

Birding Guerrero, Mexico: The Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo Area and the Sierra Madre del Sur

By Nick Lethaby and Brad Waggoner

Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo (henceforth referred to as the “Zihua area”) is a popular resort on the northern coast of Guerrero state in western Mexico. Although it is not covered in Howell's Bird-finding Guide to Mexico, it is a good location for birders who want quality birding close to their hotels. This makes it an ideal location for vacations with non-birding family members or friends, or for birders who just want to enjoy a few hours of relaxed birding most days. In addition it is relatively close to the endemic-rich Sierra Madre del Sur for those who prefer a more focused birding trip.

In this guide, we will begin with some general information about timing of our visits. We will then overview the birds in six discreet coastal areas in the Zihua area, as well as briefly discussing pelagic birding. Next we cover birding in the Sierra Madre del Sur before finishing with some discussion of birding techniques and identification problems in the area.

Timing of our visits

We have made 9 visits between us to Guerrero, seven by Lethaby and two by Waggoner. Eight of these (and all to the Zihua area) were made between late November and early April. The ninth covered the interior slope of the Sierra de Atoyac in late July. By late March some of the more skulking local breeders, such as Flammulated Flycatcher are beginning to sing, which can make detection easier. The pygmy-owl species are also much more vocal and responsive at this time. However this is counterbalanced by many of the migrants leaving the lowlands (possibly moving upslope to the lush areas in adjacent mountains based on our spring observations there). Birders wishing to focus more exclusively on breeding species would probably be better served by visiting later in April through into June, when the rainy season begins. The rainy season typically continues into October and sometimes into November. If you are planning to visit in the late March to early April period, be aware that the national ‘Semana Santa’ holiday occurs then and results in a large number of Mexican nationals arriving from the interior to enjoy the beach. This raises prices and can result in congestion.

With the exception of the July visit to the sierras, all these visits were made as part of family vacations. This greatly limited the amount of time that could be spent birding and meant we could rarely visit more distant locations. A dedicated birding trip would undoubtedly turn up new discoveries.

The Coastal Zone

There are six primary areas birders can visit or base themselves at:

- Troncones
- Playa Linda
- Ixtapa

- Zihua Valley
- Playa La Ropa
- Barra de Potosi

The first five of these offer good access to thorn forest which is preserved in several ecological zones established in the area. From many hotels or condominium complexes, it is a convenient 5-10 minutes walk to get into productive habitat, eliminating the need to rent a vehicle for the whole duration of the trip. Barra de Potosi is a wetland some 25 km distant from the main Zihua area.

Before discussing individual locations, we will begin by giving an overview of the typical resident and migrant species that are widespread throughout the area. This will avoid unnecessary repetition. In the case of some of the thorn forest species, known presence of less common species or apparent absence of (reasonably conspicuous) commoner species will be listed for each site.

North American migrants: The most frequent North American migrants are Pacific-slope, Ash-throated (exact status unclear but certainly present and perhaps fairly common), Least, and Willow (mostly in wetter areas) Flycatchers, Warbling and Bell's Vireos, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Swainson's Thrush, MacGillivray's, Yellow, Wilson's, Nashville, and Black-and-white Warblers, American Redstart (mainly in/by mangroves), Northern Waterthrush (mainly in/by mangroves), Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer and Western Tanagers, Orchard Oriole, and Painted Bunting. You can expect to encounter most of these. Uncommon to rare North American migrants we have noted in the coastal areas have included Black-capped and Plumbeous Vireos, Tennessee and Magnolia Warblers, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted, Black-headed, and Blue Grosbeaks, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Baltimore Oriole.

Altitudinal Migrants: We have noted a number of species that are presumed to be uncommon to rare winter wanderers from the adjacent interior and montane areas. In some cases, these may simply be highly localized or rare residents. These species include Gray-collared Becard, Masked Tityra, Sinaloa Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Golden Vireo (several times), Varied Bunting, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, and Black-vented Oriole.

Disturbed area residents: Disturbed areas include parks, gardens, overgrown lots, brush, and areas of longer grass. Species found in these habitats include Roadside Hawk, Inca, White-winged, Common Ground- (rather local) and Ruddy Ground-Doves, Groove-billed Ani, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Thick-billed and Tropical Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, Vermillion Flycatcher (prefers wetter areas), Rufous-backed Robin, White-collared Seedeater, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Grayish Saltator, Yellow-winged Cacique, Bronzed Cowbird, Great-tailed Grackle, and Streak-backed Oriole. Many of these can occur in thorn forest habitat as well, especially along the edges. Northern Rough-winged Swallow is common overhead.

Thorn forest species: Widespread species that can be seen at most thorn forest sites are West Mexican Chachalaca, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-tipped Dove, White-fronted Parrot, Citrolene Trogon, Golden-cheeked, Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Brown-crested, Dusky-capped (winter), and Nutting's Flycatchers, White-throated Magpie Jays, and Happy and Rufous-naped Wrens. More localized or difficult to see species include Yellow-headed Parrot, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Ferruginous and Colima Pygmy-Owls, Russet-crowned Motmot, Flammulated Flycatcher, White-bellied Wren, San Blas Jay, White-lore Gnatcatcher, Red-breasted Chat, Orange-breasted and Blue Buntings (both also in disturbed habitats adjacent to thorn forest), and Scrub Euphonia.



Yellow-headed Parrot at Troncones. Photo by Wil Mertz.

Ixtapa

Highlights: *Mottled Owl, Russet-crowned Motmot, Gray-breasted Martin, Mangrove Swallow, and Spot-breasted Oriole with several other localized thorn-forest species at one site*

Account by Nick Lethaby, numerous visits to these sites, except the old road to Zihuatanejo and Las Brisas car park, which were only visited two or three times each

There are numerous hotels along the Ixtapa main drag, such as the Krystal and Pacifico (both good for families with kids) as well as more upscale offerings such as the Barcelo and Intercontinental. Additional hotels, such as the Las Brisas, are set in the hillside at the south end of the beach.

The "Main Drag", the Marina, and the Marina Golf Course

The main road through Ixtapa to the marina must be one of the best places in Mexico to see Gray-breasted Martin. These can be seen anywhere along the road, often high-up, but

perch low-down on buildings in the mornings and evenings to give great looks. Mangrove Swallows seem rather local in the Zihua area but can usually be seen around the marina itself. The main road has a number of flowering trees along it that in the right condition can attract a lot of orioles (Orchard, Streak-backed and even Black-vented) and migrant warblers, along with the ubiquitous Tropical Kingbirds and Social Flycatchers.

