

HEATHERLEA -

Mayan Birding, Culture and Wildlife Tour - Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico
17th November-28th November 2024

Led by Gabor Orban and Andrea Katona

During this tour we were looking for BIRDS



MAMMALS

BUTTERFLIES



MAYAN PRESENT DAILY LIFE & ANCIENT CULTURAL HERITAGE



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This tour was put together by **Andrea Katona & Gabor Orban** for **HEATHERLEA** participants: Helen & Ken W., David & Maureen B., Elien & David F., Tony B. and Julie H.



Andrea and Gabor has lived, organized and led tours in Yucatan and other parts of Mexico since 2006 for 13 half years. During the last 6 years their base has been in Costa Rica.

Gabor is a birder and zoologist guide while Andrea is mainly specialized in Mayan Culture, but both know a lot about each others field. They believe that Nature & Culture depend on each other, actually matching each other, like them so they led the tour according to their slogan: Nature and Culture hands in hands. This is surely a winning combination! :) Their team was helped also by a knowledgeable local guide David, so Heatherlea group

members could learn a lot about local nature, especially birds and about ancient & actual culture of local people, habits, history and legends. This is surely a fascinating tour for those who enjoy more than just find birds.

Sunday 17th November 2024



Andrea & Gabor, David & Eileen arrived a few days earlier than the rest of the group. They all stayed at an all inclusive beachside hotel which offered easy access to nearby good birding areas. This was a great upgrade arranged by Andi instead of the simpler Puerto Morelos hotel not just in terms of the room but also that the whole group got 2 days and nights with all inclusive food and drinks. Although the weather was not very helpful at the beginning with getting the last strong stormy winds and rain of the extended rainy season it was obviously a perfect

location to start the tour. By the time the group arrived luckily the storms stopped.

Today late afternoon the rest of the group arrived with a direct flight from London. Some people went through immigration and got luggage smoothly while for others it took really long. After having everyone we had an hour long transfer to Playacar, the famous hotel zone of the Riviera Maya. Shortly after checking in we had a reunion at the restaurant which offered buffet style dinner. We discussed tomorrow's plan and had a good night sleep.

Monday 18th November 2024 Puerto Morelos, Playa del Carmen and Surrounds

Today we started at 7am with a buffet style breakfast with a great variety of food. Those who looked around at the hotel garden and seafront they could find the first **Brown Pelican, Great-tailed Grackle, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern** and **Neotropic Cormorant**.

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We started after 8 with a drive to Puerto Morelos area where we visited one of the favourite birding road of Andi and Gabor. It is a dirt road through mature dry tropical forest where we spent almost 3 hours to try to see and identify whatever was present.



We saw our first **Brown and Green Jays** and also **Squirrel Cuckoos**. Our first hummingbird was a **White-bellied Emerald**. With the call of a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** we attracted closer **Mangrove, Yellow-throated** and even the endemic **Yucatan Vireos**. One of the owls showed up as well to check us, the intruders. We also managed to see **Rose-throated Becard, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Chestnut-sided and Magnolia Warbler**. We had a small group of **Red-throated Ant-Tanagers** and a few **American Redstarts**. Gabor heard a **White-browed/Carolina Wren** which after some search most of us managed to

have at least a swift glimpse of it.

We all saw very well **Scrub Euphonia** and **Yellow-throated Euphonia**, actually once feeding side by side at the same branch so it was easy to compare size and markings.

Gabor almost literally stumbled over a large snake. He was so much concentrating on the birds that actually passed the reptile without noticing it. When the group started to check the snake Gabor turned back and he thought it was a Boa Constrictor because during 13 years that was the only really large species what they encountered from time to time. But it turned out it was a sizeable Rattlesnake. Gabor emphasized that no-one should follow his example, so much concentrating on birds, especially walking in sandals :-)



A small group of **Bronzed Cowbirds** were new as well. Gabor named some of the heard species like **Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-olive Flatbill** or **Couch's Kingbird** but we saw these birds just days later.

On the other hand we have managed to see various other flycatchers such as **Boat-billed Flycatcher, Bright-rumped Attila** (Gabor and Andi told the story of the connection with Attila the Hun), **Northern Tropical Pewee, Greenish Elaenia, Social Flycatcher**.

Our list grew rapidly with **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** and **Ivory-billed Woodcreeper**.

