

CHRISTMAS IN OAXACA

DECEMBER 20-29, 2008

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

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The city of Oaxaca 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; as a consequence, hundreds of bird species, many of them endemic to Mexico (or even to just the state of Oaxaca), 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. All of these ingredients make this, as a rule, an outstanding tour.

Our 2008 Christmas in Oaxaca tour was no exception, with a small group of amiable birders with different levels of interest and experience participating. On our first full day of the tour we took in the spectacular ruins of Montealbán in the morning and, in the afternoon, Montealban's treasures that are held in the Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca, as well as the ornate Santo Domingo church. In the process we bumped into many special birds, including—as an auspicious start to the trip—a small group of the rare endemic, Great Swallow-tailed Swift (the first time this species has ever been seen on our Oaxaca Christmas tour).

The next day began with a delightful bit of birding in a montane apple orchard at the village of Arroyo Guacamaya (including Steller's Jays of the "very different-looking" Oaxaca race) and ended with a demonstration and sale ofalebrijes—fanciful carved animals. After that we went to the warmest and most tropical area visited during our tour, various locations on the road to Tehuantepec, and found several interesting species including Orange-breasted Bunting, Plain-capped Starthroat (the first one ever seen on our Oaxaca Christmas tour), and White-throated Magpie-Jay. That afternoon we returned to Oaxaca City to see the unique radish contest held every December 23. During dinner, we watched a truly outstanding fireworks show right over our heads.

On the 24th we visited several habitats near Teotitlán del Valle, observed a weaving demonstration, and spent some time shopping. Christmas day we visited the archaeological sites of Yagul and Mitla, and a nearby mezcal factory. The afternoon was devoted to the town of the black pottery, San Bartolo Coyotepec. The day after Christmas we visited the montane forest of La Cumbre where we decided to spend some time again on the 26th, seeing the charming Bumblebee Hummingbird on both days, and finally catching up with Mountain Trogon, not to mention a diversity of other birds. On the 27th and 28th we visited the lower slopes of the mountains north of Oaxaca City, seeing Ocellated Thrasher, and Slaty and Golden vireos. We even had a glimpse of Dwarf Vireo.

All of these ornithological and cultural wonders were accompanied every day by special meals of typical Oaxacan or Mexican cuisine, including mole sauce made of many ingredients (such as dark chocolate), fried grasshoppers, prickly pear and soursop sherbets, arrachera steak, and hot chocolate. So, do come to Oaxaca to see its birds and experience its cultural traditions and rich typical foods.

ITINERARY:

Day 1, December 20. Arrive Oaxaca City, check-in at the Hotel Victoria; evening, met with guides Héctor Gómez de Silva and Mónica G. Pérez-Villafaña for a get-acquainted dinner at the Hotel Victoria restaurant.

Day 2, December 21. Our first morning was spent birding in thorn scrub below Monte Albán, followed by a tour of the ruins. After brunch at the Hotel Misión de los Ángeles, 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 (and overlooking the Santo Domingo botanical garden). Dinner at Los Danzantes.

Day 3, December 22. In the morning we drove all the way up to the village of Arroyo Guacamaya where we had a delightful time birding the apple orchard, then drove up to the pine forest. Lunch was at a rustic restaurant in Villa de Etla (Restaurant Chefi). In the afternoon we went to see the alebrijes at San Antonio Arrazola. Dinner: Restaurant El Naranjo (except people who decided to stay at hotel).

Day 4, December 23. To sample the bird's of Oaxaca's Pacific slope thorn forest, we drove 126 km towards Tehuantepec and back, stopping at several places for birding (though most was at and near San Juan Guegoyache) and having lunch at Restaurant Tangerina. In the late afternoon, *Noche de Rábanos* (Night of the Radishes). Dinner: Catedral Restaurant, which was "interrupted" at one point by a magnificent fireworks show right overhead.

Day 5, December 24. We spent this morning birding in the reservoir, thorn scrub pine-oak forest above Teotitlán del Valle. Lunch was near Teotitlán at Restaurant El Patio, and after lunch we returned to Teotitlán for a demonstration of the centuries-old technique of rug making with natural dyes, and rug shopping. Christmas eve dinner in the zócalo at Hotel Mesón del Marqués and after dinner some stayed to watch the calendas parade.