Immediately east of the main road through Ixtapa to the marina and north of the road that leads towards Playa Linda lies the Marina golf course. The surrounding mangroves, scrub, and rough grass offer a nice selection of migrants and “disturbed habitat” species. There are a number of tracks that lead through scrub and mangrove patches around the perimeter of the golf course. One species to look for is Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, although I am uncertain of this species’ exact status because of identification problems with seedeaters in basic plumage. In early April I found a flock with multiple males molting into breeding plumage and suspect that they are fairly common in the Zihua area.

Avenue Paseo del Palomar

This area is a convenient walk from most of the hotels in Ixtapa and provides access to an area of mature thorn forest. Head inland along Paseo del Palomar from the coast road. After passing the Mexican Navy Hospital (Sanatorio), there are a number of roads off to the left that have no or limited development along them. The thorn forest here is very good for birds and Russet-crowned Motmot, San Blas Jay, and Spot-breasted Oriole are all fairly easy to see. My only sighting of a Plain-capped Starthroat around Ixtapa was here. Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls were vocal and fairly easy to see during April and Mottled Owls are resident and frequently calling as well.

Las Brisas Hotel

Another area of mature thorn forest can be found around the Las Brisas Hotel’s car park and the road past the hotel. The carpark can be very birdy early in the morning with very confiding chachalacas and is a good spot to look for motmots.

The old road to Zihuatanejo

Although Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo are now connected with a modern, fast highway, about a KM or so after leaving Ixtapa, another road exits to the right that also leads to (and is signposted to) Zihuatanejo. This is the original road that connected the two towns before Ixtapa was converted to a major resort. It has very little traffic and passes through thorn scrub, making it ideal for birding. Although some buses do go along this road, the best strategy to employ is to take a taxi pre-dawn up the road and get dropped off. After birding, walk back to the main Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo road and catch a bus or taxi back to the hotel. I am uncertain of how to access this road from the Zihuatanejo end although obviously it will be possible.

In addition to the widespread thorn-forest species, several species occur here that appear absent down in Ixtapa itself. These include Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Colima Pygmy Owl, Red-breasted Chat, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Orange-breasted and Blue Buntings, Blue-black Grassquit, and Olive Sparrow. The main road and the track to the microwave also offer the opportunity to scan large expanses of thorn forest. Doing this at dawn is the best

chance of actually seeing a Collared Forest Falcon.

Although I have seen good birds from the old road itself, there are some side roads to explore, giving the potential to spend several mornings along here. As elsewhere in Mexico, roads to microwave transmission towers pass through good habitat. The best side road is one that leads up to the right to the microwave transmission tower on the top of the first hill, sign posted to "RMO Mazahuita". This road passes through about 2KM of good habitat.

If you proceed further towards Zihuatanejo, you will come to a gated development down on your right (towards the sea). There may be a security check at the entrance road to this complex and you should ask permission to enter. I experienced no problems accessing the area. The concrete roads and pathways enable access to a wide area of thorn forest and scrub. Because the thorn forest has been cleared around the buildings, there is grassy and weedy habitat that is good for attracting seed-eating species.

Playa Linda

Highlights: *Blue-footed Booby, Boat-billed Heron, Red-billed Pigeon, Colima Pygmy-Owl, Greenish Elenia, San Blas Jay, White-bellied Wren*

Missing: *Several localized thorn forest species such as Red-breasted Chat, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, and White-lored Gnatcatcher are as yet unrecorded*

Account by Nick Lethaby, numerous visits to these sites

Playa Linda lies 4-5km N of Ixtapa. There are three major hotels located here: the Club Med, Melia Azul, and Qualton. It can easily be visited from Ixtapa using public transport. It is best to take a taxi (100 pesos in 2013) out at or before dawn as the buses are infrequent and often crowded at this time. You can then take a bus back or even just walk or bike. Playa Linda provides good all-round birding with a combination of a beach and a lagoon, mangroves and freshwater marshes, and thorn forest.

The Creek Bridge

Immediately before the entrance to the small shops and restaurants, a small creek runs under the road, which is almost a roundabout structure here. On the seaward side, you can enjoy close views of crocodiles. Cross the street to the other side of the bridge and look carefully into the dense mangroves to enjoy close views of nesting or roosting Boat-billed Herons. These can also be seen flying across the street at first light. There are usually other waders like Roseate Spoonbills and Snowy Egrets.

The Jetty

The channel between Playa Linda and Isla Grande is very productive for birds with Royal Tern, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown and Blue-footed Boobies, Neotropic Cormorant, and Laughing Gull usually present. These species are best seen by walking out to the jetty where the boats leave for Isla Grande (also called Isla Ixtapa). The Brown Boobies are extremely confiding and may be sitting right on the jetty.

The Beach and River Mouth

Many of the species seen from the jetty can also be seen by walking north along the beach to the mouth of a small lagoon, where small numbers of shorebirds and waders can be seen, such as Reddish Egret and Marbled Godwits.

The Bike Path

From the road by the creek bridge described above, a paved bicycle path runs back towards Ixtapa. The foot and bicycle traffic is light, making it ideal for birding. The first 3 kilometers of the path have wetlands on the left hand side. These are initially mostly mangroves but then transition to more freshwater habitat, which have unfortunately become rather overgrown. The right hand side of the track borders extensive thorn forest. There is a small viewing platform that is a good spot to check the marshes. Further towards Ixtapa, you can also view the freshwater marshes by walking through the forest at points where you can see the marshes through the trees. The understory is fairly open in places, making progress easy.

Throughout these marshes, you can see small numbers of Wood Stork, Anhinga, Roseate Spoonbill, and various herons and egrets. If you can find areas of more open freshwater, you can see Least Grebe, Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Northern Jacana, and Purple Gallinules.

Pishing and owl imitations along the track can often attract quite a few mobbing passerines, especially wrens and migrant warblers. White-bellied Wren is easy to see here and I have recorded Greenish Elaenia and Tropical Parula several times, neither of which I have seen elsewhere immediately around Ixtapa. This is a good area for less common migrants and records include Plumbeous, Golden and Black-capped Vireos, Ovenbird, and Magnolia Warbler.

