RE)** – Great scope views at the fruiting tree on Bioto road

**Black-headed Grosbeak** – A couple seen along Bioto road

**Blue Bunting (RE)** – Good looks our first morning on Bioto road

**Blue Grosbeak** – Common wintering bird in CDL fields, seen elsewhere too

**Varied Bunting** – Best views along Bioto road our first morning

**Orange-breasted Bunting (E)** – Great looks at several birds in the thorn forest

**Painted Bunting** – A few seen in the CDL area, great bird

**Dickcissel** – Common wintering bird in CDL fields, we saw them distantly

**Red-winged Blackbird** – We saw bunches, sometimes an uncommon bird in CDL area

**Eastern Meadowlark** – Common in the open country of CDL

**Great-tailed Grackle** – Common in open country and around towns

**Bronzed Cowbird** – Most numerous in CDL area, seen here and there as well

**Brown-headed Cowbird** – Common in the CDL fields

**Orchard Oriole** – Seen near the fish plant ponds CDL, and around RP

**Black-vented Oriole (RE)** – Great looks at this stunner at the RP feeders

**Streak-backed Oriole** – The common oriole, great looks at the RP feeders

**Baltimore Oriole** – Singles seen on four dates

**Bullock’s Oriole** – Fairly common in the pine-oak zone of LB

**Yellow-winged Cacique (RE)** – Common bird in most habitats, great looker

**Scrub Euphonia** – The endemic *godmani* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species “Godman’s Euphonia”. We saw this bird well our first morning.

**Black-headed Siskin (RE)** – Great looks our second trip to Provincia

**Lesser Goldfinch** – Several seen on three dates

**House Sparrow** – Common in towns and settlements

Leader only: Hook-billed Kite, Cassin’s Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Black-capped Vireo, Golden Vireo, Hermit Warbler and Chipping Sparrow, Red Crossbill