

**SAN BLAS & THE DURANGO HIGHWAY  
OTUS ASIO TOURS  
JANUARY 15-27, 2024**



***TUFTED JAY***

The 2024 rendition of our San Blas & Durango Highway tour was a great success, ending with 323 species, the highest total I've ever recorded in the 22 years that I've run this tour. Many past trips have ended with species

counts between 260 and 270, so this was certainly an impressive number and can be attributed largely to having a group of dedicated birders that were good spotters and were willing to put in long hours and deal with bumpy roads, dusty venues and irritating “jejenes” at times were nearly intolerable. Hopefully along the way, everyone was able to see a side of Mexico that most Americans cannot fathom the existence of that includes delicious cuisine not slathered in greasy cheese and some of the friendliest and welcoming people that I ever met anywhere throughout my travels. I still am deeply saddened by the portrait of Mexico painted by the U.S. media that frightens Americans and inhibits many of them from ever venturing south of the border unless it entails spending their entire holiday in a generic beachfront compound that could be anywhere in the world. I dare say that those kinds of travelers have never been to Mexico.

We began our adventure with 5 nights in Mazatlan. The first morning gave everyone a glimpse of what was to come when we visited Estero Guayabal and recorded 86 species in a little over 3 hours. Later that afternoon, after Dan’s travel SNAFU has finally been resolved, we took a short boat trip in Mazatlan Bay to get nice looks at both Brown and Blue-footed boobies and Red-billed Tropicbird. Our visit to the Tufted Jay Reserve in the Sierra Madre east off Mazatlan is always a trip highlight and this year was no different as we had an early close encounter with a small flock of Tufted Jays, one of Mexico’s most iconic birds. The birding there was productive throughout the day, but perhaps the most memorable part of our day was having lunch in El Palmito at the home of Santos and Leonarda Vasquez. Who will ever forget the homemade blue corn tortillas cooked on the surface of wood burning stove!

Another morning was spent in the charming village of Copala where we saw many Military Macaws and after a fair bit of work were finally able to coax a handsome Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow into view. A Bat Falcon perched atop the church cross rounded out the morning in Copala, but not before several people enjoyed a piece of the restaurant’s “world famous” banana coconut cream pie. Los Ebanos road produced our only sighting of the endemic Flammulated Flycatcher and in the brushy ravine across from our lunch stop we found a beautiful male Red-breasted Chat. Our final morning in Mazatlan took us to Lago San Michel, an avian rich site that has only been recently discovered by Sinaloa birders. Here we found several



***FLAMMULATED FLYCATCHER***

species that are rarely recorded in Sinaloa and two that were first time Sinaloa birds for me: Ringed Kingfisher and Vesper Sparrow. Sparrows in general were well represented here and in addition to Vesper, we found Lark, Lincoln's, Clay-colored and White-crowned. Many years the only sparrow seen on this tour is Lincoln's, so this was quite a bonanza. Other unusual birds here included one of Sinaloa's only records of Limpkin and many Ring-necked Ducks which seldom are seen this far south on west Mexico.

From Mazatlan we drove 3.5 hours south to the small town of San Blas, one of Mexico's premier birding sites and as is always the case, it didn't

disappoint. In my mind, the San Blas area is one of the finest birding destinations in all of the world and a visit there should be on everyone's bucket list. Even with seven nights at the Garza Canela, we didn't have enough time to visit all of the birding sites that are available here, but we did our best to cover as much ground as possible. The evening boat trip on the Rio Cristobal is always a highlight for participants and this year was no different despite our missing the Rufous-necked Wood-Rail which in the end, proved to be our nemesis bird. This was just the second time over the course of my visits to San Blas that I have failed to see this bird, but I think we were adequately compensated by the Barn Owl hunting in the moonlight, the Boat-billed Herons roosting in the mangroves and the Northern Potoos watching over the marshes from exposed riverside perches.



***NORTHERN POTOO***

Our morning outing to the village of Chacalilla produced a parade of Elegant Quail and a close encounter with a Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, the latter after a lengthy wait as is often the case with this reclusive bird.

Another morning found us an hour south of San Blas where we quickly had great trailside views of a hovering Golden-crowned Emerald with its exquisitely long tail trailing behind. On the drive from El Cora to Tecuitata we had a surprise encounter with a small group of San Blas Jays, a poorly

named species since it is actually somewhat rare in the San Blas area and one of the area's endemics that we often have missed. The high ridge at Tecuitata was unusually quiet this year, but we did have a few good finds including a pair of soaring Crane Hawks and scope view of a vocalizing Colima Pygmy-Owl.



***SPOTTED WRENS***

Our full day at the ranch at La Noria started a bit slowly, but things quickly picked up when the sun crested the ridge. Scoping a flowering tree during breakfast produced many Bullock's Orioles, Calliope, Rufous and Berylline hummingbirds and a nice variety of warblers. While walking the grounds we quickly located a small, noisy group of Spotted Wrens and a Bumblebee Hummingbird drifting through the scattered shrubbery in the donkey pen. Other nice birds here included Black-headed Siskin and Rusty Sparrow along with a surprising Grasshopper Sparrow, the first time I had ever seen one at this location. On the way down the mountain we stopped at the "holey pipe," a leaky water line that always attracts an

Interesting mix of birds. During our hour long vigil at the pipe we were rewarded with many sightings of a male Mexican Woodnymph bathing in the spray, a very skittish Fan-tailed Warbler that popped in a few times as well as other more common species like Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart and Crescent-chested Warbler. Finally, near the bottom of the road a final stop produced killer views of a Golden Vireo.



***RED-HEADED TANAGER***

A morning visit to Pantanal Road near Tepic resulted in one of the tour's most memorable moments when we watched an enormous wintering flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds coming to a wet pasture for water. Mixed in with these colorful icterids were many Brown-headed Cowbirds and a couple of female Brewer's Blackbirds. A pair of White-tailed Kites added a

bit of elegance to the scene and as did many Loggerhead Shrikes and Vermillion Flycatchers. From Pantanal Road we drove to Laguna Tepetitlic by way of the old cobblestone road with plans for a quick Bridled Titmouse stop. However this year the birds had other ideas and we spent much of the morning titmouse-less until Rob Finally spotted a pair near the end of the road. Later it was suggested that we had seen the only 2 Bridled Titmice in Mexico! Over lunch at the laguna we added many Clark's Grebes and a single Mexican Duck to our burgeoning tally before retiring to San Blas late in the afternoon, but not before Dan spotted one of the best birds of the trip on a roadside fence line. The beautiful Scissor-tailed Flycatcher put on a nice, but brief show before disappearing to the north. This was the time I have seen this species in Nayarit state and it was probably the biggest surprise of the entire tour.

The morning boat trip to Laguna de Zoquipan in search of the diminutive and elusive Yellow-breasted Crake kicked off our penultimate morning in San Blas. After motoring upriver for about an hour we began slowly cruising the lagoon's edge scanning the water lettuce and hyacinth for this mouse-like rail. After 30 minutes or so we finally spotted one near the boat and though it was seen in bits and pieces, everyone was finally satisfied with their views. This bird was only recently discovered in the San Blas area and the nearest known population is thousands of kilometers to the south! Later that afternoon we drove through the Mantanchen fields where we saw a large group of Dickcissels, several Louisiana Waterthrush, a Pale-billed Woodpecker and a pair of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks hiding among a group of Black-bellied WDs.

Our last morning in San Blas started with a Mottle Owl and another unsuccessful attempt to find what became the mythical Rufous-necked Wood-Rail. After much back and forth I finally decided it was worth making the hike to the Mexican Hermit lek and happily, this turned out to be a wise decision as there were several male hermits displaying on the lek. After a bit of bushwhacking and brush clearing everyone managed to see these impressive long-tailed hummingbirds either hovering near us at eye level or perched in the understory. Several people opted out of the last afternoon's excursion and the smaller group made several more fruitless attempts to see the wood-rail before finally throwing in the towel and retiring to the Garza Canela for our final meal together.

