

Pacific Mexico & Rancho Primavera April 2-8, 2025 | Trip Report by Pat Lueders

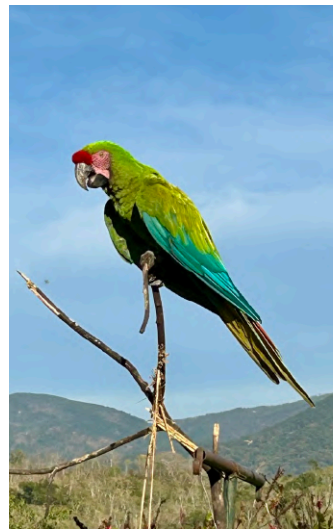


With guides Steve Shunk and Lizzy Martinez and participants Sara, John, Tony, Kate, Sally, Ginny, Ruth, Lisa, Daryl, and Pat



Wed., April 2: Arrival in Puerto Vallarta | Rancho Primavera

The popular tourist destination of Puerto Vallarta was very busy upon our arrival. Located on the Pacific Ocean, the old town elements mixed with the new construction as we drove south and climbed the cliffs surrounding the city. The winding road ran along the scenic coastline, and soon we were driving thorough small towns and villages leaving the bustle of the city behind us. Steve pointed out different locations we would be visiting and taught us the history of the area and the geography of the region. We soon turned off the main highway, having our first tour of the small town of El Tuito, only a short drive from our destination, Rancho Primavera,



where we would spend the next week. We crossed the dirt road entrance that crossed the El Tuito River, now only a stream until the upcoming rainy season, then passed meadows on both sides of the road until we crossed the cattle guard and entered the property of the ranch. The mango trees were beginning to produce fruit, the resident horses were grazing in the field, and the main house appeared, sitting at the top of the hill. Bonnie, the owner, cheerfully greeted us and gave us a tour of the main house and the large, screened porch where we would meet daily for coffee, breakfast, checklists, and to watch the fruit feeders surrounding it. We immediately saw Yellow Grosbeaks, White-winged and Inca Doves, Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers, and Great Kiskadees, as well as many hummingbirds, and it was hard to leave to move into our rooms. A short distance below the main house was a large sitting area and kitchen surrounded by four simple but comfortable rooms. Two couples were in a building adjacent to the main house. After unpacking for the week, we convened back at the main house and watched the feeders, quickly learning many species of the area including Plain-capped Starthroat, Broad-billed, Violet-crowned, Berylline, Ruby-throated, and Cinnamon Hummingbirds. Bonnie spotted a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl perched on the feeder near a fountain. Wow, what a great start! Wild Lilac-crowned Amazons noisily flew by and Streaked-backed Orioles were plentiful at the bananas. We drove to El Tuito for dinner, experiencing the first of many authentic Mexican cuisine meals we would enjoy in this village of 3,000 residents.

Thur., April 3: Rancho Primavera

We enjoyed delicious coffee and a variety of breakfast items each morning as we watched the feeders before the daily early morning walk on the ranch. First arrivals at the bananas and papaya were a Russet-crowned Motmot, a Blue Mockingbird, Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers, White-throated Thrush, and two Black-throated Magpie-Jays. A Yellow-breasted Chat also made a quick appearance to everyone's delight. Our first walk on the ranch included the entrance road and a nearby field. Steve heard and then found a close Gray-crowned Woodpecker, an area endemic. Many flycatchers were working the fields including a Western, Vermilion, Nutting's, and Boat-billed. On the forest edge, we had a nice mixed feeding flock, seeing Black-and-White, Black-throated Gray, Wilson's, Orange-crowned, Nashville, and MacGillivray's Warblers, a Golden Vireo, Tropical Parula and American Restart. In the field, seed-eating birds included Blue and male and female Painted Buntings. Two Gray Hawks were seen soaring high in sky with Black & Turkey Vultures.

After a visit to town for lunch and a short siesta, we walked a different area of the 200-acre property and visited a nearby pond. A Green Iguana was loafing in a close tree for great photos. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Least Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, White-faced Ibis, Tricolored and Green Herons were feeding at the pond and Ringed and Belted Kingfishers took turns crossing the area. Masked Tityra were spotted carrying nesting



material, and we had good looks at a shy Elegant Trogon. After dinner, we gathered to compile our lengthy list of species seen today, just our first day at the ranch!

Fri., April 4: Vallarta Botanical Gardens

We awoke to another lovely, cool day. Our morning feeder watch added a quick visit by the endemic San Blas Jay, a Bronzed Cowbird, a White-tipped Dove, and West Mexican Chachalacas. Today we visited the fabulous Vallarta Botanical Garden along the Horcones River. The garden is a non-profit dedicated to showcasing the wonder of native plant species, contributing to global botanical research, and a natural magnet for over 230 species of birds. What a beautiful place! Founded in 2004, the gardens were created from a totally blank landscape and now feature the most visited public orchid collection in the country. From the large number of birds we saw, the great shopping at their unique gift store, the variety and number of native plants and succulents, and the delicious lunch on the open patio, what a delightful day we had! Some of the 66 species we saw included Ruddy Ground Doves, Sparkling-tailed and Golden-crowned Hummingbirds, Rose-throated Becards, Green and San Blas Jays, Yellow-winged Cacique; varied, Indigo, Blue and Painted Buntings, and soaring Gray, Zone-tailed, and Short-tailed Hawks. Needless to say, our group hated to leave this wonderful paradise! At dinner in town, many of the group sampled the margaritas, which would become an evening ritual, deciding which margarita was the best.

