

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

**SHORT WEST MEXICO
January 29 – February 4, 2006**

Leader: Brian Gibbons

Rancho Primavera lived up to its billing once again as a comfortable birding lodge with excellent food, beautiful surroundings, and great birding that starts right outside the lodge. The diversity of habitats resulted in a high number of species seen during our week-long stay. Pine oak forest at an elevational range of 650-1,200 meters hosted several unique birds, as did each habitat we visited. Tropical deciduous forest along the Bioto Road was in middle elevations, and below that we birded the Thorn forest which hosted many West Mexican endemics, the star of which was Red-breasted Chat. Acacia scrub, freshwater ponds, estuaries, mangroves, and coastal beaches were some of the other habitats we birded. We saw more than 100 species during our birding efforts on the ranch, proving the diversity of Rancho Primavera and its environs. For the week, we saw 245 species, an excellent total considering we never traveled more than 50 kilometers away from the ranch.

Highlights were numerous. I apparently forgot to ask everyone to declare a “bird of the trip.” I will take it upon myself to help with that. The Russet-crowned Motmot is a perennial favorite on this tour, and one of my all-time favorite birds. Other top vote-getters always include Red-breasted Chat, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Military Macaw, and the gaudy Orange-breasted Bunting.

The single most amazing event of our tour had to be the small army ant swarm that held our attention for nearly an hour. The Groove-billed Ani numbers were growing as we were leaving, with three birds present. Also partaking in the flushed arthropod buffet were Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Nutting’s Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Wilson’s Warbler, MacGillivray’s Warbler, and the stars of the show—two Fan-tailed Warblers. These normally secretive warblers were conspicuous in their pursuit of bugs that were fleeing for their lives. Little did these hapless bugs know that there were more than ten birds awaiting their departures from the underleaf. This was a very special spectacle.

Highlights weren’t limited to birds. I enjoyed the tropical rattlesnake that crossed the highway right in front of us. This was the only snake I saw during my three weeks in Mexico; the cool, dry weather isn’t conducive to cold-blooded critters moving around. Laguna de Quelele added two very secretive birds to our list: Boat-billed Heron and Rufous-necked Wood-Rail. We did very well with raptors. The female Hook-billed Kite soaring right over us was a treat. Collared Forest-Falcon and Laughing Falcon were very cooperative, coming in for close but brief looks. The Mexican Hermit made a predictable appearance at the crimson flowers, illuminated by the sun. The fruiting trees along the road to Tehua assisted us with our Citreoline Trogon numbers which approached 25 for the day.

Twenty-three species of warblers added color to our list everyday. Red-breasted Chat and Fan-tailed Warbler were tops from the warblers. Naomi’s spotting of the Red-headed Tanager was great, and was a first for the tour. A sneaky Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow provided another tour first at Rancho Primavera during our hour-long stalk of the Rosy Thrush-Tanager.

With a diversity of habitats, birds, and scenery, western Mexico is a gem of a destination. Thank you for choosing VENT. I look forward to traveling with you all again.

ITINERARY

Day 1, January 29: Arrival in Puerto Vallarta. A couple brief birding stops along the road and to Rancho Primavera for the evening.

Day 2, January 30: Birding along the Bioto road in the morning. Lunch at Altamira. Birding at Rancho Primavera for the afternoon.

Day 3, January 31: A long day of birding down the road to Tehuamixtle with numerous birding stops in the thorn forest and at estuaries down near the coast including estero Maito and Aquiles Serdan. Lunch at Cande's in Tehuamixtle.

Day 4, February 1: To the pine oak zone along La Bascula road in the morning. Lunch at the Botanical Gardens of Puerto Vallarta (aka Bob's). During the afternoon we stopped briefly at the Pedro Moreno Road and the Cienega de Ojuelos road and ended up back at the ranch for the evening.

Day 5, February 2: We birded the Presa (reservoir) Cajon de Pena and the woodlands in the area. A long lunch at El Habal. In the afternoon through the late evening we birded the very rich Cruz de Loreto area and the adjacent agricultural fields.

Day 6, February 3: We spent the morning at the very birdy Rancho Primavera. Lunch at Altamira. For some of the afternoon we ran back to the Cienega de Ojuelos road to try to clean up on some pine oak birds.

