

Mexico's Butterflies & Birds

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



February 13 – 20, 2022

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Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Mexico Nature Tour w/ Peg Abbott

\$3990, from Mexico City, departing Guadalajara
Arrival airport is Mexico City International (MEX),
Departure airport is Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla International (GDL)

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Experience one of the greatest ecological spectacles in the world!
- ✓ Discover the highland pine forests of Michoacan
- ✓ Take in numerous rare Mexican endemic bird species
- ✓ Visit Cerro Pelón where the butterflies are most likely in their highest numbers
- ✓ Bird volcanic peaks, searching for Mountain Trogon and Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow
- ✓ Experience Mexico's rich biodiversity and culture

One of the greatest ecological spectacles in the world is the wintering grounds of the Monarch Butterfly in a small area of forest in central Mexico. Over 20-million Monarchs make their amazing yearly migration of more than 2000 miles from Canada and the United States to a small area in the mountains in the highland pine forests of Michoacan and the Estado de Mexico. Each year, a special generation of these extraordinary butterflies discover the same place. It's a marvel of nature that is not to be missed! There are several sanctuaries that protect these forests and we visit two of them.

In addition to exploring the butterfly sanctuaries, we bird La Cima, for the Sierra Madre Sparrow and Strickland's Woodpecker and visit the Lerma Marshes, where we look for the beautiful Black-poll'd Yellowthroat. We also spend some time birding around the Lake Patzcuaro region, looking for central Mexico endemics such as Dusky Hummingbird, Black-backed Oriole, Pileated Flycatcher, Transvolcanic Jay, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, and Striped Sparrow. Beyond birds and butterflies, we have the opportunity to explore more of the staggering Mexican biodiversity, enjoy great food, some amazing arts and crafts, and plenty of adventure.

We stay in lovely and unique hotels along the way that give us a chance to really settle in and relax during down times, bird the grounds, relax in thermal springs, or enjoy short walks into the local plaza.

Please note that this trip starts in Mexico City and ends in Guadalajara. We can recommend a travel agent if you'd like help booking your flights.



Itinerary

Sun., Feb. 13 Arrivals

Welcome to Mexico! Arrive today at your leisure into Mexico City. Our hotel for the night is directly accessible from the airport terminal to ease logistics on this first day. Settle in to your room, and then those arriving in time can gather for an informal dinner with the group.

Accommodations at Courtyard by Marriot Mexico City Airport

Mon., Feb. 14 La Cima | Lerma Marshes | Jungapeo

We make an early departure from the hotel to get us into the field sooner, but mostly to beat Mexico City traffic! To really speed along the process, we enjoy a field breakfast upon our arrival at the first birding stop in La Cima. Our goal this morning is to see two extremely limited range endemics: Sierra Madre Sparrow and Strickland's Woodpecker. After finding the two endemics, we make a few other stops along the road to look for birds such as the endemic and striking Red Warbler, Golden-browed Warbler, Brown-backed Solitaire, the endemic Rufous-capped Brushfinch, and the endemic Striped Sparrow.

Lunch is at a small, local place along the way. After lunch we stop at the once extensive Lerma Marshes for another very important bird, the highly endangered Black-poll'd Yellowthroat, found only in just a tiny area in Central Mexico. The Yellowthroat has seen a major reduction in its habitat over the years due to water being sent over the mountains to Mexico City.

We then have a 2-hour drive to our home for the next three nights in Jungapeo. Our hotel is nestled at the bottom of a steep canyon, perched above a beautiful river and is in close proximity to the butterfly reserves we visit over the next two days. Enjoy!

Accommodations at Hotel Aguablanca (B,L,D)



Tues., Feb. 15 Sierra Chincua Monarch Reserve | Local Birding

Today is our first visit to one of the Monarch reserves known as Sierra Chincua. Although it may seem obvious, because the Monarchs are only in the area for a very limited time, anyone that wants to see them needs to go during a very narrow window of time. To beat the crowds, and to get us to the best areas for seeing the most butterflies, we get up and out of the hotel early! We eat breakfast at the van before we depart the hotel—quick, but worth it to beat the crowds. The butterflies don't return to the exact same trees each year, so it's important to realize that getting to the location where the Monarchs are may require a little more, or a little less, walking.

