



THE BEACHES AND JUNGLES OF
SAN BLAS, MEXICO
25–31 March 2012

In the spring of 2008, our friends Chuck and Dorothy Gates took us to this awesome place on the Pacific Coast of Mexico that they had been raving about for years. The town of San Blas, in the Mexican state of Nayarit, lies halfway between Mazatlán and Puerto Vallarta. Traditionally a Mexican tourist town, San Blas has also attracted birders for the last couple decades for the fascinating combination of a diverse avifauna and an authentic Mexican birding experience. Sipping a cerveza or fresh jugo at sunset while sitting at the fort that overlooks the town, you will see parakeets zipping through the palm trees below and frigatebirds soaring over the seashore. A boat ride up the nearby river will put you eye-to-eye with Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and Common Potoo. Rufous-crowned Motmot will peer at you from the jungle shrubbery while Citreoline Trogon gleams from the canopy. Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers and Cinnamon Hummingbirds will be common in nearly all habitats, and hordes of wintering North American songbirds may even make you feel at home. Just about the time you are tired of the stormy weather of early spring here in the U.S., escape with us to the Mexican coast and enjoy this warm, laid-back birding experience.

*Paradise Birding Owner,
Stephen Shunk*

TOUR SUMMARY

Spring break has never been as wonderful as a week in San Blas, Mexico. We will spend six nights in the region, while we sample all the local habitats and experience the colors, the cultures, and the cuisine of this delightful subtropical paradise.

We begin and end our adventure in Puerto Vallarta, where Chuck Gates and I meet you at the airport. As soon as all have arrived, we head north along the coast, making a couple brief birding stops en route to San Blas. The trees and shrubs along random cobblestone streets may produce our first Grayish Saltator or an Ivory-billed Woodcreeper. Stripe-headed Sparrows and White-collared Seedeaters can be common in weedy fields, and we should encounter our first raptors, such as Short-tailed Hawk or Great Black-hawk. We may also stop along the ocean shore for a beverage, where we will enjoy our first of many Magnificent Frigatebirds, with flocks of overwintering shorebirds along the beach. We will arrive in San Blas for dinner, where we will spend the next four nights.

In and around San Blas, we will visit four primary habitat types: dry subtropical jungle, mangrove swamps, shrimp ponds, and open beaches. In the jungles, we may hear the tooting of Colima Pygmy-Owl, interrupted by the gregarious squawking of Black-throated Magpie-Jays. Pale-billed Woodpecker will be working the larger trees under the canopy, while Rufous-crowned Motmot and Orange-billed Nightengale-Thrush rustle in the lower vegetation. Both Elegant and Citreoline trogons will be heard before they are seen, when we will find them glowing from inside the forest.

The highlight of the mangrove swamps is the boat ride up the Rio San Cristobal. We will travel upstream through a tunnel of mangroves, while Boat-billed Herons stare at us from a few feet away. We may see a Limpkin nesting in a muddy cove or a Laughing Falcon perched in a tree through an opening in the mangroves. Bare-throated Tiger-Heron will dwarf the tiny Green Kingfisher, and a “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler may whistle at us from overhead. We will enjoy a late breakfast at the alligator farm near the end of the boat ride, before heading back toward the coast.

The shrimp ponds surrounding the town of San Blas will be worthy of a daily stop or two to scan through the shorebirds and waders and to watch the Mangrove Swallows feeding over the water. Collared Plover will be one of our primary target species, with Northern Jacana possible skulking along the grassy shoreline. Common Black-Hawk or Harris’s Hawk may be roosting around the fringes of the ponds, with Wood Stork, White Ibis, and Anhinga being some of the common large waterbirds in the area.

