

Veracruz, Oaxaca and the Sierra Madre

Mexico is a country with a diverse avifauna and important ecological areas. Our tour starts in Mexico City, which lies in a bowl 2230 metres above sea level and is one of the largest conurbations in the world. Just outside the city are extensive areas of pinewoods and oak woodlands interspersed with grassy plains. The tour then moves on to Veracruz province, which is one of Mexico's richest areas for birds with a habitat of limestone cliffs and secondary forest. Veracruz is a long straggly state along the Gulf of Mexico and is in ornithological terms classified as the Atlantic Slope. Our final base is at Oaxaca which is reached by travelling over the Sierra Madre – a dramatic area of mountains and forests. Oaxaca is steeped in history and Spanish is the second language to almost thirty local dialects. The area is rich in archaeological ruins especially at Monte Alban. The area surrounding Oaxaca holds up to thirty endemic bird species.

Day 1: Fly to Mexico City and transfer to our hotel on the outskirts of the city for a three-night stay.

Days 2-3: Our main interest is the mixed woodlands and open grasslands of La Cima. The latter habitat holds the endemic Sierra Madre Sparrow. Stands of pines attract Strickland's Woodpecker, Townsend's, Pine and Olive Warblers and on occasions the uncommon Colima Warbler. The pines also attract Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Blue-hooded Euphonia and Evening Grosbeak. Tres Marias is a small village with extensive oak woods. Open trails here allow easy viewing of feeding flocks and we hope to find Rose-throated Becard, Grey-breasted Jay, Grey-barred Wren, White-throated Thrush, Blue Mockingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Crescent-chested, Red-faced and Red Warblers, Painted Redstart and Varied Bunting. Older trees often have White-striped Woodcreeper. Areas of scrub attract Rufous-capped and Green-striped Brushfinches. Flowering shrubs are important for White-eared, Blue-throated and Magnificent Hummingbirds, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and a range of orioles including Black-backed. Lobos Canyon is a reliable spot for Slate-blue Seedeater whilst other species of interest include Balsas Screech Owl, Colima Pygmy Owl, Golden Vireo and Black-chested Sparrow. Lerma

Dates

Saturday January 8th – Saturday
January 22nd 2022

Leaders: Mark Finn and local guides

Group Size: 8 with leaders

Birds: 290–350

Marshes are nearby, where the endemic Black-pollled Yellowthroat is found along with migrant waterfowl and waders.

Day 4: Today we head towards the rural town of Fortin de las Flores, passing through agricultural lands where Tropical Kingbird and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher can be numerous. Our hotel in Fortin is situated in superb tropical gardens for birds including Green Jay, Montezuma's and Wagler's Oropendolas, Yellow-winged Tanager and Black-headed Saltator. Shrubs attract North American wintering warblers, in particular Magnolia and Wilson's. Mature trees are good for Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Singing Blackbird and noisy Band-backed Wrens. We spend three nights at Fortin

Day 5: An area of dry thorn scrub at Colonia Francisco Barrios is our destination today. En route we pass through extensive marshes with borderline ditches. We have good chances of finding Yellow-



Blackburnian Warbler *Photo: Simon Papps*

crowned Night Heron, Pinnated Bittern, Jabiru and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, plus the commoner ducks and herons. Arriving in the thorn forest we search for Mexican Sheartail, White-bellied Wren and Botteri's Sparrow. Other species using the thorn forest include Red-ored Parrot, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat and White-collared Seedeater.

Day 6: First stop today is to check the river area for Black Phoebe and American Dipper. In the surrounding forest it is possible to find Lineated Woodpecker, Altamira Oriole and Red-billed Pigeon. An area of limestone outcrops and shade forest at Amatlan is close to our base. Our aim is to locate Sumichrast's Wren, which is only found in Eastern Mexico. The forest itself is home to Thicket Tinamou, White-crowned Parrot, Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, White-breasted Wood-wren, Fan-tailed, Golden-crowned and Rufous-capped Warblers, White-winged Tanager and up to ten species of flycatchers.

Day 7: Today we travel towards Veracruz stopping at a coastal wetland with adjacent grassland – a favourite habitat of Double-striped Thick-knee, Long-billed Curlew, American Golden Plover, Aplomado Falcon, American and Sprague's Pipits, Grassland Yellow Finch and on telegraph lines Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Areas of scrub hold Striped Cuckoo, Rufous-breasted Spinetail and Barred Antshrike. Seasonal pools often have Blue-winged Teal, Northern Jacana and Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers. Our journey takes us along the coast with Magnificent Frigatebirds for company. Eventually we reach our hotel overlooking Lake Catemaco for a four-night stay. From the hotel veranda we can study Snail Kite, American Royal and Forster's Terns and Ringed Kingfisher.

