

# 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 which is close to the airport for an overnight stay.

**Day 2:** Our main interest is the mixed woodlands and bunch grasslands of Las Maravillas. The habitat holds the endemic Sierra Madre and Striped Sparrows. Stands of pine trees are attractive to Strickland's Woodpecker, Townsend's, Pine and Olive Warblers and on occasions the uncommon Colima Warbler. The pines also attract Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Mexican Chickadee, Blue-hooded Euphonia and Evening Grosbeak. Open trails here allow easy viewing of feeding flocks and we hope to find Rufous-capped and Green-striped Brushfinches, 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. Flowering shrubs are important for Mexican Violet-ear, White-eared, Blue-throated and Magnificent Hummingbirds, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer and a range of orioles including Black-backed. Cuicuilco is located in the suburbs of Mexico City and a preserved archaeological site. In the ruins and grounds we should find Berylline Hummingbirds, Black-headed Grosbeak, Cassin's Kingbird and wintering warblers

## Dates

Saturday November 16th –  
Saturday November 30th 2024

Leaders: Simon Papps and local guides

Group Size: 8

Birds: 380–420

from further north including Nashville, Black and White and Blue-grey Gnatcatchers. Our final birding spot is Lerma Marshes where the endemic Black-pollled Yellowthroat is found along with migrant waterfowl and waders. Transfer to Cuernavaca which is ideally located for a three-night stay.

**Day 3:** Today a visit to the archaeological area of Xochilcalco an area of dry thorn forest. The eco campground and adjacent area holds Stripe-headed and Clay-coloured Sparrows, Nutting's, Social, Least, Buff-breasted and Vermillion Flycatchers, Groove-billed Ani, Common Ground Dove, Western Tanager and Streak-backed Oriole. In the grounds leafy trees attract Nashville and Virginia's Warbler, Black-throated Grey Warbler, Warbling Vireo and wintering Painted and Varied Buntings. Bare twigs attract the endemic Dusky Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Hummingbird and Plain-capped Starthroat. In the valley thermals often have Great Black, Short-tailed and

Zone-tailed Hawks, Northern Crested Caracara, American Black and Vaux's Swifts. By the visitor centre we have good chances of Lesser Roadrunner, Squirrel Cuckoo, Western, Cassin's and Thick-billed Kingbirds. In the afternoon a visit to the forest of San Juan Talcotenco which is run by the local community for birding purposes and training local people to be bird guides. Hutton's Vireo, Slate-throated and Painted Redstarts, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and White-eared Hummingbird are possible along with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Grey-banded Wren, Hermit Warbler, Brown-backed Solitaire and the uncommon White-throated Thrush.

**Day 4:** Today we travel to Perote where the pine woods above the town attract the endemic Transvolcanic Jay, Red Crossbill and Yellow-eyed Junco. Night in Perote

**Day 5:** This morning we bird along the old road that leads to Puebla which leads through grassland habitats and open pine woods making an interesting mix for birds. Higher up the road a stop for Bewick's Wren and Orange-crowned Warbler, Striped, Rufous-crowned, Chipping, Black-chinned, Lincoln's and Clay-coloured Sparrows. Other species may include Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Olive Warbler, American Dusky and Buff-breasted Flycatchers. On the return to Perote the steppe area has wintering Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon. In the grassland we may find Buff-bellied Pipit and Horned Lark whilst stands of grass hold Savannah Sparrows. Back to Perote for brunch and then a short trip to Xalapa the state capital. In the afternoon a visit to Miradores an area of farmland with scrub, trees and water with Ladderback Woodpecker, Sociable Flycatcher, Wilson's and Black-throated Green Warblers, Least Flycatcher and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. In the bare scrubby habitat with flowers we check for Mexican Sheartail, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and House Wren. Our last stop may produce sightings of Northern Bobwhite, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Common and Grey-crowned Yellowthroats, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, White-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos, Grass Wren, Golden-fronted Woodpecker,

Black-crested Titmouse, Brown Jay, Clay-coloured Thrush and Summer Tanager. Two nights in Xalapa