When we started to run out of steam and temperature rose we decided to drive back to Playa del Carmen. After having a buffet lunch we enjoyed a bit of siesta time and ventured out at 3pm. This time even shorter distance, we remained in the Playacar hotel zone. First we stopped at a golf course with some ponds and lakes. This was a perfect place to find a long list of birds such as **Blue-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, American Coot**, dozens of **Black-necked Stilts**, several **Black-bellied Plovers**, around 50 **Laughing Gulls**, but only one **Anhinga** and **Spotted Sandpiper**. **Neotropical Cormorants** outnumbered **Double-crested**. There were plenty of **White Ibises** and **Snowy Egrets** but we could find **Little Blue Heron, Green Heron** and **Great Egret** as well among them.

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Olive-throated Parakeets and Yucatan Jays were colourful additions here as well. **Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Tropical Mockingbird, Melodious Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle** and **Summer Tanager** were added here to the list as well.

We walked a bit among the first ancient Mayan ruins and along gardens of holiday houses and finally alongside the beach we returned to our hotel. Soon we met to make the list in the bar which was followed by another fulfilling dinner.

Tuesday 19th November 2024



After another great breakfast we left the hotel and headed to Akumal area. After leaving the main road when we were about to cross Akumal we bumped into a huge crowd of students marching to celebrate the Mexican Revolution Day. We tried some backgarden roads but without success. Luckily after couple of minutes the situation resolved so after crossing the brand new Mayan Train constructions finally we reached the birding road. With a few stops and walks we spent here the morning finding some of the species which we had yesterday but many new ones as well such as Plain Chachalaca, Turkey Vulture, Lesser Greenlet, Mangrove Vireo, Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Long-billed Gnatwren. Flycatchers were represented here by **Rose-throated Becard, Least, Dusky-capped and Social Flycatchers**, plus **Tropical Kingbird**. A beautiful **Gartered Trogon** caused some excitement, but perhaps even better was to add some Yucatan endemics to the list such as **Yucatan Woodpecker or Rose-throated Tanager**. We had again **Summer**

Tanager and also **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**.

After a successful morning we returned to our hotel to check out, have our last fulfilling lunch and some cold drinks before we hit the road again.

We headed towards the Northernmost edge of the Yucatan Peninsula but broke the long journey a few times. First after about 2 hours drive mainly on good highway road we arrived to Valladolid, a local town with a mediaeval colonial style centre and an amazing hidden phenomenon, a huge water-filled natural cave with a collapsed roof. No-one volunteered to jump from the 20-30 meters height into the crystal clear but cold water, so we just took some photos and drank some refreshments. Andi explained the historical importance of the cave systems and Gabor added the natural history behind. We searched here Bat Falcons but they were not around. But much later on the way at Kikil we found a very obliging pair which everybody could enjoy through telescope as well.



During the travel and at roadside stops we saw **Common Ground-dove, White-winged Dove, Grove-billed Ani, Gray Hawk, Lesson's Motmot**, some **American Kestrels** and a strikingly coloured **Vermillion Flycatcher**.

At a watery, marshy area we had plenty species including **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Black-necked Stilt, Northern Jacana, Black-crowned Night-Heron** and **Western Cattle Egret**. The **Least Bittern** unfortunately remained just leader only bird and although we could hear **Red-winged Blackbirds**, they not moved out from the vegetation.

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Finally we arrived to Rio Lagartos where we checked in the family run hotel and later we enjoyed a Mexican meal in a restaurant just next door to the hotel. Gabor was surprised by a birthday cake, not the last time during the tour!

Our rooms had balconies looking over the lagoon so it was perfect to see all the different birds moving around. As dusk fell we saw **Brown Pelicans** diving and **Magnificent Frigatebirds** wheeling high over the sea.

Wednesday 20th November 2024 Rio Lagartos – Las Coloradas

Rio Lagartos is the northernmost national park on the Yucatan peninsula. Basically it has two extremely contrasting habitats, one of them is the mangrove lagoon system and the other one is a coastal desert-like scrub and thorn forest. It is always a hard decision where to start birding since both areas can be very productive, especially in the mornings.



After an early morning filling breakfast this morning we went out first for a boat tour to discover the lagoons and salt pans. Both of our boatmen who knew their birds, but sometimes they had a hard time to keep the 2 boats at the same area of the mangrove-fringed lagoon-estuary of the Rio Lagartos. The weather was cloudy with some sunshine and ideal for the trip as it was not too hot. Highlights were: colourful Caribbean Flamingos, Ospreys, Mangrove Yellow Warbler, Common Black-Hawk, Yellow-headed Vulture, Roseate Spoonbills and 2 Clapper Rails.

It was great to see a hunting and then perched **Merlin**.

