

Veracruz River of Raptors | Trip Report | Oct. 16 – 26, 2022 | by Dave Mehlman



Guides: Alan Monroy-Ojeda and Dave Mehlman with participants: Bob, Karen, Jean, Katy, Pete, and Val



Sat., Oct. 15 Arrival at Veracruz

Bob, Katy, and Jean had all arrived earlier in the week, so they joined Dave for some informal birding around the grounds of the Hotel Mocambo and out to the nearby beach, getting a great view of the first (of many) Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls perched in the top of an apompo tree right outside our hotel rooms. We also saw the large flock of Monk Parakeets which have become established in the area and admired the very handsome Red-bellied Squirrels to be found running about the grounds. Later in the day, Bob, Katy, and Jean went off on their own to explore Veracruz City while Alan and our driver, the one-and-only Victor, picked up Dave and headed to the airport. There, we retrieved Pete, Karen, and Val from the United flight from Houston and then all returned to the Hotel Mocambo. After getting settled into all the rooms, we had a bit of free time in the afternoon and then reconvened in the Hotel's restaurant, La Fragata, for our welcome dinner, including introductions and an overview of the tour.

Sun., Oct. 16 Mocambo Birding | Cempoala | Chichicaxtle | Cardel

The entire group got up early and met outside our rooms for some early birding on the grounds of the Hotel Mocambo and the Playa Mocambo just across the street. Greeted again by the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, we quickly found some of the common birds we would see often during the trip, such as Great Kiskadee, Clay-



colored Thrush, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and Yellow-winged Tanager. The beach yielded a few water- and shorebirds, including Royal Tern, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling, and a cooperative Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. We admired the wonderful song of the aptly named Melodious Blackbird and a Yellow-throated Warbler in a palm, while a Peregrine Falcon flew by as we returned to breakfast. After finishing the breakfast buffet, we finished packing our things, loaded our gear into the bus, and headed out for the first full day of the tour. Our first stop was the Cempoala Archeological Site, where we were guided around by Humberto (with Alan ably translating). While learning the fascinating history of this Totonac site, we watched myriads of butterflies (mostly sulphurs and whites) feeding on a noni tree and pondered the Rose-bellied Lizards and Northeastern Spiny-tailed Iguanas who now seem to primarily inhabit the site (though it is surrounded by a small, modern village). After the tour, we drove to Cardel for lunch at Tampico, where most enjoyed some of the great seafood to be had along the coast of Veracruz.

We checked into the Hotel Bienvenido and put our bags into our rooms, and some headed up to the roof to see how the hawk migration was going. Although a few things were flying by, we soon headed west to the town of Chichicaxtle and the Mario Ramos Bird Observatory (which has had a third story added since Dave's last visit). However, as we started in on our presentation from Tamara about the work of Pronatura Veracruz, we were "interrupted" by a large movement of Turkey Vultures, so we promptly abandoned the talk and headed upstairs to spend the rest of the afternoon observing the River of Raptors. Mostly Turkey Vultures were flying by in steady streams, but with a bit of effort, we could pick out Swainson's and Broad-winged Hawk, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcon overhead while the surrounding trees yielded our first sightings of some of the great local birds, including Altamira Oriole, Scrub Euphonia, Blue-gray and Yellow-winged Tanager, and a very nicely perched pair of Cinnamon-bellied Saltators. After that very fun afternoon, we returned to the Bienvenido for dinner in their restaurant, the bird checklist, and plans for the next day.

Mon., Oct. 17 Cardel | Miramar | Quiahuixtlan | La Antigua

Up early, we had breakfast at the Bienvenido and stepped outside to the voluminous chorus of the roosting Great-tailed Grackles and Bronzed Cowbirds on the phone lines right outside the hotel door. Today, we explored the northern parts of the coast with our first stop being the Parque Ecoturístico Miramar, a privately run nature reserve. Birding the grounds around the headquarters and a short walk up into the oak forest on the mountain yielded many birds and enormous numbers of migrating butterflies. The birding action was fast and furious, starting with an elegant Aplomado Falcon perched on a phone line on the drive in from the highway and



