

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

**SHORT WEST MEXICO
January 16-22, 2005**

Leader: Brian Gibbons

Our second ever Short West Mexico tour turned out to be an amazing success on the heels of our very successful first tour, just the week before. Rancho Primavera lived up to the positive reports we had heard. The food (cooked by Monterrey nutritionist Bonnie and her mother Ranch owner Pat Morrow) was phenomenal at all times, and the fresh-squeezed juices, lemongrass tea, and delectable desserts were especially welcome treats. I hope everybody felt like a personal guest rather than a hotel guest. The climate was wonderful, cool mornings and warm afternoons and never a hint of rain. This was a nice reprieve for at least a few of us. This was of course all gravy because we were here to see birds and we accomplished that mission quite handily.

The birds were the highlight of this great week. On our various day trips we had a variety of habitats in which to search for birds. On the coast we had beach, rocky coastline, estuaries, mudflats and mangroves. Just inland we had Thorn Forest (the most unique habitat with the greatest variety of endemic birds), oaks and finally up around 3000 feet elevation we were in pine forest. This great variety also led to our great diversity of birds. We saw and or heard 221 species for our week. Top Bird honors go to Military Macaw which we finally saw perched, in the scope. These two birds were exhibiting classic parrot behavior by nuzzling each other and by walking around their perch and hanging upside down. Some of the other standouts were as follows in no particular order: Russet-crowned Motmot, Rosy Thrush-Tanager, Laughing Falcon, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Elegant Trogon, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Vermilion Flycatcher, Happy Wren, Orange-breasted Bunting, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Colima Pygmy-Owl and the stunning Red-breasted Chat. There were many other common birds that were enjoyed as well. The Acorn Woodpecker and any of the great variety of hummingbirds that came to the ranch feeders are examples. The Roadside Hawks that Penny had wished for finally showed up, on the roadside. A fortuitous comfort stop yielded one of our most exciting finds, the scoped view of a calling Laughing Falcon. Collared Plovers on the mudflats at Aquiles Cerdan were sharply feathered compared to the winter-garbed Snowy and Semipalmated Plovers. Squirrel Cuckoos clambering through the trees like feathered red squirrels was a classic tropical sight. Eleven species of hummingbirds enlivened our trip, at some stops they were the most common birds around. That male Elegant Trogon that finally sat still between fig-pluckings was a great reward one afternoon at the ranch. One of my all time favorites is the Russet-crowned Motmot. Our best views of this bird were right on the ranch! I can't imagine ever tiring of Vermilion Flycatchers even if they are common.

The fig tree, or the magic tree, as I liked to call it, was fantastic. Rufous-backed Robins, White-throated Robins, Social and Boat-billed Flycatchers, Kiskadees, Euphonias, Tanagers, four species of Orioles, a few kingbirds of course, Cedar Waxwings from temperate North America and the single most delightful bird in the fig had to have been the male Elegant Trogon. In all we probably saw more than twenty species of birds in that tree and many more in the scrub and grass underneath it. I won't bore you with the details you were there! The official trip list with all our sightings follows.

ITINERARY:

Day 1, 16 Jan: Arrival in Puerto Vallarta; afternoon birding at the low water crossing as we waited for Modesto to get the tractor to pull out the Nissan that was blocking our way because it was stuck in the creek.

Day 2, 17 Jan: We birded down the first 5 km of the Bioto Road in the morning; lunch at Altamira Restaurant; La Bascula Road in the afternoon; evening at Ranch ponds

Day 3, 18 Jan: We birded our way through the thorn forest on the way to Tehuamixtle (Tehua). We ate lunch at Cande's on the coast. In the afternoon we headed to Aquiles Cerdan to bird the estuary there. We then headed back to the ranch, birding in route and arriving late in the evening.

Day 4, 19 Jan: La Bascula road just a few kilometers from El Tuito but with more pines and a different suite of birds. We ate lunch at Altamira and spent the afternoon on the Ranch.