In addition to the widespread thorn forest species listed earlier, other species that appear commoner here than in Ixtapa include Roadside Hawk (common), Red-billed Pigeon, Thick-billed Kingbird, and Scrub Euphonia. If you start walking the track at first light, you can see Paraques sitting right in the open. After about 9.00 AM or so, large numbers of Black and Turkey Vultures rise up in the thermals. Check these flocks for Zone-tailed and Short-tailed Hawks. I have no luck with any other raptors.

A side track that goes up the hillside following some power lines at about 3.5 KMs (KM distances marked on the cycle path are FROM Ixtapa) enables further exploration of the thorn forest, although it can be too overgrown some years. Colima Pygmy-Owl occurs higher up along this track and I have seen Gray-collared Becard (likely an occasional winter wanderer only) here too. After about 3KMs the main track starts to go through more agricultural areas and runs alongside the road between Playa Linda and Ixtapa. It's worth checking weedy areas for Ruddy-breasted and White-collared Seedeaters. You can either continue to Ixtapa or walk back to Playa Linda.

Zihua Valley

Highlights: *Red-billed Pigeon, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Yellow-headed and Lilac-crowned Parrot, Golden-crowned Emerald, Flammulated Flycatcher, Collared Forest Falcon, Orange-breasted Bunting, Blue-Black Grassquit*

Account by Nick Lethaby, just two visits to this site

In 2013, it came to my attention that there is a valley near Zihuatanejo that has all four species of local parrots. It also turned out to be generally excellent for birding. In addition to the highlights above, I also noted species such as Greater Pewee, Golden Vireo, Masked Titrya and Indigo Bunting that I had never or rarely seen in the area. Because Yellow-headed Parrot is widely extirpated in Mexico and declining due to capture for the pet trade, we have decided not to publish details of this site (the Troncones birds are listed on ebird already). Birders wishing to visit this site, should contact Will Mertz (see birding tips section).



Flammulated Flycatcher at Zihua Valley. Photo by Wil Mertz.

On an unrelated note, the boat harbor in Zihuatanejo itself is another good area for numbers of Gray-breasted Martins and Mangrove Swallow has been seen there as well.

Playa La Ropa

Highlights: *Hook-billed Kite, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Colima Pygmy-Owl, White-collared Swift, Red-billed Pigeon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Flammulated Flycatcher, White-bellied Wren, Red-breasted Chat*

Missing: *San Blas Jay, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Grayish Saltator*

Account by Brad Waggoner, numerous visits to these sites

Playa La Ropa lies inside Zihuatanejo Bay on a nice beach and offers various hotel and condominium accommodation options. Most of the condominiums set in the hillsides to the east and to the south of the bay. The hillside viewing, at least in the case of our rental at Punta Marina Condominiums, provided the additional benefit of relaxed patio bird observations. Views of the adjacent ridges and skies above provided opportunities for watching birds in flight and the vegetation and remnant thorn forest around the condominium were an added benefit to bird observation in a relaxed setting.



Lesser Ground-Cuckoo at Playa La Ropa. Photo by Brad Waggoner.

The "Airport Road"

This area to the east of Playa la Ropa, provided easy and uncrowded access to fairly extensive thorn forest along with areas of disturbed habitat providing a nice mix of species. The concrete road with sidewalks heading up the hillside to the east was apparently slated as the back route from Zihuatanejo to the airport. Though there was construction work happening on the road back in February 2011, the work progressed no

further than the top of the hillside and road work has seemed to have ended for the moment anyway. In the mean time the road serves as a great place for morning walkers and birders alike given its convenient location to the accommodations in the Playa la Ropa area. The top of the hillside provides lovely views of the coastline and the prominent Roca de Potosi to the south of Zihuatanejo Bay. Access to the entrance of the road is off of the main road heading into Playa la Ropa and a block north of the large boulevard called Ave Paseo de la Bahia.

Birding efforts can be easily made from the road itself, but numerous dirt sidetracks allow additional exploration. Areas and dirt paths around the Sewage Treatment Facility are worth exploring and have provided Hook-billed Kite on more than one occasion and my lone lowland sighting of Masked Tityra. The top of the hillside and beyond the end of the concrete road end also provide many additional dirt paths to explore with both disturbed areas and thorn forest. If one felt inclined, study of *myriachus* flycatchers could take place on the top of the hill with Brown-crested, Nuttings, and Dusky-capped being the ones expected, though Ash-throated (confirmed by voice) occurs too. The hillside has also produced a few goodies like Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Sinaloa Wren, and Red-breasted Chat. During visits in February 2011, the hillside provided nice aerial viewing of White-collared Swift flocks.

On my numerous birding forays in to the "Airport Road" area, a few of the more localized forest birds that are fairly easy here include Gray Hawk, Red-billed Pigeon, Colima Pygmy-Owl (hillside above), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (low areas near Playa la Ropa), Russet-crowned Motmot, Rose-throated Becard, and White-bellied Wren. In disturbed habitat places along the road species such as Olive Sparrow and Stripe-headed Sparrow, Blue and Orange-breasted Bunting are rather common. A handful of interesting species have been recorded just twice including Golden and Plumbeous Vireos, Tropical Parula, and Indigo and Varied Buntings. Species seen only once were Mangrove Cuckoo, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Greenish Elaenia, Flammulated Flycatcher, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Tennessee Warbler, Black-vented and Baltimore Orioles.

Patio at Punta Marina Condominiums

Bird observing from the expansive, north-facing, patio at our rental unit at the Punta Marina Condominiums was excellent and similar possibilities likely exist at a number of the accommodations throughout Playa la Ropa. Viewing of overhead bird flight is terrific and surrounding vegetation and remnant thorn forest also allow casual bird observations from the patio. The spotting scope has become a fixture on the patio during visits. Calling Common Pauriques were a nightly event and a Mottled Owl called one very early morning on the February 2011 visit. On most early mornings on the March 2012 visit, the *cow, cow, cow* of a Collared Forest-Falcon and the repetitive hooting of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl were heard. Late morning and afternoon viewing from the patio provides good numbers of Magnificent Frigatebirds and Black and Turkey Vultures taking advantage of the thermals and uplift created by the adjoining ridges. Other raptors noted on several occasions included Roadside, Short-tailed, and Zone-tailed Hawks along with a seemingly resident Gray Hawk sticking lower to the treetops along the ridges. White-collared Swifts were a near daily occurrence in February 2011 and occurred once during

a March 2013 visit. Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Gray-breasted Martin are also amongst the aerial species. Species recorded once or twice in-flight included Wood Stork, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, White Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbill. The “patio list” also includes a goodly number of the species seen on the “Airport Road” and viewing of the waterbird activity (mostly Brown Pelican, Laughing Gulls, and Royal Terns) over Zihuatanejo Bay makes for some enjoyable hours of relaxed birding.

