

Eastern Mexico – 23 November to 1 December 2002

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Opting for a different style of turkey, Bob Cecil, Jim Dinsmore, Jim Sinclair and I decided to spend our 2002 Thanksgiving break birding northeastern Mexico. Our plan was to bird several inland sites in the states of Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosi with a stop in coastal Tamaulipas on our way home. Other than unusually cool weather and two days of fog, the trip was uneventful weather-wise. Our trip list included a respectable 244 species and was fairly representative of this season and region. The following trip report provides more detail on our itinerary and birding highlights. A final note to readers: birders and tour leaders unwilling to share their birding information in a similar format are encouraged to stop reading now.

22 November (Friday)

Our plan called for us to rendezvous in Waco, Texas at around 10 p.m. I left my home in Mississippi at noon and arrived in Waco at 9:30 p.m., a few minutes behind Bob and the two Jim's who were arriving from Iowa. After leaving a car at the Waco airport (free long-term parking) and piling all of our gear into my Honda Accord, we were off by 10:30 p.m.

23 November (Saturday)

We had smooth driving to Laredo and arrived there at 3:15 a.m. anticipating a quick border crossing. It was here that we encountered our only mishap of the trip. I had been careful to bring all the necessary paperwork for bringing my vehicle into Mexico, but had somehow managed to leave home without the necessary papers (birth certificate, passport, etc.) necessary for me to personally enter Mexico! After trying unsuccessfully to bluff our way in, we were trying to figure out what to do next when luck intervened. While standing in line at the Mexican Customs counter, an English speaking woman in the next line overheard our dilemma and offered a solution. She suggested we return to the U.S. side and obtain an affidavit of citizenship from an all-night notary whose business card she gave us. She had apparently encountered a similar problem a few hours earlier and somehow learned of this solution. So, we headed back to the U.S. side. Forty-five minutes and \$25 later, we were back at the border and crossed by 6 a.m. without mishap. What a fortuitous break!

We drove south from Nuevo Laredo, skirted the east edge of Monterrey, and arrived in Gomez Farias at 2:45 p.m. (390 miles from Laredo). We didn't stop for any birding but did see several hundred Greater White-fronted Geese and a lone Sandhill Crane north of Monterrey, 3 Muscovy Ducks along Highway 85 just north of the turn to Gomez, and the "usual" Bat Falcon on the way up to Gomez. We also stopped at a roadside stand in Ciudad Victoria and bought a large bag of excellent oranges that lasted the entire trip. After all the driving, we relaxed for dinner at Bocatoma II, a small outdoor restaurant at the end of a winding gravel road south of Gomez Farias. How anyone regularly finds this

place is beyond me, but the meal is worth it! We ordered a kilo of lognastinos for appetizers, followed by fresh fish for dinner. And I mean fresh – we ordered the meal, watched a small boy catch the fish from a holding pond, and were eating them 20 minutes later. While waiting for the meal, we drank a couple of cervezas and took a stroll around the property. Bob and I had no more reached the edge of the lagoon when a female Sungrebe lazily swam across the channel right in front of us, affording us all great looks. We also enjoyed seeing Amazon Kingfisher, Linnated Woodpecker, and Gray-collared Becard. We spent the night at Hotel Posada in Gomez – nice rooms for about \$12 per person per night. We were in bed by 7 p.m. (415 miles by car)

24 November (Sunday)

We spent today birding the Gomez Farias area between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m., mostly along the roads to Alta Cima. At dawn, we heard (but did not see) a Collared Forest-Falcon from our motel. Birds seen in this area included Zone-tailed Hawk, several Squirrel Cuckoos, Red-lored Parrot (one of the few times we saw parrots well enough to identify them!), Golden-olive Woodpecker, Cassin's Vireo, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Crimson-collared Grosbeak. An interesting non-bird sighting involved a small leaf butterfly that we all studied at length. After a brief siesta in mid-afternoon, we headed back to Bocatoma II for a charter boat ride on the lagoon (about \$5 for 4 people for an hour). We spent about an hour cruising the lagoon and river in a motorboat with the operator, Jorge. It was a little cumbersome for birding, but we did see some nice scenery (deep blue pools and a small waterfall) and had looks at a Great Black-Hawk, a Blue-crowned Motmot (everyone but me), and an unidentified trogon. We enjoyed another dinner of fresh fish, lognastinos, and cerveza before returning to Gomez for the night. We also learned of a second motel in Gomez that may be of interest to birders – Hostal Casa de Piedra (phone 834-316-6941, email: [fameco@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:fameco@prodigy.net.mx), website is [http://tourbymexico.com/elcielo\\_casadepiedra](http://tourbymexico.com/elcielo_casadepiedra)). Rooms were about \$40 per night and they have a good library of Mexican natural history books. (26 miles by car, 3 miles on foot)