At Sierra Chincua, like at all of the other reserves, horses are available for rent for getting to the butterflies with a unique and enjoyable ride. It may seem silly to ride a horse, but once you get to the location you realize that the 10,000+ foot elevation may have a bigger effect on you than you originally thought!

After spending some time with the butterflies and looking for birds, we head back down the mountain for lunch at a great little restaurant in Angangueo, a beautiful small colonial city. After lunch we head back to the hotel for some afternoon birding.

Accommodations at Hotel Aguablanca (B,L,D)

Wed., Feb. 16 Cerro Pelón Monarch Reserve

Once again, we have breakfast at the van and drive about an hour to the Cerro Pelón Monarch Reserve. Today's trip is optional for anyone who feels like they had plenty of time with the butterflies yesterday; it is a much more difficult trip to get to this area. Again, horses are available and anyone with any question about their ability to make the climb should certainly take advantage of this option.



Cerro Pelón is known as one of the best places to see the butterflies in bigger numbers with far fewer visitors than any of the other locations. It can at times take more than two hours of hiking or horseback riding to get to the butterfly location. We do our best to find out how far away the butterflies actually are from the trail head in order to help people decide what they want to do. We take a packed lunch so that we can spend more time in the forest with the butterflies and the birds. Some of the birds we look for at both reserves include Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Crescent-chested Warbler, endemic White-striped Woodcreeper, Pine Flycatcher, Gray-collared Becard, endemic Gray-barred Wren, the striking and endemic Blue Mockingbird, endemic Green-striped and Rufous-capped Brushfinches, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and Black-headed Siskin. We return to the hotel in the late afternoon for a relaxing dinner.

Accommodations at Hotel Aguablanca (B,L,D)

Thurs., Feb. 17 Birding Hotel Aguablanca | Patzcuaro

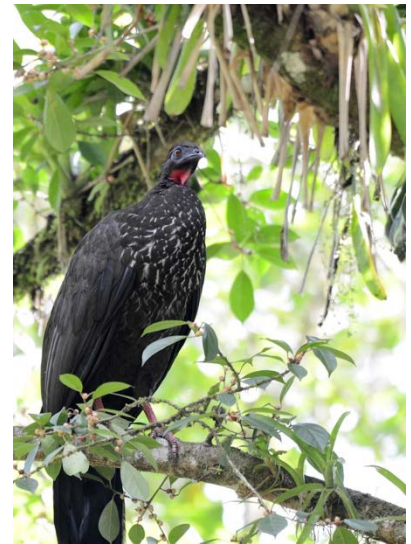
This morning we enjoy breakfast at the hotel, then head out to do some serious birding on the grounds outside. The dry forest surrounding the canyon is rich with interesting birds like Slate-blue Seedeater, endemic West Mexican Chachalaca, endemic Banded Quail, endemic Colima Pygmy Owl and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, endemic Golden-crowned Emerald, endemic Dusky Hummingbird, endemic Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Russet-crowned Motmot, endemic Pileated Flycatcher, endemic Golden Vireo, endemic Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, and endemic Black-chested Sparrow.

We then check out and have lunch on our drive to Patzcuaro, one of Mexico's Pueblo Magicos. We make a number of stops along the road to look for more highland species. Then, after settling into our beautiful hotel, Posada Yolihuani, and taking a break, we stroll into the beautiful town plaza for dinner.

Accommodations at Posada Yolihuani (B,L,D)

Fri., Feb. 18 Pine-Oak Habitat | Tacambaro | Patzcuaro

After a nice breakfast at the hotel, we drive about 30 minutes to bird an interesting volcanic peak covered in remnant pine-oak habitat. We look for Mountain Trogon, striking and endemic Red-headed Tanager, endemic



Collared Towhee, Crescent-chested Warbler, endemic Spotted and Gray-barred Wrens, and endemic Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow.