continuing with some flying and perched Yellow-headed Parrots (an endangered species), Masked Tityra, Olive-throated Parakeet, Lineated Woodpecker, and Rufous-naped Wren (this a local endemic subspecies that perhaps will be split in the future). The walk uphill through the oak forests (apparently primarily *Quercus oleoides*) was very productive for butterflying and mothing. Of particular interest were the very intriguing *Clavipes Sphinx*, behaving and looking like a small hummingbird, and two individuals of the planthopper *Cerogenes auricoma*, an otherworldly-looking creature with a horned yellow head, black wings, and white exudate streamers projecting from its sides and tail.

After this productive visit, we toured the nearby Quiahuixtlan Archeological Site, a Totonac city and burial grounds perched high on a hill overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and next to a dramatic basalt mountain. The raptors were easily visible here, too; of note were two Mississippi Kites (pretty much at the end of their migration period), Northern Harrier, a Great Black Hawk, and Short-tailed, Sharp-shinned, Swainson's and Broad-winged Hawks. Some Wood Storks decided to fly overhead, too, to add some diversity to the migration. Close looks were had at many butterflies, too, including Ruddy and Many-banded Daggerwing and numerous sulphurs. After our visit here, we returned to the Bienvenido for lunch and a very brief rest. Meeting up later in the afternoon, we started out for the town of La Antigua, the first real town the Spaniards built in Mexico after Hernán Cortés' arrival. We toured the Ermita del Rosario (the first Catholic church in the Americas, built in 1523) and the ruins of the Casa de Cortes with local guide Miguel, imagining all the people and treasure that passed through the doors over the centuries. We then headed over to the town boat dock for our first boat trip of the tour, a lovely late afternoon cruise down the Rio La Antigua to its mouth. This boat trip always yields many interesting bird sightings, and we were not disappointed! A few of the many highlights included 2 Laughing Falcons perched in trees; Ringed, Belted, Amazon, and Green Kingfisher; Black-necked Stilt; American Avocet; 3 Marbled Godwits; 2 Black Skimmers (the only ones of the trip); and a small flock of Blue-winged Teal. Returning to the dock after this excellent trip, we crossed the street for a wonderful seafood dinner at Las Delicias Marinas, which we had preordered to save some time. Many enjoyed an ice cream desert to top it off! We closed the day out with the bird list at the Hotel Bienvenido and a discussion of the plans for tomorrow.

Tues., Oct. 18 Cardel | Playa Juan Angel | Chichicaxtle | Paso Mariano

After our usual buffet breakfast at the Hotel Bienvenido, we boarded our bus for some coastal birding. Our site this morning was the beach area called Playa Juan Angel, including the beach itself and some birding along the road into the small town which passes through coastal scrub. This area is typically quite productive for birds and,



again, we were greatly rewarded, with many butterflies thrown in for good measure. The beach at the mouth of the small river that outflows here yielded lots of herons and shorebirds. Of all the sightings, however, the most amazing to me personally was that we were able to find, at the same time at a short distance, essentially all the small North American Plovers! This included Semipalmated, Collared, Snowy, and Piping (one each of the latter two). This is a rare simultaneous finding which could only be possible in this small part of the world: on the Mexican coast maybe from southern Tamaulipas to central Veracruz; Piping Plover is at the very southern end of its wintering range and Collared Plover is at the very northern end of its resident range here. Other great birds included 2 Northern Shovelers, 2 Reddish Egrets (one dark and one white), a Long-billed Curlew, Sandwich Terns, and some Short-billed Dowitchers.