Day 5, 20 Jan: We birded the thorn forest on the road to Presa Cajon de Pena (a reservoir) in the morning. Long lunch at Haval and continued our afternoon by birding the Cruz de Loreto area irrigated fields.

Day 6, 21 Jan: We set out to better the Ranch Big Day record. We spent the entire day on the Ranch except for our lunch break at Altamira. We apparently tied Marshall's tour at 122 species seen on the Ranch during our Big Day efforts.

Day 7, 22 Jan: A quick stop just off the highway at Cienega de Ojuelos netted us a few new birds. Then it was off to the airport to drop off Vic and Jane. We ended the tour with remaining participants at Laguna de Quelele birding the mangroves and fields in this area and then we were off to the airport for final departures.

Locations: Bioto (Bioto Road); CDL (=Cruz de Loreto, and adjacent farmland); CO (=Cienega de Ojuelos road, just north of LB); El Tule (small town near La Presa Cajon de Pena); LB (=La Bascula Road); LQ (=Laguna de Quelele, Nayarit); PV (=Puerto Vallarta); Ranch (Rancho Primavera);

Tour highlights are in ALL CAPS; local rarities are underlined; Mexico endemics are denoted with an (E); * = recorded on the Rancho Primavera property; (h) = heard only

SPECIES LIST (221 species)

Least Grebe* – Seen most days at Ranch

Brown Pelican – Common along coast

Neotropic Cormorant* – Common on freshwater

Anhinga – A few at LQ 22 Jan

Magnificent Frigatebird* - Common along coast, a surprising find for our Ranch big day

Bare-throated Tiger-Heron – One handsome adult spotted by Jane and seen extremely well

Great Blue Heron* – Singles seen at Ranch and around PV

Great Egret* – Fairly common, especially near coast

Snowy Egret* – Fairly common, especially near coast

Little Blue Heron* – One seen regularly at Ranch; others in lowlands near PV and CDL

Tricolored Heron – A couple seen around CDL

Reddish Egret – One immature at AC

Cattle Egret* – Common; seen daily

Green Heron* – Seen almost daily

Black-crowned Night-Heron – One seen at Estero Maito

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – One adult seen at LQ

White Ibis – Common around CDL and AC
White-faced Ibis* – Abundant around CDL, with flocks going to roost at dusk; small flock also at Ranch ponds
Roseate Spoonbill* – One at AC and another single immature at the Ranch ponds
Wood Stork* – A few seen flying over the Ranch and a few singles around CDL, largest numbers were around LQ
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck* – A couple on the Ranch pond and a single at the Jacana pond near CDL
Green-winged Teal* – Three at Ranch pond
Blue-winged Teal* – Four birds at Estero Maito
Cinnamon Teal* – Four at Ranch pond
Lesser Scaup – Twelve at Estero Maito
Black Vulture* – Common; seen daily
Turkey Vulture* – Common; seen daily
Osprey* – One at Ranch and on the coast on a couple occasions
White-tailed Kite – Several around CDL
Sharp-shinned Hawk – A couple singles seen
Cooper’s Hawk – A couple birds seen
Common Black-Hawk – One immature at LQ
Harris’s Hawk – A couple distant birds near CDL
Gray Hawk* – Our most common raptor, seen daily
Roadside Hawk – A couple cooperative birds one near Presa Cajon de Pena and the other near CDL
Short-tailed Hawk – A few seen in different locations on different days
Zone-tailed Hawk – A few seen including one at Restaurant Altamira
Red-tailed Hawk* – Singles seen on several days with 2 near CDL
Crested Caracara* – Common around CDL and one for our Ranch big day
LAUGHING FALCON – One seen on our return from Tehua and a couple heard at CO
Collared Forest-Falcon* (h) – One-two heard almost daily at Ranch
American Kestrel* – Common; seen daily
Merlin – One in CDL
Peregrine Falcon – One flyby at the Altamira and another seen well on the coast at AC
West Mexican Chachalaca* (E,h) – Heard only at the Ranch
Sora* (h) – Heard near CDL and the ranch ponds
PURPLE GALLINULE – Three in pond in CDL
Common Moorhen – 12 at pond in CDL
American Coot* – Seen on Ranch ponds, as well as near CDL
COLLARED PLOVER – Great looks at AC with comparisons to the following two species
Snowy Plover – 3 on the mud flats at AC
Semipalmated Plover – Common on the mud flats at AC
Killdeer (h) – one heard near CDL
Black-necked Stilt – One seen at AC and a large flock in the ponds near CDL
NORTHERN JACANA – 30 at pond in CDL
Greater Yellowlegs* – A couple seen on the ranch and a few at AC
Lesser Yellowlegs – A single in the fields around CDL
Solitary Sandpiper* – One seen at Ranch
Willet – 8 at AC
Wandering Tattler – One at Tehua
Spotted Sandpiper – Two at AC and another single at LQ
Whimbrel – One bird at LQ
Long-billed Curlew – 4 near CDL in the rice fields
Least Sandpiper – Numerous at AC
Wilson’s Snipe* – Seven seen at the ranch ponds one evening
Laughing Gull – Abundant along coast
Heerman’s Gull – Common along coast

