

Mexico trip, 2-12 March 2000
Stephen J. Dinsmore

2/3 March (Thursday/Friday)

On Thursday, 2 March 2000, I arrived at the home of Bob Cecil in Des Moines, Iowa. I would be joining Bob and Mike and Dixie Overton (both of Ames, Iowa) on a 10-day trip to southwest Mexico. We left Des Moines at 4 p.m., crossing the border at Colombia by 10:30 a.m. on 3 March (Friday) without any hassles. Once across the border, our goal was to reach Concepcion del Oro by dark. We made great time to Saltillo, so we decided to make a short detour to bird the vicinity of the little towns of El Prado and San Rafael. These towns are near some of the largest Mexican Prairie Dog colonies in Mexico, and we were hoping to see Mountain Plovers. After making a wrong turn on a dirt road that really wasn't a road, we finally found one of the prairie dog colonies with about an hour of birding time. We didn't see any plovers, but we did find three Ferruginous Hawks. We arrived at Concepcion del Oro at 7:30 p.m. (1575 miles)

4 March (Saturday)

We departed Concepcion del Oro by 7 a.m. and headed southwest towards Guadalajara. We made a brief stop along the highway and found a few desert birds including Harris' Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Crissal Thrasher. We also made a brief stop at the ruins at Le Quemada, about 40 miles southwest of Zacatecas (Chicomostic in the Guia Roji road atlas), where we found a few birds including Bewick's Wren, Green-tailed Towhee, and Brewer's and Black-chinned sparrows. We stopped on the southwest edge of Guadalajara for lunch-pollo asado and beer for the equivalent of about \$4 per person. In mid-afternoon, we made another stop at Quillila in the state of Jalisco where we saw Gray Silky-flycatcher, Stripe-headed Sparrow, and Lesser Goldfinch. We arrived in Autlan de Navarro by 7 p.m., only to find that there was some sort of Carnival in town and all the motels were booked. On our way to Autlan de Navarro, we had noticed a couple of motels in Union de Tula, but we thought we would check in El Grullo first because it was closer. After wandering around El Grullo for more than an hour (Mexican towns are amazingly difficult to navigate), the only rooms we found were unsuitable and we headed for Union de Tula. Finally, at 10 p.m. we checked into the brand new Motel y Bungalos La Martinica in Union de Tula for the equivalent of \$20 per room. The rooms were clean and spacious. (523 miles)

5 March (Sunday)

We got started by 7:30 a.m. and our first stop was the Microwave Tower road on the north edge of Autlan de Navarro. The birding was good and in less than two hours we saw Broad-billed Hummingbird, Nutting's Flycatcher, Golden and Black-capped vireos, Colima and Fan-tailed warblers, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Varied Bunting, and Streak-backed Oriole. It was starting to get hot, even though it was only mid-morning, so we decided to head for the Autlan cloud forest. When we arrived, we found the gate locked (no surprise). We parked the car, paid the storekeepers a few pesos to watch it, and began the long hike (~6 miles, round trip) on the cobblestone road up to the microwave tower. The road meandered through dry thorn forest, oak forest, and finally moist deciduous forest near the top. Once at the top, we followed the trail for another mile to a second forest remnant before turning back. The birding was excellent, highlighted by great looks at a Crested Guan near the top (we later had poor looks at two more Crested Guans). Other birds included 2 Squirrel Cuckoos, Berylline and Lucifer hummingbirds, Strickland's Woodpecker, Greater Pewee, Tufted Flycatcher, Golden, Cassin's, and Plumbeous vireos, Eastern Bluebird, Brown-backed Solitaire, White-throated Robin, Blue Mockingbird,

several warblers (Orange-crowned, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, and Golden-crowned), Painted and Slate-throated redstarts, Red-headed and Hepatic tanagers, Green-striped Brush-Finch, and Black-vented Oriole. We were back at the car by 4:45 p.m. and, after a brief stop for beer, we headed south towards Barra de Navidad. Along the way, we found a few drying marshes (near km 201) where we saw Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Northern Jacana, and Spotted Sandpiper. We arrived at a Birder's Bed and Breakfast in Barra de Navidad by 7:45 p.m. It is open during the winter months and run by Billie Blytman, available by phone at 01152-335-56481 or e-mail at canadabb@mars.ark.com. The B&B, located at the edge of town, is pleasant and comfortable, and Ms. Blytman is familiar with area birding locations. (102 miles)