Troncones

Highlights: *Collared Forest-Falcon, Yellow-headed Parrot, Bright-rumped Attila, Flammulated Flycatcher, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Red-breasted Chat, Spot-breasted Oriole*

Missing: *Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Russet-crowned Motmot, San Blas Jay,*

Account by Brad Waggoner, About five visits to the Parrot track and Manzanillo Bay, just one to Boca de Lagunillas

Troncones is a small beachside town located about 30 km N of the Zihua Area. It is well known for its surfing and good destination to stay if you or your family are that way inclined or like to be a bit off the beaten path. There a number of hotels and guesthouses in town primarily along the beachfront and north of town stretching to Manzanillo Bay about 3 km to the north.

“Parrot Track”

In Troncones, the parrot track is 1.9 km from when you turn right (north) on the beach front road. In April 2013 it was opposite a guesthouse called the Regalo del Mar and at the end of paved section of the road. Note that the length of paving on the road has grown in recent years so this landmark may change. In addition, a couple of parts of the road in the main town barely qualified as paved so make sure you drive 1.9 km before you start searching for the track. The parrot track leads away from the beach and up the hillside to the east for about a km before becoming overgrown.

Besides reliably producing the Yellow-headed Parrot for a handful of birders visiting this area over the past few years, this locally convenient access to thorn forest species was quite productive on visits back in early February in 2011. One morning even provided the rare viewing of the secretive and elusive, forest-hunting, Collared Forest-Falcon here. Other one-time highlights included White-lored Gnatcatcher, Red-breasted Chat, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Black-vented Oriole, and Scrub Euphonia. Flammulated Flycatcher has been noted twice (once by friends of the author).

Manzanillo Bay

About a km north of the “Parrot Track” lies the beach and the adjacent hillside of Manzanillo Bay. This area provides easy birding opportunities along the main road (with very little traffic) and a “development road” to the east of the main drag is also productive. No houses have been built on this development road so it provides a very nice and convenient birding spot from accommodations on Manzanillo Bay. Along with the typical thorn forest species, I saw goodies such as Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Greenish Elaenia, Bright-rumped Atilla, Rose-throated Becard, Golden Vireo, and White-bellied

Wren and my only lowland Hepatic Tanager. An area just to the north of this hillside produced several of the expected disturbed area species such as Blue-black Grassquit, White-collared Seedeater, Olive and Striped-headed Sparrows, and Blue and Orange-breasted Buntings. Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting were also seen in this spot.

Boca de Lagunillas

This lovely little estuary lies about 7km north of Troncones and is the river mouth for the Rio Lagunillas. I walked here from my accommodation in Manzanillo Bay. The estuary is a few kilometers past the little village of Majahua which sits at the north end of Manzanillo Bay. I walked the beach on my way up (good for shorebirds in spots) and then returned via the dirt road on my way back. This lovely spot is worthy of additional birding efforts and would likely produce similar results to the beach and river mouth at Play Linda or the lagoon at Barra de Potosi. Wil Mertz has lead many trips to this spot and would be perhaps be of help for birders wanting some local knowledge of the location (see birding tips section). Waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds were well represented here and beyond White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, and Northern Jacana, a few species were recorded here that have gone undetected in other Troncones and Zihuatanejo locations during my birding efforts: Green Kingfisher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Lucy's Warbler, and Spot-breasted Oriole. The habitat on the way back along the dirt track seemed to suit Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl quite nicely, and also provided a number of both Black-chinned Hummingbird and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Wil Mertz has seen both Yellow Grosbeak and San Blas Jay (the latter usually in the coconut groves on the south side of the river).

Barra de Potosi

Highlights: *Hérons, Red-billed Tropicbird, shorebirds incl. Collared Plover, Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, kingfishers, hummingbirds*

Missing: *Most thorn forest species*

Account by Nick Lethaby, just three visits to this site

A good and relatively close area for wetland species, seabirds, and hummingbirds is Barra de Potosi, about 20 KM SE of Ixtapa. To get here, take the main highway (Route 200) south out of Zihuatanejo and turn right in the village of Los Achotes. There are four main areas to consider birding here. There are hotels here and a great selection of seafood restaurants, as well as a beautiful long beach. This is nice location for those who prefer to experience a more authentic Mexican vacation. The village of Barra de Potosi lies at the end of the road

Rufugio de Potosi

An important recent addition is the Refugio de Potosi, founded by Laurel Patrick to increase awareness of the environment and local wildlife. The Refugio has exhibits featuring many of local wildlife species, including rehabilitated and injured individuals. The Refugio has fruit, seed, and hummingbird feeders as well as an artificial pond and stream that attract many of the local species. There is an entrance fee and it is open to the public three days a week. For details, visit the website at www.elrefugiodepotosi.org. Laurel Patrick may be contacted by e-mail (Impatrick@gorge.net) or

laurel@elrefugiodepotosi.org) and can arrange access to the Refugio in off-hours on occasions if given advanced notice. Laurel can also arrange access to Carrizo Lagoon.

The hummingbird feeders offer much the easiest chance of seeing a number of the local hummingbird species. Cinnamon, Doubleday's/Broad-billed, and Plain-capped Starthroat are all regular and are joined by Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in winter. Less frequent but fairly regular species include Green-breasted Mango, Golden-crowned Emerald, and Berylline and Green-fronted Hummingbirds. Mexican Hermit has also occurred very rarely.

Other species regularly attracted to the fruit and seed feeders or to bathe and drink include West Mexican Chachalacas (very confiding here), Golden-Cheeked, Pale-Billed, and Lineated Woodpeckers, White Throated Magpie-Jay, Rufous-naped Wren, buntings, Yellow Grosbeak, and Yellow-winged Cacique. Lesser Ground-cuckoos are typically secretive but seen regularly either on the ground or in the lower bushes on the paths (especially by the Heloderma) and around the little house.

The pond and stream are especially attractive to bathing and drinking birds towards the end of day bath when the recirculation pump has been turned off and there are little pools. Belted, Ringed, Green, and, very rarely, Amazon Kingfishers show up most days around the pond or sometimes on the wires.