Day 7, February 4: Departure day but not until we got some good birding in. We stopped and saw some Gray-breasted Martins at the Playa del Sol in Puerto Vallarta. Next we birded Laguna de Quelele and the mangroves around the lake. We looked around the beach near the airport and at some golf course ponds adding a few species to the trip list.

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

Mexico endemics are denoted with an (E), regional endemic species whose main range is in Mexico but also occur in adjacent countries (RE); (HO) = heard only

SPECIES LIST: 245 species and 6 leader only

Least Grebe – A few seen nearly every day in smaller freshwater ponds, RP and CDL

Pied-billed Grebe – One seen at PCP

Eared Grebe – One seen at PCP

Blue-footed Booby – Several seen on the last morning from the beach near the airport

Brown Booby – Best looks from Cande's at Tehua

American White Pelican – A small soaring flock seen from Restaurant Altamira during lunch

Brown Pelican – Seen commonly along the coast

Neotropic Cormorant – Seen commonly almost every day around any little bit of water

Anhinga – One seen at LQ

Magnificent Frigatebird – Seen regularly along the coast

American Bittern – One walked out from the reeds at the ranch pond one evening

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron – Great looks at a stalking bird in the CDL area
Great Blue Heron – A few seen around freshwater including RP
Great Egret – Fairly common
Snowy Egret – Common
Little Blue Heron – A few seen around water
Tricolored Heron – Several seen on a few dates
Reddish Egret – One seen at AS
Cattle Egret – The most common Ardeid for the tour
Green Heron – Seen several times especially well at RP ponds
Black-crowned Night-Heron – A few seen around the RP pond, also at LQ
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – Most numerous around LQ also seen around Maito
Boat-billed Heron – Nice scope views of these sneaky nocturnal herons
White Ibis – Fairly common around any little bit of water also at RP
White-faced Ibis – A few around RP ponds most numerous at CDL
Roseate Spoonbill – One seen at AS and a few more at the golf course ponds on the last day
Wood Stork – One seen at CDL
Fulvous Whistling-Duck – Several seen at the wastewater ponds at CDL among 1000's of the following
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – Thousands seen around AS, CDL and LQ
Green-winged Teal – Seen on the coast near Tehua, CDL and LQ too
Northern Pintail – Three seen bombing into the estuary as a Peregrine dived toward them, AS
Blue-winged Teal – Common around freshwater and brackish water
Cinnamon Teal – A few seen around CDL and LQ
Northern Shoveler – Seen in the estuaries near Tehua, around CDL and LQ
Gadwall – AS and CDL areas
American Wigeon – Two seen at AS
Ring-necked Duck – One flock of more than 20 birds seen at PCP
Lesser Scaup – Common at PCP and AS
Ruddy Duck – A few seen at AS and CDL areas
Black Vulture – Common seen daily
Turkey Vulture – Common seen daily
Osprey – One at AS and one at LQ
Hook-billed Kite – Great looks at a female soaring above the thorn forest on our return from Tehua
White-tailed Kite – One distant bird seen from the Restaurant Altamira
Sharp-shinned Hawk – Four seen on three dates
Cooper's Hawk – One seen at RP
Common Black-Hawk – One soaring above the thorn forest near PCP
Harris's Hawk – One flyby near CDL
Gray Hawk – Our most common raptor, seen all but one day, maximum 12 for one day
Roadside Hawk – Four seen in the CDL area
Short-tailed Hawk – Four seen two around RP and 2 in the CDL area
Zone-tailed Hawk – Several seen in the PCP and CDL areas allowed for good studies comparing them to Turkey Vultures
Red-tailed Hawk – Four seen in the CDL area
Crested Caracara – AS first but common in the CDL area
Laughing Falcon – Great look along LB where a bird was tape responsive
Collared Forest-Falcon – Great looks on the rd to Tehua where a bird flew over us a few times looking for an intruder
American Kestrel – A few seen every day
Peregrine Falcon – One seen at AS trying to make a pintail into dinner
West Mexican Chachalaca (E) – Several seen along the road to Tehua
Crested Guan – HO One heard calling at dawn along the road to Tehua
Quail sp – A small covey flushed along the road to PCP, probably Northern Bobwhite
Rufous-necked Wood-Rail – One sneaky individual was seen by all at LQ