As we drove back along the road to explore the coastal scrub, we rescued a Narrow-bridged Musk Turtle from the road to provide some reptilian diversity to the day. In the scrub, our primary goal was to find the very restricted range Mexican Sheartail; unfortunately, although one or two were heard by Alan, we never did get any kind of satisfactory look at this endemic. But other good birds were to be found, including Canivet's Emerald, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, a female Rose-throated Becard, Scrub Euphonias, Least Flycatcher, and a female Painted Bunting. The insects also proved very diverse here, mostly due to Pete's tireless efforts at identifying them for us. Perhaps most interesting was a very well posing Zebra-striped Hairstreak, which has the unique property of having "fake antennas" on its rear end which are waved around in order to distract predators. Other observations, mostly feeding in or around the blooming Sleepy Morning plants, included all three "royals" (Monarch, Queen, Soldier); Giant Sicklewing, and yet more *Clavipes* Sphinx moths. All this excitement left us famished and we returned to Cardel for another lunch at Tampico, followed by a brief rest. We first headed out for the afternoon to Chicicaxtle, where we heard the remainder of Tamara's talk (which we had so rudely rushed out on previously), this time helped out by Kashmir Wolf, Pronatura Veracruz' master of raptor counters, ecotours, and MOTUS. We were joined by another tour group that happened to be present so this time Tamara got a full house. Many also seized the opportunity to help support Pronatura by buying a few things in their gift shop and dropping off the school supplies they had brought. However, the hawk-watching was a bit slow this afternoon, so we headed to nearby Paso Mariano along the Rio La Antigua to finish the afternoon. Although fairly quiet, we enjoyed the sight of 2 Rufous-naped Wrens dust-bathing and found Black Phoebe in the river (the only one of the trip), Ruddy Ground-Dove, Merlin, and a Blue-black Grassquit, all while a nearly continuous stream of Turkey Vultures flew overhead. After this, we returned to the Bienvenido for dinner, the checklist, and the overview of the plan for tomorrow.



Wed., Oct. 19

Cardel | Rancho El Mirador | Coatepec

Up early, we had a buffet breakfast at the Bienvenido, loaded our bags into the bus, and headed to the mountains! Driving the back road, we arrived at our morning's destination, the lovely Rancho El Mirador and met our hosts Don Jorge and Doña Maria Guadalupe Müller at their lovely hacienda. While we took turns using the bathrooms in the Müllers' lovely old hacienda, we started to see birds right away, despite the cloudy weather. Plain Chachalacas called in the distance while a cooperative Azure-crowned Hummingbird perched on the phone wires. A variety of birds constantly paraded through the trees, many feeding on palo mulato (gumbo limbo) fruits, including Black-headed Saltator, Band-backed Wren, Masked Tityra, and Collared Aracaris. After this short interlude, we piled into the back of the ranch truck with Odilon driving and headed into the coffee plantations for some more birding. Although the cloudy weather largely continued for us, signs of a cold front, the coffee plantations were as productive as usual for many species ranging from the large and colorful (Bat Falcon, Red-lored Parrot, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Keel-billed Toucan) to the smaller and harder to spot (Common Chlorospingus, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, female/young Red-legged Honeycreeper, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Magnolia Warbler). All these birds worked up an appetite, which Don Jorge was well prepared for with a mid-morning coffee and snack break right in the coffee plantation! After a little more birding, we returned to the hacienda a bit after noon, as it was time for us to continue our travels. At this point, the clouds broke and the butterflies started flying, and many in the group got good looks at some beauties such as Rusty-tipped Page, Julia Heliconian, and Two-barred Flasher before leaving. Continuing our way to Coatepec, we stopped for lunch at the Restaurante Dulce in Totutla, then arrived at our lodging for the next two days, the lovely (and aptly named) Hotel Casabella in downtown Coatepec. After a break, we reconvened and walked a short distance to the zócalo for dinner at Finca Andrade where the group met Elisa Peresbarbosa, executive director of Pronatura Veracruz, for a conversation about the group's work in the State of Veracruz. This was followed by our usual checklist session and discussion of plans for the next day; then, we walked back to the hotel for a very nice, quiet rest amidst the much cooler temperatures of the higher elevations.