California Gull – A couple immatures seen on the rocks from our lunch spot in Tehua

Rock Pigeon – Common; seen almost daily

Red-billed Pigeon* – A few seen rocketing over finally seen well in the scope at CO rd on our last morning

White-winged Dove* – Fairly common in El Tuito area

Mourning Dove – Surprisingly absent from most areas, they were common around CDL.

Inca Dove* – Common; seen daily

Common Ground-Dove* – Common seen almost daily

Ruddy Ground-Dove* – Uncommon, but seen on Ranch

White-tipped Dove* – A couple seen well, but heard or glimpsed daily

Orange-fronted Parakeet* – Common, seen on ranch and en route to Tehua

MILITARY MACAW* – Flyovers seen on 5 of 7 days for the tour but seen perched along LB on 19 Jan

MEXICAN PARROTTLET (E) – Frustrating to say the least, heard on several occasions and glimpsed a couple times at LQ on the last day

Lilac-crowned Parrot* – Regularly seen flying overhead at dawn and dusk at Bioto, Ranch, and elsewhere

SQUIRREL CUCKOO* – Good looks on several dates

LESSER GROUND-CUCKOO (h) – Another bird that got the better of us, heard on a few occasions but not seen. This is a truly unique species and typically quite hard to see.

Groove-billed Ani* – Common; seen daily

COLIMA PYGMY-OWL (E) – Seen and heard well on our last morning at CO

FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL* – Heard frequently seen well on the ranch

Lesser Nighthawk* – A few seen at dusk at Ranch

Vaux's Swift* – Seen overhead at Bioto, Ranch, LB, and elsewhere

Broad-billed Hummingbird* – Common; seen daily

Berylline Hummingbird* – Common at LB, with just a few at Ranch (including Ranch feeders)

Cinnamon Hummingbird* – Very common, but spectacular

Violet-crowned Hummingbird - A few seen in the drier thorn forest areas

PLAIN-CAPPED STARTHROAT – Several seen well in the dry thorn forest on the drive to Tehua

SPARKLING-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD - Exceptional looks at a female on the road to Tehua

Ruby-throated Hummingbird* – Common at Ranch feeders, where easily compared to Black-chinned

Black-chinned Hummingbird* – Common at Ranch feeders

Calliope Hummingbird – Common on LB

Rufous Hummingbird – Several in the flowering roadside vegetation on the drive to Tehua

Allen's Hummingbird* – One great looking male at the Ranch feeders on our first full day

Citreoline Trogon (E) – Two on Bioto

Elegant Trogon* – One elusive male at LB and an obliging male at the Ranch fig tree

RUSSET-CROWNED MOTMOT* – Seen well at Ranch

Ringed Kingfisher – One quick flyby at LQ

Belted Kingfisher* – Seen at Ranch

Green Kingfisher* – At least two seen regularly at Ranch; others near CDL and LQ

Acorn Woodpecker* – Common in pines of LB, but also in more tropical vegetation around Ranch and El Tuito