As promised, the everything about our stay at this lovely family owned hotel was amazing. The rooms were comfortable, the ambience was elegant, the food was exquisite and the service was impeccable. In fact I would dare to say that the service I receive at this hotel is as good as any I have ever had anywhere in the world. I am a firm believer that there is much more to a quality birding tour than the number of birds that end up on the list and spending time at the Garza Canela would make this tour a memorable experience regardless of the trip total.

In today's world that is plagued by division and animosity, it has become vitally important to find ways to bring people together. For me birding is such a pursuit. Birding groups are always quite diverse in terms of the participant's philosophical perspectives, economic means and political views, but all of those divisions are laid aside and become inconsequential during our time together. In the truest sense, the thing that unites us becomes far more important than the things that divide us and I find that a refreshing change from what I most often see as I go through my daily life. Every group is special in its own way and made what it is by the blending of the unique qualities and contributions that each participant brings to the



table. I thank all of you for being a part of this one and hope to see you again somewhere down the road.

## ANNOTATED CHECKLIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

### Anatidae (Ducks & Geese)

#### **BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

Very common in the San Blas area.

#### **FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna bicolor*)

A pair was seen twice with large groups of BBWD near San Blas. This species is always sparse on this tour.

#### **MUSCOVY DUCK** (*Cairina moschata*)

One in flight on the evening boat trip and a pair in flight over the river on the morning boat trip. Despite our impressions that this is a common park and city bird, truly wild Muscovy Ducks and extremely shy and reclusive and are rarely seen when not flying.

#### **BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Spatula discors*)

Fairly common in wetland situations.

#### **CINNAMON TEAL** (*Spatula cyanoptera*)

Surprisingly scarce. Just a few here and there.

#### **NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*)

This is an irregular visitor to west Mexico in winter and this was an exceptional year. There were 75 or so in the pond on the road leading into town every time we passed by.

#### **GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*)

About a dozen were seen on our first morning at Estero Guayabal near Mazatlan.

#### **AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Mareca americana*)

A few were noted in the Mazatlan area.

#### **MEXICAN DUCK** (*Anas diazi*)

A single female was seen at Laguna Tepetitlic. This is a fairly recent split from Mallard.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

There were many at Guayabal near Mazatlan and a few others at Escopma and Tepetitlic

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas crecca*)

Just two sightings....a female with a group of BBWDs near San Blas and a male at Laguna de Tepetitlic.

**CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*)

Present in surprising numbers at Escopama near San Blas. This was the first time I have ever recorded this species on this tour!

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*)

This is another irregular winter visitor to west Mexico that was present in unusually large numbers this year. There 75+ at Escopama near Mazatlan.

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*)

There were 15-25 at Lago de Michel near Mazatlan. This species is absent entirely from west Mexico most winters.

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

Fairly common on deeper lakes and reservoirs.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*)

One was on the rocks with pelicans and cormorants at Aticama. Another very rare species here as there are only a handful of records from Nayarit.

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Very common. This is generally one of the most commonly seen ducks during the winter in west Mexico.

**Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas & Curassows)****\*\*\*RUFIOUS-BELLIED CHACHALACA** (*Ortalis wagleri*)

One of the easier endemics of the tour. They were heard daily in lowland habitat and were seen multiple times including on the grounds of the Garza Canela where Rob recorded a vase on our last morning.

**Odontophoridae (New World Quail)****\*\*\*ELEGANT QUAIL** (*Callipepla douglasii*)

This species has been elusive at times in the past, but on this tour we were treated to a parade of 20+ individuals at Chacalilla.



***STYGIAN OWL***

**Podicipedidae (Grebes)**

**LEAST GREBE** (*Tachybaptus dominicus*)

Just a few here and there.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

This is a rather local winter visitor to west Mexico. There were several at Lago de Michel near Mazatlan and a few at Tepetilitic.

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

20+ at Escopama near Mazatlan was an exceptional count and a lone bird on a shrimp pond outside San Blas was the first time I've recorded this species in Nayarit.

**CLARK'S GREBE** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

There were 30+ at Laguna de Tepetilitic where this species is a resident breeder.

## Columbidae (Pigeons & Doves)

### **ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*)

Common in urban areas and in villages.

### **RED-BILLED PIGEON** (*Patagioenis flavirostris*)

Normally common on this tour, but almost nonexistent this year. We saw one perch briefly at Tecuitata, but that was it.

### **EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

An introduced species that began colonizing in this part of Mexico about 10 years ago. It is now present in most small villages and urban areas.

### **INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*)

The small, scaly, long-tailed dove. It was fairly common and recorded in small numbers on most days. Many of the eBird reports were “heard only” as the mournful two-noted call of this dove was a common auditory backdrop at many venues.

### **COMMON GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina passerina*)

We saw just a few of these along the way. Separated from Ruddy-Ground-Dove by the scaly breast and pink based bill.

### **RUDDY GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina talpacoti*)

Very common throughout. The default small ground dove on this tour.

### **WHITE-TIPPED DOVE** (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

Heard daily and seen most days in the San Blas area. Most sightings were of birds walking on roadsides or trails ahead of us.

### **WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*)

One of the most abundant birds of the tour. We saw many daily....some days many hundreds.

### **MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

This is a scarce species on this tour. We had a few on our first morning in Mazatlan and a few others at Tepetitlan.

## Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

### **GROOVE-BILLED ANI** (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*)

Fairly common in open fields and pastures. This is the only ani that occurs in this part of Mexico.

**LESSER GROUND-CKOO** (*Morococcyx erythropygus*)

This species was finally seen in thorn scrub habitat near Chacalilla after a lengthy wait. This was a typical encounter with this species which often materializes 20-30 minutes after playback. After a short appearance it vanished again into the underbrush.

**SQUIRREL CUCKOO** (*Piaya cayana*)

Surprisingly scarce. The only sighting was during our morning at Chacalilla.

**MANGROVE CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus minor*)

We had very nice views of this skulky cuckoo on the afternoon boat trip to La Tovar.

**Caprimulgidae (Nightjars & Allies)**

**LESSER NIGHTHAWK** (*Chordeiles acutipennis*)

Several were seen aerial foraging at dusk on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan. A few others were noted at dusk at the Laughing Falcon site in San Blas.

**COMMON PAURAQUE** (*Nyctidromus albigollis*)

8-10 were seen foraging along the river on the boat trip to La Tovar. Others were at the Mottled Owl site and David flushed one from the mangroves during our Mangrove Vireo search.

**BUFF-COLLARED NIGHTJAR** (*Antrostomus ridgwayi*)

Everyone heard this one on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan and a few people caught glimpses of it as it foraged over the road before disappearing into the thornscrub.

**Nyctibiidae (Potoos)**

**NORTHERN POTOO** (*Nyctibius jamaicensis*)

Great views of several perched on a riverside snags on the evening boat trip to La Tovar.

**Apodidae (Swifts)**

**VAUX'S SWIFT** (*Chaetura vauxi*)

The only swift seen during the tour. A flock of 20-30 was foraging above the road as we drove from El Cora to Tecuitata.

**Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)**

**\*\*\*MEXICAN HERMIT** (*Phaethornis mexicanus*)

We saw several displaying males on the lek above La Palma. Worth the long hike for this endemic.

**PLAIN-CAPPED STARThROAT** (*Heliomaster constantii*)

This species has often been absent from previous tours, but we had good luck with it this year with sightings in Copala and on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan.

**BLUE-THROATED MOUNTAIN-GEM** (*Lampornis clemenciae*)

This large montane hummingbird was seen well at the Chara Pinta reserve. It was formerly called Blue-throated Hummingbird and is one of the Sierra Madrean hummingbirds that reached southeastern Arizona.