**Day 6:** Our first location today is Haya Park. Birds of interest include Plain Chacalaca, Red-billed Pigeon, White-fronted Parrot, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Band-backed Wren, Common Bush Tanager, Hooded Grosbeak and Montezuma's Oropendola. On entering the park itself we may find Black-headed Saltator, Acorn and Golden Olive Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Boat-billed and Dusky-capped Flycatchers. Roaming flocks of warblers attract a lot of interest amongst the vegetation and trees. Careful searching should reveal Blue-winged, Magnolia, Nashville, Black-and-White, Hermit, Orange-crowned, Rufous-capped and Golden-crowned and possibly Grey Catbird, Western Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Gartered Trogon and the scarce Chestnut-headed Oropendola. Scarcer species we may find include Blue-headed and White-eyed Vireo and Olivaceous Woodcreeper. In the afternoon a visit to Chavarillo which has extensive forests and orchards of lemon and orange trees. A walk through the lemon groves should add the beautiful Yellow-winged Tanager, Altamira Oriole and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers.

**Day 7:** Today we make our way south towards Veracruz. Our first birding area today is Las Barrancas a large area of farmland used for cattle raising and a mix of shrubs, trees and seasonal pools. Raptors can be common with sightings of Northern Harrier, Aplomado Falcon and American Kestrel. Typical species using the area comprise of Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Tropical and Northern Mockingbirds, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Grey Catbird. Several warblers winter including Nashville, American Yellow, Wilson's, Orange-crowned and Myrtle. In the open areas Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Plain-breasted and Ruddy Ground Doves, Lincoln's and Savannah Sparrows, Vermillion Flycatcher, Morelet's Seed-eater and Blue-black Grassquit. Further along the road shallow pools are used by Greater Yellowlegs, Northern Jacana and the localised Lesser Yellow-

headed Vulture. In the grassland Double-striped Thick-knee and White-tailed Kites are possible with scarcer species Peregrine Falcon and Grey Hawk. In the wetter parts American Purple Gallinule, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Tricoloured, Little Blue and Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, White-faced and American White Ibis. Areas of wet scrub hold Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush and Common Tody Flycatcher. Tlacotalpan and the entrance road is good for birds as it passes through lagoons and mangrove stands. Species of interest include Western Osprey, Wood Stork, Laughing Gull, Belted Kingfisher, American Royal and Caspian Terns, Black-necked Stilt and Mangrove Swallows. Transfer to the town of Catemaco

**Day 8:** From the hotel veranda we can study Snail Kite, American Royal and Forster's Terns and Ringed Kingfisher. An early morning walk around the grounds may produce Northern Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler and Blue-grey Tanager. After breakfast we head towards Ruiz Cortines which is surrounded by pristine cloud forest, patches of cleared land and degraded forest. Forest birds we hope to locate include Slate-coloured Solitaire, Keel-billed Toucan, Red-throated and Red-crowned Ant Tanagers, Scaly-throated Foilage Gleaner, Lesson's Motmot, Collared Trogon, Eye-ringed Flatbill Common Bush Tanager, White-breasted Wood-wren and the endemic Long-tailed Sabrewing. Areas with large trees festooned with air plants, creepers and vines attract Wood Thrush, Buff-throated Foilage Gleaner, Elegant Euphonia, Plain Xenops, Black-throated Green, Black-and-White and Wilson's Warblers, Green Jay and Emerald Toucanet. Another section of forest is visited after lunch where we may see Golden-browed and Golden-capped Warblers, Spot-breasted Wren, Ivory-billed, Olivaceous and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers.

**Day 9:** Camacho an area of seasonal wetlands and marshes interspersed with sugar cane and pineapple production. The first lagoons often hold Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall,

Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Great Blue and Little Blue Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Northern Jacana, Wood Stork, American White Ibis, Limpkin, Belted and Ringed Kingfishers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Least and Spotted Sandpipers and Black-necked Stilts. In roadside shrubbery wintering Common Yellowthroat, Magnolia and Wilson's Warblers, White-eyed Vireo and Common Tody Flycatcher. Further along the road another stop for a chance of Bat Falcon, Amazon Kingfisher, Gull-billed Tern and American White Pelicans. The final birding stop is beyond the picturesque village of Santa Maria Jacatepec. The habitat here is meadows and forest the latter being interspersed with outcrops of limestone. Along the road grassy patches attracted Painted Bunting, Blue-black Grassquit and Morelet's Seedeater. A steep-sided patch of forest dotted with rock outcrops has Sumichrast's Wren a rare Mexican endemic. Other species of interest included Olive-throated Parakeet in noisy, mobile flocks and Red-fored Amazon. Transfer to Vallee Nacional our home for two nights.