Golden-cheeked Woodpecker* (E) – Common; seen daily. This striking endemic woodpecker was a joy to behold.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker* – Heard and seen on several dates at Ranch and Bioto

Arizona Woodpecker – Seen at LB

LINEATED WOODPECKER (h) - heard on a few days but never showed for us

PALE-BILLED WOODPECKER – Seen well on Bioto and on the road to Tehua

Ivory-billed Woodcreeper* – Several seen on Bioto and one at Ranch

White-striped Woodcreeper (E) – I think only a few folks saw this bird that didn't show much for us in the pines

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet* – This nondescript little flycatcher was seen on several dates and heard on most days

Greenish Elaenia* – Heard one most days of the trip but only a couple people saw this plain flycatcher

TUFTED FLYCATCHER – One on LB

Greater Pewee* – Common; seen daily. Most common in pines of LB, it was also a regular flock component at lower elevations of LB, Bioto, and the Ranch.

Willow Flycatcher* – A single bird was around and calling when we were concentrating on the White-throated Flycatcher

WHITE-THROATED FLYCATCHER* – One seen at Ranch ponds; this scarce species is a near-endemic but is distinctive from the migrant *Empidonax*. We were treated to superb scope views of this calling bird.

Least Flycatcher* – A few singles here and there

Pacific-slope Flycatcher* – The most common *Empidonax*, we saw many at Ranch, Bioto, and elsewhere

Buff-breasted Flycatcher – Nice scope views on our last morning at CO

Black Phoebe* – One at Ranch seen on four dates

Vermilion Flycatcher* – Common; seen daily. This spectacular species was a treat to see so commonly.

Dusky-capped Flycatcher* – Common in all forested habitats: Bioto, Ranch, LB, near Tehua

Ash-throated Flycatcher* – Several seen and heard near Tehua; a few seen around the Ranch

Nutting's Flycatcher* – A couple seen and heard on different dates

Brown-crested Flycatcher – A couple seen along the road to Tehua and at the ranch; interesting that 4 *Myiarchus* could coexist in the thorn forest near Tehua

Great Kiskadee* – Common; seen daily

Boat-billed Flycatcher* – Seen well along Bioto, LB and at the magic fig tree

Social Flycatcher* – Common; seen daily.

Tropical Kingbird* – One of the most common birds; seen daily

Thick-billed Kingbird* – Common; seen daily

Rose-throated Becard* – Seen at Bioto and on the Ranch

MASKED TITYRA* – Common in small numbers and seen almost daily, though Bioto was our best spot; this plump shrike-like bird is spectacular with its red bill and was a nice one to encounter with regularity

Gray-breasted Martin – A large group of 40+ birds on the wires and a hotel building just outside PV

Mangrove Swallow – Great studies on the wires around CDL and also seen at AC

Violet-green Swallow * – A few around El Tuito and the ranch

Northern Rough-winged Swallow* – Common; seen almost daily

Bank Swallow – A couple near LQ

Barn Swallow – Small numbers near CDL

BLACK-THROATED MAGPIE-JAY* (E) – Seen on several days, spectacular tail

WHITE-THROATED MAGPIE-JAY – Seen on several days, great bird

Green Jay – Several seen on 2 dates at LB but never really cooperated for great looks

San Blas Jay* (E) – Seen on the ranch and finally very well from the road on our last morning

Common Raven* – Seen from the ranch and Altamira and near PV

SPOTTED WREN (E) – Good views of a couple individuals of this large, elusive wren at LB

Happy Wren*(E) – Uncommon, finally seen well on Ranch

Sinaloa Wren* (E) – Common, and seen daily at Bioto, Ranch, and elsewhere

White-bellied Wren – Two seen near Tehua

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher* – Common; seen daily. This may have been the most common passerine in mixed flocks.