Sora – Seen on four dates best seen at RP ponds and CDL pond
Purple Gallinule – Several seen at the CDL pond and one seen at the RP pond
Common Moorhen – Common at the CDL pond and also around RP ponds
American Coot – Common around ponds and estuaries including RP ponds
Limpkin – Great looks at two birds at the turnoff for PCP
Black-bellied Plover – One spending the winter at LQ in a warmer place than its arctic breeding grounds
Semipalmated Plover – Several seen at LQ on the last day
Killdeer – A couple seen in the Tehua area also a few in the CDL area
Black-necked Stilt – Common in the AS area and around CDL
American Avocet – Four in the AS area and a couple more at LQ
Northern Jacana – A couple on the ranch ponds, most numerous around CDL
Greater Yellowlegs – A couple seen on the ranch ponds also seen in the CDL area and PCP
Lesser Yellowlegs – A single bird seen in the CDL area
Solitary Sandpiper – One seen on the ranch
Willet – A couple around Estero Maito near Tehua and a couple at LQ
Spotted Sandpiper – Several around Tehua, also seen near CDL and LQ
Whimbrel – Two seen at LQ
Long-billed Curlew – Two seen at AS
Marbled Godwit – One seen at LQ
Western Sandpiper – More than 100 seen at LQ on our last day
Least Sandpiper – Two seen near Tehua
Stilt Sandpiper – 12 seen at the small ponds near AS
Long-billed Dowitcher – Common seen in the AS, CDL and LQ areas
Wilson's Snipe – Two seen on the ranch on a couple different dates
Laughing Gull – One at Tehua and several seen from the beach on our last day
Heerman's Gull – Common on the coast only at Tehua
Caspian Tern – One distant bird seen by some was this species at PCP
Rock Pigeon – A few seen around El Tuito
Red-billed Pigeon – Several seen rocketing over the forest on the Bioto road, also seen at LQ
White-winged Dove – Common in various habitats
Mourning Dove – most numerous at CDL also seen at LQ
Inca Dove – Common on roads, seen daily
Common Ground-Dove – Most numerous in the CDL area
Ruddy Ground-Dove – Seen around the ranch, most numerous in the open country near CDL
White-tipped Dove – Common, one or more seen daily
Orange-fronted Parakeet – Common seen daily in small flocks
Military Macaw – Seen on four dates, best looks by some folks were of perched birds at Bioto, thanks Nina
Lilac-crowned Parrot (E) – A few small flocks seen almost every day, hard to see perched
Squirrel Cuckoo – Seen on several dates a great bird
Lesser Ground-Cuckoo – HO along the rd to Tehua
Groove-billed Ani – Common in open country, often near livestock, we saw a few attending the army ant swarm at the ranch
Barn Owl – One seen at the church bell tower after a special request that I begrudgingly fulfilled, this bird was our only owl for our entire owling trip that night!
Colima Pygmy-Owl (E) – Finally one seen along CO rd
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl – HO several heard birds but they never came in to check out my owl call
Mottled Owl – Nina saw a bird extremely well one morning predawn
Lesser Nighthawk – Several seen late in the evening on a few dates
Pauraque – A couple seen after dark near El Tuito and at RP
White-collared Swift – More than 20 in a flock our first afternoon along the highway 20 km south of PV
Vaux's Swift – Small flocks seen on three dates
Mexican Hermit (E) – One bird made its timely appearance for us at the flower patch on LB
Golden-crowned Emerald (E) – One female seen on the Bioto rd, three seen along the rd to Tehua

