

BARRANCA DEL COBRE

(MEXICO'S COPPER CANYON)

OCTOBER 3-11, 2008

Leaders: Brian Gibbons and Brennan Mulrooney

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We began our 2008 Copper Canyon tour in Parque Sinaloa, a serene oasis in the middle of bustling Los Mochis. Immediately we were greeted with our first tropical birds: Red-billed Pigeon, Mexican Parrotlet, Broad-billed and Violet-crowned hummingbirds, Grayish Saltator, and the amazing Black-throated Magpie-Jay. Mingling with these birds were some common North American migrants: Wilson's Warbler, Bell's Vireo, and Western Kingbird were all common in the park.

As the morning warmed up, we wrapped up our birding and headed to the 400-year-old town of El Fuerte, our base for the next two days. On our first afternoon, we birded along the El Fuerte River on the edge of town, finding some great birds. We had our first looks at Social Flycatcher, Thick-billed Kingbird, Happy Wren, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, and many North American migrants. An early start the next morning allowed us a great study of Elegant Quail as a covey of nine birds loitered on the roadside before crossing in front of us.

This year we were able to access the Brand Ranch with great success, enjoying good looks at the ranch's star attraction, the Russet-crowned Motmot. Also making an appearance were Rufous-winged Sparrow, Nutting's Flycatcher, Rufous-backed Robin, and Streak-backed Oriole. In the afternoon a few of us made the short stroll over to the Posada del Hidalgo for some "humming-birding." Among the Broad-billeds and Violet-crowns were a couple of Plain-capped Star-throats.

Before our departure the next morning, we birded the train station, which produced great looks at a male Painted Bunting and a Green-tailed Towhee. The train rolled in a respectable hour and fifteen minutes late. We boarded the famous Chihuahua al Pacifico to cool off after the hot lowlands, and were treated to spectacular canyon views from this engineering marvel.

After fabulous bridges and many tunnels, we arrived in Bahuichivo. A short while later we were ensconced in the Paraiso del Oso with its charming courtyard—and a Berylline Hummingbird. Our afternoon walk was very productive; Green Kingfisher, Painted Redstart, and Brown-backed Solitaire all came out for us. The next morning we headed out to the Cerro Gallegos overlook at the edge of Urique Canyon, and we added many mountain birds: Bridled Titmouse, Mexican Chickadee, Hermit Warbler, Hutton's Vireo, Yellow-eyed Junco, Tufted Flycatcher, and Arizona Woodpecker. Although the Mountain Trogon spot didn't hold a trogon (for the first time), we did find the rare Aztec Thrush, an excellent consolation. The overlook into Urique Canyon hosted a male Anna's Hummingbird and White-throated Swifts zipped overhead. Some 4,000 feet below we could see the tropical towns of Urique and Uapalina.

The next morning we hiked into Arroyo Ranchito (behind Paraiso del Oso). This beautiful little canyon always holds great birds. It also held a jewel scarab beetle, a beautiful lime-green and golden-striped beast fitfully named the glorious scarab. We enjoyed Painted Redstarts again and were surprised by a Northern Waterthrush. The real stars, however, were the Mountain Pygmy-Owl and a very stubborn White-striped Woodcreeper which Brennan finally coaxed out for scope views.

Once again we waited at the train station. Jim won the, “How late will it actually be?” pool, taking home eleven big ones with his guess of 1:42. Again, we boarded the train, for our final leg of rail travel.

The view from Divisadero was fantastic; Tararequa, Copper, and Urique canyons were all visible from the overlook. Since we continued via bus from here, we had a little extra time. White-eared, Anna’s, Broad-tailed, and Magnificent hummingbirds were our reward. We arrived in Creel and took yet another bus to the charming Cabañas Cañon del Cobre lodge. A great kerosene-lamp dinner and crisp night in the mountain air followed.

We were off the next morning on a hunt for the marquee bird of this tour, the Eared Quetzal. Brennan and I were delighted to find a noisy family group early on during our hike. This bird easily won “Bird of the Trip” honors. We weren’t done yet though. Gray Silky-flycatchers, American Dipper, and Mountain Trogon all made the list to further our success. Amazingly, we encountered another Eared Quetzal family group near the Cascada Cusarare. We enjoyed our lunch at these 100-foot falls and started our return. Again, the first family group of quetzals was very vocal and actively feeding a juvenile that sat patiently, without moving, for mom to bring a juicy caterpillar and a praying mantis. All the photographers were captivated by these birds. Finally I pulled myself away and we made a little tour of Creel, stopping to admire the beautiful but bird-less Lago Arareco. We visited a cave-house of some local Tarahumaras just outside of Creel and saw our first Striped Sparrows of the tour.