As well as the usual **Brown Pelicans** we saw some **American White Pelicans**. Some of us had views of **Belted Kingfisher**. We stopped a few times to admire different things such as a good number of beautiful flame coloured **Caribbean Flamingoes**, **Black Skimmers** and some **White Ibises**. **Hérons** tucked in at the edges of the mangroves were **Great** and **Little Blue**, **Tricoloured** and **Green**. We looked for, but didn't find, the Bare-throated Tiger-heron. But we had excellent views of a **Reddish Egret**, rushing to and from and next to it a **Raccoon** searching for food in the water. Beside the good number of **Snowy Egrets** we had a **Great Egret** as well. **Neotropic Cormorants** outnumbered **Double-crested** but with closed views we could learn the difference.



Smaller birds included: Mangrove Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Mangrove Vireo, Tropical Kingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker. We heard Green Jay from a distance as well.

There were many **Laughing Gulls**, **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, a few **Willetts**.

We also added to the list **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks**, a few **Blue-winged Teals**, **Black-necked Stilts**, **Lesser Yellowlegs**. We spent some time with distinguishing **Black-bellied**, **Semipalmated** and **Snowy Plovers** and **Least**, **Western** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**.

Of course **Sanderling** and **Ruddy Turnstone** was

around as well.

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Sandwich, Royal and Caspian Terns were all seen by everybody, plus a few **Anhingas**. Perhaps the hardest but most exciting search was to try to get a glimpse of one of the replying **Clapper Rails** at the edge of the mangrove.

Finally before noon we returned to the small fishing village and soon we had lunch. After a short siesta we ventured out again, this time to the coastal desert-like scrub and thorn forest.

We spent about 3 hours with looking for birds and we ended up close to 50 species.

Highlights were the endemic or near endemics **Mexican Sheartail, Yucatan Wren, Yucatan Jay** and incredible good views of a surreal male **Northern Cardinal**.



As well as the commoner birds or the ones we had seen the previous day, we spotted the following ones as well: **Aztec/Olive-throated Parakeet, Ruddy Ground and Eurasian Colared Dove, Cinnamon and Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Vermillion Flycatcher, Morelet Seedeater, Blue-black Grassquit, Common Yellowthroat, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, White-eyed and Mangrove Vireo, Groove-billed Ani, Black-and-White and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Parula, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Wood Thrush, Scrub Euphonia.**

A **Common Pauraque** was a great surprise, also had **Crested Caracara** and an upclose beautiful view of an **Altamira Oriole**.

We returned back to Rio Lagartos before dark, made the list and had dinner again at the same restaurant. Not another birthday cake!?! :-)

Thursday 21st November 2024 From Rio Lagartos through Chichén Itzá to Uxmal

Although today we were still looking for birds this was also a day to visit the World-famous and the most visited Mayan Archeological site, Chichen Itza plus travelling from the northernmost area of the Yucatan Peninsula to more of the Western and inner part of it.

A World Heritage Site meaning 'at the rim of the well where the Water Wizards live'



Some of the 1000 Columns ☺ Chichen main pyramid with hammock shop in front

We made our way to Chichén Itzá, passing several small villages with colonial ruins or still standing churches en route.

We had a lovely sunny day for exploring this most famous Mayan ruin complex, which gave us a perfect mix of nature and culture. Most of the tourists stick to the main buildings, such as

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the majestic El Castillo or the Observatorio, but after David and Andi explained some of the details of the buildings and how was life among these walls and columns Gabor pointed out more and more birds as well.

The Itzaes arrived about 900 AD and added the more severe Mayan-Toltec style. The site was dominated by the 79 foot high El Castillo pyramid dedicated to Kukulcan (meaning Feathered Serpent God) where Kukulcan 'descends' on the equinoxes in a natural phenomenon of light and shade. The base of the Temple of the Warriors, part of a group of many columns, is decorated with eagles, warriors and jaguars devouring human hearts. The ball court was huge, with annexed temples and stone rings. It seems that the captain of the winning team was sacrificed, so they went straight to heaven, although it can also be interpreted that the losing team lost their lives. The Tzompantli platform, surrounded by carved skulls, is evidence of human sacrifice practised from the 11th to 13th centuries.



So some of the birds we found at this always busy ruin complex were **White-winged Doves, Groove-billed Anis**, all three possible **Vulture** species so **Black, Turkey and Lesser Yellow-headed**. Beside the usual **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** we had a **Golden-olive** one as well. Had again a **Bat Falcon** and 2 new Woodcreeper species, such as the funny looking **Ruddy and the Ivory-billed Woodcreeper**. Several Green Jays were around, we also found bright yellow-orange **Altamira Oriole, Clay-coloured Thrush, Masked Tityra**. We also sighted a **Black-**

headed Saltator and a bright **Summer Tanager**. There were many motionless iguanas on the ancient stones. **Rose-throated Becards** added again some colour.