Thurs., Oct. 20

Las Minas | Perote | Laguna Alchichica | Camino de Conejo

We had an early breakfast in the pre-dawn darkness, but as things lightened up, it was apparent that there was a heavy overcast today in Coatepec. Our goal today was to explore the higher elevation forests of the Sierra Madre Oriental and the eastern end of the Transvolcanic Belt, plus take a look at the altiplano which lies west of the mountains. The first stop we visited was the small roadside community of La Joya, high in the tall pine

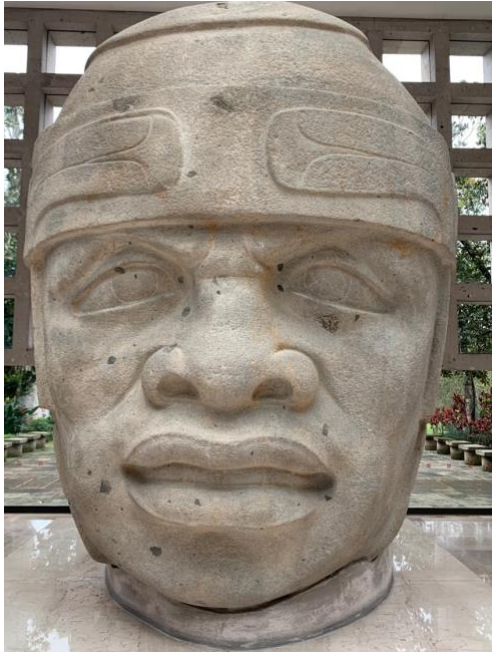


forests. However, as we drove up there, we ascended completely into the cloud layer, so when we arrived at La Joya, there was very limited visibility and a cold mist all around. After a quick bathroom stop at the nearby restaurant there, we decided to push upward and westward, in hopes of getting either above or beyond the cloud layer (although La Joya has typically been an excellent birding spot on prior tours). As we headed up, the clouds lifted a slight bit, enough so that we pulled into several sites along the Cruz Blanca—Las Minas road, another traditionally great birding spot, and tried to see what we could find; the elevation here was about 7600 feet.

Indeed, it was cloudy, misty, and the roadside vegetation was soaking wet, but our indomitable group kept at it and found some of the best birds of the trip (if I do say so myself!). Probably the highlight was a spectacular Red Warbler, seen reasonably well foraging in some low scrub—arguably the most beautiful of all the North American warblers. But, with persistence, many other species were found, most unique to this habitat type and therefore only found here on the tour: Bushtit (of the Black-eared subspecies), Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Brown Creeper, Slate-throated Redstart, Mexican Chickadee, Hermit Warbler, and Hutton's Vireo. Amazingly enough, Alan noticed a skulking Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush sitting deep in a bush; with the aid of the scope, it was possible to distinguish this from the remarkably similar Russet Nightingale-Thrush. We also walked to a bridge over a nearby stream where Alan has occasionally seen American Dipper, but none appeared today.

Finishing here, and a bit wet and bedraggled, we continued up and finally arrived on the altiplano to the west of the mountains, where the clouds began to part and the sun finally showed itself. A quick stop at a Pemex station in the town of Perote yielded not only essential bathrooms, but also some unexpected birds, including Lesser Goldfinch, House Finch, Bewick's Wren, Canyon Towhee, Say's Phoebe, and a bit out-of-place Townsend's Warbler. A Rock Squirrel also stopped by to add to our mammalian diversity. We then continued on westward to our primary site for the morning: the intriguing alkaline lake Laguna Alchichica (which is actually mostly in the State of Puebla). This mysterious lake is a volcanic crater that has filled with water and contains stromatolites and species of diatoms, crustaceans, fish, and amphibians that are found nowhere else in the world. This salt lake, like similar lakes around the world, is also a bird magnet, especially in the winter months. On our visit, scattered Eared and Pied-billed Grebes were patrolling its surface, along with a few American Coots, Northern Shovelers, a lone Least Sandpiper, and a single Ruddy Duck. The desert scrub uplands yielded Black-chinned Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Canyon Towhee, and a fly-by Lucifer Hummingbird.

After this very productive morning, we had a delicious lunch at La Bruma Café & Bistro in Perote, which left us a few hours for some final birding in the higher elevation pine forests on the slopes of the Cofre de Perote volcano. A few stops here along the Camino de Conejo at about 8300 feet yielded Transvolcanic Jay (a Mexican endemic confined to the transvolcanic belt from this point west to Colima), Yellow-eyed Junco, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, lots of Mourning Doves, and Pine Siskin. As the bird activity slowed in the late afternoon, we



returned to our bus and headed back down the mountains (and into the clouds) to Coatepec, where many picked up some laundry and we walked to dinner at the nearby La Roma, where we did the bird list and discussed plans for the next day.