25 November (Monday)

We spent this morning birding the Gomez Farias area again before heading south towards El Naranjo at noon. Between 7 a.m. and noon we slowly birded and drove the 9 km road from Gomez to Alta Cima. There were a couple of rough spots along the first kilometer, but we found the road otherwise fine and easily passable by my Honda. Birding highlights included Thicket Tinamou (heard only), Olivaceous and Ivory-billed woodcreepers, White-throated Thrush, Blue Mockingbird, and spectacular view of a male Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia. At noon we headed south, stopping for pollo asado and cokes in Loma Alta (\$10.50 for the 4 of us). We arrived in El Naranjo at 3 p.m., checked in to the motel (Hotel De Valle, about \$15 per person per night), and birded locally from 3:30 to 6 p.m. The birding was good and we saw Muscovy Duck, Green Parakeet, Black Phoebe, White-winged Tanager, and Blue Bunting. Dinner consisted of street tacos and cerveza at a small stand near the motel – my favorite Mexican meal. (102 miles by car, 2 miles on foot)

26 November (Tuesday)

We spent today birding several locales in the mountain just west of El Naranjo and found the birding to be generally very slow. Birds were downright scarce, although we eventually found a couple of mixed-species flocks that were worth the wait. Along Highway 80 before El Sabinito, we found a cooperative Elegant Trogon and little else. On Maguey de Ote Road south of Highway 80 at kilometer 148 we found Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, White-winged Tanager, and Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Farther west along Highway 80, we stopped near the fire tower for a short hike and a lunch of kippers and triskets. Birding was very slow here, but we finally found a good flock that included Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Mockingbird, Crescent-chested and Townsend's warblers, Painted Redstart, and Hepatic Tanager. But certainly the most interesting sighting was an odd-looking critter we found crossing the road. It turned out to be a whip scorpion. We again spent the night at Hotel De Valle in El Naranjo and enjoyed another dinner of street tacos and cerveza. (46 miles by car, 2 miles on foot)

27 November (Wednesday)

This was perhaps the best birding day of the trip, both in terms of species diversity (117) and rarities. The day dawned gray and foggy, and we encountered intermittent light drizzle throughout the day. We began by birding the gravel road near kilometer 152 until about 10 a.m. Unlike the previous day, we found the bird activity excellent. At one point, Jim S. heard some distant parrots that didn't sound quite right. Well, after a few seconds of searching the foggy sky, we discovered why – they were macaws! Although they were quite distant, we thoroughly enjoyed seeing and hearing a flock of 34 Military Macaws. Other highlights here included 2 female Barred Antshrikes, 3 Rufous-browed Peppershrikes, Carolina Wren, 2 Blue Mockingbirds, and several active flocks of passerines studied at close range. We then retraced our way towards El Naranjo, stopping briefly at a wetland east of town where we saw Muscovy Ducks, 2 "Mexican" Mallards, and a male Altamira Yellowthroat. Then it was south towards Xilitla. We saw 3 Bat Falcons en route and saw a Common Loon on an unnamed lake just north of Ciudad Valles. We then found a fabulous wetland along Highway 85 just south of Rio Tampaon, where we birded from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Among the abundant waterbirds we saw 2 Roseate Spoonbills, White Ibis, Canvasback, a male Snowy Plover, and an American Pipit. But all of this was overshadowed by a juvenile Surf Scoter! At times we could see this bird in the same scope view as the spoonbills, certainly an oddity for this part of the world. Farther south on Highway 85, we took a dirt road west between kilometers 350 and 351. Along this road we saw a male Aplomado Falcon, Scrub Euphonia, and Yellow-winged and Blue-gray tanagers. We then returned to Highway 85 and made a beeline for Xilitla, where we spent the night in El Castillo (about \$25 per person per night). That evening we enjoyed a traditional Mexican dinner on the square just above the hotel. (168 miles by car, 1 mile on foot)