Brown-backed Solitaire (h) – A few heard, that's what counts for this species, along LB

Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush* – Elusive but one seen near the fig tree

White-throated Robin* – A pile of these robins was at the fruiting fig on the Ranch

Rufous-backed Robin* (E) – Several seen well at the fruiting fig

Blue Mockingbird* (E) – A few were glimpsed but they never cooperated by investigating tape playback

Northern Mockingbird – Only seen in the lowlands CDL area and Tehua

Cedar Waxwing* – Seen on 3 days most numerous at the fruiting fig on the Ranch

Loggerhead Shrike – Seen only in the lowlands near CDL

Bell's Vireo* – Most numerous in flocks on our drive to Tehua

Plumbeous Vireo* – Uncommon; seen at Bioto, LB, and CO

Golden Vireo* (E) – Common on Bioto, with others on LB and CO

Warbling Vireo* – Fairly common flock component in all habitats

Orange-crowned Warbler* – Common and seen in small numbers most days; those seen included mostly *lutescens*, but also a few that looked like *celata*

Nashville Warbler* – Common; seen daily. This species vied with gnatcatcher as most common mixed-flock passerine.

Tropical Parula – A few near Tehua and a couple near CDL

Yellow Warbler* – Common and seen or heard daily, especially in open areas and lowland areas.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER* – Two seen during the Ranch big day effort, rare for W Mexico

Yellow-rumped Warbler* – Common, especially in pine forest of LB and in mangos on Ranch; these were all of the “Audubon’s Warbler” subspecies group (*auduboni*)

Black-throated Gray Warbler* – Very common; one of the primary flock components in all habitats

Townsend’s Warbler – Just a couple seen at LB

Black-throated Green Warbler – A couple singles at LB and one the last morning at CO

Grace’s Warbler – A common bird that nearly completely avoided detection during our tour, one seen at CO

Black-and-white Warbler* – Common in woodlands

American Redstart* – A couple for the Ranch big day and a couple around LQ

Northern Waterthrush – Heard and seen? in mangroves around LQ on the last day

Louisiana Waterthrush* – Resident bird along stream at Ranch seen several times

MacGillivray’s Warbler* – Very common in brushy and weedy habitats, hard to see

Common Yellowthroat* – Very common in brushy and weedy habitats

Wilson’s Warbler* – Very common in forested and brushy habitats

Painted Redstart – Common in pine forest of LB and CO, best looks at CO

Rufous-capped Warbler – Three for our first afternoon on LB rd were the only ones for the trip

Yellow-breasted Chat* – A fairly common wintering bird that is very sneaky, we did see a few well.

RED-BREASTED CHAT (E)– This spectacular thorn-forest specialty was a definite tour highlight. One adult male came in nicely and later in the morning an immature male sneaked in briefly, both sightings near Tehua.

Scrub Euphonia* – Common, especially on Bioto; the West Mexican form (*godmani*) is sometimes known as “**Godman’s Euphonia**” and is considered a possible split. Euphonias are spectacular and (very) cute goldfinch-like birds, and their relationships recently have been revised and they are now thought to be closer to finches than to tanagers

Red-crowned Ant-Tanager* – One sneaky male seen upstream from the low water crossing on the ranch driveway

Hepatic Tanager* – Fairly common in pine forest of LB

Summer Tanager* – Uncommon on ranch and nearby

Western Tanager – One seen near Tehua

ROSY-THRUSH-TANAGER* – A Spectacular bird with scope views on Bioto Rd, a tour highlight. Also glimpsed on the Ranch

Grayish Saltator* – Common in open areas around Ranch and all habitats

Yellow Grosbeak* – Best seen on our Ranch big day

Black-headed Grosbeak – Four on LB were well-seen

Blue Bunting* – A few seen on our trip to Tehua including an amazing male and also seen on the Ranch

Blue Grosbeak* – Common in lowlands of CDL

Varied Bunting* – The amazing males were well seen on a few days and scoped on Bioto

ORANGE-BREASTED BUNTING (E)– We had unbelievable views of males a fairly common bird in the lowlands

Painted Bunting* – Stunning males and distinctive green females seen on several dates

Dickcissel – A common bird near CDL where we scoped a treefull

Olive Sparrow – One sneaky bird popped up to investigate my Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl imitation near Tehua

Blue-black Grassquit* – Seen on several days, best views were around the Ranch

White-collared Seedeater* – We saw this little sprite well a few times but best views were in the CDL area; note that this subspecies (*torqueola*), sometimes known as “**Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater**”, has been granted full-species status by some and is a possible future split.