Later we continue to drop in elevation and make a couple of stops looking for the rare, and difficult to find, White-chinned Swift! There are some great places to look for other swifts, as well. Great-swallow-tailed, endemic White-naped, Black, Chestnut-collared, and Vaux's can all be seen in this area! We have lunch at a fancy and interesting restaurant in Tacambaro before making a few more stops in search of the White-chinned (or White-fronted) Swift near its roosting locations.

We head back to Patzcuaro in the late afternoon for time to explore around the plaza and then have dinner. *Accommodations at Posada Yolihuani (B,L,D)*

Sat., Feb. 19 Birding En Route to Guadalajara

We have a lovely breakfast at our hotel before checking out and making a few stops around Patzcuaro for birds. We have a three-hour drive to Guadalajara and our hotel in Tlaquepaque. Along the way, we bird a few different spots looking for more species of the dry highlands of central Mexico, near the town of Churintzio. We have lunch in Churintzio, at a great local spot, before making the last push into Guadalajara. Tonight, we stay in the crafts mecca of Tlaquepaque at the comfortable and popular Quinta Don Jose Boutique Hotel.

We enjoy farewell dinner in the excellent restaurant, right at the hotel. *Accommodations at Quinta Don Jose Boutique Hotel (B,L,D)*

Sun., Feb. 20 Departures

You may depart at your leisure today out of the Guadalajara airport. We arrange one shuttle to the airport around the majority of everyone's flights; if your flight isn't around this time, you can take a taxi. (B)

This Itinerary is subject to change due to weather, road condition, access, and other real-world factors.

Guide Peg Abbott



Peg is the owner and lead guide of Naturalist Journeys, LLC. She has been designing, guiding, and organizing natural history tours for more than 25 years, working for the National Audubon Society and other organizations before launching Naturalist Journeys, LLC in 1998. Her work has taken her from Alaska to Africa and Argentina, as well as many other locations around the world. She has conducted research on several bird and mammal species and keeps a close interest in Yellowstone and Mexican wolf reintroduction projects. Her interests include all aspects of natural history and geology. After 20 years in and around the Yellowstone area, Peg relocated in 2003 to the birding mecca of Portal, AZ.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour: \$3990 DBL / \$4535 SGL, based on double occupancy from Mexico City, departing Guadalajara. Includes seven nights' accommodations, meals as noted in the itinerary, purified water, airport transfers, ground transportation in vans, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included is airfare to Mexico City and from Guadalajara, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Mexico City International (MEX) at your leisure on February 13. If you plan to join the group for an informal dinner, please plan to arrive no later than 5:00 PM. Please plan departures at your leisure from Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla International (GDL) on February 20. We arrange one shuttle to the airport around the majority of everyone's flights; if your flight isn't around this time, you can take a taxi.

Pace of the Tour

Moderate, with full days of birding and walks on quiet roads and trails. A typical walk is less than two miles and often we have a series of walks at different spots that are a half-mile each, several times a day. Please note: Hikes to the butterfly sanctuaries are at altitude; you need to be able to make that walk or plan to rent a horse.

Photo Credits

Rufous-crowned Motmot, Peg Abbott (PA); Monarchs, Hugh Simmons Photography (HSP); Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Mike Boyce; Blue Mockingbird, PA; Black-necked Stilt, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Olive Warbler, PA; Monarchs, HSP; Red-faced Warbler, Mary McSparen (MM); Monarchs, Alex Guillaume, courtesy UpSplash; Black-crowned Night-Heron, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Monarchs, HSP; Black-pollled Yellowthroat, courtesy Solipaso; Painted Redstart, HSP; Hotel Aguablanca, courtesy the hotel; Acorn Woodpecker, Greg Smith (GS); Crescent-chested Warbler, PA; Vermilion Flycatcher, CS; Posada Yolihuani, courtesy the hotel; Mountain Trogon, Robert Gallardo; Squirrel Cuckoo, PA; Red-lored Parrot, Bob Hill; Crested Guan, SS;

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