**Day 10:** A short drive this morning to bird along Camino Morales which passes through forest and farmsteads. The first section has Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Black-cowled Oriole and Collared Forest Falcon. The road increases in altitude albeit slowly with the next area having White-bellied Emerald, White-necked Jacobin and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher. The mixed feeding flocks often hold Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Worm-eating Warbler and Rufous-tailed Jacamar. If the weather is the cloudy groups of White-collared and Vaux's Swifts feed at lower levels. Other species present include Black Hawk Eagle, Tropical Peewee, Orange-billed Sparrow and Blue Bunting. Cerro Marin is a small village with a road that runs steeply uphill into forest habitats. The larger trees attract Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Chestnut-sided and Tennessee Warblers, Northern Parula and Red-legged Honeycreepers. Lower down in the shrubbery we may find Stripe-throated Hermit, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Orioles, Crimson-coloured Tanagers, Greyish and

Buff-throated Saltators, Yellow-billed Cacique, Blue-black Grosbeak, Olive-backed Sparrow and Bananaquit.

**Day 11:** Today we spent birding along road 175 towards Oaxaca. The route took us through spectacular scenery with forests and areas of grassland. Species of interest include Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-winged Tanager, Montezuma's and Chestnut-headed Oropendola, and Bright-rumped Attila. The road starts to rise in altitude and a stop in an area with large trees and mistletoe can be productive for Black-faced Grosbeak and White-crowned Parrots. In the smaller trees and scrub orioles notably Baltimore, Hooded and Black-cowled are often present. In roadside flowers the spectacular Violet Sabrewing, Long-billed Hermit and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. We also search for jays that form groups of which Unicoloured and Azure-hooded may be seen. Other species of interest include White-collared Swift, Scaly-throated Foilage Gleaner, Emerald Toucanet, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Transfer to Oaxaca situated in a dry valley our final base in Mexico.

**Days 12-13:** Travel to the community of Teotitlan which has White-tailed Kite, Red-tailed Hawk and Cassin's Kingbirds plus two Mexican endemics in Grey-breasted Woodpecker and Boucard's Wren. Beyond the village is a reservoir which attracts Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Least Grebe, American Coot, Belted and Green Kingfishers, Least and Spotted Sandpipers. On the grass edges we located Buff-bellied Pipit, Lark Sparrows and Berylline Hummingbirds. Our journey continues up the valley with views of the endemic Bridled Sparrow. A few kilometres further an area of dry oak woods held several species of warblers, a calling Blue Mockingbird and excellent views of Mexican Sheartail. Lunch was taken followed by a visit to Santa Ana a very dry area dominated by cactus where Ocellated Thrashers reside. Roving flocks of Whitehouse's Jay are also possible.

**Day 14:** Today is spent in the high elevations of La Cumbre an area of old pine-

woods and bushes. Before arriving at La Cumbre we make a stop for the endemic Oaxaca Sparrow. In the forest we embark on several walks for sightings of the scarce Black-headed Siskin, White-breasted Nuthatch and Strong-billed Woodcreeper. Other species present included Hutton's Vireo, Red and Hermit Warblers, Mexican Chickadee and White-eared Hummingbirds. Further up the mountain we explore another area for Dwarf Jay, Mountain Trogon, Brown Creeper, Ruddy-capped and Russet-tailed Nightingale Thrushes, Grey-breasted Wood-wren, Chestnut-chested Warbler and Rufous-capped Brushfinch. Around midday we go for lunch at Colibri a restaurant with several hummingbird feeders including Blue-throated Mountain Gems and in the scrub below wintering MacGillivray's Warbler and Yellow-eyed Junco. In the afternoon a revisit to areas visited in the morning.

**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 starts 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: £4,795  
Single room: £400  
Deposit: £400  
\*Air Fare: £830

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