

Trip Report — Mexico: Oaxaca Valley II 2024

December 21-28, 2024 with Jesse Fagan & Alex Sundvall & local Guide Jorge Herrera



The incredible view from Monte Alban! One of the most important sites for the Zapotec. Photo by guide Jesse Fagan.

There might not be a single country that is more underappreciated for birds than Mexico. Our nextdoor neighbor is incredibly diverse with one of the highest totals of endemic birds in the world. And of all the states in Mexico: Oaxaca is one of the best. From colorful birds, to incredible archaeological sites, to a rich culinary and cultural experience, it is unmatched in Mexican birding. This tour sets a nice and relaxed pace while still enjoying the best the Oaxaca Valley has to offer. The gorgeous weather and slower pace make it ideal for a holiday tour. One of the major highlights for this December tour

is the night we spend in the zocalo seeing the radish festival. There were so many absolutely incredible pieces of artwork created all using natural materials. We also spent a morning exploring Monte Alban, one of the most important sites for the Zapotec people. Our favorite bird of the tour was the stunning endemic Red Warbler with Russet-crowned Motmot and Strong-billed Woodcreeper for second and third place.

From Jesse and I and all of us at Field Guides, we thank you for choosing to spend your holidays with us! Thank you for being a great group and we saw some incredible birds and sights during our time in Oaxaca! We hope to see you again soon and happy birding!



A glorious White-throated Magpie-Jay beautifully captured in flight by Debby Vogt. These had been pretty scarce so it was a real treat to see them!

Day 1: We started the tour dark and early heading towards the Ex-Hacienda Aranjuez (no we weren't kidding about the name!) The birding started slow, but as the sun crested over the horizon and began to glow across the hillside, activity picked up all around us. There was a constant swarm of Berylline, Rufous, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visiting the Cazahuates (Tree Morning-Glories) and distracting our eyes from all the other birds flitting around! We watched multiple mixed flocks of warblers, flycatchers, orioles, and tanagers foraging along the creek in the Huisache thornscrub. Highlights here included our first Mexican endemics in Bridled Sparrow, White-throated Towhee, and Oaxaca Sparrow; and some other nice wider ranging birds like Black-vented Oriole, Virginia's Warbler, and Blue-black Grassquit. After spending the whole morning along the hillside, we headed to lunch in Teotitlan del Valle and had an incredible demonstration of the native rug weaving by Wilmar at the Bug in the Rug. After lunch, we made a brief jaunt north of town to a small reservoir where we saw a number of water birds, the best being a pair of Eared Grebes, a local rarity! Also on the lake were a few squadrons of Ring-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teals, and American Coots with a large swarm of Northern Rough-winged Swallows skimming the water for bugs. From there, we headed back into town and ended the night at our hotel.

Day 2: Today we headed up the mountain to nearly 10,000 ft to bird La Cumbre, a protected area in the wonderful pine-oak humid forests. All of the trees hung with lichen and bromeliads, and White-eared Hummingbird chatter constantly filled the air as they went to and from flowers, rarely perching for a look. Our main target up here was the endemic Dwarf Jay, usually in feeding flocks with Gray-barred Wren. After hours of searching we finally lucked into a mixed flock and got them! We also saw Steller's Jays (these are likely a separate species from the ones in the states), Red and Hermit Warblers, Greater Pewee, Tufted Flycatcher, and an incredibly cooperative Mountain (Northern) Pygmy-Owl. We had a lovely picnic lunch in the park, and then headed back down the mountain and back into town to give us some time to freshen up before our evening at the Noche de Los Rabanos. The radish festival was truly a sight to behold, with incredibly elaborate and intricate sculptures made of Radish, flowers, and corn husks. It

was well worth the 90+ minutes we stood in line! Then after a great dinner we headed back to our rooms to get some rest after a very long day.



The Tule Tree, an absolutely massive Montezuma Cypress tree. It's a bit sad to think how these trees used to dominate this landscape and now so few remain. It has the widest trunk of any tree in the world and is over 1600 years old. Photo by guide Jesse Fagan.

Day 3 started cold and rainy, leaving us a little worried about how the day might progress. It was raining during the entirety of our 90 minute drive, but thankfully as soon as we got to the famed KM 77, the rain cleared and we were dry. The birds loved it and there was an explosion of activity right when we got out of the bus. A stunning Orange-breasted Bunting, a charismatic pair of Russet-crowned Motmots, and the newly minted Russet-naped Wren were all within earshot of the parked vans. A little farther down the road was a big family group of White-throated Magpie-Jays torpedoing through the sky. After our successes there, we headed back toward civilization making a

quick stop which gave us a Blue Mockingbird, before heading into town for lunch. Afterwards, we went to the ruins of Mitla where our driver and local guide Jorge gave us a wonderful interpretive talk about the ruins of the once religious capital of the Zapotec empire. After waiting out some more rain, we headed to Yagul, another ruin, to bird a little bit along the entrance road. We didn't see too much, so we headed back to the hotel where we had our Christmas Eve dinner (and drinks!) before heading to bed preparing for another long day tomorrow.

