

Trip Report: México (Oaxaca State)

May 23rd – 27th 2013



Located within a renowned hot-spot of avian endemism in south-western México, Ciudad de Oaxaca is also a cultural (and gastronomic) venue - UNESCO World Heritage listed sites include the colonial architecture of the historic city centre and the pre-colonial Zapotec archaeological site of Monte Albán that overlooks the city. This report captures highlights from three full days of birding whilst staying at the Las Golondrinas hotel in Ciudad de Oaxaca (www.hotellasgolondrinas.com.mx) and being guided by Eric Antonio Martínez, founder of Mexico-Birding (see <http://www.mexico-birding.com>). Eric is a biologist and excellent guide who certainly knows his bird calls and, together with his Mexico-Birding colleagues in other parts of the country, offers local guiding services that are connected to nearby communities and conservation efforts. Thanks to his regional knowledge we visited several sites within approximately an hour of Ciudad de Oaxaca that are not on 'typical' tour routes or listed in Howell's 'A Bird-Finding Guide to Mexico'.



Red Warbler [Ixtepeji forest road] - endemic



Golden-browed Warbler [Teotitlán to Benito Juárez road] – regional specialty

Most international birders visit Oaxaca during the northern winter, when the weather is dry, the deciduous trees have shed their leaves and resident species are joined by large numbers of northern migrants. By late-May, most North American migrants have already departed and there are no large, mixed flocks. The first of the wet season rains also fall around this period and this is reputedly a good time in which to locate endemic birds that are active and vocalizing during their breeding season. This year's first rains had indeed fallen before my arrival and the lower elevation scrub vegetation was starting to turn bright green, although most of the deciduous trees in the oak and pine-oak forest had not yet regained their leaves. It also rained occasionally each day that I was in Oaxaca, mainly at upper elevations, but this did not prevent us from birding full time. Over the three days we located almost all of the possible endemics and regional specialties, including 22 Mexican endemics within a trip total of 97 species (including 60 'lifers'). Photography was also quite successful, although at times it proved to be very challenging in the pine-oak and humid pine-evergreen forests where bird density was low and the canopy high.



Slaty Vireo [Monte Albán] – endemic

The first day was spent birding in the vicinity of Teotitlán del Valle, where, thanks to the wide variety of habitats and altitudes, we saw more birds than on the next two days combined! An initial visit to dry scrub and agricultural areas close to town delivered good views of several endemics, including both Beautiful Hummingbird and Dusky Hummingbird visiting agave flowers, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, Boucard's Wren, Brown-backed Robin and White-throated Towhee. After a brief break for rain, a walk through dry scrub along the lower reaches of the Teotitlán to Benito Juárez dirt road added key endemics such as Ocellated Thrasher, Blue Mockingbird, Dwarf Vireo and Bridled Sparrow. The rest of the day was spent ascending through dry oak forest and then epiphyte laden pine-oak forest for a late-lunch at Benito Juárez (almost 3,000m ASL), before slowly descending back to Teotitlán del Valle and Ciudad de Oaxaca. Highlights in these forests included endemics such as Collared Towhee and Oaxaca Sparrow (endemic to the state of Oaxaca), plus other regional specialties including Whiskered Screech-Owl, Elegant Trogon, Mountain Trogon, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Brown-backed Solitaire, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Gray Silky-Flycatcher, Crescent-chested Warbler and Golden-browed Warbler (certainly one of the most striking warblers I have ever seen).

Our second morning was spent in the much cooler, even cold, pine-oak and humid pine-evergreen forests of the Ixtepeji protected area between 2,600m and 3,000m ASL. Birds were fewer and further between in this ethereal forest, but included some real specialties – endemic Long-tailed Wood-Partridge, Dwarf Jay, Gray-barred Wren and Red Warbler. We also encountered a Mexican Whip-poor-will nest on the roadside bank (with an adult and two fledglings). Having seen the key target species, and with the early-afternoon rain

becoming heavier, we headed down to Monte Albán at ~1900m ASL in the Oaxaca valley, where the weather was dry. There we enjoyed considerable success, adding endemic Slaty Vireo in the dry scrub and several other species including various wren species living around the impressive archaeological site.

