

ITINERARY
MEXICO: VERACRUZ RIVER OF RAPTORS
October 4-14, 2026



While raptors are the main draw for migrant-watchers, we'll also see some other birds that migrate through eastern Mexico. Wood Storks are one of the larger species that travel this route, using thermals to gain height in the same way as hawks. Photograph by participant George Parker.

We include here information for those interested in the 2026 Field Guides Mexico: Veracruz River of Raptors tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our website)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

This tour brings you to Mexico to witness one of the most legendary migration spectacles on the planet. The migration of soaring birds on thermals over the narrow coastal plain of Veracruz is unmatched in scale and density, and the narrow bottleneck between the mountains and the sea also concentrates landbirds, like Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, in mind-bending numbers. In addition to this spectacle of spectacles, we will also head into the scenic, lush highlands of the nearby Sierra Madre Oriental. The primary goal of this tour is to enjoy the sheer numbers of birds that pass through the state of Veracruz every autumn, but the diversity of habitats we access, as we go from sea level to 10,000 feet in

elevation, allow us to see over 300 species, including more than a dozen Mexican endemics. Veracruz is the most bird-diverse state in Mexico. This, when combined with the diversity of landscapes, interesting historical and cultural locations we visit, delicious food, and of course, the incomparable visible migration, makes this tour an absolute winner!



We'll also take some time to look for some of Veracruz's local specialties. The Blue-capped Motmot is a Mexican endemic, found in the forests of northeastern Mexico. Photograph by guide Jorge Montejó-Díaz.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better-fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** Participants should be in reasonably good health and able to walk up to three miles in a day at a "birder's pace." We will do a fair amount of stationary birding, notably while watching migration events. The hawk watches we visit have chairs for public use, but you might want to bring a small folding stool for those pauses studying coastal birds during our mornings on the beach. Our birding will generally take place along wide dirt roads, some of which involve mild to moderate elevation change. If circumstances warrant (for example, a bird is calling from nearby, but somewhere off the road), we may offer optional short side trips on narrower, occasionally steeper, trails in search of particular species. Be aware that during the visits to the ruins, we will encounter some steep steps. We will visit several coastal sites, so expect to walk on sand as well.
- **PACE:** *Early starts are necessary to take full advantage of morning bird activity.* We will take full advantage of the first and last couple of hours of light, especially in the lowlands, so that we can make the most of the birdiest and most pleasant times of the day.
- **ELEVATION:** Elevations will range from sea level to almost 10,000 ft. The city of Veracruz sits at sea level, while Xalapa is located at just under a mile above sea level (~4,650 feet), but we will climb (mostly by vehicle) to nearly 10,000 feet on one birding day in the surrounding mountains. Because of the elevation, we take our hikes at a very moderate, even slow pace, but those who have trouble with altitude may wish to bring along medication to combat altitude sickness.

- **WEATHER:** Along the coastal plain, weather is typically sunny, humid, and warm, with highs in the mid 80's F to low 90s F (you will definitely want to bring a hat with a brim to protect your face from the sun!). A 20+ ounce reusable waterbottle is essential, and we will always have filtered water available for refill. In the mountains, the temperature typically remains a bit cooler all day, so we'll likely continue to bird throughout the day on those visits. Mornings may be chilly (high 30's to low 40's F), so plan accordingly, and have some long-sleeve layers for these days. Also, especially around Xalapa, a rain jacket could prove useful, as rain is a possibility there.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has an equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants should be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. Sitting out some duration is certainly an option on all of the days except for our transit days (transits are currently on days 2, 5, and 9). Be sure to inform your guide if you are opting out so the group is not waiting for you.

Our main purpose is for all to see well and enjoy the mind-boggling spectacle of migration, and a rich diversity of Mexican birds, and out of the latter group, we will prioritize the region's endemics and specialty species.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide for the tour.



About the Birding Areas

The Veracruz Coastal Plain—The gulf coastal plain of Mexico tapers to its narrowest point along the coast north of the city of Veracruz. At La Mancha, this distance gets to less than two miles, with the rugged, forested Sierra Madre Oriental approaching the Gulf of Mexico from the west. Consequently, the airspace here is filled up with birds each autumn, as they get funneled between the mountains and the sea on their journeys from North America to Central and South America. The towns of Cardel and Chichicaxtle feature long-running raptor migration counts which in some years have tallied over 6 MILLION raptors flying south over the course of the fall, and La Mancha Biological Station sometimes features passerine and waterbird counts, as well as bird banding. Our trip is timed to hit the sweet spot for the highest numbers of buteos (Broad-winged Hawks and Swainson's Hawks), while also featuring large numbers of other migrating birds (including American White Pelicans, Anhingas, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, White-winged Doves, and many more),

and this combination can provide one of the most breathtaking migration spectacles on our planet. The areas of tropical dry forest in the coastal plain also host some excellent local birding, including endemics Mexican Sheartail, and Veracruz Wren, as well as White-bellied Wren, Black-headed Trogon, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Double-striped Thick-knee, and more. We will also be visiting marshes, river mouths, coastal lagoons, and lakes, to sample the aquatic habitats of the lowlands – we may even get to take a boat trip along one of the local rivers. We will also spend some time at the ancient ruins of Quiahuixtlan, and we will visit the Antigua River Mouth, where the first Spanish settlement in the mainland Americas was located (and the oldest Catholic Church in the Americas is here too).