28 November (Thursday)

When we awoke this morning, we found the surrounding mountains shrouded in fog. And although we couldn't enjoy the scenery, we did enjoy the spectacular show by 2 Bat Falcons as they chased White-collared Swifts above the motel! We spent the remainder of the day birding the ruins at Las Pozas, a sculpture garden in an incredible surreal jungle-like setting. The weather was less than great and included fog, a light rain, and temperatures that hovered in the mid-50s all day after an early morning low of 44! Birding at Las Pozas was good and we found Emerald Toucanet, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Slate-colored Solitaire, Common Bush-Tanager, an incredible flock of 62+ Yellow-winged Tanagers, and Montezuma Oropendola. A little birding just east of town produced a large flock of Green Parakeets and Amazon and Ringed kingfishers. We again spent the night at El Castillo and enjoyed an excellent dinner at a small Italian restaurant on the town square. (29 miles by car, 2 miles on foot)

29 November (Friday)

We birded at Las Pozas from 7 a.m. until 1 p.m. under much better weather conditions than the previous day. We were delayed a bit getting in when a suspicious-looking man demanded payment from us (there is a \$2 per person per day entrance fee), but refused to give us a receipt. So we birded the road and waited until 9:30 a.m. when the regular work crew arrived. Highlights included Zone-tailed Hawk, Bat Falcon, Collared Forest-Falcon (heard only), many Squirrel Cuckoos, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Emerald Toucanet, a spectacular Violaceous Trogon, Rose-throated Becard, Slate-colored Solitaire, and Common Bush-Tanager. After Las Pozas, we retraced our path northward towards Ciudad Valles. We again stopped at the wetland south of Rio Tampacon where we saw many of the birds seen here two days earlier, including the juvenile Surf Scoter, a Semipalmated Plover, and a cooperative male Collared Plover. At Ciudad Valles, we turned east on Highway 70 and drove the short distance (~10 miles) to the Taninul resort where we spent the night (\$15 per person). We birded the grounds in late afternoon and enjoyed great looks at several sleeping Boat-billed Herons in the trees by the little museum. After dark we drove the roads hoping for a nightjar or one of several nocturnal mammal species, but all we found was a calling Mottled Owl. (68 miles by car, 2 miles on foot)

30 November (Saturday)

We departed Taninul resort at 5:30 a.m. and drove straight to La Pesca, arriving there at 11:30 a.m. On the way Jim S. spotted a pair of Eurasian Collared-Doves along Highway 180 on the north edge of Manuel. We spent all afternoon birding the vast lagoons near La Pesca and ocean watching from the jetty at the inlet east of town. Some of the many highlights included a subadult Masked Booby resting on the beach, a fly-by juvenile Northern Gannet, hundreds of waders (13 species) including numerous Reddish Egrets, a single Ross's Goose in a small flock of Snow Geese, 16 species of shorebirds, Gull-billed and Common terns, and a Linnated Woodpecker. We spent the night at Hotel Rivera del Rio in La Pesca at a cost of about \$50 per room. We found this motel adequate, but very noisy. We ate dinner at the hotel restaurant – fresh speckled sea trout and cerveza for about \$7 per person. (272 miles by car, 1 mile on foot)

1 December (Sunday)

We spent the early morning (7 to 9:30 a.m.) birding the lagoons and beach at La Pesca before heading for the border. Many of this morning's birds were repeats from yesterday, but we did see Clapper Rail, 5 more shorebird species including Whimbrel, Dunlin, and Wilson's Snipe, and 2 "Mangrove" Yellow Warblers. A quick attempt to find a Black Rail was unsuccessful. On our way north we found another pair of Eurasian Collared-Doves at kilometer 89 on Highway 97. We arrived in Reynosa at 1:10 p.m. and quickly turned in the vehicle permit. We encountered heavy traffic on the U.S. side, and it took us 1 hour and 15 minutes to pass through U.S. customs. We arrived in Waco at 10:30 p.m. after another 1 ½ to 2 hours of delays near San Antonio and Austin. Thus ended another fabulous birding trip to Mexico. (656 miles by car)

For additional information, contact Bob Cecil ([wewarb@aol.com](mailto:wewarb@aol.com)) or Stephen J. Dinsmore ([sdinsmore@cfr.msstate.edu](mailto:sdinsmore@cfr.msstate.edu)).