Carrizo Lagoon

Immediately by the entrance to the Refugio de Potosi, a large freshwater lagoon known as Carrizo Lagoon is visible from the road (and also from the watch tower in the Refugio). This can hold large numbers of herons (including Boat-billed), Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, White and White-faced Ibises, Anhinga, American White Pelican, ducks, shorebirds, and terns, depending on the water levels (highest in November and then dropping lower into the spring). This lagoon proved a good spot for kingfishers (Ringed, Green, and Amazon) and shorebirds, including a Collared Plover and several Northern Jacanas, on my early April visit. To get good looks at the birds, you need to walk down through the fields to access the lakeside. I did this and had no problems. Alternately you can ask if Laurel Patrick can arrange access.

Barra de Potosi

This is a large shallow seasonally (Oct-Mar) intertidal lagoon that holds waders, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and kingfishers. I have done hour long kayak trips twice and found them limited in effect due to the size of the lagoon and running aground in the shallows. However, you can see Ringed and Green Kingfishers and various waders this way. It might be better to try a boat up the lagoon although that will be limited by the shallow water as to how close it can get to the birds. If you are capable of enduring a long kayak session under the sun, you might enjoy more success. It may be as efficient to drive or walk the track along the N. side of the lagoon as far as you can go.

Roca de Potosi

These offshore rocks are also known simply as “Los Morros”. They are not visible directly from the village due to the headland but you can take a boat out to look around them. The rocks hold a huge Brown Booby colony along with smaller numbers of Red-billed Tropicbirds, Bridled Terns, and Brown Noddies. The terns are generally not present until into April. Masked Booby has occurred here.

Pelagic Birding

Account by Brad Waggoner, one boat trip

It is possible to charter boats at the Ixtapa marina or Zihuatanejo harbor to go offshore for pelagic species. I have not tried going further offshore but possible species in April-May can include Townsend’s, Wedge-tailed, and Christmas Island Shearwaters, Brown Noddy, and various storm-petrels if you can get far enough out.

A near-shore, small-game fishing trip taken in March 2013 confirmed that a charter boat trip to further offshore would be needed for most pelagic birds. This six hour fishing trip, starting in Zihuatanejo harbor at the main city dock at 8:00 AM, reached probably about 2 to 3 miles offshore at the furthest point. While a handful of Red-billed Tropicbirds were probably the highlight, the trip did not produce any tubenoses. The trip was a smashing success for providing excellent fishing for Black Tuna and there were indeed waterbirds to sort through while fishing. A few decent sized flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes contained a few Red Phalaropes including one showing in mostly alternate plumage. Comparative looks at Laughing Gulls and Franklin’s Gulls were a bonus, and northbound flocks of both Elegant and Common Tern added some interest. A few of the concentrations of feeding Brown Pelicans and Brown Boobies could have potentially revealed something of interest, however the boat never approached close enough to allow investigation.

The Sierra Madre del Sur

There are two roads into the Sierra Madre del Sur. Hwy 134 lies close to the Zihua area and leads over the northern and lower part of the sierra to Altamirano in the Balsas drainage. To the south of the Zihua area, closer to Acapulco, is the road from Atoyoc up and beyond Paraiso is described in Howell. We will describe the Hwy 134 to begin with as this is much the most convenient for day trips from the Zihua area.

Hwy 134

Account by Nick Lethaby, just three visits to this site

Hwy 134 leads northeast off Hwy 200 several km N of Ixtapa and is well sign-posted. The road is paved all the way and easily drivable in any vehicle. It is rather winding and certain parts are prone to have fallen rocks scattered over the road. For these reasons, you should exercise caution. The sierra is much lower here than at Atoyac and Hwy 134 lacks extensive tracts of species-rich evergreen forest. Therefore many species present above Atoyac are probably not found here. However, it should be stressed that very little birding has been done and there are likely many discoveries to be made. An additional challenge is that it seems very difficult if not impossible to access the limited areas of evergreen

forest away from the main highway. Fortunately, traffic on the road is extremely light so birding along the road is easy.

One advantage of Hwy 134 compared to birding above Atoyac is the relatively quick transect from coastal thorn forest through pine-oak with some evergreen to Balsas scrub. This would probably take only about a 3-4 hour drive. A second is the bird diversity in the coastal approaches to the pass. The very steep slopes here result in a mix of bamboo, scrub, lush barrancas, and pine-oak. Thus almost any combination of species can appear. For example, in one 100 yard stretch of road I have seen Ladder-backed Woodpecker, White-tailed Hummingbird, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Slaty Vireo, Red-breasted Chat, and Red-headed Tanager!

To date, the limited birding efforts along this highway has only proceeded to a few kms beyond the pass. It is likely that the road beyond the pass would go through good habitat for species such as Black-chested Sparrow, Dusky Hummingbird, Dwarf Vireo, Banded and Boucard's Wrens. However, confirming if this is indeed the case and where exactly these species would occur has yet to be determined.

Mesas de Bravo

Account by Brad Waggoner, just one visit to this site

Mesas de Bravo lies 4 km off Hwy 134 alongside a permanent river with some low waterfalls. There is a small park here allowing recreational access to the river that is used by local families and (Mexican) tourists. The river has a narrow strip of riparian vegetation with pine-oak on the low ridges above it.



Green-fronted Hummingbird at Mesas de Bravo. Photo by Brad Waggoner.

The turn to Mesas de Bravo is about 35-40 km from the junction of Hwy 134 and Hwy 200. Watch for a bridge called “Puente de la Cuba”. A km or so past this bridge, look for dirt road that leads off to the right. This has a painted sign to Cascadia Mesas de Bravo (note that this is NOT an official road sign). At least in April 2013, this dirt road was easily drivable in regular car. If you prefer to visit Mesas de Bravo on the way down, it is about 7 km below Vallecitos, the only village/town of any size along the road. The sign is not easily visible from the direction of Vallecitos.