The next morning we enjoyed closer scope views of Striped Sparrow near Choguita, and I was stunned to hear an Eared Quetzal in a distant canyon. As we wound our way out of the mountains, another quetzal undulated across the road in its distinctive flight—truly astonishing luck with this bird. Finally we reached the level grasslands of the Central Mexican Plateau. After a brief tour of Mennonite country, we dined in Cuauhtémoc and headed for the Pancho Villa Museum which occupies the house he shared with one of his twenty-plus wives. After learning a little about the outlaw/revolutionary folk hero, we headed for Hotel Sicomoro to relax before our return north.

ITINERARY

October 3rd - Arrival in Los Mochis, trip introduction and dinner.

October 4th – Parque Sinaloa, Los Mochis, Sinaloa; Drive to El Fuerte, afternoon town tour and birding along the El Fuerte River until dusk.

October 5th – Birding the El Fuerte River Valley including the Brand Ranch and Miguel Hidalgo Reservoir.

October 6th – Birding around the El Fuerte Train Station, train to Bahuichivo and transfer to Paraiso del Oso in Cerocahui. Evening birding around the grounds and along the stream behind Paraiso del Oso.

October 7th – Van to Cerro Gallegos and the Urique canyon overlook birding along the way. Lunch at the overlook.

October 8th – Birding behind the Paraiso del Oso along the canyon trail into Arroyo Ranchito then transfer to Bahuichivo train station for the train to Divisadero. We then took a bus to Creel due to track maintenance needed because of a freight derailment, then another bus to Cabañas Cañon del Cobre.

- October 9th** – Birding hike to Cascada Cusarare, Lunch at the falls. A brief birding stop at Arareco lake and a stop to visit a Tarahumara cave dwelling during an afternoon outing to Creel.
- October 10th** – Starting at Creel our first birding stop was in the small community of Choguita (the Striped Sparrow spot). Brief birding and agricultural tour of Mennonite colony. Lunch at Rancho Viejo in Cuauhtémoc and continue on to Chihuahua and the Pancho Villa Museum.
- October 11th** – Departures for points north

BIRD LIST

Unusual or especially memorable observations are underlined.
 Mexican endemics and near-endemics are **boldfaced**.

- Black-bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte river valley, best looks at the small pond on the evening of the 5th (just outside El Fuerte)
- American Wigeon (*Anas Americana*) – A few on the small pond on the evening of the 5th
- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – “Mexican Duck” Several at the small pond
- Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – A single bird at the small pond
- Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) – A single bird at the small pond
- Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) – A single bird at the small pond
- Rufous-bellied Chachalaca** (*Ortalis wagleri*) – Heard Only at the El Fuerte station on the 6th
- Elegant Quail (*Callipepla douglasii*) – A great group of 9 birds on the road near El Fuerte
- Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – A couple on the small pond near El Fuerte
- Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A couple on the small pond near El Fuerte
- Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – A few along the El Fuerte River
- Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – Several distant birds from the dam of Presa Miguel Hidalgo
- Bare-throated Tiger- Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*) – Nice scope views of an adult along the river in El Fuerte
- Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen several days, small numbers
- Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – Seen on several days as well, small numbers
- Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – Several seen in the lowlands, Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte
- Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – Large numbers seen daily
- Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Seen daily
- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Seen daily in the lowlands, Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte
- Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) – One seen cruising the grasslands near Chihuahua
- Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) – One seen soaring with the following species, during the drive to Cerro Gallegos from Paraiso del Oso
- Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Great comparisons with the above bird
- Harris’s Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – A single seen by Rita from the train
- Gray Hawk (*Asturina nitida*) – A few seen in the El Fuerte area
- Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*) – Singles near El Fuerte and Creel
- Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Seen on four days in the mountains
- Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) – Common around El Fuerte
- American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – Common, seen daily
- Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – A single at the small pond near El Fuerte on the 5th
- Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Three on the small pond
- American Coot (*Fulica americana*) – Several on the small pond
- Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A couple seen in the lowlands

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – A group of three seen from the van to El Fuerte