Sat., April 5: Provincia Road

This morning, we visited a different habitat, the nearby pine-oak forest, for an introduction to the montane habitats of Cabo Corrientes and to find some new bird species. Acorn Woodpeckers were vocal as was a perched Greater Pewee. A White-striped Woodcreeper, another area endemic, finally gave us good looks, as did a pair of Arizona Woodpeckers. A bright Flame-colored Tanager gave a quick flyby, the diminutive Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet came in closely, and some of the group got quick looks, but all heard, a Brown-backed Solitaire. Two Tufted Flycatchers were seen along the road as was the elusive Happy Wren.

After lunch and the daily siesta, we walked a new trail on the ranch. What success we had! Our first new species was the Citreoline Trogon that we were hoping to find. We also had scope views of Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, a pair of Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and a pair of colorful Rosy Thrush-Tanagers, a new species for most of the group. At the pond was the biggest surprise of the week for Steve and Lizzy, a first time visit for the ranch of a Reddish Egret! After many photos, we also saw a Black-crowned Night Heron, a Green Kingfisher, and soaring Vaux's Swifts. As we left the pond, we watched a newborn lamb crying for its



mom and being bottle-fed by one of the resident women, hopefully to be adopted later by another mother sheep.

Sun., April 6: Mayto & the Costalegre

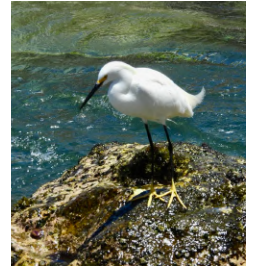
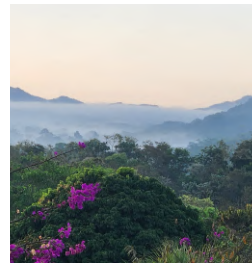
We left early this morning to visit the southern coast of Cabo Corrientes and the Costalegre, hoping to find birds that specialize in lower-elevation habitats. We stopped at various spots finding some new species for the tour including Brown-crested Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, White-throated Magpie-Jays, Ovenbird, and a pair of Red-breasted Chats. Some had quick looks at a Flammulated Flycatcher and an Orange-breasted Bunting. One last stop before a delicious lunch at a local food truck gave us better looks at a female Orange-breasted bunting, an Olive Sparrow, and a soaring dark morph Hook-billed Kite.

We visited a village on the beach, watching local fisherman gathering and cleaning huge oysters. From the waterside café, we spotted Heermann's Gulls on the rocks, soaring Magnificent Frigatebirds and Elegant Terns. The rocks on the jetty were covered with Sally Lightfoot Crabs, some very colorful.

Mon., April 7: Los Arcos & Yelapa

This was our last day of the tour and possibly the most exciting! We left the ranch early to drive back towards Puerto Vallarta to board two boats for a trip up and down the coast, visiting the Los Arcos Marine Reserve. We were blessed with a calm and sunny morning; perfect weather to look for seabirds and mammals. As we left the harbor, we saw many Brown Pelicans flying low over the water and Common Bottlenose Dolphins followed in the wake of our boats. Olive Ridley Sea Turtles were seen floating nearby. When we arrived at the Los Arcos Marine Reserve, a collection of offshore rocks, we found Blue Footed Boobies perched on the cliffs near Cocos Boobies for nice comparisons. Very exciting and definitely the goal of many in our group! Our brunch stop was a beachside restaurant in the lovely cove of Playa Yelapa. We walked a short distance down the beach to the lagoon finding many new species including Black-necked Stilts, an immature Northern Jacana, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Osprey, and Royal and Elegant Terns. What a memorable day!

Our farewell dinner was celebrated at a lovely hilltop restaurant. We agreed that we had felt a part of the El Tuito and Mexican communities during our visit to the Cabo Corrientes area. Rancho Primavera was simple but comfortable, and the staff felt like family. Coffee and breakfast were delicious every morning. All of our meals at the local family-operated El Tuito restaurants were varied, authentic, and delicious. Thank you to Steve and



Lizzy who did a wonderful job of leading us and explaining the unique qualities of the birds, habitats, geography, and food of this area that they obviously love.

Tues., April 8: Departures

Sadly, it was our last morning at the ranch, and we packed up. We had our final morning walk, and again it was very productive. New species included Greenish Elaenia, Northern Waterthrush, Spotted Sandpiper, and Cinnamon-rumped Seed eaters. We bid farewell to Bonnie and her staff who came to say good-bye. We agreed we would always remember this delightful week when we felt a part of the community in this area of Western Mexico.

Photos: Group (Pat Leuders - PL), Heermann's Gull (PL), Orchids (Lloyd McKinney, Tony - TM), Rufous-crowned Motmot (PL), Military Macaw (PL), Scenic (TM), Blue Mockingbird (PL), Yellow Grosbeak (PL), Black-throated Magpie-Jay (PL), Elegant Trogon (PL), Golden-crowned Emerald (PL), Painted Bunting (PL), Masked Tityra (PL), Scenic (TM), Citreoline Trogon (PL), Scenic (TM), Boat (PL), Blue-footed Boobies (PL), Snowy Egret (PL)