There are a couple of places to check. After about a km you will reach a ford across the river. In late March 2013, the flowering trees were attracting a number of hummingbirds including Black-chinned, Broad-billed (Double Day’s), Green-fronted, Cinnamon, Berrylline, and Golden-crowned Emerald and the surrounding stream riparian habitat provided Green Kingfisher, Masked Tityra, and a Tropical Parula amongst the abundant Nashville Warblers. In another kilometer or so and a little elevation gain, the road parallels a ridge and enters nice pine/oak habitat. Acorn Woodpecker were prevalent here and a small flock of passerines included Greenish Elaenia, Black-throated Green

Warbler, Summer Tanager, Western Tanager and a few Black-headed Grosbeaks along with one female Rose-breasted Grosbeak. 4 km from the main road, you reach the park area (entrance fee) and the adjoining small village at Mesas de Bravo. The lovely riparian corridor along the river is another spot worthy of additional birding efforts. Species recorded during my visit here included Bright-rumped Attila, a potpourri of vireos including Bell's, Golden, many Warbling, Plumbeous, Cassin's, and Blue-headed, and a small flock of Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers. There was a similar mix of Hummingbirds in to the ones at the river ford visiting a flowering tree near the park building structure (there were 7 Green-fronted Hummingbirds noted between these two locations). The disturbed habitat around the village produced Rufous-capped Warbler, Black-headed Saltator, Olive Sparrow, Varied Bunting, and a pair of Scrub Euphonia visiting some mistletoe. Birders could also contact Wil Mertz for possible guiding help at this location (see birding tips section). Will has seen Emerald Toucanet a couple of times here.

The Pass

Account by Nick Lethaby, just three visits to this site

From the junction with Hwy 200, it is about 74KM to the pass. You should allow about two hours to reach the pass from the Zihua area. Note the KM posts are from Altamirano, so a 70KM distance from the Hwy 200 junction would be KM 116 on the km posts, for example. In practice, km posts are relatively infrequent along the highway. In the subsequent account, the term "before the summit" will refer to the area on the coastal side of the summit and the term "beyond the summit" will be used to refer to the area on the interior slope of the summit.

A potential problem is that the vicinity of the pass can be very windy, necessitating birding in sheltered spots. A late November visit was very windy, whereas two late March ones were not. It is not clear how seasonal the frequency of wind is at this point. In late November, the area before the summit was also in deep shade and rather cold until several hours after sunrise, which probably contributed to slow birding activity. In late March, this area got warmer much more quickly and bird activity had dropped noticeably by 10.30 AM.

Migrant flocks in this area unsurprisingly feature more interior and montane winterers such as Yellow-rumped (*auduboni*), Townsend's, Hermit, Black-throated Gray, and Black-throated Green Warblers, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Bullock's Oriole that are generally absent along the coast.

At the summit, there is an obvious large pull-off on your left as you drive up from the coast. There is room to park several cars and probably even a bus here. Our recommendation would be to start by parking here. You can then bird around the parking area and walk about half a kilometer beyond the summit along the road side. This area has generally been good for flowers and has sufficient humidity to attract some more interesting species, including Bumblebee Hummingbird (note that Calliope and Rufous occur here too), Gray-breasted Wood-wren, Tufted Flycatcher, Blue Mockingbird, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, and Rusty Sparrow.

After birding the summit area, we recommend that you turnaround and bird the more humid slopes before the summit. There are areas to pull-off on the downslope side of the road about every 2 kms or so but they are not obvious so drive slowly so you can see them and carefully park. The best roadside birding appears to be from about 72 KM-67KM. The habitat here is fairly lush semi-deciduous/evergreen in the wet barrancas (that intergrades into pines higher up on the inaccessible ridges). It is best to stop in the few areas that have relatively tall trees on both sides of road. Flowering plants are fewer here. In late November, Berylline Hummingbird was the commonest species, with a single female White-tailed Hummingbird, a female Blue-throated, and a male Golden-crowned Emerald. In late March, White-tailed Hummingbird was the predominant hummingbird with at least five present, along with a Golden-crowned Emerald. Other interesting species along this section were Ruddy Quail-Dove, Gray-breasted Wood-wren, Blue Mockingbird, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, White-throated Robin, Red-headed Tanager, Audubon's Oriole, Slaty and Golden Vireos, Rufous-capped, Golden-crowned, Fan-tailed, and Crescent-chested Warblers, Slate-throated Redstart, Red-breasted Chat, Greenish Elenia, Rusty-crowned Ground- and Rusty Sparrows.

Other species that would seem very likely to be present in this area include Amythst-throated Hummingbird, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, White-striped Woodcreeper, Golden-browed Warbler, and Rufous-capped Brushfinch. This section of the road also passes through a moderate amount of bamboo and it seems possible that Slate-Blue Seedeater would be present when it is flowering.

Beyond the summit, there are a couple of places where dirt tracks lead off where parking is easy. The habitat in this area is mostly pine-oak with some scrub and agricultural fields. The avifauna is rather reminiscent of SE Arizona with species like Greater Pewee, Bridled Titmouse, Hepatic Tanager, Grace's Warbler, and Varied Bunting. More interesting species I've seen include Blue Mockingbird, Rusty Sparrow, and Black-vented Oriole. However, most of these can also be seen immediately around and before the summit. Therefore US birders are likely to want to focus on the summit area and the approaches to it from the coast, where pockets of evergreen and semi-deciduous forest greatly increase diversity. In late November, there were many flowers in the area beyond the summit with large numbers of Rufous and Berylline Hummingbirds with singles of Black-chinned Hummingbird and Golden-crowned Emerald. It seems likely other good hummingbirds would occur at times.

The Sierra de Atoyac

This is an outstanding area for birding. The coastal slopes are closest to the Zihua area but still require about a four-five hour drive to reach good habitat (around San Vicente), necessitating a 2.00 AM start to reach it by dawn. The interior slopes require a much longer drive of perhaps seven hours, although I have not driven to these from the Zihua area.

Note that the upper reaches of this road are now in much better condition than described in Howell's guide. On the interior side, the road is paved for further than detailed in his site account. It is possible to drive right through from the coast to the interior with these

improved conditions but the drive is about five hours from the White-throated Jay area to the region above Paraiso and apparently passes through extensively modified habitat (per Jon King). The summit area of the road is also fairly rocky which may make progress tricky for a vehicle without high ground-clearance.

The Coastal Slopes

Account by Nick Lethaby, a single one-day visit to this site

The account in Howell of the coastal slopes is much more informative than this one. My impression from subsequent discussions and investigation is that the area above Paraiso is probably more productive than the area just below it. The road above Paraiso is now generally in good shape with even minibus services available up into the cloud forest.