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*)

Generally outnumbered by Black-chinned in west Mexico, but we did see a couple of females during the tour.

**BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus alexandri*)

Only a few sightings. Can be separated from Ruby-crowned by its longer bill and constant tail wagging as it feeds.

**CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD** (*Selasphorus calliope*)

A nice male was photographed by several people at the ranch at La Noria. This small hummingbird is distinctive with its fingered gorget.

**RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD** (*Selasphorus rufus*)

Seen at the Chara Pinta Reserve and at Rancho La Noria.

**\*\*\*BUMBLEBEE HUMMINGBIRD** (*Selasphorus heloisa*)

A well-named, tiny hummingbird that drifts through the air. Everyone had nice views at Rancho La Noria.

**BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Cyanthus latirostris*)

We had scattered sightings of this species throughout the tour. Along with Cinnamon, the most frequently encountered hummingbird.

**\*\*\*GOLDEN-CROWNED EMERALD** (*Cyanthus auriceps*)

This is one of the tougher endemics and everyone saw it well at El Cora where it hovered briefly in front of us showing off its long forked tail.

**WHITE-EARED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Amazilia rutila*)

Common at higher elevations. Many were seen at the Chara Pinta Reserve and Rancho La Noria.

**\*\*\*MEXICAN WOODNYMPH** (*Thalurania ridgwayi*)

Another often tough endemic that showed well at the “holey pipe” where a male repeatedly bathed in the spray.



### ***TROPICAL PARULA***

#### **BERYLLINE HUMMINGBIRD (*Saucerottia beryllina*)**

Fairly common at mid-range elevations. We saw them at Copala, Rancho La Noria and El Cora.

#### **CINNAMON HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia rutila*)**

This large colorful hummingbird was easily the most common hummingbird of the tour and we saw them most days. One or two frequently came in close in response to the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl tape.

## Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules & Coots)

### **RIDGWAY'S RAIL** (*Rallus obsoletus*)

One responded to playback in the mangroves near San Blas, but never revealed itself visually.

### **VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*)

Heard only at Laguna de Zoquipan.

### **SPOTTED RAIL** (*Pardirallus maculatus*)

Thanks to Bud's sharp eyes we had excellent views of this elusive rail on the boat trip to La Tovar.

### **SORA** (*Porzana carolina*)

One was seen at large wetland in Chacalilla. It was heard several times elsewhere.

### **COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*)

Generally uncommon on this itinerary. We noted a few near Chacalilla and at Tepetitlic.

### **AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

Abundant throughout.

### **PURPLE GALLINULE** (*Porphyrio martinica*)

Bud spotted one at Lago de Michel where they are uncommon. We also saw many from the boat as we were going to Laguna de Zoquipan.

### **YELLOW-BREASTED CRAKE** (*Hapalocrex flaviventer*)

This tiny crake is the newest addition to the avifauna around San Blas and our dedicated trip to Laguna de Zoquipan to find them did not disappoint as we were able to see at least 3 different individuals.

## Aramidae (Limpkin)

### **LIMPKIN** (*Aramaus guarana*)

This species began to colonize the San Blas area in the early 2000's and has now become fairly common there. This year we also saw one at Lago de Michel in Mazatlan, one of the few Sinaloa records of Limpkin. This seems to be a bird that is slowly pushing the limits of its range northward.

## Recurvirostridae (Stilts & Avocets)

### **BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

The Latin specific name for this species is reflective of its commonality in Mexico and the Neotropics and it was widespread on this tour.

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Generally not a common species in this part of Mexico. Often present where stilts occurred but in smaller numbers.

*Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)*

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*)

One on the boat in Mazatlan Bay and a couple more on the flats at the thermoelectric plant near Mazatlan.

*Charadriidae (Plovers & Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

One at Guayabal near Mazatlan and another at Punta Puntilla in San Blas.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Uncommon but we had groups of about 15 at Guayabal and Laguna Mantanchen.

**SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

High water throughout reduced habitat for this species. We only saw them at Guayabal and Escopama.

**WILSON'S PLOVER** (*Anarhynchus wilsonia*)

At least 78 were counted roosting on the sandy beach at Punta Puntilla near San Blas.

*Jacanidae (Jacanas)*

**NORTHERN JACANA** (*Jacana spinosa*)

Fairly common around San Blas with lesser numbers in appropriate habitat around Mazatlan.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers & Allies)*

**WHIMBREL** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

5-10 were on the flats at the thermoelectric plant in Mazatlan. A few others were seen in the San Blas area.

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*)

One was at Guayabal and several more were on the flats at the thermoelectric plant.

**MARbled GODWIT** (*Limosa fedoa*)

Very scarce. One at Guayabal and two others at the thermoelectric plant in Mazatlan.

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*)

A few were seen here and there. This species is common in west Mexico in winter.



***COMMON BLACK HAWK***  
***PHOTO BY DAVID ANDERSON***

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

One put in a very brief appearance in a marsh field on Pantanal Road near Tepic.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularia*)

Common and seen most days in appropriate habitat.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) This is an uncommon species in western Mexico, so it was surprising to see one at Paco's Reserve.

**WANDERING TATTLER** (*Tringa incana*)

One the rocks at Playa Cerritos.

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*)

Several were seen on the mudflats on the evening boat trip in San Blas.

**WILLET** (*Tringa semipalmata*)

Very common in coastal areas throughout.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Scattered sightings throughout.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

On the rocks at Playa Cerritos.

**BLACK TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria melanocephala*)

This is a very scarce species in west Mexico. There was one on the rocks at Playa Cerritos, but it was the first one we've had in several years.

**SURFBIRD** (*Calidris virgata*)

Several were on the rocks at Playa Cerritos where it a regular winter visitor.

**STILT SANDPIPER** (*Calidris himantopus*)

A group of four was foraging in the shallow water at Guayabal.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

A small group was seen on the beach at Punta Puntilla in San Blas.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

There were a few scattered sightings of this small sandpiper which generally winters farther north. The muddy brown coloration is a helpful point of separation from Western Sandpiper, especially when the legs are covered with mud.

**Laridae (Gulls, Terns & Skimmers)**

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

One made a surprise appearance among the hordes of gulls at Playa Norte when the fishermen began throwing fish scraps to the frigatebirds.

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

Fairly common in coastal areas.

**HEERMAN'S GULL** (*Larus heermani*)

There were a few in coastal areas throughout, but they were especially abundant at Playa Norte in Mazatlan.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*)

Fairly common.

**WESTERN GULL** (*Larus argentatus*)

This species only occurs at Playa Norte in Mazatlan where it is now thought to be breeding. We saw at least two individuals there.

**CALIFORNIA GULL** (*Larus californicus*)

At least three first cycle birds were on the beach at Playa Norte.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

Several were at the thermoelectric plant in Mazatlan and a few others at the crocodile overlook in San Blas.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

We had nice side by side comparisons with Royal Tern at Guayabal where the significantly larger size of this species was quite evident.

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*)

A large flock was roosting at Guayabal and there were also a few at Escopama.

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*)

This is a rare wintering species in west Mexico, so it was a bit unusual to see a few with the congregation of Forster's Terns at Guayabal.

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

Fairly common in coastal areas.

**Phaethontidae** (Tropicbirds)

**RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD** (*Phaethon aethereus*)

Several pairs breed on the booby rocks in Mazatlan and we had nice views from the boat as they wheeled overhead.

**Ciconiidae** (Storks)

**WOOD STORK** (*Mycteria americana*)

A common breeding species in western Mexico.

**Fregatidae** (Frigatebirds)

**MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD** (*Fregata magnificens*)

Very common in coastal areas.