6 March (Monday)

We left Barra de Navidad at 7:15 a.m. and headed south, making a quick stop along the Playa del Oro Road where we saw Orange-breasted Bunting and Yellow-winged Cacique. Our next stop was the Playa del Oro road, where we birded until noon. We walked much of the road, adding Rufous-bellied Chachalaca (a group of three), Lilac-crowned Parrot (distant views of a small flock), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (heard only), White-tipped Dove, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Citreoline Trogon, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Rose-throated Becard, Bell's Vireo, San Blas Jay, White-bellied Wren, Colima Warbler, Blue-black Grassquit, Olive Sparrow, Grayish Saltator, and numerous Orange-breasted Buntings. At the end of the road is a nice beach ("Beach of the Gold") with views of an offshore island. Red-billed Tropicbirds and Brown Boobies were nesting on the island in large numbers, and we also saw Magnificent Frigatebird and Herring Gull. We made a quick midday stop at the El Toro microwave tower road, but it was hot and the birding very slow. Still, we managed to see Gray Hawk, San Blas Jay, and Blue Bunting in half an hour of birding. We continued south towards El Paraiso, stopping a few times to scan some bays and mudflats. Along this stretch, we added American White Pelican, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, and Mangrove Swallow. At El Paraiso, we checked into an oceanfront motel and took a break for some beach time. The beach was relatively birdless, although we managed to add Whimbrel and Sandwich and Forster's terns. At 5 p.m., we headed to Boca Armeria on the opposite side of the Rio Armeria. Also known as Pascuales, it is accessed from the town of Tecoman. Along the way, a couple of quick stops produced Thick-billed Kingbird and Hooded Oriole. The extensive tidal flats and lagoons at the river mouth were loaded with birds, and we stayed here until dark (8 p.m.). Among the many birds here were Reddish Egret, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Sora, 7 Collared Plovers, Pectoral Sandpiper, Common and Black terns, and Black Skimmer. (115 miles)

7 March (Tuesday)

We departed El Paraiso at 7:30 a.m. On our way back to the main highway, we birded a bit in the palm groves and found Ruddy Ground-Dove, Ringed Kingfisher, and Happy Wren. We headed towards Colima, making a few stops along the way. At the Los Asmoles exit off Highway 54, we found Banded Quail, San Blas Jay, Rufous-naped Wren, White-collared Seedeater, and Grasshopper Sparrow. At nearby Tampumachay, a small motel/restaurant (take the Los Asmoles exit), an hour of birding produced Citreoline Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Canyon Wren, Rufous-backed Robin, Magnolia Warbler, and Black-chested Sparrow. In Colima, we made a quick stop at the Microwave Shrine. It was quite hot and the birding was very slow, although we managed to see Squirrel Cuckoo and White-throated Magpie-Jay. About 5 miles west of Colima on the road to Minatitlan is a wooded recreational area called Balniero Agua Fria, where we birded for an hour and added Common Black-Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Gray-collared Becard, Tropical Parula, and had brief looks

at a possible Collared Forest-Falcon. We were back in Colima at 5:30 p.m. where we were staying with the Rocio Torres family (friends of Bob's). (91 miles)

8 March (Wednesday)

We got an early start, leaving Colima by 7 a.m. Our first stop was along the stream at the south edge of Comala. We birded the small woodlot from the road and saw Social Flycatcher, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, American Redstart, and Grayish Saltator. After an hour of birding, we headed to La Maria, a private park with a small natural lake. On the way, we had great looks at a calling (laughing?) Laughing Falcon perched alongside the road. The birding at La Maria was excellent. During our four hour stay, we saw Least Grebe, West Mexican Chachalaca, Mexican Parrotlet, Lesser Roadrunner, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Greater Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Masked Tityra, Spotted Wren, Hermit Warbler, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Fan-tailed Warbler, Summer and Flame-colored tanagers, Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, and Hooded Oriole. After a quick beer stop, we headed up the road towards Manitlan and entered the Biosphere Reserve. Birding in the thorn scrub was very slow, so we decided that the larger forest along the stream might be more productive. We found a small pullout along the road and walked about a mile of the stream. The forest here was a bit cooler and we managed to find a few birds in our one-hour walk, including Mountain Trogon, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Green Jay, and Louisiana Waterthrush. On our return to Comala, we found a small flock of Orange-fronted Parakeets feeding along the road. We returned to Colima by 5:30 p.m. and spent our second night with the Rocio Torres family. (133 miles)