Day 4: instead of opening presents, we spent Christmas morning exploring the breathtaking ruins of the ancient Zapotec capital of Monte Albán. First we did some birding along the entrance road, where we had a couple nice mixed flocks of birds including our first Summer Tanager and Cooper's Hawks. Once the gates opened we quickly climbed the hill to explore the former city of Monte Albán again with wonderful interpretation from Jorge. We also birded our way through old houses and city squares and temples. Two major highlights really stand out from our time there: the first being a lovely female Yellow Grosbeak, a real rarity this far south in the state! And finally, after hours upon hours and days of trying, waiting, and hoping, we finally got our Slaty Vireo. We took the afternoon off to give ourselves a little rest before again climbing up to La Cumbre and having a picnic dinner before a brief owling session. Unfortunately the owls were mostly quiet that night, but we did walk away with views of Mexican Whip-poor-will and a tooting Northern Saw-whet Owl.



The Strong-billed Woodcreeper, one of the major highlights of the tour! These birds sound very differently from their Central and Southern American cousins and might represent a cryptic species. Photo by guide Alex Sundvall.

Day 5: Today we birded the Benito Juarez road which starts out in the dry thornscrub and ends up in the humid Pine-oak forest. We arrived just at sunrise and literally watched the sun as it spilled farther and farther down the hillside. Once the sun hit the valley the bird life exploded into activity. Large mixed groups of warblers foraged along the hillside, Gray Silky-flycatchers were a constant presence either in the soundscape or the sky, and our first pair of Lesser Roadrunners were doing their best sad puppy impression. After one flushed out of the tree in front of us, we eventually tracked another one down calling in some low hanging branches right off the road. We then continued climbing up in elevation and kept trying for our remaining targets. We found a nice pull off higher up in the pine zone and there were Mexican Violetears everywhere! We then wrangled with a Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo that did not want to be found! Thankfully Bob

spotted it way up in the tree and we all got awesome scope views of it. Our afternoon was a break from all the birding as we enjoyed a mezcal tasting after lunch at Don Agave, and the great Tule Tree: the widest tree in the world at 2000 years old and a 45 foot diameter with a 180 foot circumference!

Day 6: Our final day of birding we again ascended the nearby mountains towards La Cumbre, but instead of taking the Camino La Cumbre at the top, we went the exact opposite direction towards the village of Yuvila. This side of the mountains still has pine-oak forests, but with increased humidity. This was made evident immediately by the amount of bromeliads and hanging moss from all the trees! The understories were also thicker on this side, which led to better shots at a couple birds we were still missing. We spent the entire morning walking nearly 2 miles down this road with the constant chatter of Mexican Violetears, White-eared Hummingbirds, and Gray Silky-flycatchers. Every now and then the chatter was punctuated with the incredible cascading waterfall of glass that is the song of Brown-backed Solitaire. Finally it seemed there were birds around! More Red and Golden-browed Warblers foraged in the understory providing great views. Gray-barred Wrens chattered in the midstory with raucous Steller's Jays and pretty Hepatic Tanagers in the canopy. But the stars of the show were the sparrows. Finally we connected with some Yellow-eyed Juncos after spending days up in their habitat. Collared Towhees were remarkably cooperative for this large, beautiful, normally skulky sparrow. And finally, a pair of Brushfinches right at the end of the road: both Rufous-capped and Chestnut-capped! They certainly made us work for it, never showing full parts of their bodies, but we saw them! Later we enjoyed lunch with the company of a Blue-throated Mountain-gem, with bonus Zone-tailed Hawk and another Collared Towhee! Heading back down the mountain back toward town, we stopped again for one last ditch effort at some of our remaining targets. While we didn't end up with those, we still pulled three new birds for the trip with Painted Bunting, Black-throated Green Warbler, and a stunner of a Painted Redstart dancing just above eye level! A wonderful bird to end the tour with.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link