Sierra Madre Oriental—Xalapa, the capital city of the state of Veracruz, is nestled into the mountains of the Sierra Madre Oriental at 4,650 feet (1,420 meters) above sea level, and offers many opportunities for access to a great diversity of high elevation habitat. At Cofre de Perote, the far eastern extension of the Central Mexican Plateau, we will be birding between 7,000 and 10,000 feet, from arid xerophytic scrub featuring yucca and cactus, up through juniper forest, pine oak woodland, and into fir habitat. Although lumbering has occurred in the Xalapa-Perote region, there are still magnificent forests of humid pine-oak and fir, as well as broadleaf “cloudforest.” Many montane species, including several endemic to Mexico, can be found in these forests. Transvolcanic Jay, Gray-barred Wren, Strickland’s Woodpecker, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Collared Towhee, Hooded Yellowthroat, Black Thrush, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, the elusive Bearded Wood-Partridge, Red Warbler, and Russet Nightingale-Thrush are among some of the interesting species that inhabit these beautiful forests. Our birding will take place along dirt roads and smaller paved roads, where we will try to do our walking downhill as much as logistically sensible. Most grades are gentle to moderate, but a few may be steep. Temperatures at the highest elevations may be chilly in the early mornings, but should warm to very comfortable levels if skies are clear.



*This is what the excitement is all about: huge kettles of Swainson's and Broad-winged hawks!
Photograph by participant George Parker.*

Itinerary for Mexico: Veracruz River of Raptors

Day 1, Sun, 4 Oct, Arrival in Veracruz. Upon arrival in Veracruz, you'll be met at the airport and transferred directly to our hotel. The drive takes about 20 minutes, so we recommend planning your arrival no later than 5:00 p.m. to give you time to settle in and freshen up. For those already in town, we'll meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a brief get-acquainted session before heading to dinner. Night in Veracruz.

Day 2, Mon, 5 Oct. Drive to Cardel. We will check out of our hotel and spend the morning birding a coastal site nearby. We will quickly start filling in the checklist with herons, terns, kingfishers, pelicans, sandpipers, and plovers while noting the passage of doves, swallows, and flycatchers overhead. Midday, we will make our way back to the north towards Cardel. Depending on our arrival time, we may head to one of the migration counting locations for a look at the diurnal migration, and the rest of our day will depend on our timing and the migration conditions. We may take an afternoon birding excursion if the migration is tapering off as the day cools down. Night in Cardel.

Days 3-6, Tue-Fri, 6-9 Oct. Lowlands around Cardel. We will have three more full days to experience the migration of birds through the Veracruz coastal plain, as well as sample the variety of habitats in the humid lowlands. This will allow us some flexibility in our daily schedule so that repeat visits to key areas may be possible if deemed necessary to fully appreciate the winged spectacle that Veracruz is so justly legendary for. We will likely spend mornings looking for songbirds on the ground, and potentially in active migration, and then spend much of the warm middays enjoying migration of birds as they use thermals to aid them on their southbound journeys. There is a possibility of a boat ride, and we will at some point visit the ruins of Quiahuixtlan, and the historic town of La Antigua. Nights in Cardel.



Another endemic we'll look for is the Veracruz Wren. This species was recently split from the Rufous-naped Wren, and is found only in the lowlands of Veracruz. Photograph by guide Sam Wilson.

Day 7, Sat, 10 Oct. Drive to Xalapa. We will begin the day ascending to the capital of Veracruz, the mountain city of Xalapa. We will likely make some birding or sightseeing stops on our way up the mountains, and depending on the weather, might look for some coastal migration on the way up as well. The afternoon will find us enjoying the lush habitat at one of the protected natural areas in Xalapa, and experiencing our first contact with the montane birds of the region. Night in Xalapa.