9 March (Thursday)

This was the day for our assault on the volcano (Volcan de Fuego). We left Colima at 7 a.m. and headed northwest towards the volcano. The roads here (as in most of Mexico) were very confusing and we lost some time trying to find the road to the National Park. We finally found it and began the slow ascent. We didn't bird the scrub along the first few miles of the road, but instead headed towards the oak forest. Several stops in this habitat produced Lesser Roadrunner, Calliope Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, White-striped Woodcreeper, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, Mexican Jay, Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, Gray-barred Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Crescent-chested Warbler, Grace's Warbler, Red-faced Warbler, and Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia. As we continued our slow ascent, the road got progressively worse and in places it was barely passable. At some point, we missed a turn for the National Park and instead ended up on a road that skirted the south edge of the volcano. We followed this road for a couple of miles before we realized we were on the wrong road. About this time, we found a rather strange lady wandering the woods with a chainsaw, and Bob was able to understand enough of what she said to get us turned around. It was now 1 p.m., hot, and we were afraid we might not make it to the volcano. We were right about not reaching the volcano. We eventually found the road to the National Park, but it was in terrible condition and we finally gave up before reaching the spruce forest. Disappointed, we headed towards Ciudad Guzman. Just northwest of Ciudad Guzman are some vast marshes, and we birded here for a couple of hours before dusk. Some of the birds we saw here were Clark's Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, (Mexican) Mallard, Ruddy Duck, Osprey, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, and huge flocks of roosting Yellow-headed Blackbirds probably numbering in the tens of thousands. We spent the night in a nice motel on the square in Ciudad Guzman. (136 miles)

10 March (Friday)

This was our last full day of birding. Our goal was to reach Zacatecas by dark, so we figured we had a half a day of local birding time before we needed to head north. Disappointed about not reaching Volcan de Fuego, we decided to make an attempt at the other volcano, Volcan de Nevado. Bob remembered a rough but passable road to the summit, so we gave it a shot. We headed south out of Ciudad Guzman on Highway 417 and turned right (west) on the road to El Grullo. After driving approximately 5.2 miles (passing under the Autopista and by a prison on our right), there was a turn-off on the left with a sign for the National Park (del Navado Park). The road was new, wide enough for 2-3 vehicles, and smooth all the way to the top. We passed through several habitat zones on our way to the top: dry oak forest, a moist oak/deciduous forest, mixed deciduous/coniferous forest, and finally spruce forest. This was certainly the most spectacular forest habitat we had seen the entire trip. We birded along this road for about three hours. Hummingbirds were everywhere. Most were Magnificent and White-eared hummingbirds, but we also added Calliope and Blue-throated hummingbirds. Other birds we saw here included Zone-tailed Hawk, Crested Guan, Band-tailed Pigeon, Violet-green Swallow, Aztec Thrush, Red Warbler, Golden-crowned Warbler, Rufous-capped Warbler, Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer, Collared Towhee, and Black-headed Siskin. The view of Volcan de Fuego from the top was spectacular. On the basis of our experiences with the two volcanoes, we would recommend that birders not waste time trying to reach Fuego. The road to Nevado is in much better condition and passes through the same habitats found on Fuego. We left the park at 11 a.m. and headed for Zacatecas, where we spent the night. (330 miles)

11/12 March (Saturday/Sunday)

We left Zacatecas at 7 a.m. Saturday morning and headed north on Highway 54. At kilometer 308, we turned east on a gravel road towards Rancho Arbolitos. We drove east about 6 miles to a large prairie dog colony. We birded here for less than an hour and added Golden Eagle, Merlin, Greater Roadrunner, and Cactus Wren, but no Mountain Plovers or Worthen's Sparrows. This was our last birding stop of the trip. We made a beeline for Des Moines, Iowa, arriving there at 11 a.m. on 12 March. (1587 miles)

The entire trip went very smoothly with excellent weather and no car troubles. We had no problems with anyone, including the cops, but did encounter more than the usual number of checkpoints, run by the federales or the military. As always, they were polite, professional, and, at most, checked a couple of bags in the trunk. While in El Paraiso, I slept through an earthquake that hit about 10:30 p.m. According to subsequent seismological reports, it was a 5.5 on the Richter scale and was centered a few miles north of where we were staying. There were no injuries or damage, but we did mill around outside the hotel for a while with the Mexicans, waiting for aftershocks. It knocked out the power, so someone handed out candles. The final totals for the trip were 4,592 miles driven and 286 species of birds were seen. I would like to thank Bob Cecil for all of his work organizing an excellent trip. Please contact me at sdinsmore@cfr.msstate.edu or Bob Cecil at wewarb@aol.com for additional information.