Day 8: An early morning walk around the grounds may produce Northern Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler and Blue-grey Tanager. After breakfast we head towards an isolated patch of rainforest with a biological research station. Typical birds of this lowland forest include Grey-headed Kite, White Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Brown-hooded

Parrot, Long-tailed Hermit, Red-capped Manakin, Lovely Cotinga, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Black-throated Shrike-Tanager and Crimson-collared Tanager. En route to Sontecomapan an isolated village has Limpkin and Ruddy Crake. Late afternoon we arrive at Arroyo Agrio, an area fringed with hedgerows and fruiting trees, with the latter attracting Aztec Parakeet, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, tanagers and orioles. Nearby forest patches sometimes have Collared Forest Falcon, Barred Woodcreeper and Red-throated Tanager.

Day 9: Today should be one of the highlights with a boat trip on Lake Sontecomapan with visits to mangrove swamps, rivers, rainforest and open water. The harbour itself often has Reddish Egret and Tricoloured Heron. Our boat takes us into the backwaters where we have our best chances of Sungrebe, Pinnated Bittern, Bare-throated Tiger Heron and the localised Boat-billed Heron. Other species of the mangroves include American Pygmy Kingfisher and Yellow-tailed Oriole. After lunch we explore the forest above Catemaco for Tuxtla Quail-Dove, Violet Sabrewing, Slate-coloured Solitaire, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush and Plain-breasted Brushfinch.

Day 10: Our last day in the Catemaco area with visits to Bastonal and Playa Azul. En route a stop in Catemaco may produce Yellow-throated Warbler, and above the



Rufous-tailed Jacamar Photo: Barry Lancaster

lake Chestnut-collared and Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts. The grounds of Playa Azul are overgrown with flowering trees and flowering shrubs which attract Grey-collared Becard, Band-backed Wren, Green-breasted Mango and Azure-crowned, Rufous-tailed and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. The road to Bastonal is steep, passing fields used for cattle ranching. Typical species of the area include Hook-billed and Double-toothed Kites, Laughing Falcon, Northern Bobwhite, Scaled Pigeon, Smoky-brown, Chestnut-collared, Lineated and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, Bright-rumped Attila, Worm-eating Warbler, Blue Bunting, Black-cowled and Altamira Orioles and parties of Lesser Goldfinch.

Day 11: Transfer to Tuxtepec, a bustling and lively town situated in a valley below the Sierra Madre. Thickets have Slate-throated Tody-Flycatcher and the rather uncommon Thick-billed Seedfinch. Rivers attract Spotted Sandpiper, Mangrove Swallow and a range of herons and egrets.

Day 12: We have all day to cross the spectacular Sierra Madre en route to Oaxaca. The road zigzags and winds its way through pristine forest and pinewoods before reaching the summit. Valle Nacional is a hamlet with extensive forests offering us the chance of Crested Guan, White-faced Quail-Dove, Barred Parakeet, Emerald-chinned and Bumblebee Hummingbirds, Black-crested Coquette, Azure-hooded and Unicoloured Jays and White-naped Brushfinch. Transfer to Oaxaca for three nights.

Days 13-14: Monte Alban, the old capital of the Zapotec empire, is close to Oaxaca. The habitat is mainly arid with areas of scrub and vegetation filled gullies. Typical birds of Monte Alban include White-throated Towhee, Blue Mockingbird, Canyon and Rock Wrens and Thick-billed and Western Kingbirds. The surrounding countryside is bordering on sub-desert with patches of vegetation in watercourses. Flowering trees attract Berylline, Black-chinned and Dusky Hummingbirds. Open areas with



Aplomado Falcon Photo: Simon Papps

trees have Loggerhead Shrike and Curve-billed Thrasher. Birds of prey using the area include Short-tailed and Swainson's Hawks. To the north of Oaxaca the road leads up into the Sierra Madre mountains. Important species we hope to locate include Oaxaca and Bridled Sparrows, Boucard's Wren, Grey Silky-flycatcher, Slaty and Golden Vireos and Black-vented Oriole. Cerro San Felipe is an area of pine and oak woodlands where we will seek out some of Mexico's rarest endemics. Common species include Red, Crescent-chested, Rufous-capped and Golden-browed Warblers, Slate-throated Redstart and Collared Towhee. The higher ground is home to the endangered Dwarf Jay. Other species we may encounter include Long-tailed Wood Partridge, Mountain Pygmy Owl, Mountain Trogon, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, and Russet and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrushes.

Day 15: Today we leave Oaxaca for the journey back to Mexico City, which offers fantastic views over the desert and dramatic canyons. Near the town of Puebla,

where cacti forest start to dominate, colonies of the endemic Grey-breasted Woodpecker reside. Other species include Harris's Hawk and Botteri's Sparrow. Our flight back to Europe leaves in the evening with arrival on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price: £2995
 Single room: £200
 Deposit: £300
 *Air Fare: £625

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature.

* Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights