



## **BIRDING TEXAS & BEYOND**

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### **Oaxaca, Mexico: “Tierra de Aves”**

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Report and photos by Oscar Carmona



In the rugged mountains and lush valleys of southern Mexico lies Oaxaca, a state that offers birders one of the most rewarding birding experiences in North America. With nearly 750 recorded species, Oaxaca’s extraordinary bird diversity stems from its remarkable topographical complexity. The state encompasses everything from tropical coastlines along the Pacific to temperate pine-oak forests with crowning peaks that soar above 9,000 feet. Between these extremes lie thorny valleys, cloud forests, tropical deciduous woodlands, and riparian corridors—each harboring its own distinctive avian communities.

No discussion of Oaxacan birding can begin without celebrating many of the Mexican endemic species found in the region, including the Oaxaca Sparrow, West Mexican Chachalaca, Dwarf Vireo, Ocellated Thrasher, Boucard's Wren, Beautiful Hummingbird, and Red Warbler. However, what sets Oaxacan birding apart from other birding destinations is the deep cultural richness that permeates every aspect of travel here. Ancient Zapotec and Mixtec civilizations recognized the importance of birds, incorporating them into art, mythology, and daily life. Modern Oaxacans continue this tradition, with many communities engaged in conservation efforts that benefit both birds and birders. The markets in Oaxaca offer glimpses of this continuing relationship between local people and their natural environment.

## ITINERARY

**Days 1-4: Puerto Escondido, Old Puerto Escondido-Oaxaca Highway (Hwy 131), Laguna de Manialtepec, and Highway 200 South toward Puerto Angel**



Puerto Escondido, about a 3-hour drive south from Oaxaca City, offers unique birding opportunities within minutes of comfortable accommodations and a variety of restaurants offering authentic Oaxacan cuisine. This accessibility, combined with the region's stable weather patterns and year-round bird activity, makes it an ideal destination for birders of all experience levels. While Puerto Escondido has earned international fame for its legendary surf breaks and laid-back beach culture, this Pacific coast gem harbors one of Mexico's most

rewarding tropical birding experiences; a destination where the morning's birding can seamlessly transition into an afternoon at the beach and an evening of exceptional cuisine. Located along Oaxaca's rugged coastline, Puerto Escondido serves as a gateway to diverse habitats harboring over 200 bird species along the coast, including numerous Pacific slope endemics and specialties rarely seen elsewhere in North America. The town itself sits at sea level, surrounded by tropical deciduous forests that climb into the foothills of the Sierra Madre del Sur. Nearby lagoons, mangrove systems, and riparian corridors create a mosaic of microhabitats that support an extraordinary diversity of resident and migratory species. The main coastal Highway 200 provides access to Laguna de Manialtepec and various forest sites with dirt roads leading inland to more birding opportunities.

One of Puerto Escondido's unexpected pleasures lies in the excellent birding opportunities available around the town and hotel properties. Many hotels feature landscaped gardens with flowering trees and shrubs that attract hummingbirds and several other species. We spent four nights at Casa Yuma - a minimalist, oceanside, tranquil hotel with stunning ocean views located about 20 minutes south of Puerto Escondido. The hotel felt both modern and rustic; a sanctuary to



unwind, reconnect with nature, and experience the best Oaxacan hospitality. The service at Casa Yuma was excellent. The hotel's restaurant featured traditional Oaxacan dishes made with organic, locally sourced ingredients. Every staff member we encountered was welcoming, attentive, and genuinely invested in ensuring we had a comfortable and memorable stay - leaving us dreaming of our next visit.

Some of the notable species we encountered in and around Puerto Escondido include Citreoline Trogon, Magnificent Frigatebird, Orange-breasted Bunting, Banded Wren, Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird, West Mexican Chachalaca, Double-striped Thick-knee, Wood Stork, Golden-cheeked and Lineated Woodpeckers, Russet-naped Wren, and Russet-crowned Motmot.



Russet-crowned Motmot



Citreoline Trogon



Double-striped Thick-knee

**Old Puerto Escondido-Oaxaca Highway 131:** Highway 131 is the most direct route but the least developed road from Puerto Escondido to Oaxaca City compared to Highway 175D, a newer toll highway that significantly reduces the travel time between the two locations from 8 to 3 hours. Some of the notable species we observed along this highway include White-throated Magpie-Jay, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Blue Bunting, Streak-backed Oriole, Spot-breasted Oriole, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Yellow-winged Cacique, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

**Laguna de Manialtepec:** Located 10 miles west of Puerto Escondido along Highway 200 lies Laguna de Manialtepec, a coastal lagoon system that provides the region's premier waterbird habitat. This shallow, brackish lagoon supports extensive mangrove forests and mudflats that attract both resident waterbirds and significant numbers of wintering North American shorebirds. We took a 3-hour boat tour around the many channels and riverways around the lagoon. Here we found several notable species, including Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Northern Jacana, Green Kingfisher, Mangrove Swallow, Ringed and Belted Kingfishers, and Cinnamon Hummingbird. There are numerous boat operators around the lagoon - we took a private tour with La Puesta del Sol. The tour guide was very knowledgeable about the birds and wildlife found in the lagoon. Aside from the great birding, the scenic views and pristine waters of the lagoon and mangroves were stunning.



Boat-billed Heron



Bare-throated Tiger-Heron



Northern Jacana

**Highway 200 South toward Puerto Angel:** The journey along Highway 200 from Puerto Escondido south to Puerto Angel provides birders with an exceptional opportunity to explore the region’s remarkable avian diversity. Highway 200 stretches approximately 40 miles between Puerto Escondido and Puerto Angel (about a 2 hour-drive), winding through coastal lowlands, tropical dry forests, and mangrove ecosystems. While the distance seems modest, the birding opportunities along this route were anything but small.

