



The Birds and Natural History of OAXACA, MEXICO

January 5-15, 2011

The state of Oaxaca is wonderfully diverse in flora and fauna, history, culture, cuisine, and scenery. Our tour is designed to provide optimum exposure to this richness at a comfortable pace while enjoying unique and superb lodging experiences,



great natural history and birds, and fascinating cultural experiences.

While in the city of Oaxaca we'll stay at the charming Hotel Azucenas, a wonderful place with a nice intimate atmosphere, located in a quiet neighborhood. From there we'll visit the arid scrub habitat around Teotitlan del Valle, a Zapotec town well known for its fine weaving. On past trips we've seen as many as 90 species of birds in the day we spend in this area. Some of the specialties include

White-throated Towhee, Boucard's Wren, Ocellated Thrasher, Oaxaca and Bridled Sparrows, Dusky Hummingbird, Gray-breasted Woodpecker, Golden Vireo, and White-striped Woodcreeper.

To the north, in the Sierra Juarez, we'll enjoy rich cloud forest and have good opportunities to find the endemic **Dwarf Jay**, plus **Gray-barred Wren, Golden-browed and Red Warblers, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Collared Towhee, Chestnut-capped and Rufous-capped Brush-Finches, and Gray-breasted Wood-Wren.**

We'll trade the color of Oaxaca City for the color of the Sierra Miahuatlan, where we'll stay in a hotel on a mountain ridge surrounded by pine forest and flowering plants with **hummingbirds, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and Hooded Yellowthroat.** Fruiting pyracantha bushes may provide close views of **White-throated Robin, Brown-backed Solitaire, Gray Silky-Flycatcher, and Russet Nightingale-Thrush.** In the nearby forests and on our descent to the Pacific coast, we'll look for **Common Bush-Tanager, Red-headed Tanager, Blue-capped and Bumblebee Hummingbirds, Mountain Trogon, and Golden Vireo,** plus some striking butterflies amidst the rich tropical vegetation. Here we'll also visit a shade grown coffee plantation where we've found dozens of **Fan-tailed Warblers, Double-toothed Kite, Barred Woodcreeper,**

Emerald Toucanet, and outstanding butterflies. The coffee plantation is run by the Gomez family. They will be our gracious hosts and tour guides, educating us about the biodiversity, watershed, and community benefits of their organic shade grown coffee.

We'll stay at the lovely and unique Rancho Cerro Largo on the Pacific coast, where **White-throated Magpie-Jay**, **Banded Wren**, **Russet-crowned Motmot**, **Lesser Ground-Cuckoo**, **Orange-breasted Bunting**, **Red-breasted Chat**, and **Citreoline Trogon** can be found on the lodge grounds. Out over the Pacific, we'll see **Red-billed Tropicbirds** and **Brown Boobies** soaring with **Magnificent Frigatebirds**. In the nearby forest we should find **Colima Pygmy-Owl**, **Happy Wren**, **Blue Bunting**, **Yellow-winged Cacique**, **Golden-cheeked Woodpecker**, and many other avian wonders. In the Puerto Escondido area we visit the mouth of the Rio Colotepec, which is wonderfully rich in waders, shorebirds, and terns. We also go to the Laguna Manialtepec, a mangrove-lined lagoon where we should see **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron**, **Boat-billed Heron**, **Mangrove Vireo**, **Mangrove Swallow**, and **Collared Plover**, with a chance for **Ruddy-breasted Seedeater** and **Mangrove Cuckoo**.

Our journey combines exciting birding, rich natural history, outstanding food, the warm hospitality of the people of Oaxaca, and memorable cultural experiences. These include a visit to a Zapotec village renowned for its fine weaving, lectures on regional plants, art, culture, and cuisine with Susana Trilling of Seasons of My Heart Cooking School, a tour of the ancient ruins of Monte Alban, and a visit to the Oaxaca Cultural Museum.

Gray Silky-Flycatcher
(on the right)

**Cinnamon
Hummingbird**
(on page 1)

- - *John & Melanie Dicus*



[Day 1 begins on page 3]

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January 5-15, 2011: 11 days & 10 nights

Day 1 - Arrive at the Oaxaca Airport from where you'll take a taxi or colectivo to the Hotel Azucenas, about 20 minutes away. This lovely hotel is perfectly situated in a fairly quiet neighborhood about 5 blocks (5-10 minute walk) from the bustling zocalo and restaurants and will serve as a comfortable home base from which we'll explore the area around Oaxaca City. Check out www.hotelazucenas.com for more information on the hotel.

Day 2 - After breakfast at 6:15 AM, we'll head east toward the weaving town of Teotitlan del Valle, about 40 minutes away. The habitat in the area is oddly reminiscent of the grasslands and desert scrub of southeast Arizona, with some of the very same plant species. The avifauna also shares similarities but with a few interesting twists. Instead of Gila Woodpecker, we'll be looking for its cousin, the endemic **Grey-breasted Woodpecker**, and instead of Canyon Towhee, the local one here is **White-throated Towhee**. Just above town is a small reservoir that, like other open bodies of water in arid areas, can be attractive to grebes, waders, ducks, shorebirds, and a variety of passerines. We'll pass by a grove of Erythrina trees, which should be close to their flowering peak. The crimson blooms may be hosting several **hummingbird** species, with possibilities for **Dusky**, **Berylline**, **Ruby-throated**, and **Green-fronted**, and **orioles** including **Black-vented**. The hills above town are home to several Oaxaca Valley specialties including **Ocellated Thrasher**, **West Mexican Chachalaca**, **Boucard's Wren**, and **Bridled** and **Oaxaca Sparrows**. Also in the area are **Blue Mockingbird**, **Golden Vireo**, wintering sparrows and warblers, and various flycatchers. We'll drive the dirt road for a few miles, reaching oaks then pines as we look for **Oaxaca Sparrow**, **Rufous-capped Brush-Finch**, **Green Violetear**, and **Red Warbler**. After our half-day in the foothills, we'll return to Teotitlan del Valle for lunch at the Restaurant Tlamanali that serves wonderful Zapotec specialties with mescal (optional) as the appetizer. Following lunch, we'll visit Isaac Vasquez Garcia, a master Zapotec weaver with a love of sharing his knowledge. From Isaac we'll learn how local artisans spin wool, use natural dyes, and create finely woven and colorful products. If you're interested in purchasing a carpet or other weaving, this is the place to do it. On the way back to Oaxaca City, we'll stop at Santa Maria del Tule to see the "biggest" tree on Earth, a Montezuma Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) with a circumference of about 50 meters and a footprint of about 2000 square feet. It's a big tourist spot, but you just have to see this tree.

Day 3 - Breakfast at 6:15 AM, then depart for the Cerro San Felipe in the Sierra Juarez (sometimes called the Sierra Aloapanec), about 45 minutes north of the city. We'll spend most of the day around 8000 feet in the high "cloud" forests where firs, pines, and oaks are dotted with epiphytic bromeliads, lichens, ferns, and orchids. The area is lush and can be excellent for birds, and fortunately the forests are being protected by local communities whose efforts so far seem effective. Mixed flocks, which are sometimes more common when the weather is cool and foggy, are of two general

types. One is led by noisy **Steller's Jays** and **Gray-barred Wrens**, amidst which may be quiet and inconspicuous **Dwarf Jays**, endemic to the mountain range. The other type includes smaller songbirds such as warblers (**Townsend's**, **Hermit**, **Red**, **Crescent-chested**), **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Brown Creeper**, **Hutton's Vireo**, **Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo**, and **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper**. The darkish understory is punctuated in places with wildflower blooms that should still be very nice in January. We've enjoyed **hummers** including **Green Violetear**, **Amethyst-throated** (a cousin of the Blue-throated), **Bumblebee**, and **White-eared**, and have also found **Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer** here. We'll have lunch at a mountaintop restaurant before an afternoon outing along another mountain road. We'll perhaps make a short stop at a foothill reservoir on our return to Oaxaca City, where we'll have time to relax at the hotel before dinner. Please keep in mind that because of the altitude on the Cerro San Felipe, the temperature will be cooler than in Oaxaca City. Layers are important. A polypropylene-type undergarment, a good fleece jacket, a windbreaker-type shell, and a light pair of mittens, are all recommended.

Day 4 - Today you can sleep in before our 7:30 AM breakfast, after which we'll begin what should be an unforgettable day. We'll leave the hotel at 9 AM and head to the nearby Mercado Abastos, where we'll learn about the wonderful mix of local flora, culture, and cuisine on a guided tour. The market is a Disneyland of colors, scents, tastes, sounds, and vibrant activity, and simply shouldn't be missed. After our market tour, we'll head north to the town of Etlá and the Seasons of My Heart cooking school, where we'll be treated to a lecture and lunch with well-known chef and author Susana Trilling. This will be our big meal for the day. We'll return to the city in the late afternoon and have time for relaxing or to walk around town. If you still have an appetite, you'll be on your own for dinner or perhaps some local ice cream.

Day 5 - After an early breakfast, we'll have several options. One is to return to the Cerro San Felipe where we'll retrace our earlier journey in search of any of the specialties that may have eluded us on our first visit. Or we can head east to Yagul, where a wonderful patch of native arid scrub surrounds a quiet and usually deserted ruin site. Yagul is a good spot for **Boucard's Wren**, **Dusky Hummingbird**, and the ever-elusive **Ocellated Thrasher**. Or we can choose to make visits to both locations. We'll try to return to town with enough time for shopping and enjoying the ambiance.