I had some difficulty in finding my way through Atoyac. At least in the dark, I could see no sign of any zocolo and was unable to use the directions in Howell. Finding the road to Paraiso took a bit of asking, preparation, and luck. I would strongly recommend printing out a detailed street plan using multiple google maps and then carefully proceeding with many stops to check any street names. The name of the street that turns into the Paraiso road is called "Calle Hermengildo Galeana" but note that street signs are somewhat hit and miss. Also this street doesn't start until well into Atoyac. When you get into Atoyac you will be made to bear right to circulate on the one way system. I somehow got partially lost and never found the zocolo. Depending on where you join Calle Hermengildo Galeana, you will likely eventually cross a small bridge. Immediately after this you'll be on the road to Paraiso and you will notice you're passing under a sign over the road (for traffic coming in the other direction - telling them they're getting on to the one way system). I ended up asking three people, only one of whom had any clue what I was asking - probably due to my barely existent Spanish. My impression was that many streets don't cross the stream, so that may be a useful clue.

I reached the far edge of San Vicente about the time the light became birdable (about 6.30) and spent the next 2.5 hours birding the section to Paraiso. Although early April is supposed to be a good time for hummingbirds, I found only a few nectar sources and not many hummers at all. The only hummers I saw were a number of Beryllines and a single Cinnamon. A couple of times I had potentially interesting hummers chased away by Beryllines. I did see what was almost certainly a Green-fronted Hummingbird perched up high but it was too distant for a definitive view. I would strongly recommend being very patient hanging out around any nectar sources.

The coffee plantations along this section were very birdy, although numbers of some North American migrants (Swainson's Thrush, W. Tanager, Nashville and Wilson's Warbler), Brown-backed Solitaires and Masked Tityras were almost annoying. Highlights for me were Bright-rumped Attila, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Ruddy Foliage-Gleaner, Red-legged Honeycreeper (2), and Emerald Toucanet (2). Other species of interest were Orange-fronted Parakeet (common), Golden-crowned and Rufous-capped Warblers, Golden Vireo, Squirrel Cuckoo, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Sinaloa and Happy Wrens, Lineated Woodpecker, White-naped, Black, and Vaux's Swifts, Audubon's Oriole, and White-throated Robin.

Mid-morning, I drove on up past Paraiso in the hope that higher up would yield more flowers and hummers. However, the species was generally similar with the addition of a Fan-tailed Warbler. At 19 KM out of Paraiso (from the entrance road into town) I went around a sharp lefthand bend over a stream. 50 yards past the bridge, the small farm on the bend had cleared a small strip of ground upslope of the road where a small tributary stream flowed down. The clearing and water source combined to have a number of flowers so I walked up the slope to check these out. Although I only found two hummers, these were a female Short-crested Coquette and an immature male Sparkling-tailed Woodstar - both of which gave prolonged close range perched views! A repeat check of the area on the return found neither of these but added a Golden-crowned Emerald. I then headed up another 6-8 KMs. Although the forest didn't look much different to me, this is supposedly cloud forest. Pishing at my first stop brought in a Slate-colored Redstart and a pair of Common Bush-Tanagers.

The Interior Slopes

Account by Nick Lethaby, a single three-day visit in July to this site

In the following account, I have combined what I saw with additional information that came up when researching the road up to Filo de Caballo and beyond. Note my visit was in late July but the information from others is from a variety of different dates. I haven't attempted to vet the observers so cannot vouch for the reliability of all the information below.

Logistics: Probably the closest decent hotel is the Hotel Cactus in Zumpango. This is 250 pesos/night with a fan, hot shower, and flush toilets. If coming from Chilpancingo, you will need to U-turn in Zumpango and head back towards Chipancingo as the hotel is on the south/east side of a divided highway. There are plenty of restaurants in Zumpango. This is also the location of the nearest Pemex station

The road to Filo de Caballo is clearly signposted to that town only. This road is paved to beyond (not sure how far) the "lumber camp" at 64 km. This lumber camp has had some new construction that appears to be some cabanas and toilets. However construction is either going very slowly or it has been abandoned half built (as is common in Mexico). If some accommodation does get completed here, please let other birders know about it. There are small shops at multiple villages along the road with multiple restaurants in Xochilapa (at 12 km) and in Filo de Caballo. I used one called El Pinito that was a km or so before Filo de Caballo (and just after Aviacion). It had a menu board which simplified ordering as I have virtually no spanish. So it's easy to stay up on this highway if you can sort out sleeping. I just slept one night in the car, but it would be best to target two nights up here or even more.

It is decidedly cold at night and early in the morning, even in summer. I was unprepared for how cold and windy it could be (in July) so make sure you have a thick sweatshirt, warm hat, windbreaker, etc. I think you need three good layers for the first hour or so. My three were not warm enough and hampered my ability to bird. I managed to sleep OK despite the cold but a sleeping bag or warm blanket is really needed.

Birding: Good birds can be seen from the main highway 95 after you leave Zumpango and before you get to the road for Filo de Caballo. In particular, Gray-breasted Woodpecker is easy to see from the main road in the first 2.5 – 4 km out of Zumpango in the early morning (and probably all the way to the Filo de Caballo junction). Simply scan the organ pipe cacti until you find a woodpecker. In the morning, I saw 6 with fairly low effort. A lot of the views can be distant and a scope would definitely help get good views quickly. However I found 3 in a cactus close to the road around 3 KM out. Also I found a path up into the thorn forest for Black-chested Sparrow, Orange-breasted Bunting, Banded Wren, etc. Just over 3 KM out of Zumpango, you can turn left on the paved road into Huitziltepec. Go about 1.5-2 km along here and there will some more organ pipe cacti close to this much quieter road. The woodpecker is also here. Just past the cacti there is a nice thorn forest valley with Banded Quail, Russet-crowned Motmot, Mangrove and Lesser Ground-Cuckoos among other birds. However these birds are present on the Filo de Caballo road. I would recommend playback to assist in getting better looks at the quail.