The beaches and rocky shores from Matenchen Bay north to the mouth of the San Cristobal can also be incredibly productive for waterbirds, with large flocks of Surfbirds possible sharing the rocks with a Whimbrel or two, and swarms of frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans flying, roosting, or otherwise loitering in the area and especially at the small harbor where the fishermen deliver their daily catch. Some of the jungle-like vegetation approaches the beach in many places, where we could see Lineated Woodpecker, San Blas Jay, Groove-billed Ani, and Ruddy Ground-Dove. A visit to the small island across the San Blas harbor will allow us views of the seabird rookery offshore, where Blue-footed and Brown Boobies nest. The island is also an excellent place to see Zone-tailed Hawk at close range, Crested Guan skulking in the shrubs, and Blue-black Grassquit on the grassy fringes of the beach.

After our last breakfast in San Blas we will begin an incredibly scenic drive through the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental on our way back toward Puerto Vallarta. Various stops along the main route might produce Military Macaw or Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, and the mouths of small canyons can echo with the mystical, cascading song of the Brown-backed Solitaire. We will spend much of the day birding among the oak woodlands at the Rancho la Noria. Green Jay will be very vocal around the fields and gullies, and we will search for Gray Silky-Flycatcher in the trees below the flocks of Black-headed Siskins. The woodlands can also host impressive flocks of wintering songbirds, such as Townsend's Warbler, Bell's Vireo, and Summer Tanager. We will arrive that evening at Mismaloya, south of Puerto Vallarta, where we will spend our last two nights.

Our final full day will take us into the spectacular forests, both wild and cultivated, of the Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens, where we are now in the state of Jalisco. We will spend the morning in the lower gardens enjoying our best looks yet at many common birds of the trip, including Masked Tityra, Rufous-backed Robin, and Streak-backed Oriole. During our delightful lunch at the open-air café, we could be graced with the resident Mexican Hermit. We will spend the afternoon uphill in the woodlands and jungles of the preserve, where we will search for Squirrel-Cuckoo, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, and Red-billed Pigeon. On our last morning, we will head just north of the Puerto Vallarta airport for some birding along the Rio Ameca estuary before returning for our flights home.

Throughout the trip we will enjoy many looks at some common and charismatic Mexican birds, such as Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Stripe-headed Sparrow, White-throated Thrush, and Yellow-winged Cacique. We will also have plenty of time in San Blas to explore the downtown square, with its authentic artisanal wares and delicious local foods.

BASIC DAILY ITINERARY

Sunday, March 25: Arrival in Puerto Vallarta by 2 p.m.; drive to San Blas. Dinner and Night in San Blas.

Monday, March 26: Morning birding in the jungles; afternoon on the beach. Night San Blas.

Tuesday, March 27: Morning birding in the jungles; afternoon at the beach. Night San Blas.

Wednesday, March 28: Morning boat trip up the Rio San Cristobal; afternoon open. Night in San Blas.

Thursday, March 29: Morning drive into the foothills and Rancho La Noria. Afternoon drive past Puerto Vallarta to Mismaloya. Night at Mismaloya.

Friday, March 30: All day birding at Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens and Sanctuary. Night at Mismaloya.

Saturday, March 31: Morning birding around Puerto Vallarta, lunch, and return to airport by noon.

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes four nights lodging in San Blas and two nights in Mismaloya; all meals from Sunday dinner on March 25, through lunch on Saturday, March 31; transportation from Puerto Vallarta airport; service related gratuities; and the services of your two guides (with 6–8 participants; 1 guide with 4–5 participants). Minimum registration of 4 persons, maximum of 8.

Not included are alcoholic beverages; trip insurance (required); other personal expenses; and guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our skills and service. Please note that we will require you to provide proof that you have purchased trip insurance with your registration materials.

2011 TOUR FEE (subject to change for 2012): \$2,890 single/\$2,540 double
DEPOSIT: \$95
1st PAYMENT: \$1,000
BALANCE: \$1,795 single/\$1,445 double

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 90 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 90 and 60 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 60 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future.

To register for this tour, submit an initial non-refundable \$95 deposit with the registration forms found here: <http://www.paradisebirding.com/2011regforms.pdf>. A first payment of \$1,000 is due 90 days prior to departure, with final payment due 60 days prior to departure.

We look forward to seeing you in Mexico for spring break 2012!

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