## *Sulidae (Boobies & Gannets)*

### **BROWN BOOBY** (*Sula leucogaster*)

We had terrific close range views of these as they fed near the boat as we headed to the booby rocks. There were also many sitting on the rocks.

### **BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY** (*Sula nebouxii*)

A bit less common than Brown Booby, but there were many on the booby rocks in Mazatlan.

## *Anhingidae (Anhingas)*

### **ANHINGA** (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Quite common in the river mangroves in San Blas.

## *Phalacrocoridae*

### **NEOTROPICAL CORMORANT** (*Nannopterum brasiliense*)

This is the common cormorant in western Mexico and we saw many at multiple locations.

## *Pelecanidae (Pelicans)*

### **BROWN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Common in coastal areas.

### **AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

A flock of 75+ was seen soaring over the water at Escopama. There were a few more at Laguna Tepetitlic.

## *Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets & Bitterns)*

### **BARE-THROATED TIGER-HERON** (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*)

We had one at Lago de Michel in Mazatlan where this species is uncommon. In San Blas there were good numbers seen in the mangroves during our boat trips on the Rio San Cristobal and also along the edges of Laguna de Zoquipan.

### **BOAT-BILLED HERON** (*Cochlearius cochlearius*)

Very nice views of both juvenile and adult birds on the afternoon boat trip in San Blas. This species in Spanish is known as "Garza Canela" and is the namesake of our hotel.

### **YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Very common throughout especially in mangrove habitat and along coastal rocky shorelines. There 15+ on the rocks at Aticama.



***BARE-THROATED TIGER-HERON***

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

This is a cosmopolitan species found in much of the world. In west Mexico it is quite common, but generally less so than the previous species.

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulescens*)

Present throughout, but in smaller numbers than most of the herons..

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*)

A few here and there. Generally not found far from coastal areas.

**REDDISH EGRET** (*Egretta rufescens*)

Nice photo ops of this one at the thermoelectric plant in Mazatlan. There was also one in the “shoveler pond” on the way into to San Blas.

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*)

Very common throughout.

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*)

Recorded almost daily, but extremely common on both of our river trips in San Blas.

**WESTERN CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

This is recently split species and is the Cattle Egret occurring in the Western Hemisphere. They were fairly common in cattle pastures around San Blas.

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*)

Very common throughout.

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)

Recorded on most days. Generally not a common bird on this tour, but this year there were more than usual. They were especially in evidence at Tepetitlic where they outnumbered all other herons.

**Threskiornithidae (Ibises & Spoonbills)**

**WHITE IBIS** (*Eudocimus albus*)

Common throughout.

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*)

This is the default dark ibis in west Mexico. It was present in small numbers in many wetland situations.

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** (*Platalea ajaja*)

This species was present , but in smaller numbers than I generally see on this tour.

**Cathartidae (New World Vultures)**

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

A very abundant species on this trip. Hard to look upon without seeing one.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

Generally outnumbered by Black Vultures, but very common throughout.

**Pandionidae (Osprey)**

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Just a few sightings with the highest count of 3 at Tepetitlic.

**Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles & Kites)**

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*)

This species has declined very dramatically in northwestern Mexico and is no longer expected on this tour, so seeing a pair on Pantanal Road near Tepic was a treat.

**SNAIL KITE** (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*)

Only a few along the river in San Blas. The numbers seemed to be down this year.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus hudsonius*)

This is an irregular winter visitor to west Mexico. We saw a few around Mazatlan.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

The common montane accipiter in this part of Mexico. We saw one soar over the road as we were heading down the mountain from Rancho La Noria.

**CRANE HAWK** (*Geranospiza caerulescens*)

Great looks at pair soaring overhead at Tecuitata.

**COMMON BLACK HAWK** (*Buteogallus anthracinus*)

Fairly common in wetland areas. They are especially conspicuous around mangroves. The individual perched on a cross on the beach at Punta Puntilla was one of the more photogenic subjects of the tour.

**HARRIS'S HAWK** (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

Another species that has declined in this part of Mexico. We had one on the drive from Mazatlan to San Blas and a few others in the San Blas area.

**GRAY HAWK** (*Buteo nitidus*)

As per usual, this was the most commonly seen raptor of the tour.

**SHORT-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo brachyurus*)

A couple were seen soaring high overhead in the San Blas area. The best views were probably at Laguna de Zoquipan.

**ZONE-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo albonotatus*)

The Turkey Vulture lookalike. One was soaring with a group of vultures at Laguna de Zoquipan in San Blas.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

A few scattered sightings. This species is always present in low numbers on this tour.

**Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)**

**BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*)

A memorable encounter watching one hunt over the marshes while we were potoo hunting.



### ***COLIMA PYGMY-OWL***

*Photo by Dan Kaplan*

## *Strigidae (Owls)*

### **MIDDLE AMERICAN SCREECH-OWL**

*(Megascops guatemalae)*

A recently discovered species in the San Blas area. We heard one calling from the mangroves on the road out of town early one morning.

### **\*\*\*COLIMA PYGMY-OWL**

*(Glaucidium palmarum)*

Endemic to western Mexico and always hard to get a good look at as it tends to be more secretive and remain higher in the canopy than Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. We had a nice scope view of one at Tecuitata.

### **FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL (*Glaucidium brasilianum*)**

Conspicuous both vocally and visually. We heard this diurnal owl calling in response to the pygmy-owl tape at almost every stop and saw several that had responded.

### **MOTTLED OWL (*Ciccaba virgata*)**

Heard and seen briefly by a few people on Los Ebanos Road in Mazatlan. Later everyone had a nice view near San Blas. This is a very common owl in this part of Mexico.

### **STYGIAN OWL** (*Asio stygius*)

Thanks to Santos' local knowledge we had great views of a roosting bird at the Reserva Chara Pinta.

### *Trogonidae* (Trogons)

#### **\*\*\*CITREOLINE TROGON** (*Trogon citreolus*)

Another west Mexican endemic that was a bit elusive this year. Everyone had good looks on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan. Others were seen well at Tecuitata.

#### **ELEGANT TROGON** (*Trogon elegans*)

We managed to avoid this normally widespread species until our last morning on the hike to the hermit lek.

#### **MOUNTAIN TROGON** (*Trogon mexicanus*)

A common trogon in highland forests of Central America and western Mexico where it occurs between 3500-10,000 feet. The only place this species occurs on this tour route is on the old Durango Highway and on our day there we saw 3-5 at the Reserva Chara Pinta.

### *Momotidae* (Motmots)

#### **RUSSET-CROWNED MOTMOT** (*Momotus mexicanus*)

Though this species is common in the San Blas area, we found it maddeningly difficult to see well on this trip. Most birds we encountered remained high in the canopy and when they moved seemed to always perch in places with obstructed views. I think that eventually everyone was able to get a satisfactory view though on a scale of 1-10 I would rate our experience with this bird no higher than 5.

### *Alcedinidae* (Kingfishers)

#### **RINGED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle toquata*)

This species is more common in Eastern Mexico and has been absent from this tour's list most years. But since 2022 they seem to be increasing in the San Blas area where we saw them most days this year.

#### **BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

A common winter visitor to west Mexico that was seen regularly.

#### **GREEN KINGFISHER** (*Chloroceryle americana*)

This small kingfisher was very common in the mangroves along the San Cristobal River.

## Picidae (Woodpeckers)

### **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

Vicki spotted one on the hike down from the hermit lek. This was just the second time I have recorded this bird on this tour.

### **ACORN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

In western Mexico this species occurs in pine/oak forest above 4000 feet. The only sightings this year were at Rancho La Noria where they were quite conspicuous.

### **\*\*\*GOLDEN-CHEEKED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes chrysogenys*)

This species is found only in western Mexico, but there it is common and conspicuous. They were seen in a variety of habitats and in moderate numbers almost daily.