We always have a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** with us whose repetitive call summons birds!

The butterflies were beautiful and included a large **Blue Morpho, Confusing Sister, Julia Heliconian, Erato Heliconian, Zebra Heliconian, Mexican Cicadia, White Peacock**, stunning.

Finally we looked down into a sacred Cenote, a huge natural well and then we returned to the crowded parking lot and headed to a nice restaurant. We were spoiled again by a buffet lunch and colonial style.

After filling up and cool down we continued our journey on the highway towards Merida and finally to Uxmal where we checked in **The Lodge at Uxmal** which was an upgrade arranged by Andi. We arrived in time not just to check in but also to look around in the garden and in the area of the archeological site's entrance which was just steps away from our rooms.



This late afternoon bird-walk provided us beside the usual but never boring **Summer Tanager, Black-throated Green Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Melodious Blackbird** some new species as well, such as **Cinnamon Hummingbird, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo** and more than a dozen **Cave Swallows**. But perhaps the best one was a pair of **White-fronted Amazon Parrots**.

Finally before dusk we retreated to our beautifully appointed and situated hotel and soon after calling out the list we had dinner.

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Friday 22nd November 2024 Uxmal Archeological area and surroundings



Magician's Pyramid surrounded by jungle at Uxmal; Black Iguana warming up

With a great pre-breakfast birding between 6 and 8 in the morning we ended up with 38 species, including several new ones. What is more, we really did not need to walk or work too hard with most of them since we had found a fruiting tree in the lodge's garden which worked as a magnet for various species such as **Golden-fronted and Yucatan Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Orchard, Orange, Hooded and Altamira Orioles, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Summer Tanager, Boat-billed, Least and Social Flycatchers, Rose-throated Becard and Cinnamon Hummingbird.**

We had at least 3 **Green Jays**, 5 **White-fronted Amazons** and a large group of **Grove-billed Anis. A Gartered Trogon** added some more colours while **Cave Swallows** zoomed by. We could compare **Yellow-rumped and Yellow-throated Warblers** plus **Black-headed and Cinnamon-bellied Saltators** as well. We also added **Northern Parula** and **Yellow-faced Grassquit** to the morning list, plus we heard **Spot-breasted Wren.**



After having our well-deserved fulfilling breakfast we took a short walk to the entrance of the beautiful Uxmal Mayan ruins in the middle of the thorn forest and were rewarded with a good variety of Yucatan species. Statuesque iguanas sunned themselves on the hot stones, looking like stones themselves. We explored the site, including tracks at the edge of the forest around the archeological area, where we saw, and all climbed, one of the less excavated ruins for the views. The Xiu tribe founded Uxmal in the Puuc region. Between 800BC and 200 AD it was a village. From then until 1000AD it became a residence for rulers, a ceremonial centre and dominant city, with over 20,000

residents. The Xiu, a Toltec group, arrived and introduced new styles at the beginning of the 10th century. Archaeological highlights included the magnificent so-called Magician's Palace, with temples on top of the rounded pyramid structure, Nun's quadrangle, phallical symbols of fertility, the Grand pyramidal palace and massive Governor's palace faced by a platform with a carving of an iconic double jaguar which faced two ways, and the 'Dovecote' with its perforated, triangular, stepped arches. There were many carvings of Chac, the rain God and of serpents, eagles, parrots and important people with feathered headdresses: the Puuc style of carving. We admired typical Mayan arches at the entrance to the Nun's Quadrangle.

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As temperature continuously was rising birding was not so rewarding as earlier in the morning but still Gabor found our first **Turquoise-browed Motmot** which was later followed by another one. Most of the other birds we had seen before but it was still good to see another **Rufous-browed Peppershrike** or a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**.

We really crissed-crossed all the different corners of Uxmal and after we stopped at the restaurant to cool down a bit and regain some lost calories and liquids.

After lunch we strolled back to The Lodge and had siesta till 3pm when we drove out very shortly to a brand new, still closed road through the forest which offered a perfect place to safely discover the area for about 2,5 hours.

We started hearing a Collared Forest-Falcon, but unfortunately the bird not showed up. But we all saw very well **Eye-ringed Flatbill, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Rose-throated Becard** and several **White-fronted Amazons**.

2 endemic Yucatan Gnatcatchers were great found and several **Northern Water-Thrushes** were added as well. Gabor picked up the calls of **Gray-throated Chat** and also **Gray Catbird** but this time we could not see them. On the other hand **Red-billed Pigeon** we saw well.



About 80 cave swallows flew gracefully overhead.

We saw many birds in quick succession: **Hooded** and **Altamira Orioles**, a stunning **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, two **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, Yucatan and Green Jays**, the ubiquitous **Golden-fronted Woodpecker, White-winged** and **White-tipped Doves**, a **Black-headed Saltator, Greyish Saltator, White-eyed** and **Yellow-throated Vireos, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Plain Chachalaca, Aztec Parakeet**, four **Red-throated Ant-Tanagers** and a **Clay-coloured Thrush**.

When we felt running out of energy we walked back to the bus and within minutes we were back to our rooms, quickly refreshed ourselves and met to call out the list at 18.30 in the restaurant. We finished the day with another excellent dinner.



Turquoise-browed Motmot



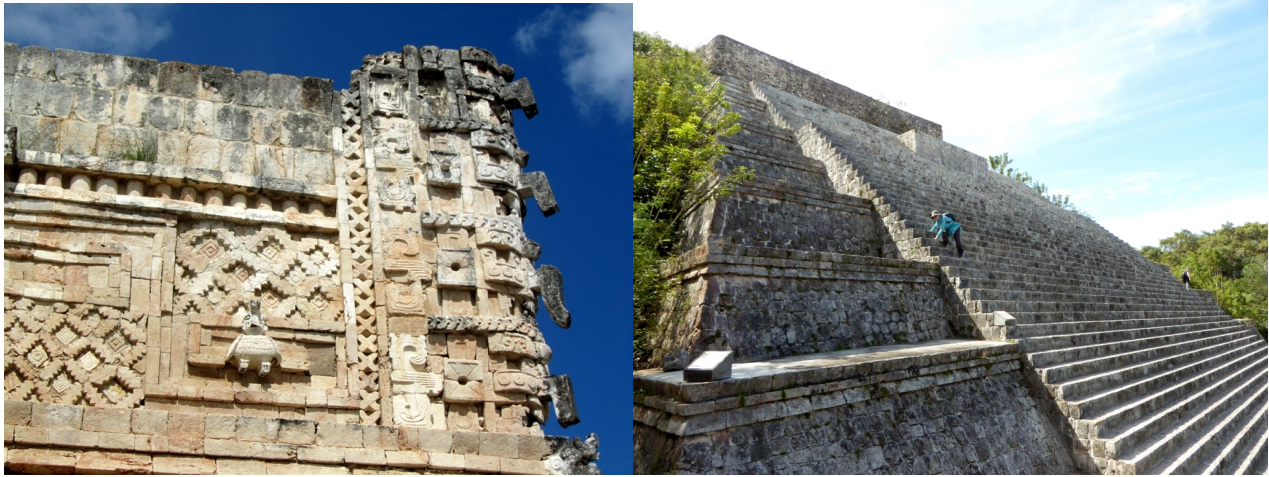
Uxmal Ball Court

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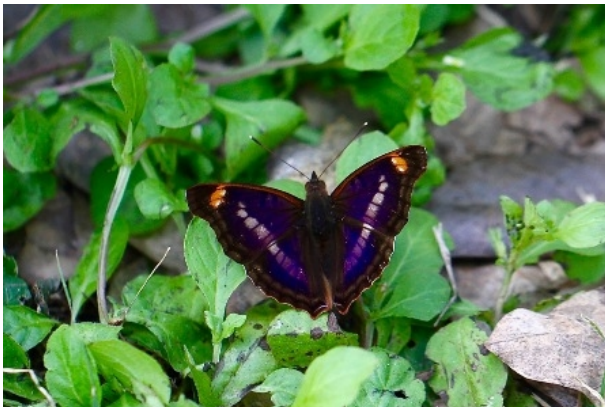
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Chac carvings & Main Pyramid at Uxmal

Saturday 23rd November 2024

We had our last pre-breakfast bird watch as the sun rose in The Lodge grounds and, apart from the usual "suspects" such as **Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Hooded and Altamira Orioles** and other frequently seen birds like **Social Flycatcher, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee**, we were rewarded with splendid close views of a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and more distantly perched **White-fronted Parrots**. There were **2 Masked Tityras, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Clay-coloured Thrush, Cinnamon Hummingbird, White-winged Dove, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Melodious Blackbird, Northern Parula and Summer Tanager**. About 30 **Cave Swallows** flew across and we found a perched **Roadside Hawk** while we heard a distant **Collared Forest-Falcon** as well.



Pavon Emperor



Zebra Heliconia

Between about 7 and 8 am we had our excellent breakfast and then went back to the nearby spot with an excellent road which was not used yet by a new hotel and what we visited yesterday afternoon.

Later on we visited the gardens and fields of Hacienda Uxmal with various habitats and great bird activity.

We spent the morning here finding more and more birds, close to 30 species. We had nice views of 5 **Groove-billed Anis, Least Flycatcher, 2 Rufous-browed Peppershrikes, Spot-breasted Wren, Tropical Mockingbird, Scrub Euphonia, Yellow-billed Cacique, Black-and-White Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator**.

About 10 **Ridgeway's Rough-winged Swallows** flew across and we found 2 **Gray Hawks** and a **Short-tailed Hawk** in the air as well.

A large number of **Yucatan Jays**, about 21 were around and we found 2 beautiful **Green Jays** as well.

We spent here quite a lot of time but when temperature started to be too high we returned to our lodge, finalized packing and checked out at noon.

We drove a short distance on undulating roads till Santa Elena where we stopped at The Pickled Onion restaurant which place and Valery the owner from UK Andi and Gabor knew for

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long time. We had an excellent lunch and during chatting with Valery it turned out that we were one of the last guests of her since she just sold the place.

After saying goodbyes we set off on our long journey to Felipe Carillo Puerto, crossing the Puuc hills to the Gulf of Mexico, North of Campeche.

We wended our way along country roads of variable quality, past Mayan style thatched houses, sugar cane and vegetables in fertile fields, and small herds of cows, in contrast to the limestone geology and dry forest in the previous area.



Banded Peacock



Painted White



Finally we arrived at our hotel Turquesa Maya at Felipe Carillo Puerto, close to the **Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve**. We got our rooms and after some rest we have gathered to discuss the list and have our excellent dinner. We also discussed our plan for tomorrow, not knowing that we have to rethink it by a sudden surprise. Overnight Hotel Turquesa Maya

Sunday 24th November 2024 Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve



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Before breakfast we saw a few interesting species despite we were in a town but at the edge and really close to the Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve. Beside the omnipresent **Great-tailed Grackles**, **Melodious Blackbird**, **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** and **Eurasian Collared Dove** we also found **Plain Chachalaca**, **Red-billed Pigeon** but the best was a group of **White-fronted Amazons**.



After a great Mexican/American breakfast, we wanted to spend the whole day in the **Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve**. Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve is a huge protected area including tropical semi-deciduous forests, mangrove habitats, lagoons and sandy beaches. However, most of the area cannot be visited or is extremely hard to reach. Well, the only Southern entrance road where we wanted to start was blocked by demonstrating local people, buses and lorries. As we understood they were outraged by the fact that the government and the military took away large part of the area from the local community. This was a bad news for us as well since Gabor and Andi knew that this dirt road leads into the forest with excellent wildlife. Two decades ago on one of their first tours here apart from excellent bird species they found 2 jaguars which they watched for hours, courting and even mating.

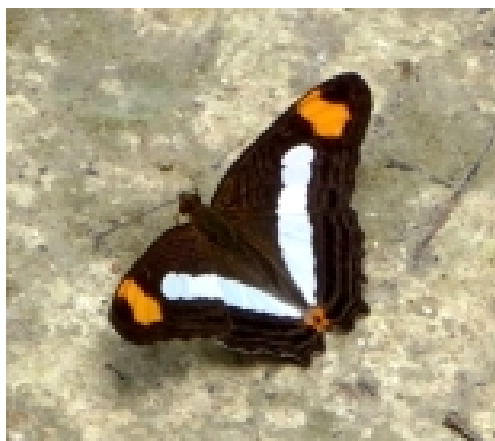
Luckily they knew some good alternatives. First we visited Laguna Ocom Road where we walked and heard **Keel-billed Toucan** and **Stub-tailed Spadebill**. It was excellent for Woodpeckers and Woodcreepers, so we could identify **Pale-billed Woodpecker** with a red punk crest and **Ruddy-**, **Northern Barred** and **Ivory-billed Woodcreepers**.

Other interesting species included **Northern Bentbill**, **Eye-ringed Flatbill**, **White-eyed Vireo** and **Yellow-throated Vireo**. **Long-billed Gnatwren** we located by its voice but the **Brown Jays** were much louder. There were several **Red-throated Ant-Tanagers** and with some work we spotted **Spot-breasted Wren** and we even nailed down a female **Gray-throated Chat** finally.