Fri., Oct. 21 Macuiltepetl | Museum of Anthropology

We began today with a later breakfast; the skies appeared more promising than the day before we were pleased to note. After getting ready to go (all bags had to be packed and loaded since we were leaving town), we headed to nearby Xalapa to the wonderful Parque Ecológico Macuiltepetl, a city park right in the middle of town, which comprises a reforested extinct volcano. Typically a favorite stop on the tour, the park had many highlights, though activity seemed a bit lower than normal due to a slight overcast. As we walked slowly up to the top of the volcano, we gradually saw a lot of interesting birds, including Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Green Jay, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a nice flock of White-eyed Vireo and Magnolia, Black-and-white, Golden-crowned, Wilson's, and MacGillivray's Warblers. After much effort on the way back, we finally had decent views of the primary target bird for the day: Blue Mockingbird! Many insects were seen, too, including a Starred Oxoe, a bright caterpillar of Orange Mapwing, and the odd groups of *Perreyia* larva (a species of sawfly) which crawl around together in groups on the ground and are called locally "caca de luna." [ed note—no translation will be provided!]

We then drove to the quite lovely La Estancia de los Tecajetes restaurant for a delicious lunch on their covered patio overlooking the park of the same name; this restaurant features local foods from the nearby highlands, including several delicious moles. After lunch, we drove to the Museo de Antropología de Xalapa (MAX) for a tour of this excellent museum. It's one of the best in Mexico and specializes in the cultures of southeastern Mexico, including the ones that pre-date the better-known Mayan and Aztec civilizations. Unfortunately, our contracted guide for the tour (Prof. Sagrario Cruz) was sick and unable to make it, so everyone explored the museum on their own admiring its collection of original Olmec heads. After finishing the tour, we loaded up the bus and headed back down to the by-now-familiar Hotel Bienvenido in Cardel to rest in preparation for the rest of the tour in Southern Veracruz to come. We walked across the zócalo for dinner at Jugos El Manantial, where we dined, did the checklist, and went over plans for the next day. Returning to the hotel, we settled in for the



night, except for Jean, Dave, and Alan, who were rudely interrupted by the brief appearance of “Lago Bienvenido” on the floor at their end of the hall! But this problem was soon fixed and off to bed we went.

Sat., Oct. 22

Cardel | Las Barrancas | Alvarado | Tlacotalpan | Catemaco

After an early breakfast at Hotel Bienvenido, we loaded up all our gear and headed south. Our first stop was the road to the community of Las Barrancas, which runs east through coastal savannahs and rangelands from the main highway. A bathroom break at the Pemex on the corner yielded our first Tropical Mockingbird and then we proceeded down the road, stopping regularly to look for birds. This has always been a very, very productive area for birding on every tour and this year was no different! Highlights included many Scissor-tailed Flycatchers with some Fork-tailed Flycatchers thrown in for good measure; Eastern Meadowlarks singing and flying around; White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbills, and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks flying overhead; perched Crested Caracara and Aplomado Falcon; Hooded Oriole; and a fly-away Wilson’s Snipe, a species not often seen on this tour. Amazingly enough, at one point a Savannah and a Grasshopper Sparrow perched on a fence almost next to each other in perfect morning light and we dug up a Lincoln’s Sparrow in a shrub. As luck would have it, as we drove a side road through the grassland in search of Double-striped Thick-Knee, the ranch owner and his father drove up and offered to let us further down the road behind normally locked gates, which added to the fun. In total, we saw well over 30 thick-knees here, way more than Dave or Alan could ever recall in this location, at least partly because of our special access to normally closed parts of the ranch. The thick-knee is a very odd species of shorebird, typically found in upland grasslands, that is here near the northern limit of its North American range—a true favorite of everyone on the tour. The ponds on the ranch yielded large flocks of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, both brightly colored adults and duller juveniles, a Loggerhead Shrike, and decent views of flying Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, another coastal savannah specialty bird.