Although we did not drive all the way to Puerto Angel, we spent most of the day exploring the various habitats and stopping points all the way to Mazunte and San Agustinillo. Mazunte is known for its “magic town” status (a designation given in Mexico to towns that possess unique cultural, historical, and natural attributes), turtle conservation efforts, and wellness scene. San Agustinillo, on the other hand, is a more laid-back fishing village with a bohemian vibe. Notable species observed along the highway include Squirrel Cuckoo, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Altamira Oriole, Yellow-winged Cacique, Short-tailed Hawk, White-eared Hummingbird, and Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird.



Turquoise-crowned Hummingbird

## Days 5-8: Oaxaca City, Monte Alban, La Cumbre, Teotitlan del Valle and Santa Maria del Tule area

The capital of Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, sits at the convergence of multiple ecosystems, creating a remarkable variety of habitats within easy reach of the city center. The region offers opportunities to observe over 300 species without venturing more than a few hours from the hotel. Local markets offer opportunities to experience traditional Oaxacan culture and cuisine, while nearby archaeological sites provide glimpses into pre-Columbian civilizations. The protected status of archaeological sites provides indirect conservation benefits for bird populations, creating habitat in an increasingly developed landscape.



Templo de Santo Domingo de Guzman



The combination of world-class birding, comfortable accommodations, excellent food, and cultural richness makes Oaxaca City unique among birding destinations. Our birding trip coincided with the Guelagueta Festival. This event occurs on the last two Mondays of July and showcases the rich cultural heritage of the eight regions and 16 indigenous groups of Oaxaca. The festival features traditional food, folkloric dances, music, art, parades, mezcal tastings, and customs representing each region of the state. We stayed at the Grand Fiesta Americana hotel, located in historic Oaxaca, within walking distance of major attractions and just a few blocks away from where the event was taking place. An experience unlike any other; locals and visitors witnessing and participating in celebrations of cultural diversity that have brought these communities together for over 3,000 years. The beauty, complexity, and resilience of Mexican culture in its most vibrant form.

**Monte Albán Archaeological Zone:**

Designated as a world heritage site by UNESCO and about 5 miles from the city center, the ancient Zapotec ruins of Monte Albán offered excellent birding opportunities. The archaeological site's elevation of 6,400 feet and mix of open areas, scattered trees, and adjacent oak woodlands attract a diverse array of species. The site's edges blend into oak-pine forest where we encountered, among other notable species, Blue Mockingbird, Gray Silky-flycatcher, Boucard's Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, Cinnamon-rumped Seed eater, White-throated Towhee, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush.



Rufous-capped Warbler



Cinnamon-rumped Seed eater

**Santa Maria del Tule and Teotitlán del Valle:** While El Árbol del Tule is undoubtedly the main attraction, Santa Maria del Tule, located about 6 miles from Oaxaca City, offers visitors more than just its famous tree. The town maintains a traditional Zapotec character, with local artisans producing beautiful crafts including textiles, pottery, and wood carvings – making it a must visit location while in Oaxaca. Another must visit location is Teotitlán del Valle, located about 45 minutes east from Oaxaca City, the town remains famous for its traditional rug weaving using natural dyes. At approximately 5,400 feet elevation, the location is also an ideal ecological zone where highland and lowland bird species overlap. The areas around Teotitlán del Valle provide access to scrub habitats, oak woodlands, and transition zones that harbor some of Mexico’s most sought-after endemic species. The notable species we found in the area include Bridled Sparrow, Black-vented Oriole, and White-throated Towhee.



Bridled Sparrow

**La Cumbre and Sierra Norte (Hwy 175):** The road north from Oaxaca City toward Tuxtepec (Highway 175) provides access to some of the region’s best highland birding. La Cumbre, at kilometer 77, sits at approximately 9,000 feet elevation and offers access to pristine cloud forest habitat. This area is renowned for its diversity, with species such as Red Warbler, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Slate-throated Redstart, Gray-barred Wren, and Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem. The cloud forest also hosts Mountain Trogon, and with patience and luck, the elusive Dwarf Jay. We spent the morning birding along the Corral de Piedras road. The cooler temperatures and morning mist created an otherworldly birding experience – we had temperatures in the morning at around 50°F, warming to 60°F by afternoon.





Mountain Trogon

Oaxaca is an exceptional birding destination, offering incredible diversity across multiple elevations and habitats. From the pine-oak forests of the Sierra Norte to the South and Coastal Plains, we encountered an array of Mexican endemic and near-endemic species that make this region a must-visit for birders. What's more, birding in Oaxaca provides a window into one of Mexico's most diverse regions, where ancient cultures developed in harmony with extraordinary natural wealth.

For seasonal considerations, the dry season from November through April generally offers the most comfortable birding conditions, with clear skies and mild temperatures. This period also coincides with the presence of numerous North American migrants, significantly increasing species diversity. The rainy season from June through October presents different opportunities and challenges. While afternoon thunderstorms can interrupt birding activities, the increased insect activity and lush vegetation create excellent conditions for resident species.

This trip presented an opportunity to connect with nature, enjoy the local cuisine, and experience one of Mexico's richest cultural landscapes. For birders seeking to expand their horizons beyond familiar North American species, Oaxaca represents an ideal introduction to Neotropical birding. The infrastructure is excellent, the people are welcoming, the history and culture are palpable, and the birds are extraordinary.

A complete list of birds observed during our trip can be found at:  
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/400686>