Day 6 - After breakfast we'll spend the morning at the nearby Monte Alban ruins. Prior to our guided tour of the site with outstanding local guide Benito Hernandez, we'll walk along the nearby trails and search for some of the same birds as in the Teotitlán del Valle area - **Ocellated Thrasher**, **Boucard's Wren**, **Beautiful** and **Dusky Hummingbirds** - plus others including the rare **Pileated Flycatcher** and the hard-to-find **Dwarf Vireo**. Monte Alban (a name given by the Spanish to the site known to its native Zapotec inhabitants as Danni Dipaa) is a major site that dominated the region between Teotihuacán (in the Valley of Mexico to the north) and the great Mayan sites to the south for about 1200 years. During its peak, from 500 B.C. to 750 A.D., the cultivation of corn, beans, squash, chilies, and fruit on the surrounding hillsides and nearby valleys sustained an urban population of about 40,000 people, whose architecture, carvings, pottery, and mythology reflected a rich culture.

We'll enjoy a packed lunch after which we'll head south into the Sierra Miahuatlan, traveling about three hours to the ridge top town of San Jose del Pacifico and the Hotel Puesta del Sol, where we'll spend the night. There may still be flower thickets on the hotel grounds where we'll look for **Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer**, **Hooded Yellowthroat**, and **hummingbirds** such as **Bumblebee**, **Garnet-throated**, **Berylline**, **Rufous**, and **Blue-throated**. Madrean birds such as **Greater Pewee**, **Hepatic Tanager**, and maybe **Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo** are possible. If the *Pyracantha* is in fruit, we may have great looks at **Gray Silky-Flycatcher**, **White-throated Robin**, **Russet Nightingale-Thrush**, and **Brown-backed Solitaire**. We'll have dinner at the hotel restaurant. As in the Cerro San Felipe, please keep in mind that because of the altitude at the Puesta del Sol, the temperature will be cooler than in Oaxaca City. Layered clothing is the key. The rooms all have fireplaces, a good supply of wood, and extra blankets.

Day 7 - Today we'll start with an optional pre-breakfast walk around the hotel grounds at 7:00 AM, during which we'll look for the above-mentioned species and others. After breakfast we'll begin our gradual descent to the coast and Rancho Cerro Largo. We'll make several stops along the way on quiet side roads to enjoy the forests that will range from mixed conifer to tropical evergreen (with shade grown coffee in the understory) to tropical deciduous (TDF) on the coast. There are all kinds of possibilities for birds and butterflies along this route. We'll make special stops at our favorite spots for the diminutive **Bumblebee Hummingbird** and the highly endemic **Blue-capped Hummingbird**. If we're lucky we'll find standouts like **Emerald Toucanet** or perhaps some mixed flocks with **Red-headed Tanager**, **Golden** and **Slaty Vireos**, **Common Bush-Tanager**, **Gray-crowned Woodpecker**, and others. We'll cover about 75 miles, have a packed lunch along the way, and arrive at Cerro Largo in the afternoon, where we should have time for an optional swim in the warm Pacific. We'll eat well, as Cerro Largo has wonderful food.

Day 8 & 9 - The grounds around Cerro Largo have a few different trails and seem to have some of the best habitat in the area, so we'll spend a fair amount of our three days right at the lodge. **Lesser Ground-Cuckoo**, **Russet-crowned Motmot**, **Orange-breasted**, **Blue**, and **Painted Buntings**, **Banded Wren**, **White-throated Magpie-Jay**, **Yellow-winged Cacique**, **West Mexican Chachalaca**, **Citreoline Trogon**, and **White-ored Gnatcatcher** are regularly seen on the grounds. The spell of this wonderful place may be such that we won't want to go anywhere else while we're there. Before breakfast we'll spend time on some nearby trails that can be extremely productive. We have had good luck finding **Altamira**, **Streak-backed**, and **Spot-breasted Orioles**, plus **Olive Sparrow**, **Red-breasted Chat**, **Colima Pygmy-Owl**, and **Happy Wren** at these sites. One of the viewpoints from the bluff is an excellent spot to scan an offshore rock for **Magnificent Frigatebird**, **Red-billed Tropicbird**, and **Brown Booby**. The weather will be much warmer on the coast, and after our busy week in the Oaxaca Valley and in the mountains, we'll make ample time for relaxing, swimming, and reading at Cerro Largo. They have a small library or you may want to bring a good book. All of the cabanas have great Pacific views and comfortable hammocks.