Days 8-9, Sun-Mon, 11-12 Oct. Highlands around Xalapa. We will have two full days to explore the rich highlands in and around Xalapa, from lush cloud forest to spectacular canyons, pine-oak woodland, and even a good sampling of the dry central plateau of Mexico, where the rain-shadow effect provides dramatically different habitat, and so, different birds, than the nearby gulf slopes. We will visit Las Minas Canyon, the Cofre de Perote, and several other exciting high-elevation birding locales, with the exact order of operations to be determined based on the weather. There are quite a few specialties in this region, including such endemics as Strickland's Woodpecker, Transvolcanic Jay, and the shy and elusive Bearded Wood-Partridge, among a slew of other delightful birds. Nights in Xalapa.

Day 10, Tue, 13 Oct. Lowlands around Veracruz. We will check out of our hotel very early and head back to the south, out of the mountains, to visit the grasslands south of Veracruz City. Here, in addition to the myriad of migrants that may be crisscrossing the sky, there will be a slew of open-land residents, like Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and Aplomado Falcon, competing for the same space in the sky. After our morning in the grasslands, looking for birds such as Common Tody-Flycatcher, Pinnated Bittern, and Double-striped Thick-Knee, will make our birding plan based on what we have already seen and have yet to see (and the weather). Night in Veracruz.

Day 11, Wed, 14 Oct. Departure for home. You may schedule your departure for any time today. *¡Que les vaya bien!*

About Your Guides

Micah Riegner grew up exploring the Central Arizona Highlands and was fortunate to have parents who took him along on college field courses ranging from the coast of Mexico to the mountains of Costa Rica, where encounters with tinamous, barbets, and jacamars launched him into the birding world at a young age. During his time at Prescott College, he made annual pilgrimages to Amazonia, where he worked as a guide and participated in expeditions, mostly in Brazil. For his master's, he studied the foraging ecology of Amazonian woodcreepers. When he's not in the field, he tries to make time to paint birds and other creatures that spark his interest.

"Micah is a real bird finder and a delightful guy. He obviously knows the country and the culture well. He provided us with some really great owling, too." P.B., Central Mexico & Baja: Birds, Butterflies & Whales 2022

Micah guided tours with Bret Whitney, John Coons, Dan Lane, and Tom Johnson before joining Field Guides full-time in 2019. Micah is a generous guide with an easy laugh and is eager to share his love of birds and nature in the years to come. We know you will have a great time traveling with him, too!

Micah scouted for this tour with Jorge and his partner, Amy, back in 2021. He is thrilled to be going back to this bird-rich part of Mexico.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Micah's complete tour schedule; just click on his photos.

Jorge Montejó was born in Yucatan, Mexico, and developed a passion for nature from a very early age, exploring the surroundings of his native Merida, where he began to observe birds and learn how to trap them! His interest in birds and nature continued to grow during his college years in Veracruz, when Jorge and a group of friends "discovered" the great coastal migration in the state, now known as the Veracruz River of Raptors. Since the late 90's, Jorge has guided birding tours throughout Mexico.

His explorations have taken him across Mexico and to other parts of the world, including Venezuela, Brazil, and much of the US and Canada. Because of both the beauty and importance of birds, he considers the opportunity to watch them and share his passion with others a great honor, as well as a great responsibility. On the rare occasions when he is not in the field, Jorge shares his bird observations with his partner, Amy, from their base in the city of Xalapa, set in the foothills of central Veracruz.

"Jorge Montejó-Díaz was a – perhaps the – key reason this trip was so successful. I would do another trip on which he is a guide in a heartbeat. Fantastic birder and very knowledgeable about exactly where to find them. Very patient and personable, and helped in every way he could: translating, explaining menus, culture, and the pre-Columbian history of the region. He is extremely knowledgeable about the history of Veracruz, among other things." J.H., Veracruz

Financial Information

FEE: \$4450 from Veracruz

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$450

DEPOSIT: \$450

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: April 7, 2026

LIMIT: 10

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

DOCUMENTS: Be sure to verify the latest entry requirements for each country you will visit or transit.

Passport: A current passport is required for international travel. It should be in good condition, valid for at least 6 months beyond your return date, and have at least one blank page for each country on your itinerary.

Citizens of other countries should check with the consulates of each destination for current entry requirements.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: This tour begins and ends in Veracruz, Mexico (Veracruz International Airport, VER). Flights are available from most cities to Veracruz via Mexico City or Houston.

Arrival: Veracruz (VER) on October 4, no later than 5:00 p.m.

Departure: Veracruz (VER) on October 14, at any time.

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$4450 for one person in double occupancy from Veracruz.

It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 10, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through dinner on Day 10, all ground transportation, including airport transfers, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Veracruz, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, breakfast on Day 11, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement is \$450 for those requesting a single room. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour, but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm, and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please send your deposit of \$450 per person, see fieldguides.com/payment-options/ for our Payment Options.

Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure or by April 7, 2026. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later. Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is

not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

NCP 7/2020; 1/25NC; peg; 1/26 upd peg; 1/26NC