On the final day we ascended the dirt road to Arroyo Guacamaya, starting with dry scrub vegetation at ~2,000m ASL (where we enjoyed extended, close-up views of an enthusiastically calling Ocellated Thrasher and brief views of an endemic Red-headed Tanager along a creek), before climbing through dry pine-oak forest to over 2,800m ASL. Along this forest section we finally saw an endemic White-striped Woodcreeper and in lush vegetation at Arroyo Guacamaya itself we added endemic Aztec Thrush and Rufous-capped Brush-Finch.



Blue Mockingbird [Monte Albán] - endemic; Ocellated Thrasher [road to Arroyo Guacamaya] - endemic



Western Wood-Pewee [Monte Albán]



Elegant Euphonia [road to Arroyo Guacamaya]



Mountain Trogon [Teotitlán to Benito Juarez road] – regional specialty



Rock Wren; Vermillion Flycatcher [both Monte Albán]



Gray Silky-Flycatcher [road to Arroyo Guacamaya] – regional specialty



Dry Oak Forest (~2000m ASL) and bromeliad laden Oak Forest (~2200m ASL) between Teotitlán and Benito Juárez; Humid Pine-Evergreen Forest (~3000m ASL) along upper section of Ixtepeji forest road



Pine-Oak Forest (~2600 to ~2800m ASL) along middle section of Ixtepeji forest road



Thorn scrub vegetation (~2100m ASL) and Pine-Oak Forest (~2400m ASL) along road to Arroyo Guacamaya



Corpus Christi celebrations in the Zocalo, Ciudad de Oaxaca



Exploring/birding at Monte Albán; Church of Santo Domingo de Guzmán [Ciudad de Oaxaca]

1. Bird Trip List¹

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. As field guide I used '[A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America](#)' by Steve Howell and Sophie Webb (Oxford University Press, 1995) - which contained all of the species encountered. Some names have been updated since this guide was published, so birds in the trip list are identified as per 'The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World', Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 (online version 6.5).

Locations where species seen in sequence of travel:

Oax = Oaxaca city at ~1,600m ASL

T = Teotitlán del Valle (dry scrub) and road through oak and pine-oak forest to Benito Juárez (~1,600m to 3,000m ASL)

Ix = Ixtepeji road climbing through humid pine-oak and pine-evergreen forest (~2,600m to 3,000m ASL)

MA = Monte Albán dry scrub and rocks at the archeological site (~1,900m ASL)

AG = Arroyo Guacamaya road climbing through dry scrub and pine-oak forest (~2,000m to 2,800m ASL)

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus* [T; AG]

Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus* [MA]

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* [T; AG]

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* [T]

West Mexican Chachalaca *Ortalis poliocephala* **E** **beard only** [T; AG]

Long-tailed Wood-Partridge *Dendrortyx macroura* **E** [Ix; AG]

American Coot *Fulica americana* [T; AG]

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferous* [T]

Band-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas fasciata* [Ix]

Inca Dove *Columbina inca* [T, AG]

Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerina* [MA]

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* [T]

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* [T]

Whiskered Screech-Owl *Otus trichopsis* [T]

Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor* [T]

Mexican Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus arizonae* * [Ix]

Black Swift *Cypseloides niger* [AG]

Dusky Hummingbird *Cynanthus sordidus* **E** [T; AG]

Blue-throated Hummingbird *Lampornis clemenciae* [T]

Magnificent Hummingbird *Eugenes fulgens* [T]

Beautiful Hummingbird *Calothorax pulcher* **E** [T]

Elegant Trogon *Trogon elegans* [T; AG]

Mountain Trogon *Trogon mexicanus* * [T; AG]

Gray-breasted Woodpecker *Melanerpes hypopolius* **E** [T]

Acorn Woodpecker *Melanerpes formicivorus* [T]

White-striped Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes leucogaster* **E** [AG]

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes affinis* [T]

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet *Camptostoma imberbe* [MA]