### **GILA WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes uropygialis*)

A noisy and conspicuous woodpecker of arid habitats. They were fairly common on our outings around Mazatlan. They also were seen regularly in San Blas though there in lesser numbers.

### **LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates scalaris*)

This is another woodpecker that prefers dry and arid locales. We had them in Copala, along the Pantanal Road and at Tepetitlic.

### **ARIZONA WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates arizonae*)

The only North American *Dryobates* woodpecker that is brown and white rather than black and white. It is a montane species that is nearly endemic to Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental where we had good looks on the way up to the Chara Pinta Reserve.

### **\*\*\*GRAY-CROWNED WOODPECKER** (*Colaptes auricularis*)

This species is endemic to mid-elevation forests in western Mexico. Its numbers are declining as its preferred habitat is highly susceptible to human disturbance and logging. We were fortunate to get a good look at the Chara Pinta Reserve.

### **LINEATED WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus lineatus*)

The common large *Dryocopus* throughout much of the Neotropics. This is usually an everyday bird on this tour, but this year we struggled to find one, but eventually had one respond to playback and show well on the hike to the hermit lek. The lines on the back of this species are parallel.

### **PALE-BILLED WOODPECKER** (*Campephilus guatemalensis*)

One responded to playback in the Mantanchen fields. The lines on the back of this species converge to form a V and the eye is completely surrounded by red.

## Falconidae (Falcons & Caracaras)

### **LAUGHING FALCON** (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*)

### **CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara plancus*)

A species that prefers arid habitat. They were common in the Mazatlan area and less so around San Blas where semitropical forest predominates.

### **AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparserius*)

In this part of Mexico the American Kestrel is primarily a wintering bird and the numbers were good this year with many sightings along the way.

### **MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*)

Quick flybys at Lago de Michel and Chacalilla.

### **BAT FALCON** (*Falco rufigularis*)

A classic view of this crepuscular species perched on the church tower in Copala. He was enjoying his lunch while we were enjoying ours.

### **PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*)

We had one soaring with the frigatebirds as we watched the sun setting from our rooftop bar on our first night in Mazatlan.

## Psittacidae (New World & African Parrots)

### **MONK PARAKEET** (*Myiopsitta monachus*)

Apparently these have become regular on Pantanal Road near Tepic where we saw about a dozen. Their appearance in this part of Mexico is not good news for native cavity nesters as they are terribly invasive and can successfully outcompete most species for nest sites.

### **WHITE-FRONTED PARROT** (*Amazona albifrons*)

40-50 flew over our first morning in San Blas.

### \*\*\***MEXICAN PARROTLET** (*Forpus cyanopygius*)

Endemic to northwest Mexico, this sparrow-sized parrot is declining and is now considered threatened. We had our first encounter at Tecuitata and quickly realized how difficult they are to locate once they have landed. Later we had much better views on the hike to the hermit lek.

### **ORANGE-FRONTED PARAKEET** (*Eupsittula canicularis*)

The most common psittacid in this part of Mexico. We recorded them almost daily and many were very cooperative.

### **MILITARY MACAW** (*Ara militaris*)

Great views of 15-20 birds in flight at Copala where they are generally easy to see due to the abundance of trees with large hard-shelled fruit that is difficult for other birds to access.

### *Furnariidae* (Ovenbirds & Woodcreepers)

#### **IVORY-BILLED WOODCREEPER** (*Xiphorhynchus flavigaster*)

A wide ranging woodcreeper found from northern Mexico to Costa Rica. They were common around San Blas where we recorded a few on most days. We also had one at Copala.

#### **\*\*\*WHITE-STRIPED WOODCREEPER** (*Lepidocolaptes leucogaster*)

Endemic to western and southern Mexico where it prefers montane pine-oak woodlands. We saw several on our day of birding on the old Durango Highway.

### *Tityridae* (Tityras & Allies)

#### **MASKED TITYRA** (*Tityra semifasciata*)

White birds are always so striking and this handsome fruit eater was common this year in the San Blas area. We saw them well at Tecuitata and during the hike to the hermit lek.

#### **ROSE-THROATED BECARD** (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*)

This is the only member of the Tityridae family that occurs in the U.S. as a non-vagrant. Despite its limited geographical range in the southwestern U.S., it is common and widespread in Mexico and Central America. We had several encounters during the tour.

### *Tyrannidae* (Tyrant Flycatchers)

#### **NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET** (*Camptostoma imberbe*)

This is a common bird throughout this tour route and we heard them often. Early on we had very close views in Copala. After that they were mostly heard. The name is derived from the fact that unlike most flycatchers, they lack rictal bristles around the base of the bill.

#### **GREENISH ELAENIA** (*Myiopagis viridicata*)

Widespread tropical species that reaches the northernmost limit of its range in central Sinaloa. We had brief views on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan.

**TUFTED FLYCATCHER** (*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*)

A colorful high elevation flycatcher with cinnamon underparts and face and a prominent crest. They were abundant in the pine oak belt forests throughout the Sierra Madre.

**GREATER PEWEE** (*Contopus pertinax*)

Primarily a pine-oak dweller, we saw them at Reserva Chara Pinta, in Copala and at Rancho La Noria.

**WHITE-THROATED FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax albigularis*)

Great views of one responding to playback along the edge of Laguna Mantanchen. Bud had a great action photo.

**HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax hammondi*)

One of the easier empires to ID with its long primary projection and constant kinglet-like wing flicking. We had them at the Chara Pinta Reserve and Rancho La Noria.

**DUSKY FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax oberholseri*)

One was seen well and photographed by several people next to the road while we were searching for Bridled Titmouse.

**PINE FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax affinis*)

Nearly endemic to Mexico and found only in pine forests above 5000 feet. One showed fairly well at the Chara Pinta Reserve. It is somewhat distinctive in appearance with a teardrop shaped eye ring and lacking the yellowish tones of Western with which it occurs. Despite the common name, it is often found away from pines in clearings and orchards.

**WESTERN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax difficilis*)

This species has been returned to its prior taxonomic status after the lumping of Cordilleran and Pacific-slope flycatchers last year. Guides will be happy not to have to attempt to sort those two out any longer as Western Flycatcher is common across a variety of habitats and elevations.

**BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax fulvifrons*)

A tiny emptied that was seen well both at the Chara Pinta Reserve and Rancho La Noria.

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*)

Escopama, Copala and Lago San Michel.

**SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*)

A pair has taken up residence at the schoolyard in El Palmito where our sighting was the first one I've had in Sinaloa! More expected was one at Rancho La Noria.



***NUTTING'S FLYCATCHER***  
***PHOTO BY DAVID ANDERSON***

**VERMILLION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

Tough to miss this one!

**\*\*\*FLAMMULATED FLYCATCHER** (*Ramphotrigon flammulatum*)

A shy and reclusive endemic that stays mostly out of sight in dense thornscrub outside the breeding season. We had very nice extended views of one that responded to playback on Los Ebanos Road.

**BRIGHT-RUMPED ATILA** (*Attila spadiceus*)

Heard only on the hike to the hermit lek.

**DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*)

The whiny call note of this species was frequently heard. This is a very widespread tropical flycatcher that is found from southern Arizona south into Argentina and it was recorded by voice many times during the tour and also seen several times.

**NUTTING'S FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus nuttingi*)

This flycatcher is closely tied to arid thornscrub forest. We had very nice views on our first morning in Mazatlan when took great umbrage to the pygmy-owl tape.

**BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)

A large Myiarchus flycatcher that we saw on the hike to the Mexican Hermit lek and on Los Ebanos Road in Mazatlan. It is very similar in appearance to Great Crested Flycatcher.

**GREAT KISKADEE** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

Fairly common in open and disturbed areas throughout.