Stripe-headed Sparrow* – This common but striking species was seen daily

RUSTY SPARROW – We had great looks at this large sparrow at LB

Lark Sparrow – A couple flushed off the road as we drove near LQ

Lincoln’s Sparrow* – Fairly common in brushy habitats at Ranch

Red-winged Blackbird – 12 at CDL were the only ones

Eastern Meadowlark – Several seen and heard near CDL

Brewer’s Blackbird -- One female in the fields near CDL

Great-tailed Grackle – Common; seen almost daily

Bronzed Cowbird – Seen in a few places best views were in the scope around CDL

Brown-headed Cowbird – Just a few seen around CDL

Orchard Oriole* – One at the first Lesser Ground-Cuckoo spot and a few around the Ranch

Hooded Oriole* – Small numbers seen on 5 dates

Black-vented Oriole* – Seen at Ranch on several dates

Streak-backed Oriole* – Common and seen daily, but a magnificent bird

Baltimore Oriole* – Seen on two dates

Bullock’s Oriole* – Two seen on LB and a single female on the Ranch

Yellow-winged Cacique* – Common and seen daily, but a also a magnificent bird

Black-headed Siskin – Fairly common in pine forest of LB, largest numbers were in the CO area on our last morning

Lesser Goldfinch* – Seen around Ranch and fig tree; these were all of the black-backed form

House Sparrow – Common in towns, including El Tuito

Leader only: Royal Tern, Barn Owl, Golden-crowned Emerald , Marsh wren, Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow and Western Meadowlark

MAMMALS

large squirrel sp. – Several sightings of a very large, long-tailed, gray squirrel; I am still working on identifying it

REPTILES

Spacatacled Caiman – A few at LQ included a very large individual

Black Iguana – One scoped up near CDL

Green Vine Snake – One unidentified species on LB

IDENTIFIED BUTTERFLIES AT RANCHO PRIMAVERA from the first tour some of which we saw during the second tour 16-22 January 2005

Underlined species are those that I know the group saw and enjoyed. I only made passing efforts to identify the butterflies, but below are the species I succeeded with. I am hoping Becky’s pictures can help me identify another 5 or more species.

Large Orange Sulphur – Common at Ranch bougainvillea hedge

Cloudless Sulphur – Common at Ranch bougainvillea hedge

White Angled Sulphur – One in PV 16 Jan

Mexican Silverspot – Common in gardens (ph)

Erato Heliconian – 10+ at LQ; showy with yellow bar and red spot

Zebra Longwing – Commonly seen in woodlands (ph)

Julia – A few seen at Ranch (ph)

Mexican Fritillary – A few seen at Ranch

Malachite – Seen best at vado west of Ranch on 15 Jan
Red Rim – About 10 seen on Bioto Road, and a few elsewhere
Red-bordered Pixie – Abundant on Bioto (ph)
Fatima – Common throughout
Tropical Buckeye (*nigrosuffusia*) – A few visited garden (ph)
Mangrove Buckeye – Seen in mangroves at LQ
Mexican Bluewing – One seen in lowlands 12 Jan
Monarch – A few seen
Queen – A few in the lowlands near PV
Band-celled Sister – Identified at Bioto Road and vado west of Ranch
Long-tailed Skipper – A couple on Bioto

Other possible identifications:

Orange-barred Sulphur
cf. Rusty-tipped Page
Pale-banded Crescent
Yellow-tipped Flasher - ph
Sickle-winged Skipper
Hermit Skipper - ph
Ocola Skipper - ph