List of species seen on
Mexico trip, 3-11 March
2000 (286 species)

Least Grebe
Pied-billed Grebe
Clark's Grebe
Red-billed Tropicbird
Brown Booby
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Double-crested Cormorant
Magnificent Frigatebird
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
White Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Wood Stork
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Fulvous Whistling-Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
(Mexican) Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Cinnamon Teal
Northern Shoveler
Green-winged Teal
Redhead
Lesser Scaup
Ruddy Duck
Osprey
White-tailed Kite
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Gray Hawk
Common Black-Hawk
Harris' Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Zone-tailed Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Ferruginous Hawk
Golden Eagle

Crested Caracara
Laughing Falcon
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Prairie Falcon
Rufous-bellied Chachalaca
West Mexican Chachalaca
Crested Guan
Scaled Quail
Banded Quail
Sora
Common Moorhen
American Coot
Collared Plover
Killdeer
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Northern Jacana
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Spotted Sandpiper
Whimbrel
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Stilt Sandpiper
Long-billed Dowitcher
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Caspian Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Black Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Dove
Band-tailed Pigeon
White-winged Dove
Mourning Dove
Inca Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Ruddy Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Orange-fronted Parakeet
Mexican Parrotlet
Lilac-crowned Parrot
Squirrel Cuckoo
Lesser Roadrunner
Greater Roadrunner
Groove-billed Ani

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Broad-billed Hummingbird
White-eared Hummingbird
Berylline Hummingbird
Cinnamon Hummingbird
Blue-throated Hummingbird
Magnificent Hummingbird
archilochus sp. (Ruby-
throated/Black-chinned)
Calliope Hummingbird
Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Citreolene Trogon
Mountain Trogon
Elegant Trogon
Russet-crowned Motmot
Ringed Kingfisher
Belted Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Acorn Woodpecker
Golden-cheeked Woodpecker
Golden-fronted Woodpecker
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Strickland's Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper
White-striped Woodcreeper
Tufted Flycatcher
Greater Pewee
Cordilleran Flycatcher
empidonax sp.
Black Phoebe
Eastern Phoebe
Say's Phoebe
Vermilion Flycatcher
Nutting's Flycatcher
Flammulated Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Social Flycatcher
Tropical Kingbird
Cassin's Kingbird
Thick-billed Kingbird
Western Kingbird
Gray-collared Becard
Rose-throated Becard
Masked Tityra
Loggerhead Shrike
Bell's Vireo
Black-capped Vireo
Plumbeous Vireo
Cassin's Vireo
Golden Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo
White-throated Magpie-Jay

Green Jay
San Blas Jay
Mexican Jay
Chihuahuan Raven
Common Raven
Horned Lark
martin sp.
Mangrove Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Cave Swallow
Barn Swallow
Bridled Titmouse
Bushtit
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Gray-barred Wren
Rufous-naped Wren
Spotted Wren
Cactus Wren
Canyon Wren
Sinaloa Wren
Happy Wren
Bewick's Wren
House (Brown-throated) Wren
White-bellied Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Western Bluebird
Brown-backed Solitaire
Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
White-throated Robin
Rufous-backed Robin
American Robin
Aztec Thrush
Northern Mockingbird
Curve-billed Thrasher
Crissal Thrasher
Blue Mockingbird
Gray Silky-flycatcher
Orange-crowned Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Colima Warbler
Crescent-chested Warbler
Tropical Parula
Yellow Warbler
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-throated Gray Warbler

Black-throated Green Warbler
Townsend's Warbler
Hermit Warbler
Grace's Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
American Redstart
Northern Waterthrush
Louisiana Waterthrush
MacGillivray's Warbler
Gray-crowned Yellowthroat
Wilson's Warbler
Red-faced Warbler
Red Warbler
Painted Redstart
Slate-throated redstart
Fan-tailed Warbler
Golden-crowned Warbler
Rufous-capped Warbler
Yellow-breasted Chat
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager
Hepatic Tanager
Summer Tanager
Western Tanager
Flame-colored Tanager
Red-headed Tanager
Elegant (Blue-hooded) Euphonia
Blue-black Grassquit
White-collared Seedeater
Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer
Green-striped Brush-Finch
Olive Sparrow
Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow
Green-tailed Towhee
Collared Towhee
Canyon Towhee
Stripe-headed Sparrow
Black-chested Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow
Black-chinned Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Grayish Saltator
Pyrrhuloxia
Black-headed Grosbeak
Blue Bunting

Blue Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Varied Bunting
Orange-breasted Bunting
Painted Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Western Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Great-tailed Grackle
Bronzed Cowbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Black-vented Oriole
Orchard Oriole
Hooded Oriole
Streak-backed Oriole
Bullock's Oriole
Yellow-winged Cacique
House Finch
Black-headed Siskin
Lesser Goldfinch
House Sparrow