



MEXICO
VERACRUZ RIVER OF RAPTORS
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
ILLINOIS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SEPT 25 – OCT 4, 2023

Guides: Adam Sell + Local Guides
Jorge Montejo & Amy McAndrews
Maximum group size is 10 participants

Price: \$3450
Based on double occupancy
\$350 single supplement

Visit the trip webpage: www.redhillbirding.com/veracruz

To register for the trip, visit www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform

There are few locations in the world that can claim to be a global migration destination, but Veracruz in fall is on that short list. Each autumn, millions of migrating birds use a narrow corridor along the coastal state of Veracruz to migrate south. Raptors are directed to this region by the looming Sierra Madre Oriental to the West and Gulf of Mexico to the east, which leaves a narrow lowland passage for migrant birds to use.

The result is one of the greatest migration spectacles in the world. Nearly the entire global population of Mississippi Kites, Broad-winged Hawks, and Swainson's Hawks will pass over Veracruz in October, as well over a million Turkey Vultures. Over 2 million raptors are annually

counted from hawk watch sites in the region. Mixed in with the boreal migrants are species more typical of the tropics, including Hook-billed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, and Roadside Hawk.

If the raptors weren't enough, many other species use this corridor to migrate. Large movements of Anhinga, Wood Stork, and American White Pelican can be expected alongside the raptors while White-winged Doves, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, and many other land birds put on amazing flights as they move south. It's not even just the birds! Millions of butterflies and dragonflies also pass through this region on their journey south.

Veracruz is also home to varied habitat including coastal lagoons and marshes, tropical deciduous forests, and high-altitude pine/oak woodlands. While the migration is spectacular, we also spend time in these habitats to search out the beautiful resident species including numerous Mexican endemics like Mexican Sheartail, Bumblebee Hummingbird, Strickland's Woodpecker, Blue-crowned Motmot, Transvolcanic Jay, Red Warbler, Gray-barred Wren and many others.



This is a high-diversity tour! Kettle of Swainson's Hawks (L) and the endemic Red Warbler in the highlands above Veracruz (R).

ITINERARY

Day 1, Mon, Sep 25. Arrival in Veracruz. Night in Veracruz City

Today is a dedicated arrival day to Veracruz City. We will arrange transport to our hotel for the evening and will enjoy dinner together with a short group orientation.

Day 2, Tue, Sep 26. Chichicaxle, transfer to Xalapa; Xico and El Hayo Park. Night in Xalapa

After breakfast at the hotel, we can bird the grounds and search for migrant shorebirds like Black-bellied Plover and Whimbrel while greeting some of our regular neotropical species including Social Flycatcher, Melodious Blackbird, and hopefully, Yellow-winged Tanager. From here we will begin moving from the coast on up to the foothill town of Xalapa (pronounced *ha-LA-pa*), which is the hometown of our local guides! If we have time, we will visit Chichicaxtle,

which serves as the second counting site for the Veracruz Hawkwatch, where we could catch our first glimpse of migrant raptors, with Broad-winged Hawks nearing their peak and Mississippi Kites still showing well.

We will arrive to Xalapa in time for lunch and a chance to explore the region and visit the Texolo waterfall outside of Xico and El Haya Park. Some targets we hope to find in and around Xalapa include a variety of tropical birds like Wedge-tailed Sabrewing, Blue-capped Motmot, Blue Mockingbird and Yellow-winged Tanager.

Day 3, Wed, Sep 27. Macuiltepetl Park & Xalapa Anthropology Museum. Night in Xalapa

After breakfast at our hotel, we will head to the unique Macuiltepetl Park. Cerro de Macuiltepetl is an extinct volcano rising 1500 meters above the heart of Xalapa, where we will bird the forested trails and enjoy an overlook of the bustling city. Highlights on the morning could include Squirrel Cuckoo, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Rusty Sparrow, Black-headed Saltator and many others. We will also keep our eyes peeled for neotropical migrants, including up to 20 species of migrant warblers!

In the afternoon, we will enjoy Xalapa's anthropology museum. It is a wonderful museum and worth a visit when in the area. In the late afternoon, we try to get in some more birding around Xalapa if there is time.

Day 4, Thu, Sep 28. Highlands surrounding Xalapa. Night in Xalapa

With an early start, we will begin our drive to higher elevations at Las Minas Canyon. We will be in picturesque pine-oak highlands with spectacular views. We will be searching for higher elevation specialties like Mountain Trogon, Brown-backed Solitaire, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, Red Warbler and many more residents and migrants. Hummingbirds are most diverse at this portion of our tour and we will look for Rivoli's Hummingbird, Blue-throated Mountain-Gem, and Bumblebee Hummingbird. Heading higher yet, we will visit the Cofre de Perote region. Dominated by pines and firs, we will search for more Mexican endemics like Strickland's Woodpecker, Transvolcanic Jay, Striped Sparrow and Collared Towhee.