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) – A single bird seen at Ocolome along the river

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) – A few seen along the El Fuerte River

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few seen on Presa Miguel Hidalgo

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – Seen daily

Red-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas flavirostris*) – Best looks at Parque Sinaloa

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – Seen on a few days in the mountains, usually flying past quickly

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Common in the lowlands and again near Creel, amazing expansion in Mexico continues for this exotic

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Common in the lowlands

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – A few seen in the lowlands and in grasslands

Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – Common, seen almost daily

Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) – Fairly common, often zipping past near El Fuerte

Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) – Good looks in Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte

Mexican Parrotlet (*Forpus cyanopygius*) – Good looks our first day in Parque Sinaloa

Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) – Close, brief looks on the Brand Ranch

Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) – Fairly common in lowlands

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) – Great study of birds during dinner from Posada del Hidalgo

Whiskered Screech-Owl (*Megascops trichopsis*) – Great scope views for some early risers

Mountain Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*) – Great study of a bird in Arroyo Ranchito

Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) – Night time views at foraging birds over El Fuerte

White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Brief looks at Cerro Gallegos during lunch

Broad-billed hummingbird (*Cyanthus latirostris*) – Common in the lowlands

White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) – A nice male at the feeders at Divisadero

Violet-crowned Hummingbird (*Agrytria violiceps*) – Fairly common in the hot lowlands

Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) – Very cooperative bird at Paraiso del Oso feeders

Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) – A couple scoped birds at the Divisadero feeders

Plain-capped Starthroat (*Helimaster constantii*) – A nice bird visiting the feeders at Posada del Hidalgo

Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Achilocus alexandri*) – A single bird at Paraiso del Oso

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) – A great male at Cerro Gallegos, a couple more at Divisadero

Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – Several seen in the mountains

Mountain Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) – A nice male appeared with the second group of Eared Quetzals near Cascada Cusarare

Eared Quetzal (*Euptilotis neoxenus*) – Beyond words, a great experience with 2 family groups along the trail to Cascada Cusarare

Russet-crowned Motmot (*Momotus mexicanus*) – Good looks at a cooperative bird in the thorn forest of the Brand Ranch

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) – Singles seen on four days

Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*) – Seen on four days but best looks along the stream behind Paraiso del Oso

Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Seen daily in the mountains

Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) – Common in the lowlands

Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – Great looks in the Paraiso del Oso courtyard, also seen in other locations in the mountains

Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*) – A few seen in the lowlands

Arizona Woodpecker (*Picoides arizonae*) – Good looks along the road to Cerro Gallegos

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) – “Red-shafted” birds seen briefly and heard several times in the mountains

Gilded Flicker (*Colaptes chrysoides*) – Seen near El Fuerte

White-striped Woodcreeper (*Lepidocolaptes leucogaster*) – Finally distant scope views in Arroyo Ranchito behind Paraiso del Oso

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – In thorn forest outside of El Fuerte

Tufted Flycatcher (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*) – A couple birds in the pine forest on the drive to Cerro Gallegos

Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) – A single migrant bird in Parque Sinaloa

Greater Pewee (*Contopus pertinax*) – Singles on three days in the mountains

Hammond’s Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*) – A few seen in Arroyo Ranchito

Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) – A couple birds near El Fuerte

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) – A few seen every day

Say’s Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) – A single bird at a gas station on the drive to Chihauhua

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A great bird, seen several days

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) – A couple calling birds on the Brand Ranch

Nutting’s Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingi*) – A couple calling birds on the Brand Ranch and a couple more at the train station in El Fuerte

Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – Fairly common in the lowlands

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – Common in the lowlands

Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) – Common in the lowlands

Cassin’s Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) – A few in Los Mochis and in the mountains too

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – A few seen in the lowlands

Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) – El Fuerte river valley

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa

Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – El Fuerte River environs

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Paraiso del Oso

Bell’s Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) – El Fuerte River area

Cassin’s Vireo (*Vireo cassini*) – A bright bird along the El Fuerte River

Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) – A few in Parque Sinaloa, one in mountains

Hutton’s Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – A few seen in the mountains

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – A single bird seen by a few folks in El Fuerte area

Steller’s Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Common in the higher areas in the mountains

Black-throated Magpie-Jay (*Calocitta colliei*) – A couple of these great birds in Parque Sinaloa

Mexican Jay (*Aphelocoma ultramarina*) – Seen distantly in the mountains a couple times