**BOAT-BILLED FLYCATCHER** (*Megarynchus pitangua*)

Unfortunately this one was heard only on the hike to the hermit lek.

**SOCIAL FLYCATCHER** (*Myiozetetes similis*)

Very common throughout and recorded most days. A mini kiskadee lacking rufous in the wings.

**TROPICAL KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

Abundant in any open and disturbed area.

**CASSIN'S KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus vociferous*)

Two responded vigorously to playback in the field at Ranch La Noria.

**THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus crasirostris*)

Common throughout and sharing habitat with Tropical Kingbird, but far less abundant than that species.

**SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Tyrants forficatus*)

Possibly the bird of the trip spotted by Dan near the toll booth on the new highway from San Blas to Tepic. This species winters in southern Mexico and migrates up the east coast, so it is scarce in Nayarit and Sinaloa.

**Vireonidae** (*Vireos, Shrike-Babblers & Erpornis*)

\*\*\***GOLDEN VIREO** (*Vireo hypochryseus*)

Everyone had stunning views of this endemic vireo when it responded to the owl tape on our way down from Rancho La Noria.

**BLACK-CAPPED VIREO** (*Vireo hypochryseus*)

A very handsome vireo that is an irregular wintering species in western Mexico. Everyone had excellent views in Copala.

**BELL'S VIREO** (*Vireo bellii*)

A vireo of scrubby fields and woodland edges that pumps its tail frequently. We has nice looks at Guayabal and Chacalilla.

**HUTTON'S VIREO** (*Vireo huttoni*)

We had just a few on the Old Durango Highway and at the Chara Pinta Reserve. In appearance these are very similar to Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

**PLUMBEOUS VIREO** (*Vireo plumbeus*)

A distinctive vireo that is leaden colored and has prominent white spectacles. We ran into them at Copala and Chacalilla.

**WARBLING VIREO** (*Vireo gilvus*)

Seen almost daily. Easily the most common vireo of the tour.

**Laniidae (Shrikes)****LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Common on Pantanal Road near Tepic, but completely absent elsewhere. A declining species in west Mexico.

**Corvidae (Crows, Jays & Magpies)****\*\*\*BLACK-THROATED MAGPIE-JAY** (*Calocitta colliei*)

The spectacular appearance of this bird is somewhat diminished by its abundant distribution. We saw moderate numbers almost everyday. An interesting side note is that they have been recently introduced into southern California and seem to be increasing there.

**\*\*\*TUFTED JAY** (*Cyanocorax dickeyi*)

This is always one of the best birds of the trip and they didn't disappoint this year as a group of 8-10 put on a nice show on the old Durango Highway. This species was not discovered until 1936 when the road between Mazatlan and Durango City was built.

**GREEN JAY** (*Cyanocorax yncas*)

Unlike the behavior of this species in Texas, in western Mexico they are shy and hard to see. We heard them several times during our day at Rancho La Noria, but true to form they were not cooperative.

**\*\*\*SAN BLAS JAY** (*Cyanocorax sanblasianus*)

A poorly named bird as it is decidedly uncommon around San Blas, but instead occurs farther south. Perhaps Puerto Vallarta Jay would be a better name. We were lucky to find a small group as we drove from El Cora to Tecuitata..

**\*\*\*PURPLISH-BACKED JAY** (*Cyanocorax beecheii*)

With the demise of Paco's reserve in Mazatlan this species has become harder to see, but we had nice views at el Yugo as well as on the La Noria Road near Mazatlan.

\*\*\***SINALOA CROW** (*Corvus sinaloae*)

Abundant in large numbers throughout. Despite the name, it is not endemic to the state of Sinaloa, but also occurs in the states of Nayarit and Sonora.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

One was hanging around the breakfast area at Rancho La Noria. Others were seen in flight at Tepetitlic and on the Old Durango Highway.

*Paridae (Tits, Chickadees & Titmice)*

**MEXICAN CHICKADEE** (*Poecile sclateri*)

We saw these several times in mixed flocks at the Chara Pinta Reserve.

**BRIDLED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus wollweberi*)

After a long search we finally found a pair on the old cobblestone road to Tepetitlic. Believe it or not.....these are not usually this difficult!



***MANGROVE SWALLOW***

### Hirundinidae (Swallows)

#### **NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*)

Very common throughout.

#### **MANGROVE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta albilinea*)

These were fairly common around water. The only white-rumped swallow on the tour.

#### **BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*)

Fairly common around San Blas.

### Regulidae (Kinglets)

#### **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Corthylio calendula*)

A few were seen on the old Durango Highway and Tepetitlic.

### Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

#### **BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*)

Several were seen at the Reserva Chara Pinta and along the Old Durango Highway.

### Poliioptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

#### **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliioptila caerulea*)

Perhaps the most abundant neotropical migrant on this tour.

#### **BLACK-CAPPED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliioptila nigriceps*)

This bird is almost endemic to Mexico, but its range creeps barely into southwestern Arizona in the U.S. It is not common on this tour and we were lucky to get good looks at Guayabal and Lago San Michel..

### Troglodytidae (Wrens)

#### **CANYON WREN** (*Catharses mexicanus*)

A rooftop singer serenaded us with its cascading song during lunch in Copala.

#### **HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*)

Encounters on the Old Durango Highway and at Rancho La Noria..

#### **MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*)

One showed briefly a small grassy swale at Guayabal, the first record for this species at that locale.

#### **\*\*\*SPOTTED WREN** (*Campylorhynchus gularis*)

Endemic to western and central Mexico. On this tour we see them only at Rancho La Noria and as usual they were conspicuous there.

\*\*\***HAPPY WREN** (*Pheugopedius felix*)

A bird that is heard daily, but always difficult to see. All eventually managed to see this little guy, so in the end he made everyone happy.

\*\*\***SINALOA WREN** (*Thryophilus sinaloa*)

Very similar in appearance to Happy Wren, but with more subdued colors and less distinctive streaking on the cheeks. One was seen very well in Copala and after that they were often heard

Mimidae (Mockingbirds & Thrashers)

\*\*\***BLUE MOCKINGBIRD** (*Melanotis caerulescens*)

Unlike most mockingbirds, it is not easy to see this shy skulker, so it was great to have one perch in the open briefly at Rancho La Noria.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Fairly common throughout and much easier to see than its blue cousin.

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

This species reaches the southern edge of its range in the Mazatlan area, so it's easy to miss on this tour. We heard one on the La Noria Road while looking for Elegant Quail in the garbage pit, but later at Lago San Michel everyone saw one that sat in the open for a few minutes.

Turdidae (Thrushes & Allies)

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*)

A few were hanging around the field at Rancho La Noria.

**BROWN-BACKED SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes occidentalis*)

The tinkling, cascading song of this bird is the best clue to its presence. Despite this characteristic vocalization it usually remains out of sight, but we did see quite a few at Reserva Chara Pinta. We also heard them at Copala, Tepetitlic and Rancho La Noria.

**ORANGE-BILLED NIGHTINGALE-THRUSH** (*Catharus aurantirostris*)

Generally a very tough bird to see, but we had good luck this year when one came to the leaky pipe at Rancho La Noria. Another saw seen well on the trail to the hermit lek.

\*\*\***RUSSET NIGHTINGALE-THRUSH** (*Catharus aurantirostris*)

I thought we had missed this endemic until one popped up and sat on a rock below us at the Red Warbler spot at the Chara Pinta Reserve.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*)

One made a brief appearance at Rancho La Noria.



**RED WARBLER**  
*PHOTO BY DAVID ANDERSON*

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

There were a couple at the Chara Pinta Reserve.

**WHITE-THROATED THRUSH** (*Turdus assimilis*)

Brief and unsatisfying views at the Chara Pinta Reserve and Tecuitata.

