

LEGACYLINE NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2009

Birding trips to SE Chiapas State, the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve, and Northwest Mexico occupied the first two months of this year. While guiding for these tours my Mexico year list soared to 616 species – not bad for thirty-three days in the field. Even better than the high total number are the individual sightings themselves, some of which are exceptional and likely not to be repeated soon.

During the January tour to SE Chiapas [Tropical Birding amid the Mayan Ruin], while birding the jungle trails at the Bonampak ruins site, we watched a SPECKLED MOURNER form less than 15 feet. It had flown to us in response to tape playback of its voice – likely the first voice recording of this species ever to come from Mexico. This species is rarely recorded in Mexico, and for me easily outdistanced such spectacular gems as Lovely Cotinga, Spotted Wood-Quail, and Scarlet Macaw for *Bird-of-the-Trip!*

The following day an even bigger surprise awaited us as we were privileged to document Mexico's first WHITE-WINGED BECARD. This cooperative bird allowed close observation and outstanding photo opportunities. Pat Stermitz of CO stated that she had briefly seen a black bird with white streaks. Five minutes later Kraig Kemper of WA pointed out to me Pat's bird – and then pandemonium followed, as I shouted; "Everyone get on this bird – it is a NEW BIRD for Mexico!" Yes, the fun is in the *FINDING!*

In my experience the month of February is a fabulous time period to pursue the legendary Horned Guan in the protected oak covered summits of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas – El Triunfo. During our custom tour we located FIVE different birds while walking the reserve trails, with another half dozen unseen males heard calling from the forest canopy. This trip was my eleventh visit to the mountain since 2001, and it just keeps getting better. We documented the occurrence of Mexico's most exotic hummingbird – the BLUE-THROATED GOLDENTAIL. While walking through the coffee *finca* above Paval, Clyde Blum of TN said that he had 'a hummer with a purple head and a bright red bill', and my head snapped in his direction. I had long sought to photograph this hummingbird in Mexico – likely the first documentation of the species since Rook & Galley collected 18 specimens in the Sierra Madre de Chiapas during November and December of 1962, 1963, & 1965. Is this species simply an irregular winter visitor? Did the mid-February date give me an opportunity to chance upon it for the first time in eleven Pacific slope descents down from El Triunfo? Just how lucky were we to photograph it? I will learn in time...

As I headed to NW Mexico in late February I cautiously hoped for even more electrifying sightings. Birding the *barranca* country along the Durango Highway with a custom group of excellent FL birders had its own rewards. Among them were Eared Queztl, Red Warbler, Green-striped Brush-Finch, and Tufted Jay. And if these species were not enough, we recorded the earliest known arrival date of SINALOA MARTIN at their nest site in the high country – on FEB 26th we had four to six birds re-exploring their nest crags after six months in the southern hemisphere.

HERITAGE STYLE CRUISE – WESTERN MEXICO:

The Norwegian Star Cruise Line offers an eight-day cruise along the west coast of Mexico leaving from Los Angeles, CA from September 26th – October 3rd, 2009.

Balcony Rooms [all have a nice deck overlooking the water] are available for at a great price of \$870/pp sharing a double, including taxes and port charges [Inside rooms - \$570/pp]. All meals and run of the ship are included in the NCL Freestyle Package.

Legacy Tours will organize no-cost seabird spotting from the upper deck of the ship while in deep water -- albatrosses, *Pterodroma* petrels, & tropical pelagics. In addition, Legacy Tours will provide optional low-cost day trips for endemic birds at the three scheduled ports of call – Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan, & Puerto Vallarta:

- a. Cabo - Gray Thrasher, Xantus' Hummingbird, & Belding's Yellowthroat
- b. Mazatlan - Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Elegant Quail, Purplish-backed Jay, and Sinaloa Crow
- c. Pto. Vallarta - Citreoline Trogon, San Blas Jay, and Sinaloa Wren

The price is right for this RELAXING birding trip that will be fun for all who enjoy cruising - birders, non-birding spouses, and family friends. Cabins are limited, as is the vehicle space for the land-tours, so touch base with our office ASAP hold a cabin...

CHECK-LIST OF THE BIRDS OF MEXICO

Clients traveling with Legacy Tours in Mexico often give high praise the Check-list of Birds we use for our daily tallies while on tour. Hal Opperman and I have recently completed a revision of this checklist, and I have chosen to make it available as a PDF download from our website. It is designed to be printed front and back on a page, and includes all regularly occurring AOU species listed numerically in order from Great Tinamou[#1] to House Sparrow[#1013]. In addition, and most importantly, it follows the recent Clement's update and includes the identifiable *species groups*, so that a more complete accounting of forms can be kept while on tour in Mexico. Charlie Kahle, our web site manager, will likely have it all in place within a fortnight.

OAXACA IN JULY

One space my likely become available for our Breeding Season Tour of Oaxaca, NW Chiapas, and the Sierra Los Tuxtlas, Veracruz State -- focused birding with fantastic results! Oaxaca & NW Chiapas: Southern Mexico with a focus on 40+ endemics 15 days & nights - 20 different wrens, including 'most wanted' Sumichrast's and Nava's Wrens - begins and ends in Oaxaca City -- \$2,995. If you have an interest in joining this endemic rich tour please let us know ASAP...

GRATEFUL APPRECIATION

Our success during the past twenty years is the direct result of our many friends choosing to travel with us, and their sharing by word of mouth a positive response to a variety of programs offered by Legacy Tours... so once again, we sincerely say -- THANK YOU.

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