Broad-billed Hummingbird – The most common hummingbird, seen daily in all habitats
Berylline Hummingbird (RE) – A few around the feeders, most numerous in the pine oak zone
Cinnamon Hummingbird – A few seen everyday except for our last day
Violet-crowned Hummingbird (RE) – A few seen at the ranch feeders and in the thorn forest
Ruby-throated Hummingbird – The most common hummingbird at the ranch feeders
Black-chinned Hummingbird – A few at the RP feeders
Calliope Hummingbird – Common in the pine oak areas of CO and LB
Rufous Hummingbird – Several in the flowers at the roadside near Llano Grande
Allen’s Hummingbird – One nice male at the same location as the Rufous Hummingbirds
Citreoline Trogon (E) – Common in the thorn forest at fruiting trees
Elegant Trogon – The first spotted by Debbie, Great looks along the Bioto road, also seen at CO and LB
Russet-crowned Motmot (RE) – Best looks at this amazing bird and a personal favorite at RP
Belted Kingfisher – Singles seen at the ranch and PCP
Green Kingfisher – A few seen on the ranch
Acorn Woodpecker – Common in the pine oak areas but most easily seen right at RP in the big snag
Golden-cheeked Woodpecker (E) – A common bird seen nearly every day
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – Two seen on LB
Ladder-backed Woodpecker – A few seen on Bioto road and seen a few days later in the PCP area
Arizona Woodpecker – Three seen at LB, one of these sightings led to our amazing experience with Laughing Falcon
Gray-crowned Woodpecker (E) – Great looks along the road at LB
Lineated Woodpecker – Good looks along the Bioto road and the Tehua road
Pale-billed Woodpecker – Good looks along the Bioto road and along the Tehua route too
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper – Best looks were along the Bioto road
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet – Most numerous in the thorn forest and edge habitat near Tehua
Greenish Elaenia – Common but hard to see well, Bioto and other locations
Tufted Flycatcher – Common at the highest elevations we visited in the pine oak zone, LB
Greater Pewee – Common at RP and in the pine oak zone
Willow Flycatcher – A couple seen around the RP ponds
Least Flycatcher – A couple on the ranch and one at PCP
Pacific-slope Flycatcher – Common in all habitats
Black Phoebe – One to Two seen most days, often around the ranch
Vermilion Flycatcher – Common in open country
Dusky-capped Flycatcher – Common along Bioto CO and LB
Ash-throated Flycatcher – One seen and heard along Bioto the first morning
Nutting’s Flycatcher – The most common Myiarchus flycatcher, Bioto, Tehua and RP
Brown-crested Flycatcher – A couple seen along Bioto and along the road to Tehua
Great Kiskadee – Common seen every day
Boat-billed Flycatcher – Four seen along the Bioto road the first morning
Social Flycatcher – At least a few seen every day
Tropical Kingbird – The most common flycatcher, everywhere in open country
Thick-billed Kingbird – Present in all habitats in small numbers
Rose-throated Becard – Seen on several days best looks were along Bioto
Masked Tityra – Seen on a few dates, best looks along Bioto
Gray-breasted Martin – On our first and last days in Puerto Vallarta at the Playa del Sol hotel
Tree Swallow – Three zipping around the ranch ponds with other swallows one evening
Mangrove Swallow – Great scope studies on the roadside at CDL
Violet-green Swallow – Most easily found at the RP ponds or over the grounds
Northern Rough-winged Swallow – The most common Swallow seen in a variety of locations
Bank Swallow – Common in the CDL area
Barn Swallow – Common in the CDL area and a few around the ranch
Green Jay – Several seen on LB
San Blas Jay (E) – Seen along the road to Tehua and at RP

Common Raven* – HO on the ranch

Spotted Wren (E) – Several seen well, finally at high elevation on LB

Happy Wren (E) – Heard often and seen well a few times

Sinaloa Wren (E) – Seen and heard fairly often

White-bellied Wren (RE) – Three seen along the road to Tehua

House Wren – One in the thorn scrub near AS

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – Four seen on our day in the pines, LB

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – Perhaps the most common Passerine in all habitats

Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush – Several seen around the Army ant swarm at RP, this is normally a sneaky bird that is hard to see but the ant swarm allowed to study these birds at our leisure

White-throated Robin – A couple seen in the fruiting fig tree just outside of El Tuito

Rufous-backed Robin (E) – Common at fruiting trees, especially the fig mentioned above

Blue Mockingbird (E) – Only one seen, perhaps only by Nina

Northern Mockingbird – A few near Tehua and common in the CDL area

Bell's Vireo – A few at lower elevations in the thorn forest also at RP

Black-capped Vireo – Amazing looks at a female and later a male along Bioto

Plumbeous Vireo – Several seen in various habitats

Golden Vireo (E) – Most numerous along the Bioto road

Warbling Vireo – Common in all habitats

Orange-crowned Warbler – Abundant over-wintering visitor in all habitats

Nashville Warbler – Just as abundant as the previous species in all habitats

Lucy's Warbler – A few seen in the lowest elevation thorn forest near Tehua

Tropical Parula – Seen along the Bioto road, Tehua road and around the PCP

Yellow Warbler – Common at lower elevations and the RP grounds

Yellow-rumped Warbler – Common in forested habitats and around RP

Black-throated Gray Warbler – A very common flock member in all wooded habitats

Hermit Warbler – One seen along the road, LB

Black-throated Green Warbler – One seen at LB

Yellow-throated Warbler – Three seen in the pines and oaks of LB

Grace's Warbler – Common in the pines of LB

Black-and-white Warbler – One to three seen almost every day in wooded habitats

American Redstart – One seen at LB and a couple seen on the RP, including a nice adult male