**\*\*\*RUFOUS-BACKED ROBIN** (*Turdus rufopalliatu*s)

A common Mexican endemic. They were fairly widespread and seen most days.

**Ptiliogonatidae (Silky-flycatchers)**

**GRAY SILKY-FLYCATCHER** (*Ptilogonys cinereus*)

A near Mexican endemic with a range that barely reaches western Guatemala. This is a very attractive fruit-eating species that occurs in irregular numbers during the winter in west Mexico. Though this was a down year, we had nice scope views at Rancho La Noria.

### Peucedramidae (Olive Warbler)

#### **OLIVE WARBLER** (*Peucedramus taeniatus*)

An interesting species taxonomically that is found in pine forests from southeastern Arizona to Nicaragua. It was formerly considered a warbler, but recently has been placed in its own family and is now considered most closely related to Old World accentors. We had decent views at Reserva Chara Pinta and in Loberas on the Old Durango Highway.

### PASSERIDAE (Old World Sparrows)

#### **HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*)

Common in towns and villages.

### Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias & Allies)

#### **\*\*\*WEST MEXICAN EUPHONIA** (*Euphonia godmani*)

Endemic to western Mexico and the only euphonia we saw on the tour. We had really nice views at Lago San Michel.

#### **HOUSE FINCH** (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

It was very unusual to see this generally common finch a single time, but that was the case this year with our only encounter on our first morning at Guayabal.

#### **BLACK-HEADED SISKIN** (*Spinus notatus*)

These were fairly common around ranch La Noria where we watched them drinking from a leaky water pipe. We also had nice views of a male at the Chara Pinta Reserve.

#### **LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*)

There were a few on the old Durango Highway, but these were generally scarce this year.

### Passerellidae (New World Sparrows)

#### **STRIPE-HEADED SPARROW** (*Peucaea ruficauda*)

We had these on the road into Chacalilla and later at Rancho La Noria and Tepetitlic..

#### **GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** (*Ammodramus savannarum*)

A scarce winter visitor. One responded to a scolding tape in the brushy pasture at Rancho La Noria.

#### **CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

Hundreds were seen at the Chara Pinta Reserve, on the Old Durango Highway and at Rancho La Noria.

**CLAY-COLORED SPARROW** (*Spizella pallida*)

It was an exceptionally good year for unusual sparrows with Clay-colored being an example of a species that appears in this part of Mexico about every 5 years. We had good looks at Lago San Michel.

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*)

There were many feeding on the lawn near the restaurant at Lago San Michel. A few More were seen at Tepetitlic.

**\*\*\*GREEN-STRIPED BRUSHFINCH** (*Arremon virenticeps*)

A shy endemic brushfinch found in montane regions of northern and central Mexico. One showed very well at a dedicated stop on the Old Durango Highway.

**YELLOW-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco phaeonotus*)

Several were seen along the old Durango Highway and several more at the Reserva Chara Pinta. The Spanish name for this species is “Ojo Lumbre” which means “fire eye”.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

There was a small group in a brushy pasture near Lago San Michel. This is just the second time I have recorded this species on this tour!

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

The sighting of a Vesper Sparrow at Lago San Michel was in keeping with 2024 being a great year for sparrows in west Mexico. I had never before recorded this species on this tour, so though it is a common bird for most North American birders, it was entirely unexpected on this tour!

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

Several were seen on Pantanal Road near Tepic where this species is regular in winter.

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolnii*)

This was the common wintering sparrow in west Mexico and we had many sightings.

**\*\*\*RUSTY-CROWNED GROUND-SPARROW** (*Melospiza kieneri*)

After a couple of failed attempts we finally had one put on a good show in Copala where I always find this species. For my money this is one of the prettiest sparrows in North America and one of the tour's popular endemics.

**RUSTY SPARROW** (*Aimophila rufescens*)

Great views of one perched in the sun on a some low vegetation at Rancho La Noria.

**GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo chlourus*)

This species was fairly common in the Mazatlan area this year. Most years it is completely absent.

**SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*)

Seen only at Reserva Chara Pinta.

**\*\*\*RUFIOUS-CAPPED BRUSHFINCH** (*Atlapetes pileatus*)

Another Mexican endemic found only in Sinaloa on this tour route. Some people had glimpses while we hiked at the Reserva Chara Pinta.

**Icteriidae (Yellow-breasted Chat)****YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** (*Icteria virens*)

Fairly common in brushy areas throughout, though often tough to see due to its preference for dense cover. We had several along the way usually in response to the pygmy-owl tape. This species was formerly considered a warbler, but has now been placed in its own family.

**Icteridae (Troupials & Allies)****YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephala xanthocephala*)

Thousands and thousands were seen in a wet field on Pantanal Road. This recently discovered wintering area for these colorful icterids has made this a regular species on the tour. We also saw several flyby flocks at Laguna de Zoquipan.

**CHIHUAHUA MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella lilianae*)

This is a recent addition to North America's avifauna having been split for Eastern Meadowlark. We had several on Pantanal Road near Tepic. Counterintuitively, Western Meadowlark does not occur in this part of western Mexico.

**\*\*\*YELLOW-WINGED CACIQUE** (*Cassiculus melanicterus*)

A conspicuous endemic that was seen in large numbers in many lowland situations. One of the tour's easier endemics.

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** (*Icterus spurius*)

This is one of the more common wintering orioles in west Mexico and we saw it many times. The best views were in San Blas at Mark Stackhouse's feeders.

**HOODED ORIOLE** (*Icterus cucullatus*)

Scattered sightings of this large oriole with a long d-curved bill. The best views were at Mark's feeders in San Blas. The Latin specific name for this species means "cuckoo-like," an appropriate moniker for this elongated and long-tailed oriole.

**STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE** (*Icterus pustulatus*)

Very common throughout and seen daily except in the higher montane areas.

**BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** (*Icterus bullockii*)

Several nice males were feeding in a flowering tree while we ate breakfast at Rancho La Noria.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

There were many of these on Pantanal Road near Tepic and also at the Cocodrilaro Road near San Blas.

**BRONZED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus aeneus*)

Unusually scarce this year. Everyone saw them well at Mark's feeders in San Blas.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

Seen in several places, but especially abundant on Pantanal Road.

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

This is a very rare bird on this tour, but in recent years we have had luck finding a few of them on Pantanal Road among the hordes of blackbirds. We saw 3-5 females there.

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

Abundant and conspicuous in urban and disturbed areas.

*Parulidae* (New World Warblers)

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*)

A pair responded to playback along a stream in the fields near Mantanchen.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

One was seen well on our first morning at Guayabal near Mazatlan. It was cavorting on a sandy bank with a Common Yellowthroat.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*)

One was at the Tufted Jay Reserve and another bathing in the mist from the leaky pipe at Rancho La Noria.

**CRESCENT-CHESTED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis superciliosa*)

A fairly common warbler found in pine-oak forests in the mountains of Mexico and Central America where it ranges south into northern Costa Rica. We saw them on the Old Durango Highway, at the Reserva Chara Pinta and on the road below La Noria.

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Leiothlypis celata*)

During the winter months this is the most common migrant warbler in western Mexico and we encountered it daily.

**LUCY'S WARBLER** (*Leiothlypis luciae*)

A pair joined a mixed flock that was mobbing a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl on Los Ebanos Road near Mazatlan.

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** (*Leiothlypis ruficapilla*)

These are fairly common in west Mexico in winter and a frequent component of mixed flocks.

**GRAY-CROWNED YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis poliocephala*)

A shy yellowthroat that skulks about in dry, brushy fields. WE had very good views at Guayabal and on Pantanal Road.

**MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER** (*Geothlypis tolmiei*)

This is a rather inconspicuous bird as it tends to remain in thick cover and it didn't seem to be terribly abundant this year. We had a couple sightings including on the cobblestone road to Tepetitlic.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*)

We saw these in a variety of damp, wetland situations. There is a resident breeding population in this part of Mexico and we were likely seeing these resident birds as well as wintering migrants from points north.