We will lunch in the town of Perote before dropping into the more arid Perote valley to seek out a new suite of species including Lucifer Hummingbird, Woodhouses's Scrub-Jay, Ocellated Thrasher, and Black-chinned Sparrow. We will bird our way back to our hotel in Xalapa where we will spend another evening.

Day 5, Fri, Sep 29. Transfer to Cardel and first taste of migration. Night around Cardel

After breakfast at our hotel, we will begin our drive to Cardel, which will act as our base for witnessing the incredible migration that makes Veracruz famous. We will start by visiting Miradores Lagoon on our way down to the coast. Here, we will look for the recently split Grass Wren (formerly Sedge Wren), the endemic Mexican Sheartail, Plain-breasted Ground-Dove, Botteri's Sparrow, and many others. After a well-earned lunch in the town of Cardel, we will visit a hotel rooftop for our first taste of migrant raptors and waterbirds. Numbers from this

location can be staggering. If the flight lines are more inland, we can visit Chichicaxtle to catch the migrants before dinner at our hotel.

Day 6, Sat, Sep 30. Playa Juan Angel and raptor migration. Night around Cardel

After an early breakfast at the hotel, we will make our way down to the close by coastal region of Playa Juan Angel. Here, we hope to find some migrant shorebirds, will have another shot at Mexican Sheartail. We could be witnesses to yet another mass migration event of swallows, kingbirds, doves, storks, and more. If the conditions are right, visible migration here can be almost overwhelming. In the afternoon, we will head to the coast along the Antigua River for a boat ride and exploration of this historic region. We will end the day with a nice dinner along the river.

Day 7, Sun, Oct 1. Farallon Lagoons and Quiahuiztlan Ruins. Night around Cardel

In the morning, we will visit the Farallon Lagoons, where we will search for more shorebirds including American Avocet, Black-necked Stilts and Wilson's Phalaropes among many others. Waders like Tricolored Heron and Reddish Egret could be around, and there is always a chance that a migration event is taking place. After this stop we will visit the ruins of Quiahuiztlan. While enjoying the ruins, we could find Canivet's Emerald, Great and Common Black Hawks, and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. Of course, this is also a great location for visible migration, and we hope to bear witness to some big kettles of raptors or storks.

After lunch back in Cardel, we will spend some leisurely time watching migrants pass by the hotel rooftop, or will make our way west to Chichicaxtle to catch the stream of migrants.

Day 8, Mon, Oct 2. Xoxcotitla Reserve and final migration watch. Night around Cardel

On our final full day in the lowlands, we will visit a deciduous dry forest typical of the region. Our search for species typical of this region could include Plain Chachalaca, Red-lored Parrot, Rose-throated Becard, Band-backed, Rufous-naped, and Spot-breasted Wrens, Montezuma Oropendola, and many others. We will also be keeping an eye out for a lot of our familiar neotropical migrants as we follow them south.

In the afternoon after lunch, we will settle in for our final afternoon of watching the flow of migrants that make this place a migration corridor of global significance.

Day 9, Tue, Oct 3. Las Barrancas and Tlacotalpan. Night in Veracruz City.

We will leave early on our return to Veracruz to make a stop at a wonderful wetland and grassland complex outside of the city. Some of the species we will keep an eye out for include Double-striped Thick-knee, Aplomado and Laughing Falcons, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and Blue-black Grassquit. If we are lucky, we could find Pinnated Bittern, which is residents in this region.

We will have lunch and enjoy some quick birding around the town of Tlacotalpan, which is a great representation of a tradition small town in Veracruz. We will then finally return to Veracruz City for our final dinner and checklist.

Day 10, Wed, Oct 4. Departure from Veracruz City

Today is a dedicated departure day. You may schedule your flights for any time. ¡Hasta pronto!

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Contact and Registration Information

To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](http://www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform) (www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact the office at info@redhillbirding.com.

We are requiring that all participants be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with at least one booster shot. All guides are fully vaccinated.

Timing

The trip will begin in Veracruz City on the **evening of Monday, September 25**. If arrivals are all on time, we will have a small orientation and first dinner together during the evening at the hotel. Our trip will end on **Wednesday, October 4** in Veracruz City.