We probably could have continued birding here for many more hours, but our travels had to continue, so we went further south to the town of Alvarado for our second boat trip of the tour. Here, after a quick bathroom break, we boarded a lancha for a 2½ boat trip into the Alvarado Lagoon. This lagoon is one of Mexico’s most important coastal wetlands and has extensive areas of open water surrounded by dense mangrove forests. The boat trip provided great views of many Common Black-Hawks (perched and flying), White-collared Swifts, herons, egrets, and kingfishers. A very lucky few glimpsed a rapidly departing Sungrebe that darted away as the boat passed by. Part of the trip included a very short trip into the mangroves, where a small channel allowed us to sit under the canopy and look for birds. This proved to be an excellent spot, with a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron walking off as we arrived, a pair of Mangrove Warblers (currently considered a distinctive subspecies of Yellow



Warbler) over the boat, Common (Blue) Morphos flying by, a diverse set of migratory passerines (Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Wilson's, Hooded, Magnolia, and Black-and-white Warbler), and great views of a Rufous-breasted Spinetail and a pair of Barred Antshrikes, the latter responding to tape-playbacks. Another fabulous boat trip on the tour!

It was running late by the time we returned to the dock, but no complaints were heard! We continued on to the UNESCO World Heritage town of Tlacotalpan, on the banks of the Papaloapan River, for lunch at the lovely Restaurante Doña Lala, featuring all sorts of seafood. After lunch, we continued for several more hours of driving to the town of Catemaco, where we settled into our rooms at the Hotel Playa Azul, right on the shore of Lake Catemaco. After unloading, we went to dinner at a nearby restaurant, where we feasted, did our usual checklist, and discussed plans for the next day. Of interest was a Giant Toad (a species recently split from the former Cane or Marine Toad) gobbling up insects on the lawn of the hotel where the restaurant was.

Sun., Oct. 23 Playa Azul | Nanciyaga | UNAM Biological Station | Barra de Sontecomapan

We started off the day with a nice breakfast of fruit, eggs, and the best coffee by far of the tour in the dining room of the Playa Azul. Some informal birding before and after breakfast yielded Mottled Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Collared Forest-Falcon, and a Lesson's Motmot calling, noisy groups of Band-backed Wrens, and a constantly calling Hooded Warbler. After getting ready to go, we loaded up in the bus for the short drive to the nearby Reserva Ecológica Nanciyaga, a privately owned patch of nice, tall tropical forest on the shore of Lake Catemaco. We spent the entire morning here, walking the entrance road in from the highway to the gift shop and dining room by the lake. The full bird list for the morning was an impressive 77 species despite the constant traffic of cars coming in and out since the Reserve is such a popular place on weekends. Its hard to mention just a few highlights, but some include: Scarlet Macaws (the product of a successful reintroduction project), Mantled Howler Monkeys (heard and seen), Boat-billed Heron (roosting in trees above a crocodile pen), Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Ruddy Crake heard calling in the marsh, and many interesting Neotropical migrants, including Worm-eating, Kentucky, and Blue-winged Warbler; Louisiana Waterthrush; Wood Thrush; and Warbling and Yellow-throated Vireo. After this fabulous morning, we enjoyed lunch at the Reserve in their wonderful restaurant on the upstairs deck. This was followed by a walk through some of the landscaped and ornamented grounds, with Alan explaining to the group how everything was ritually used, particularly the temazcal.



After this, we returned to the Playa Azul for a brief rest, then headed out for the afternoon to explore some of the lower elevation habitats of the Los Tuxtlas region. Heading down the main highway to the coast, our first stop was the stretch of road through the Estación de Biología Tropical Los Tuxtlas, a famed research station operated by UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Although the birding was a bit slower than usual, we were able to find some interesting birds for the trip, such as Plain Xenops, Tropical Pewee, Lesser Greenlet, and a pair of very cooperative Collared Trogons. Continuing down, we arrived at a small community on the coast called Barra de Sontecomapan, right at the mouth of the Rio Sontecomapan, and admired the late afternoon light on the water and adjacent hills. We then headed back to Catemaco for another dinner at the La Finca, along with the bird list and review of plans for the next day.