Sinaloa Crow (*Corvus sinaloae*) – Common in the El Fuerte area

Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) – A couple in the grasslands of Chihuahua

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – A few seen in the El Fuerte area and the mountains

Violet-Green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Paraiso del Oso, seen by some

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Common in the lowlands

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few singles seen through the trip

Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile scalaris*) – Common flocking bird in the mountains, often came in to Pygmy-Owl calls and pishing

Bridled Titmouse (*Baeolophus wollweberi*) – Paraiso del Oso and area

Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – El Fuerte area

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Heard only a couple times

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – Several seen in the mountains

Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – Great looks at three birds near the Cabañas Cañon del Cobre lodge

Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Heard often, glimpsed by some a few times

Happy Wren (*Thryothorus felix*) – Great looks at these guys along the El Fuerte River

Sinaloa Wren (*Thryothorus sinaloa*) – Good looks at one along the El Fuerte River at Ocolome

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – A single bird in the lowlands

American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Great looks at a singing bird near Cascada Cusarare

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – Common in the mountains

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polyoptila caerulea*) – Very common in the lowlands

Black-capped Gnatcatcher (*Polyoptila nigriceps*) – A single fussing bird along the river in El Fuerte

Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) – Just seen from vehicles in the Creel area

Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis*) – One of my favorite Mexican songs, good looks too behind Paraiso del Oso

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) – One seen by some folks at the Aztec Thrush Chokecherry tree near Mesa de Arturo (supposedly the Mountain Trogon spot)

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) – Several singles seen in the mountains

Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatu*s) – Many seen in the El Fuerte area

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – A few seen in the mountains

Aztec Thrush (*Zoothera pinicola*) – Four birds seen flying away from the Chokecherry tree

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common in the lowlands

Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – Seen almost daily in many habitats

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A few seen in Los Mochis

Gray Silky-Flycatcher (*Ptilogonys cinereus*) – A long-distance scope of a few birds near Cascada Cusarare

Olive Warbler (*Peucedramus taeniatus*) – Frustrating birds on a few occasions in the mountains

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – Common in the lowlands

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*) – A couple in the El Fuerte River valley

Lucy's Warbler (*Vermivora luciae*) – Several along the El Fuerte River

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) – A few seen in the lowlands

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) – A couple seen in the mountains

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) – Several seen in the lowlands and one seen in the mountains

Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*) – Fairly common in mixed –species flocks in the mountains

Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*) – A few seen in mixed-species flocks in the mountains

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) – A surprising find along the stream, Arroyo Ranchito, behind Paraiso del Oso

MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*) – Good looks at one bird in Parque Sinaloa, and several birds along the El Fuerte River

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) – A couple seen along the El Fuerte River

Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – Common in the lowlands

Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) – Common in the mountains, great bird

Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*) – Seen well around Paraiso del Oso

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa

White-collared Seedeater (*Sporophila torqueola*) – The “cinnamon-rumped” form of western Mexico, One female-plumaged bird in Parque Sinaloa

Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – One bird cooperated at the train station in Parque Sinaloa, sitting on a fencepost for a moment

Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*) – Fairly common in the mountains

Rufous-winged Sparrow (*Aimophila carpalis*) – Great scope views at Brand Ranch

Striped Sparrow (*Oriturus superciliosus*) – Scope views near the cave-dwelling Tarahumaras and again the next day at Choguita

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Great Scope views at Parque Sinaloa

Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*) – Good looks several times in the mountains

Grayish Saltator (*Saltator coerulescens*) – Common in Parque Sinaloa and lowlands

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – El Fuerte area

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – Just a couple females seen

Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) – Females only at the Brand Ranch

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) – Great views of a male at the El Fuerte train station

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) – Calling birds and backlit scope views

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – El Fuerte area

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Grasslands of Chihuahua

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Grasslands of Chihuahua and mountains

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Common lowlands and grasslands

Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) – Seen at the small pond near El Fuerte

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – Numerous along the river in El Fuerte

Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Parque Sinaloa and El Fuerte area

Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*) – Fairly common in the lowlands

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – Abundant in the lowlands

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) – A few seen through the trip, all habitats

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen around towns

OTHER FAUNA

Coyote

Antelope Jackrabbit

Rock Squirrel

Mexican Gray Squirrel

Chipmunk sp

Bat sp

Spiny-tailed Iguana

Spiny Lizard sp

Canyon Tree Frog

Toad sp