Day 6, December 25. This morning we traveled to Yagul in the eastern end of the Oaxaca Valley, stopping on the way to visit the Tule tree. After birding the driveway to Yagul and exploring the Yagul ruins and Mitla, we stopped for lunch at Restaurant Rancho Zapata and saw a demonstration of mezcal making at the Beneval mezcal factory. In the afternoon, we visited the black pottery makers of San Bartolo Coyotepec. Dinner was at Catedral Restaurant.

Day 7, December 26 This morning we drove up to the mountains north of Oaxaca City, where we had breakfast at Restaurant del Paso. After breakfast we birded La Cumbre. Lunch was at nearby Café Colibrí and was followed by a bit of birding again at La Cumbre. Dinner: Restaurant La Biznaga.

Day 8, December 27 This morning we birded the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175 North, followed by a little bit more birding in La Cumbre (finally catching up with Mountain Trogon) and another lunch at Café Colibrí. After that we birded La Cumbre yet again and San Andrés Huayapam reservoir.

Day 9, December 28. This morning we returned to bird the thorn scrub of the lower slopes of Highway 175 North. The afternoon was free and some people chose to relax at the hotel whereas others went to the town of Oaxaca.

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

LOCATION KEY

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

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

L = Lower slopes of Hwy. 175 North. Arid thorn scrub and scrub oak, with nearby perennial stream.

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.

H = Huayapam reservoir

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.

BIRDS OBSERVED

SWANS, GEESE & DUCKS (Anatidae)

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – T

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) – a couple at T

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)—several males and females at T

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)—several males and females at T

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – T

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)—1 at T

BITTERN & HERONS (Ardeidae)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – V

AMERICAN VULTURES (Cathartidae)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – V

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – W

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES (Accipitridae)

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

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – 1 at Santo Domingo botanical garden and 1 at V

White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*) – 3 at and near Y

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*)—one soaring over T

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – M, G, V, H, L

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – V, T

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – V, T

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)—T

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) – T

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

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

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – V

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

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

Common Ground Dove (*Columbina passerina*).- V

TYPICAL OWLS (Strigidae)

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) - V; around town

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES

Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) – seen by one participant.

SWIFTS

Great Swallow-tailed Swift (*Panyptila sanctihieronymy*) - 2 at Santo Domingo botanical garden. A very rare species in Oaxaca!

HUMMINGBIRDS (Trochilidae)

Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*) – T, C, Persistent "tick-tick" wind-shield wiper call

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

White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) – C, A very common high elevation hummer, but easier to hear than to see.

Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) – M, L.

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis amethystinus*).-.1 above T

Blue-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*) – 5 at . This species ranges to extreme SW Arizona in summer, but is otherwise restricted to the highlands of Mexico.

Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – C.

Beautiful Hummingbird (*Calothorax pucher*) – Y. Another highly local Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic.

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

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – M

Bumblebee Hummingbird (*Atthis heloisa*)— at least 3 at C, and also seen by one participant above T. A bird with personality and charm.

Plain-capped Starthroat (*Heliomaster constantii*) – P

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

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus ruus*) – M

TROGONS (Trogonidae)

Mountain Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) – 2 at G, and 2 at C.

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES (Picidae)

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

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – T, L,H
Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – L
Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides vilosus*)– 1 heard at T and 1 at C

OVENBIRDS AND WOODCREEPERS (Furnariidae)

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes affinis*)—6 at C

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES (Tyrannidae)

Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – 1 at P.
Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) – 5 at T.
Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) – 2 at L.
Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – C
Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*) – M
Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – M, L
Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – W
Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – P.
Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – M, P, V
Nutting's Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingii*) – P, L.
Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – M, P, L
Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – 1 at H
Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – Santo Domingo botanical garden N
Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – V. The commonest kingbird in the Oaxaca Valley in winter.
Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) – 1 at P, 3 at L.
Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Santo Domingo botanical garden
Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) – 1 at P.

Generae incertae sedis

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – C. As usual there, seen following flocks of Gray-barred Wrens.