Mon., Oct. 24 Playa Azul | Ruiz Cortines | Owling

After another nice breakfast at Playa Azul, we loaded up for a day in the higher elevations of the Los Tuxtlas. Our first stop was the small town of Ruiz Cortines, site of a community-based ecotourism program supported by Pronatura Veracruz. After the obligatory bathroom stop, we met local guide Braulio, a community resident and expert birder, who was to take us around the area. But we were quickly distracted by a lot of birds visiting a flowering *Erythrina* right by the community center dining room! Good lucks were had at Bananaquit, Black-cowled Oriole, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, and Long-tailed Sabrewing (the latter species was just this year “demoted” by the American Ornithological Society from a full species endemic to the Los Tuxtlas to “merely” a subspecies of Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, although still endemic to the Los Tuxtlas area—we added it to the list anyway!). After this promising start, we got into the bus and started driving into the forest that surrounds the community, where we proceeded to walk and ride for several kilometers. What this forest lacked in quantity, it very much made up in quality, with many great things heard or seen including Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner, Slate-colored Solitaire, Golden-browed Warbler, White-winged Tanager, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, and a spectacular Ornate Hawk-Eagle, which perched overhead for good, though neck-stretching, views. Continuing on even further, we emerged into more open habitats with a good view of the sky and were rewarded with a pair of White Hawks, circling far overhead against a beautiful blue sky, along with a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk.



After that great morning, we returned to town for lunch in the community dining room. Many enjoyed the local version of “flat burrito” called a memela, along with other tasty treats. After lunch, Braulio led us on a walk on some of the roads right around town, which proved very fruitful. A downed tree held a large flock of small finches, including lots of Yellow-faced Grassquits, some Morelet’s Seedeaters, a few Indigo Buntings, and a Blue-black Grassquit. Baltimore Orioles and Yellow-bellied Elaenias flew through the tree canopy and we were able to glimpse a Gray-crowned Yellowthroat skulking in a shrub. When we returned to the bus, a pair of foraging Rufous-capped Warblers greeted us right at the community center, providing very close looks at this lovely, resident warbler species. We returned to the Hotel Playa Azul for a brief break and then went for an early dinner. Later in the evening Pete and Jean went with Alan and Dave back to the Nanciyaga Reserve after dark for some owling. Although pretty quiet, aside from the many fireflies floating by, at least 2 pairs of Mottled Owls sounded off, one individual of which we were able to see with the aid of an indirect spotlight high up in a tree. While on the road, a pair of Raccoons and a pair of Nine-banded Armadillos wandered by, adding some mammals to our trip list.

Tues., Oct. 25 Playa Azul | Return to Veracruz

We started the day with our final great breakfast at the Hotel Playa Azul, then spent the early part of morning exploring the grounds of this lovely hotel, which we had not had a chance to do previously during our stay there. It turned out to be quite productive, with 69 total species, many by now old friends, and a couple new acquaintances. A fly-by small flock of Brown-hooded Parrots was the most interesting, but a cooperative White-fronted Parrot perched for decent views in the scope. Masked Tityras were very well seen today, as were some Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, Montezuma Oropendolas, Altamira Orioles, and Band-backed Wrens. A variety of migrants from North America were well seen, too, including Philadelphia Vireo and Worm-eating Warbler, which tend to be harder to find. A Louisiana Waterthrush was hanging out by an abandoned swimming pool and a Yellowish Flycatcher perched in a tree to provide yet another example of a challenging *Empidonax* for us to identify. After final packing and loading, we departed this lovely spot at about 10:30AM for the long drive back to Veracruz. As fate would have it while on the way, we fortuitously stopped at a roadside ice cream vendor and Bob’s dream of sampling jobo ice cream was realized! This delicious tropical fruit was at the end of its normal season, but fortunately, this one vendor had some so everyone broke down and had an ice cream snack. A bit later, we pulled off the road for lunch for a seafood lunch at El Jarocho, and finally navigated the Veracruz traffic to arrive back at the Hotel Mocambo about 3:30PM. We all convened for our last dinner later that afternoon, though a strong sea breeze sprang up which chased us inside the restaurant and off the patio. We enjoyed a

final dinner together, along with the final bird checklist and a review of the airport transfers for the following day.