Birds seen on eastern Mexico trip, 23 November-1 December 2002 (244 species)

Thicket Tinamou  
Common Loon  
Least Grebe  
Pied-billed Grebe  
Masked Booby  
Northern Gannet  
American White Pelican  
Brown Pelican  
Neotropic Cormorant  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Little Blue Heron  
Tricolored Heron  
Reddish Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black-crowned Night-Heron  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron  
Boat-billed Heron  
White Ibis  
White-faced Ibis  
Roseate Spoonbill  
Wood Stork  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck  
Greater White-fronted Goose  
Snow Goose  
Ross's Goose  
Muscovy Duck  
Gadwall  
American Wigeon  
(Mexican) Mallard  
Blue-winged Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Green-winged Teal  
Canvasback  
Ring-necked Duck  
Lesser Scaup  
Surf Scoter  
Osprey  
White-tailed Kite  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Gray Hawk  
Common Black-Hawk  
Great Black-Hawk  
Harris' Hawk  
Roadside Hawk  
Short-tailed Hawk  
White-tailed Hawk  
Zone-tailed Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Collared Forest-Falcon  
Crested Caracara

American Kestrel  
Aplomado Falcon  
Bat Falcon  
Plain Chachalaca  
Northern Bobwhite  
Clapper Rail  
American Coot  
Sungrebe  
Sandhill Crane  
Black-bellied Plover  
Collared Plover  
Snowy Plover  
Semipalmated Plover  
Killdeer  
American Oystercatcher  
Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Whimbrel  
Long-billed Curlew  
Marbled Godwit  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Sanderling  
Western Sandpiper  
Least Sandpiper  
Dunlin  
Stilt Sandpiper  
Short-billed Dowitcher  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Wilson's Snipe  
Laughing Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Gull-billed Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Royal Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Common Tern  
Forster's Tern  
Black Skimmer  
Rock Dove  
Red-billed Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Inca Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
White-tipped Dove  
Green Parakeet  
Military Macaw  
Red-lore Parrot  
Squirrel Cuckoo  
Greater Roadrunner  
Groove-billed Ani  
Mottled Owl  
White-collared Swift  
Vaux's Swift  
Wedge-tailed Sabrewing  
Magnificent Hummingbird

Violaceous Trogon  
Elegant Trogon  
Blue-crowned Motmot  
Ringed Kingfisher  
Belted Kingfisher  
Amazon Kingfisher  
Green Kingfisher  
Emerald Toucanet  
Acorn Woodpecker  
Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Smoky-brown Woodpecker  
Golden-olive Woodpecker  
Linneated Woodpecker  
Olivaceous Woodcreeper  
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper  
Barred Antshrike  
Northern Beardless Tyrannulet  
Tufted Flycatcher  
Greater Pewee  
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher  
*Empidonax* sp. (not Yell.-bell.)  
Black Phoebe  
Eastern Phoebe  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
Dusky-capped Flycatcher  
Brown-crested Flycatcher  
Great Kiskadee  
Boat-billed Flycatcher  
Social Flycatcher  
Tropical Kingbird  
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
Gray-collared Becard  
Rose-throated Becard  
Masked Tityra  
Loggerhead Shrike  
White-eyed Vireo  
Cassin's Vireo  
Blue-headed Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Rufous-browed Peppershrike  
Green Jay  
Brown Jay  
Tamaulipas Crow  
Chihuahuan Raven  
Common Raven  
Tree Swallow  
Mangrove Swallow  
N. Rough-winged Swallow  
Cliff Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Black-crested Titmouse  
Spot-breasted Wren  
Carolina Wren  
Bewick's Wren  
House Wren  
Sedge Wren  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
Eastern Bluebird  
Brown-backed Solitaire

Slate-colored Solitaire  
Clay-colored Robin  
White-throated Thrush  
Northern Mockingbird  
Blue Mockingbird  
American Pipit  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Nashville Warbler  
Crescent-chested Warbler  
Northern Parula  
Tropical Parula  
“Mangrove” Yellow Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
Townsend’s Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
Northern Waterthrush  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Common Yellowthroat  
Altamira Yellowthroat  
Gray-crowned Yellowthroat  
Wilson’s Warbler  
Painted Redstart  
Golden-crowned Warbler  
Rufous-capped Warbler  
Common Bush-Tanager  
Hepatic Tanager  
Summer Tanager  
Flame-colored Tanager  
White-winged Tanager  
Blue-gray Tanager  
Yellow-winged Tanager  
Scrub Euphonia  
Yellow-throated Euphonia  
Elegant Euphonia  
White-collared Seedeater  
Olive Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Lincoln’s Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
Black-headed Saltator  
Crimson-collared Grosbeak  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Blue Bunting  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Melodious Blackbird  
Brewer’s Blackbird  
Great-tailed Grackle  
Bronzed Cowbird  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Hooded Oriole  
Altamira Oriole  
Audubon’s Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Scott’s Oriole  
Montezuma Oropendola  
Lesser Goldfinch  
House Sparrow