Northern Waterthrush – A few in the mangroves around LQ

Louisiana Waterthrush – One in the stream at RP

MacGillivray's Warbler – Fairly common but hard to see in wooded habitats

Common Yellowthroat – Fairly common in scrubby areas especially around the RP ponds

Wilson's Warbler – A common over-wintering warbler in a variety of habitats

Painted Redstart – Fairly common at LB and CO

Fan-tailed Warbler (RE) – Amazing looks at this sneaky bird. The Army Ant swarm was the only reason we saw this species so well. This tour was very fortunate, missed by my second tour.

Rufous-capped Warbler (RE) – Several in the pine oak areas of LB and CO

Yellow-breasted Chat – One seen on the ranch and a couple more at LQ

Red-breasted Chat (E) – This is always a trip highlight, an amazing West Mexican endemic

Scrub Euphonia – The endemic *godmani* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species "Godman's Euphonia". We saw a couple along Bioto and a couple building a nest at LQ

Red-crowned Ant-Tanager – Good looks at a family group along Bioto road

Hepatic Tanager – Several in the pines of LB

Summer Tanager – Singles at Bioto and LQ

Western Tanager – Several seen on our trip to Tehua

Red-headed Tanager (E) – Male and female a tour first! Spotted by Naomi on LB

Rosy Thrush-Tanager – Great looks at a family group on the ranch, we had fun stalking these sneaky birds

Grayish Saltator – A common tropical bird, a few seen almost every day

Yellow Grosbeak (RE) – Good looks along Bioto, also seen from the road to Tehua

Black-headed Grosbeak – Most numerous on our drive to Tehua
Blue Bunting (RE) – Singles seen on the Tehua road and near PCP
Blue Grosbeak – Common in open country especially the CDL area
Indigo Bunting – Four seen along the CO road
Varied Bunting – Fairly common in edge habitat
Orange-breasted Bunting (E) – This stunning bird was common along the Tehua road
Painted Bunting – A couple at the turnoff for PCP along the roadside, also seen on the RP
Dickcissel – Common in the CDL area
Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow (E) – Another first for the tour when one popped up while we were stalking the Rosy Thrush-Tanager
Blue-black Grassquit – Common in the open country around CDL, PCP and LQ
White-collared Seedeater – The endemic *torqueola* subspecies of western Mexico is considered by some to be a distinct species the “Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater”. We saw them at the turnoff for PCP and on the ranch.
Stripe-headed Sparrow – Common along roadsides in open country
Rusty Sparrow – One sneaky bird on the roadside up on LB, I don’t think everybody got on this one
Lark Sparrow – Common on the roadside near PCP and CDL and also seen on the ranch
Grasshopper Sparrow – Fairly common on the roadsides around PCP and CDL
Red-winged Blackbird – A few small flocks in the CDL area
Eastern Meadowlark – Several singing from fence posts in the CDL area
Great-tailed Grackle – Common around towns and in open areas
Bronzed Cowbird – A small flock seen on our first full day during lunch at Altamira
Brown-headed Cowbird – Common in flocks around CDL
Orchard Oriole – A few around Tehua CDL and the RP
Hooded Oriole – Only a few seen, most regularly on the ranch tagging along with the next species
Black-vented Oriole (RE) – Seen only on the ranch in their comings and goings from Pat’s feeder
Streak-backed Oriole – The most common oriole, seen daily in all wooded and brushy habitats
Baltimore Oriole – One seen along the Tehua road and another seen on the ranch
Bullock’s Oriole – A couple seen in the pines of LB
Yellow-winged Cacique (RE) – Abundant seen daily, a fantastic, charismatic bird
Black-headed Siskin (RE) – Seen in the pines and oaks of LB and CO
Lesser Goldfinch – Two seen by Nina near PCP
House Sparrow – In El Tuito and other areas of human habitation

Leader only: White-striped Woodcreeper (HO), Brown-backed Solitaire, Townsend’s Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Lincoln’s Sparrow

Non-bird highlight had to be the Tropical Rattlesnake in the road near Bob’s a personal first.