Wed., Oct. 26 Departures

We met for one final breakfast before everyone except Jean (who stayed one extra night) departed. Victor provided us a final lift to the airport and we said farewell to this wonderful part of Mexico which will be sorely missed, along with the great people we met and birds and butterflies we saw.

Map of Locations Visited

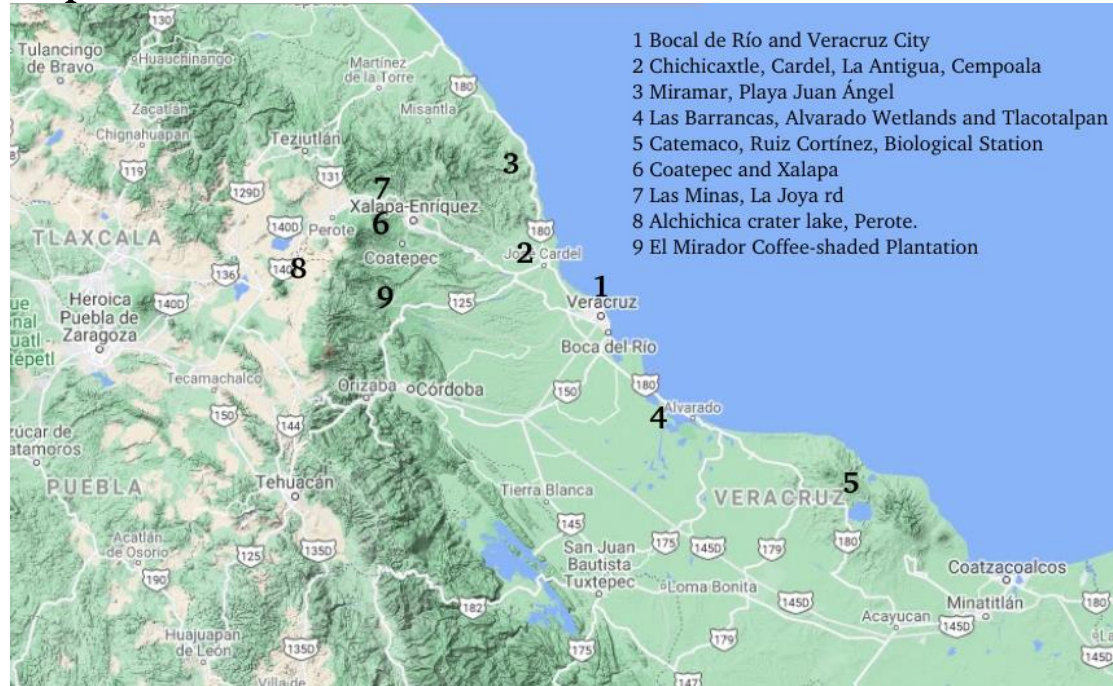


Photo Credits: Group at Barrancas (David Mehlman - DM), Group at Cempoala (DM), Blue-gray Tanager (NJ Stock), Great Kiskadee (NJ Stock), Playa Juan Angel Scenic (DM), Chichi Observation Platform (DM), Group at Mirador (DM), Group at Las Minas (NJ Stock), Slate-throated Redstart (NJ Stock), Cabeza Colossal (DM), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (NJ Stock), Blue Mockingbird (NJ Stock), Blue-capped Motmot (DM), Black-crowned Night Heron (NJ Stock), Barra de Sontecomapan (DM), Collared Forest Falcon (NJ Stock), Black-and-white Warbler (NJ Stock), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (NJ Stock), Black Vulture (DM), Ornate Hawk Eagle (Katy Globus - KG), Boat-billed Heron (KG), Social Flycatcher (KG), Double-striped Thick-Knee (KG), Group at Hotel Playa Azul (Alan Monroy)