[Day 9 continues on page 6]

On our second day there we'll make an early morning trip back up Highway 175 into the broadleaf evergreen forest, about an hour away. In the lush shade grown coffee plantations we'll look for **Golden-crowned Emerald, Emerald Toucanet, Masked Tityra, Audubon's Oriole, Golden Vireo, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Fan-tailed Warbler, Rose-throated Becard, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Pale-billed and Lineated Woodpeckers**, and many others. We'll have lunch and take a tour at Finca el Pacifico, the first certified-organic shade grown coffee plantation in Oaxaca, before returning to Cerro Largo.

Day 10 - On our final morning at Cerro Largo, we'll return to the nearby side roads for birding before a late breakfast, after which we'll head west to Puerto Escondido and the Hotel Santa Fe - www.hotelsantafe.com.mx. We'll have lunch at the hotel before a late afternoon visit to the Rio Colotepec and its rich river mouth where **waders, shorebirds, terns, gulls**, and hopefully a **Collared Plover** can be found. The nearby scrub can be good for **White-collared and Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters**. We'll have dinner at the hotel.

Day 11 - After a 6:15 AM breakfast, we'll drive about 20 minutes west to the Laguna Manialtepec, a beautiful estuary lined with tall red mangroves, where we'll take a boat tour. Both water and forest birds are found in and around the lagoon. Waders (including **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** and **Boat-billed Heron**), perhaps some waterfowl, shorebirds (including **Collared Plover**), gulls and terns, songbirds like **Mangrove Vireo** and **Ruddy-breasted Seedeater** and, with luck, **West Mexican Chachalaca**, may be found. We'll return to the hotel by 11 AM for a last swim and to pack, have lunch at noon, and head to the Puerto Escondido airport around 1 PM.

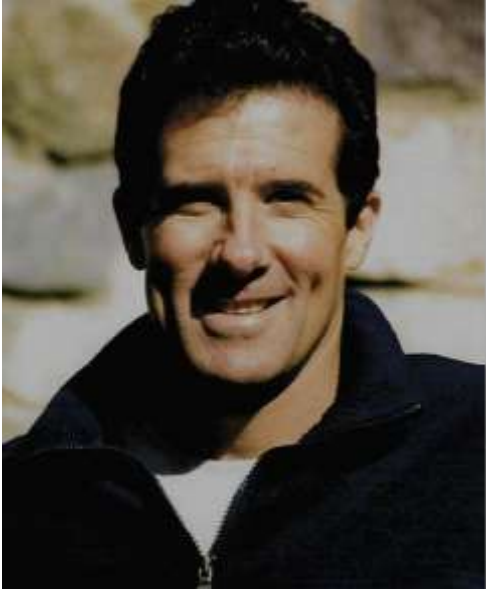
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An adult **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron**. It is beautiful and often quite approachable.

- - *Karen Enriquez*



[Important details are on page 7]



Mark Pretti, your tour leader.

Leader This trip will be led by **Mark Pretti** who has led numerous tours throughout Mexico. Mark will have you in the right place at the right time for the best birding opportunities and an educational, worry-free tour.

Price Approximately \$2750 per person based upon double occupancy. Single accommodations may be available for an extra charge. Please inquire early.

Includes Expert guide service, lodging for 10 nights, **ALL meals** (except for dinner the first night), entrance fees, and all ground transportation within Mexico.

Does not include cost of airfare to Oaxaca City, Mexico and home from Puerto Escondido. BIRD TREKS will, upon request, help you obtain the most suitable airfare. Also not included are the cost of alcoholic beverages and items of a personal nature.

Deposit A \$600 deposit will assure your reservation on the tour. The balance is payable in early November 2010. Mark's tours to Mexico almost always sell out. Send your deposit soon to insure your reservation and to obtain the best possible airfare.

Extra Services We offer the services of our exclusive BIRD TREKS travel agent, **Lori Heathcote**, in arranging your air travel and other extras. Lori has 24 years of experience in the travel industry and is a veteran birder. Contact her at Bailey Travel at 1-800-224-5399, or e-mail lori@baileytravel.com. By dealing with Lori you have the security of a 24-hour toll-free telephone number in case of any travel emergency. She can also assist you with all pre- and post-tour travel plans. There may be a fee for these services.

Refund & Cancellation Policy With written notice more than 90 days prior to the first day of the tour, 100% of your deposit will be refunded, minus a \$100 service fee. With 30-90 days notice, you will receive a 50% refund of the full cost of the tour. No refund can be made with less than 30 days notice. You will receive a full refund if you provide a replacement for your spot on the tour. No partial refund can be given once a tour begins. We **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment. Contact Access America at 1-800-284-8300 and mention **BIRD TREKS (ACCAM # F021096)**. You can apply by phone or via the Internet at www.accessamerica.com.