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – V

VIREOS and ALLIES (Vireonidae)

Slaty Vireo (*Vireo brevipennis*) –1at L.
Dwarf Vireo (*Vireo nelsoni*) – 1 at L.
Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinis*) – C and P.
Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – C.
Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – W
Golden Vireo (*Vireo hypochryseus*) – singles at L and S
Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo (*Vireolanus melitophrys*) – 2 at T and 1 at C. As usual there, seen following flocks of Gray-barred Wrens.

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS (Corvidae)

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stellari coronatus*) – C, G. The distinctive *coronatus* subspecies.
White-throated Magpie-Jay (*Calocitta formosa*)—a small flock at P
Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) – T
Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – 2 at G, 2 at C.

SWALLOWS (Hirundinidae)

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – M, T, L

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – 1 at M, 2 at T.

CHICKADEES & TITMICE (Paridae)

Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile sclateri*) – heard at C

Bridled Titmouse (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – seen by one participant above T. In oak scrub, above the thorn scrub but below the tall pines.

LONG-TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*)—C, the distinctive black-eared form

CREEPERS (Certhiidae)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – 1 at G and 3 at C

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

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

Rufous-napped Wren (*Campylorhynchus rufinucha*) – 10 at P

Boucard's Wren (*Campylorhynchus megalopterus*) – Y. A Oaxaca-Guerrero endemic, characteristic of cactus-dominated thorn scrub vegetation.

Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – M, heard at T

Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*)—heard at M and T

Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – V

Brown-throated [House] Wren (*Troglodytes aedon brunneicollis*) – 2 at C. Restricted to high elevations, and considered a separate species by some taxonomists.

Gray-breasted Wood-Wren – heard at C

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – C, T, L

OLD WORLD WARBLERS (Sylviidae)

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

White-lored Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila albiloris*)—a few at P

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) – 2 at restaurant in C. Also heard above T. The tumbling song of this species is one of the characteristic sounds of the Mexican highlands.

Orange-bill Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus aurantiirostris*) – heard at L

Russet Nightingale-Thrush (*Catharus occidentalis*) – 1 at C

White-throated Robin (*Turdus assimilis*) – G

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

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

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS (Mimidae)

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – M, Y, P

Ocellated Thrasher (*Toxostoma ocellatum*) – L.

Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – M, V.
Blue Mockingbird (*Melanotis caerulescens*) – heard M, seen at L

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*)— T

SILKY-FLYCATCHERS (Ptilogonatidae)

Gray Silky-Flycatcher (*Ptilgonys cinereus*) – G, T, C

OLIVE WARBLER (Peucedramidae)

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

WOOD WARBLERS (Parulidae)

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – W. Widespread in highlands.

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*)—10 at M

Virginia's Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*)—1 at M, 1 at P

Crescent-chested Warbler (*Parula superciliosa*) – 4 at T, C

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

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

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

Hermit Warbler – (*Dendroica occidentalis*) – C

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

MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmei*) – heard at L

Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – M, P, T, C

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

Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – C

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

Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) –M, V, heard at L.

Golden-browed Warbler (*Basileuterus belli*)— T, C.

TANAGERS (Thraupidae)

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) – G

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – M, G, P, L.

SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

White-collared Seedeater (*Sporophila torqueola*) M

Rufous-capped Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes pileatus*) – 3 at G

Collared Towhee (*Pipilo ocai*) – G, T

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, L. A handsome sparrow with a very restricted range.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) –M.

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) – T

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) - G

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

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS & ALLIES (Cardinalidae)

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – G, L

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) –G

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – V

Oranged-breasted Bunting (*Passerina leclancherii*) – P

Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – P, L.

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES (Icteridae)

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

Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – M

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) – M,G, L

Black-backed Oriole (*Icterus abeillei*) – C. Endemic to pine forests of central and southern Mexico.

Black-vented Oriole (*Icterus wagleri*) – L. A near-endemic; this species ranges from southern Sonora to northern Nicaragua.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)—1 at Santo Domingo botanical garden, 1 at L

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

Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*)— a few at P

Yellow-winged Cacique (*Cacicus melanicterus*) – P

FINCHES (Fringillidae)

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – W

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostre*)--G

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – V

Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia (*Euphonia elegantissima*) – G, L. This beautiful species is usually found at clumps of mistletoe.

Scrub Euphonia (*Euphonia affinis*) - seen by one participant at P

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – V

Total: 155 species