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

A common wintering species here where they are especially fond of mangroves.

**TROPICAL PARULA** (*Setophaga pitiayumi*)

We saw a few of these here and there, but had great eye level looks of one at Parque Sophia in Mazatlan.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*)

Fairly common and recorded daily away from the mountains. This is a fairly common breeding bird in western Mexico, so its relative abundance during the tour was not surprising. We also saw the Mangrove subspecies which has a brilliant chestnut head. Despite the drastic morphological differences between the "Mangrove Warbler" and standard yellow warblers, there has never been any research indicating this might be a distinct species.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER** (*Setophaga coronata*)

Very common throughout. Resident breeders in this part of Mexico are augmented by wintering visitors from farther north. Most of the individuals we saw were the

Audubon's race although Myrtle warblers are also relatively common in west Mexico in winter.

**GRACE'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga graciae*)

We had great eye level views of this pinewoods warbler in the village of Loberas on the old Durango Highway.

**BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*)

Very common and seen most days.

**TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*)

Common at the Reserva Chara Pinta. There were also a few at Rancho La Noria.

**HERMIT WARBLER** (*Setophaga occidentalis*)

David photographed one at the Reserva Chara Pinta.

**FAN-TAILED WARBLER** (*Basileuterus lachrymosus*)

This species has become much more difficult in recent years. They never seem to be in the same place year to year and most years aren't in any place, so it was good to have one come in for a bath at the leaky water pipe near La Noria.

**RUFIOUS-CAPPED WARBLER** (*Basileuterus rufifrons*)

This is a resident mid-elevation species and we usually see many around Rancho La Noria. Unfortunately that wasn't the case this year, but we later found several on the old cobblestone road to Tepetitlic while looking for titmice.

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Seen almost daily in small numbers.

**RED-FACED WARBLER** (*Cardellina rubrifrons*)

Dan saw one at the old abandoned quarry below Rancho La Noria.

**\*\*\*RED WARBLER** (*Cardellina rubra*)

One put on a great show for us at the Chara Pinta Reserve. This came after a lengthy search, so it was great to finally find this little beauty.

**PAINTED REDSTART** (*Myioborus pictus*)

Cooperative individuals were noted at Rancho La Noria and Tepetitlic.

**SLATE-THROATED REDSTART** (*Myioborus miniatus*)

Fairly common at Reserva Chara Pinta and around Rancho La Noria. This species can be separated from Painted Redstart by the lack of a large white wing patch.

## Cardinalidae (Cardinals & Allies)

### **HEPATIC TANAGER** (*Piranga flava*)

Very nice views of both yellow females and brick red males on the old Durango Highway and around Rancho La Noria. They can be differentiated from Summer Tanagers by the grayish cheeks and bill.

### **SUMMER TANAGER** (*Piranga rubra*)

Mainly a migrant and a winter visitor in this part of Mexico. Singles were seen at Chacalilla and on the hike to the hermit lek.

### **WESTERN TANAGER** (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

A common winter visitor to northwestern Mexico and that was AWOL this year until one showed up at Mark's feeders in San Blas.

### **FLAME-COLORED TANAGER** (*Piranga bidentata*)

Crippling views of a male at Parque Sophia in Mazatlan. It is unusual to find this bird away from the pine-oak forests in the Sierra Madre, so this was a significant sighting.

### **\*\*\*RED-HEADED TANAGER** (*Piranga erythrocephala*)

We saw this small endemic *Piranga* tanager very well at Reserva Chara Pinta and also at the Bumblebee Hummingbird site at Rancho La Noria.. The male is quite distinctive, but the female might be confused with a female Hepatic Tanager, but is much smaller and has a stubbier bill.

### **NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

A couple were seen the first morning at Guayabal. This is about as far south as this species occurs in west Mexico.

### **PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

There 5-6 in fields near Lago San Michel. Mazatlan is at the southern edge of this species' range and we have missed it many years.

### **YELLOW GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus chrysopheplus*)

We had nice looks at this species in Copala and on Los Ebanos Road.

### **ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

A female put in a very brief appearance at Rancho La Noria.

### **BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

It was a good year for this species. We saw them at scattered montane sites including on the Old Durango Highway, the Chara Pinta Reserve, Copala and Tepetitlic.

**\*\*\*RED-BREASTED CHAT** (*Granatellus venustus*)

Everyone saw a striking male in the ravine across from our lunch stop on La Noria Road near Mazatlan. This is always one of the more difficult endemics to find on this tour as they are skulky and inhabit dense thornscrub, so we were lucky with this one.

**BLUE BUNTING** (*Cyanocompsa parellina*)

Females were spotted at two locations: with a mixed flock in Copala and in a dense thicket at Tecuitata.

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*)

Fairly common and widespread. Scattered sightings of mostly females along the way.

**LAZULI BUNTING** (*Passerina amoena*)

There were a couple bathing in the stream at Copala. This species is decidedly uncommon on this tour route.

**VARIED BUNTING** (*Passerina versicolor*)

Fairly common in dry scrub and brushy areas, but most birds seen were dull brown females. We did see a couple of males with plum colored faces and red napes. Despite the vivid colorful depictions of males in field guides, they often look black in poor light.

**PAINTED BUNTING** (*Passerina ciris*)

These were fairly common although most of those we saw were females and young males which are a pale greenish color, however a colorful adult male put in an appearance on Pantanal Road.

**DICKCISSEL** (*Spiza americana*)

A flock of about 30 and probably more were seen in the Mantanchen fields near San Blas. This is a very irregular visitor to this part of Mexico that is unusually common this year.

**Thraupidae (Tanagers & Allies)**

**BLUE-BLACK GRASSQUIT** (*Volatinia jacarina*)

This small entirely black seedeater was seen in a brushy field near Chacalilla. Females can be told from the more common Cinnamon-rumped Seedeaters by the finely streaked breasts and straight, sharply pointed bill.

**RUDDY-BREASTED SEEDEATER** (*Sporophila minuta*)

Some people finally were able to see a female at the large shrimp pond complex near Chacalilla where this species occurs regularly, but is always outnumbered by Cinnamon-rumped Seedeaters. The pinkish bill and strong white edgings to the wing feathers are good field marks for females and non-breeding males.

**\*\*\*CINNAMON-RUMPED SEEDEATER** (*Sporophila torqueola*)

An endemic seedeater that was recently split from the White-collared Seedeater. The second half of this split is now known as Morelet's Seedeater and it occurs in eastern Mexico and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. We saw many of the Cinnamon-rumped variety throughout the tour.

**CINNAMON-BELLIED SALTATOR** (*Saltator grandis*)

This species is the result of another recent split and was formerly known as Grayish Saltator which is probably a more appropriate name as they show almost no cinnamon coloration on the underparts. They were common throughout the tour and recorded almost daily.

***TOTAL SPECIES FOR THE TOUR: 323***

***TOTAL OF WEST MEXICAN ENDEMICS: 34***

***MAMMALS***

**MEXICAN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus cunicularius*)

A pair dashed by us as we were waiting for the Lesser Ground-Cuckoo to reveal itself.

**WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus griseus*)

Fairly common in wooded montane regions.

**WHITE-NOSED COATI** (*Nasua narica*)

Several sightings of this raccoon-like creature.

**RACCOON** (*Procyon lotor*)

One was seen on a mudflat during our afternoon boat trip to La Tovar.

**CALIFORNIA SEA LION** (*Zalophus californianus*)

Several were on a small exposed rock during our boat trip in Mazatlan Bay.

**HUMPBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

The blow from a single whale was seen several times on our boat trip on Mazatlan Bay, but it never broke the surface.