Please do not book your flights until we confirm that the minimum number of participants (6) have registered for this tour.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically moderate**. While much birding will be done from wide, open roads and other easily accessible places. We will have some mild to moderate changes in elevation, particularly in the highlands above Xalapa. Participants should be in reasonably good health and able to walk 2-3 miles at a “birders pace” (that is, very slowly). Some hiking can be on uneven trails, and when we visit ruins, we will encounter some steps that can be steep. Often on this trip, we will have longer periods of stationary birding for watching migration. Having a small, portable folding stool is recommended for participants that prefer to sit.

Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. A typical day will have us up early to take advantage of early morning bird activity and to beat the mid-day heat, which is especially important in the

lowlands. Afternoons will often be at a slower pace in the lowlands, as we will be visiting migration sites for more prolonged periods of stationary counting. Whenever we have an overnight at a location where we are not transferring hotels, there will be the option to opt-out of all or sometimes part of the day's activities.

Price

The price of the trip is **\$3450** and the single supplement is **\$350**. This price will **include** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 10; all transportation and accommodation during that period (except airport transfers); an expert Red Hill Birding guide with a scope and audio equipment; an expert local guide; any park entrance fees; tips for local guide and driver; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, airport transfers, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals, local guide, and driver), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of **\$800** per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by June 25, 2023. Our trips are priced with a cash/check discount. We accept payment by Zelle, check, bank transfer, or by credit card (with a 3.1% processing fee).

Accommodations and Food

Accommodations are generally good throughout. All hotels will include free wireless internet. We favor hotels that are convenient to our birding sites whenever possible. Food is very good on this tour, with excellent opportunities to try Mexican cuisine. Bottled water that can be used to refill personal water bottles will be provided throughout the tour. It will be important to stay hydrated in the hot climate and at higher elevations. Soda and coffee/tea are included with meals, but alcoholic beverages are extra.

Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **good**. Veracruz is known for its fall migration. Typical of migration bottlenecks, sometimes the migrating birds are very distant but some will fly by at close range. In the more open areas and wetlands in the lowlands, photographic opportunities can be excellent. Many birds of this region are not shy or retiring. Birding in the highlands in and above Xalapa can provide excellent opportunities for photography, but it will present the usual challenges of forest photography, including potentially low light and obstruction. Although this is primarily a birding tour and we will not be making special accommodations for photographers, this can be an excellent part of Mexico for bird photography and any photographers in the group will go home with many excellent images.

Weather

In coastal lowlands of Veracruz, the weather is usually sunny, humid and warm. Daily temperatures usually reach the low to mid 80s. In Xalapa where we will venture into the mountains, morning temperatures can start in the low 40s and a midweight jacket will be

useful. It is typically cooler in the mountains and highland town of Xalapa. As we are in a tropical region, rain can always occur, but we do expect plenty of sunny days.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear comfortable, lightweight clothing. Long sleeves and long pants are recommended for sun protection. A warm sweater or midweight jacket is useful for cool nights and mornings above Xalapa. Rain gear such as a rain jacket or umbrella are needed in case of inclement weather.

In terms of gear, you will want to bring the usual binoculars, field guide, hat, camera, and other gear you are accustomed to going birding with. It is critical to stay well-hydrated in such a hot, dry environment, so please bring a reusable water bottle. We will be providing water to refill throughout the trip. For coffee drinkers, a travel coffee mug is a nice thing to have along in the morning. Veracruz is sunny, so bring sunscreen and a hat as well. A flashlight (preferably a headlamp) can be useful if we have any night excursions or if power outages occur.

Money

The currency in Mexico is the Peso. You can exchange money at the airport upon arrival. Alternatively, ATMs are widely available on our trip and most accept American debit cards.

Resources

The best field guide for Mexico may still be the 1995 *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America* by Steve Howell and Sophie Webb, although the taxonomy is now quite out of date. It's also hardly a "field guide," so some people cut the plates out and have those bound separately.

The Merlin Bird ID App by Cornell University has a very nice Mexico "Bird Pack" including one for just the Gulf of Mexico region. This app can be downloaded for free for Apple and Android and includes photos, information, and sound recordings of the birds we will encounter.

Travel Considerations

Only a current passport is necessary for entry into Mexico at this time. There is no need for a visa. Currently, there are no COVID-19 testing entry or exit requirements for Mexico. As of June 2022, the CDC and State Department of the United States is no longer requiring a negative COVID-19 test for reentry into the United States.

Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for domestic trips. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to www.travelexinsurance.com or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

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Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



Rufous-naped Wren – the Veracruz subspecies is a likely split in the future (Photo by Jorge Montejo)