When most of us got tired and birds were less active as temperature rose we decided to return to our hotel, have a lunch and an early afternoon siesta time and ventured out in the afternoon again to the same productive area.

We had some of the previously mentioned birds, but 2 **Black-headed Trogon** were new, also a **Great-crested Flycatcher** appeared. We heard a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** but it not came close enough. We managed to find 2 endemic **Rose-throated Tanagers** as well.

At another section of this road we found more interesting species. **Wedge-tailed Sabrewing**, **2 Rose-throated Becard** and **Black-cowled Orioles** were new. It was great to see 8 **White-fronted Amazons** but we also managed to identify 2 **Yellow-lored Amazons** which are Yucatan endemic parrots. We saw a **Squirrel Cuckoo** as well.



Confusing Sister



Bluet by Andrea

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Overnight Hotel Turquesa Maya at Felipe Carillo Puerto, where we dined again with really great, enthusiastic service of the local Mayan lady.

Monday 25th November 2024 Sian Káan Biosphere Reserve and travel to Coba

After another fulfilling breakfast we said goodbye to our hosts, packed the van again and travelled to the Western entrance of the Sian Káan reserve, the Camino Faro Vigia Chico Road. As we went further and further in it became less wooded more marshy, mangrove habitat. Since there were a lot of rain before unfortunately the mosquitoes became quite annoying up to a point that after one and a half hour difficult birding we left the area. Still we managed to see some species such as **Snowy Egrets** and **Green Heron** on and alongside the road. **Yellow-olive Flatbill, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Lesser Greenlet** and endemic **Black Catbirds** were great. **Yucatan Jays** were in really good numbers and we found **Tropical Mockingbird, Black-and-White Warbler, American Redstart** and **Magnolia Warbler**.

We wanted to add an extra site (not mentioned in the itinerary) as a surprise for the group but we were surprised that the **Muyil archeological site** was closed due to renovation of its reception buildings. So we decided to travel to Tulum where we visited a typical family-owned, locally famous Mexican restaurant. After a great lunch we continued our travel towards Coba. We stopped once alongside a densely forested area where we have found **Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Black-headed Trogon, Olive-throated Parakeet, Least Flycatcher, Lesser Greenlet, White-eyed Vireo, Black-and-White Warbler, American Redstart, Red-throated Ant-Tanager** and endemic **Rose-throated Tanagers**.



Finally we arrived to our hotel which newly re-opened just few weeks ago after long years. The building is like a colonial style convent but with lovely swimming pool and cosy restaurant. We got help to get all our luggage in the rooms, refreshed ourselves a bit and spent an hour birding before dark alongside the Lake Coba. On and at the edge of the lake we found **Lesser Scaup, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron**. On the nearby trees we had **Eurasian Collared Dove, Yellow-throated Vireo, Tropical Mockingbird, Hooded Oriole, loads of Great-tailed Grackles, Summer Tanager**. At the entrance of the hotel **Palm Warbler** was new and we had **Morelet's Seedeater** as well.

We started to lose light and at dusk we were surprised by **Common Pauraque** and **Lesser Nighthawk** as well.

We had a lovely dinner between the bar and the pool and after discussing the list it was time to rest and have a good night.

Tuesday 26th November 2024 Coba Mayan Archeological Zone

We had our breakfast at 7am with the intention to be at the entrance of the Mayan site before it opens at 8am. Instead of travelling a short distance with bus we walked and birded alongside the lake and then till the little ticket selling booth.

At the lake apart from yesterday's species we had both **Least and Pied-billed Grebes, Limpkin, Little Blue and Tricoloured Herons**.

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Although we were in time and the entrance control guys were in good number as well, the staff who was about to sell the tickets were late at least 10 minutes. The manana mentality ruled but finally we got in. We spent almost 4 hours inside the large site and found more than 40 species of birds including Black-headed and Gartered Trogons, Lesson's and Turquoise-browed Motmots, Rose-throated Becard and Black-headed Saltator, just to mention the most colourfull ones. We heard **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** and **Pale-billed Woodpecker** as well. **Olivaceous Woodcreeper** was new and **Northern Bentbill** was interesting. **Yucatan Vireo** was exciting and we got **Long-billed Gnatwren** and **Swainson's Thrush** as well. **Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Magnolia Warbler and American Redstart** added some more colour.



It was a great visit mammal-wise as well since we have managed to find **Agoutis, Coatis and Spider Monkeys** as well.

Finally when we were getting tired we left the archeological site and walked to the laguna-side local restaurant which offered excellent traditional Mayan food, buffee-style. Finally we returned to our hotel, refreshed ourselves and had some siesta time.