Greenish Elaenia *Myiopagis viridicata* [T; AG]

Cordilleran Flycatcher *Empidonax occidentalis* [AG]

Greater Pewee *Contopus pertinax* [T; AG]

Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus* * [T; MA; AG]

Pileated Flycatcher *Xenotriccus mexicanus* [T]

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* [T]

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* * [T; MA]

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* [T]

Dusky-capped Flycatcher *Myiarchus tuberculifer* [T; AG]

Social Flycatcher *Myiozetetes similis* [T]

Cassin's Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans* * [T; MA; AG]

Rose-throated Becard *Pachyramphus aglaiae* [T, AG]

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina* [T]

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* [T]

Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus* * [T]

¹ First sighting ever for DJS; **E** = México endemic species; * = photo available

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* [T]
Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri coronata* [T; Ix; AG]
Western Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens* [T; AG]
Dwarf Jay *Cyanolyca nana* [E] [Ix]
Common Raven *Corvus corax* *beard only* [AG]
Boucard's Wren *Campylorhynchus jocosus* [E] [T]
Gray-barred Wren *Campylorhynchus megalopterus* [E] [T; Ix]
Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus* * [MA]
Canyon Wren *Catherpes mexicanus* [MA]
Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* [T]
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren *Henicorhina leucophrys* *beard only* [Ix]
Brown-backed Solitaire *Myadestes occidentalis* * [T; Ix; AG]
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus aurantiirostris* [T; MA]
Russet Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus occidentalis* [T]
Rufous-backed Robin *Turdus rufopalliatus* [E] [T]
Aztec Thrush *Zoothera pinicola* [E] [AG]
American Robin *Turdus migratorius* [T; AG]
Clay-colored Thrush (Robin) *Turdus grayi* [AG]
White-throated Thrush (Robin) *Turdus assimilis* [AG]
Black Thrush *Turdus infuscatus* [Ix]
Ocellated Thrasher *Toxostoma ocellatum* [E] * [T; AG]
Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre* [T]
Gray Silky-Flycatcher *Ptilogonys cinereus* * [T; MA; AG]
Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* [T]
Blue Mockingbird *Melanotis caerulescens* [E] * [T; MA; AG]
Dwarf Vireo *Vireo nelson* [E] [T]
Hutton's Vireo *Vireo huttoni* * [Ix]
Slaty Vireo *Vireo brevipennis* [E] * [MA]
Crescent-chested Warbler *Parula superciliosa* [T; AG]
Rufous-capped Warbler *Basileuterus rufifrons* [T; AG]
Golden-browed Warbler *Basileuterus belli* * [T]
Painted Whitestart *Myioborus pictus* [AG]
Slate-throated Whitestart *Myioborus miniatus* [T; Ix]
Red Warbler *Ergaticus ruber ruber* [E] * [Ix]
Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia *Euphonia elegantissima* * [T; AG]
Hepatic Tanager *Piranga flava* [AG]
Red-headed Tanager *Piranga erythrocephala* [E] [AG]
Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* * [T; AG]
Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus* [AG]
Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria* [MA; AG]
Black-headed Siskin *Spinus notata* [AG]
White-throated Towhee *Pipilo albicollis* [E] [T; MA; AG]
Collared Towhee *Pipilo ocai* [E] * [T; AG]
Rufous-capped Brush-finch *Atlapetes pileatus* [E] [AG]
Blue-black Grassquit *Volatinia jacarina* [T]
White-collared Seedeater *Sporophila [t.] morelleti* [MA; AG]
Bridled Sparrow *Aimophila mystacalis* [E] * [T]
Yellow-eyed Junco *Junco phaeonotus* [T]
Oaxaca Sparrow *Aimophila notosticta* [E] [T; AG]
Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus* [T; MA]
Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus* [Oax]
Black-vented Oriole *Icterus wagleri* * [T; MA; AG]
House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus* [Oax; T; MA]
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* [Oax; AG]

Total 97 confirmed species for the trip, of which 60 were 'lifers' for DJS and 22 are considered Mexican endemics...