The Filo de Caballo road has a surprising amount of traffic, especially in the late afternoon/early evening and it is not always easy to park. However there are plenty enough places to stop and bird. The first 21 km are thorn scrub and probably most species can be seen by just checking one area. Although previous records for Balsas Screech Owl have been in the first 1-3 km, I found this species higher up the road. Generally my experience was that Black-chested Sparrows, Dusky and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, Black-vented Oriole, and Banded Wrens were found at a number of locations in the first 21 km so you should see these fairly easily. I spent a lot of time around the sharp righthand bend at 17.3 km (there is a small pull-out just before the bend). One observer noted Pileated Flycatcher, Slate-blue Seedeater, and White-throated Flycatcher here. I was successful in located a Pileated Flycatcher (required playback) at this bend. I did find a fair amount of bamboo here but it was not seeding, so the absence of the seedeaters was hardly surprising and they are likely erratic here (there is much more bamboo on the coastal slope). Neither pishing or playback revealed any White-throated Flycatchers. An evening attempt for Balsas Screech Owl using playback was successful and I had great looks. The bird responded about 100 yards or so below the bend. I was able to coax it into the open red-barked trees on the slope upwards of the road where it could be seen easily. During the early morning, pishing stirred up quite a few birds including Yellow Grosbeak, Greater Pewee, Hepatic Tanager, and Rufous-capped Warblers. I had probable looks at Nutting's Flycatchers and 2-3 Russet-crowned Motmots were present as well. In July, there are white-flowering trees until about km 21 that attract hummingbirds. Other observer have noted Green-fronted and Beautiful Hummingbirds but I cannot recall at what time of year. Lesser Roadrunner and Dwarf Vireo has been reported from km 19. I had a quick view of a Fan-tailed Warbler around km 21.

About km 22, the habitat transitions to scrub oaks. I spent some time around km 24-26 using pishing and playback for Dwarf Vireo but had no success. Plumbeous Vireos were present along with Bridled Titmouse, Orange-billed Nightingale Thrush (common and singing), Berylline Hummingbird, Chipping and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Black-

vented Orioles, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Happy Wren. I had to try quite hard for Boucard's Wren but eventually found 4 at 27.3km on the right side of the road where there was slightly more open vegetation. Others seem to have had them more easily. Rusty Sparrow is in the same general area. Also Pileated Flycatcher has been noted around km 25 as well.

About km 33 you transition into pine-oak with all the usual species (Painted Redstart, Greater Pewee, Berylline Hummingbird, etc). I didn't spend much time in this habitat but other observers have noted Chestnut-sided Shrike Vireo at km 35 and (a definitely out of habitat) Pileated Flycatcher at km 47.

At least in July, a good area to bird is the forest just before and after Carrizal de los Bravos (around km 56/57), which is the village after Filo de Caballo. Note that there is now a triple paved fork in Filo de Caballo. You need to take the lefthand one to continue on the correct road. My initial focus around here was Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo. Although I had two respond vocally to playback neither came in close. However, I was able to get sensational views of two birds that at different times came into pishing, as well as see another three birds in feeding flocks. There were nice feeding flocks up here with Tufted Flycatcher, Crescent-chested and Red Warblers, Slate-throated Redstart, Hutton's Vireos, Brown Creeper, and White-striped Woodcreeper. Rufous-capped and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Golden-browed Warbler, and Gray-breasted Wood-wren all showed well here in response to pishing as well as further up in the "jay zone". At least in July, pishing seemed much more effective on the wood-wren than playback, although I didn't try playback much because I saw this species easily without it. There were lots of nightingale-thrushes in this area as well as higher up. Pretty much all I saw well were Russet Nightingale-Thrush, although I had 1-2 likely Ruddy-capped (based on habitat) that I was not able to see the color on the lower mandible. The only hummers I saw through here were White-eared, which were fairly common with a little effort up to the junction with the Chilpancingo road at km 58. Cinnamon-breasted Flowerpiercers were also visiting the flowers.

You reach the protected forest area around 60.5 km. I continued to about km 63/64 where the large open area on the left represents the lumber camp/cabana area. There are various tracks of the main road into the forest on both sides and you can explore at will. Although some have seen large numbers of hummingbirds here in winter visits, especially Green Violet-ears, I saw only about 5 hummers sightings in seven hours of birding so late July is not a good time. It appears that Green Violet-ears are not present here in June/July. Bumblebee Hummingbirds are certainly present still in June (per Jon King) and apparently easy in winter. It's possible with persistence I might have seen this species but all my hummers were clearly mountain-gem types. I eventually got good perched views of both Amythyst-throated and Garnet-throated Hummingbirds. The latter was fairly common on a June visit so I suspect this species is as common in summer as in winter.

White-throated Jay appears to be pretty easy in this area at all times of the year. At least in July, the species responded amazingly well to pishing. I heard them calling about 100-

yards up the slope and pished. The birds zoomed down immediately with one ending-up in an open bush only about 4-5 yards away for 3-5 minutes.

I was successful in getting good looks at a Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush through of playback. Note that Russet Nightingale-Thrush is common here as well. Spot-crowned Woodcreepers are regularly seen in this area too and I was able to find one in a mixed flock. Other good birds in the area seen by others include Barred Forest-Falcon, Long-tailed Wood-Partridge, White-faced Quail-Dove, and Unicolored Jay (I heard). Stygian Owls have been seen via playback easily by at least two observers at the lumber camp. I did not try for this species.

Birding tips and other information

During most of our visits no efforts were made to use playback for night birds or difficult species such as rails or Flammulated Flycatcher. In our last two or three visits, we have started use of playback. Our experience is that random use of playback in the hope of detecting a species is only sometimes successful. However, an unanticipated advantage of such playback is familiarization with the species call, with the result that you recognize it when you hear one. Once a species is detected and known to be nearby, playback is much more effective. Playback is also valuable in confirming identification of difficult species like Nutting's Flycatcher.

Difficult species include *myriachus* flycatchers, pygmy-owls, Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers (much harder than implied in the field guide), basic/female plumaged Ruddy-breasted and White-collared Seedeaters, female/immature buntings, and orioles.

Although, it might be expected that more remote areas are better for birding, some species seem especially easy right in town because they are accustomed to humans and hunting is not allowed. West Mexican Chachalaca is the most obvious example.

During my visits in late November and early April, biting insects were not a major problem. However, it would be advisable to wear long pants or use repellent for early morning or evening birding. Even during winter, the sun is usually hot by late morning so pre-dawn starts are advised. Our experience is that birding from noon until late afternoon is relatively unproductive. Unless you are visiting a wetland area, it is better simply to relax during the afternoon.

There are no expert bird guides in the Ixtapa area but one person with some knowledge of local species and some good areas is Wil Mertz. He can be contacted at hunter_mx1@yahoo.com.

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