Later on we travelled to a nearby area where Gabor and Andi had a hard time to find one of their favourite birding sites because the area became overgrown. We stopped alongside the road a few times and after a bit of struggling we had amazing experiences. We compared **Cinnamon** and **Buff-bellied Hummingbirds**, but also found **White-bellied Emerald. A Northern Crested Caracara** flew over with **Turkey Vultures. 4 White-fronted Amazons and 4 Aztec Parakeets** were seen. We nailed down 2 **Couch's Kingbirds** after some close look and also hearing them, identifying the call. **Eastern Wood-Pewee, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Melodious Blackbird** was added to the daily list. Was great to hear and see **Green Jays** and **Yucatan Jays** as well. We heard **Spot-breasted Wren** and saw **Hooded Orioles**, but **Yellow-backed Oriole** was a fantastic new species. But the most amazing sighting was surely a huge gathering of mainly immature and female but some male **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**; we counted 21 on one tree before sunset!

Finally we returned to our hotel where Andi arranged a special dinner on the terrace with the lagoon view. The last dinner we spent in excellent company, eating great food and good wine, adding more birds to the list and discussing the whole tour. What a great way to finish the last full day of a tour!

Wednesday 27th November 2024 Coba Lagoon area

For our last morning Gabor and Andi suggested a later than usual breakfast from 8am so those who were interested could have a longer early morning birding for about 2 hours. Early morning we still heard **Common Pauraque** and **Ruddy Crake**. We tried hard to attract the latter closer but we could not get a glimpse. Also we heard for long **Collared Forest Falcon. Limpkin** was extremely close though. **Gartered Trogon** and 2 **Collared Aracaris** were excellent start. **Ridgeway's Rough-winged Swallows** were in good numbers.



After breakfast we drove to a nearby private dirt road which lead through a densely forested

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area and ended at a more open farmland where part of the group saw 3 **Crested Guans** feeding in a distance at the edge of the cornfield and soon flying over the forest, one perched shortly before disappeared. Alongside the forest trail we had Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eye-ringed Flatbill upclose views twice, White-browed Gnatcatcher and White-browed Carolina Wren. We had good views of nice endemics in the form of Rose-throated Tanager and Blue Bunting.



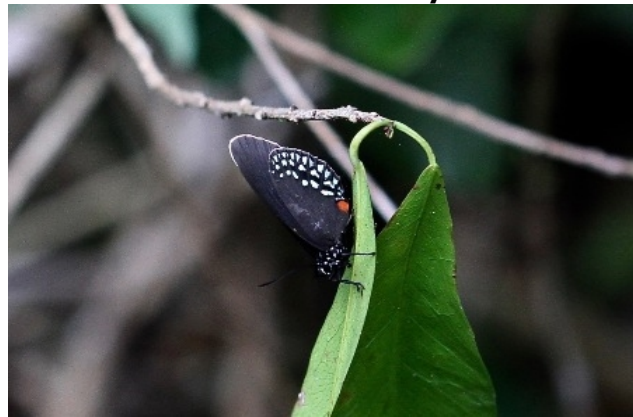
So even this last 1 hour birding gave us some new and excellent observations which clearly showed that if we could continue birding in this area we would find more and more exciting things. Finally we returned to our hotel, had lunch, said goodbyes and travelled first to Catalonia Maroma where David and Eileen and Gabor and Andi stayed for another couple of days, while David took the rest of the group to the airport.

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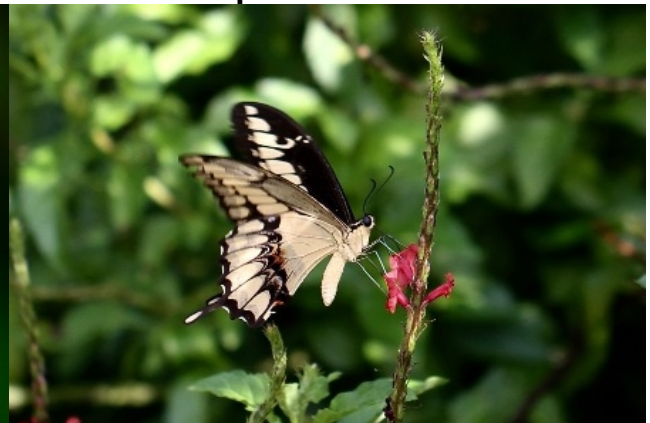
Altamira Oriole

Mayan Bees



Mexican Cycadian Eumaeus toxea

Cloudless sulphur Phoebis sennae



Common Mestra

Giant Swallowtail

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