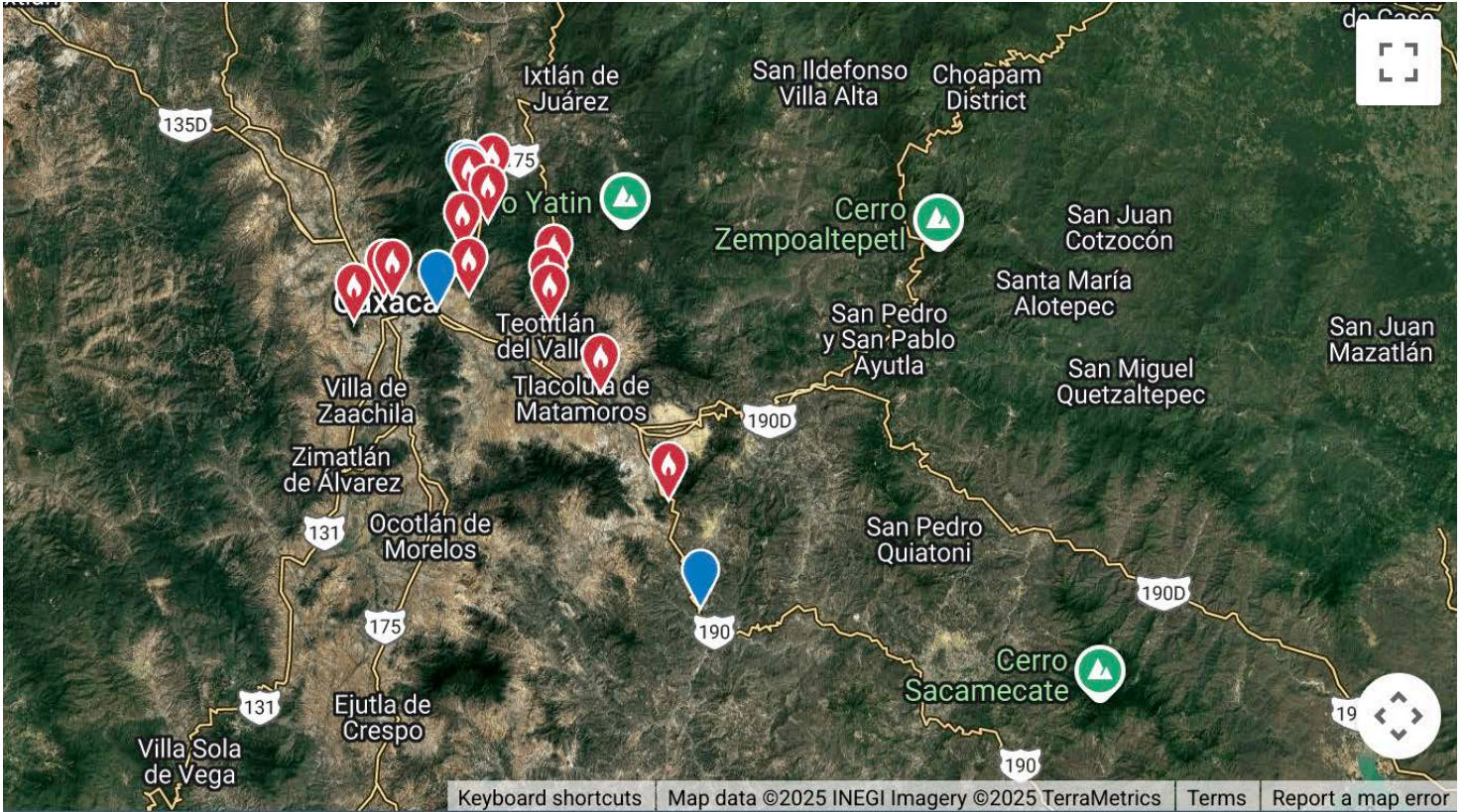
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Jesse and Alex

Field Guides Birding Tours - OAXACA VALLEY II, 2024 (guides Jesse Fagan and Alex Sundvall)



22 – 28 Dec 2024 (7 days) Link-only



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Oaxaca, Mexico

Centro | Ixtlán | Tlacolula

Alex Sundvall



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...






















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Species Observed
























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50	Blue-winged Teal <i>Spatula discors</i>	 1
2	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	 1
25	Ring-necked Duck <i>Aythya collaris</i>	 1
2	Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	 1
3	Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i> *	 1
1	Band-tailed Pigeon <i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>	 1
1	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	 1
17	Inca Dove <i>Columbina inca</i>	 3
1	White-tipped Dove <i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>	 1
31	White-winged Dove <i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	 7
1	Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	 1
2	Lesser Roadrunner <i>Geococcyx velox</i>	 1
1	Mexican Whip-poor-will <i>Antrostomus arizonae</i>	 1
19	Mexican Violetear <i>Colibri thalassinus</i>	 3
2	Rivoli's Hummingbird <i>Eugenes fulgens</i>	 2
3	Blue-throated Mountain-gem <i>Lampornis clemenciae</i>	 2
19	Ruby-throated Hummingbird <i>Archilochus colubris</i>	 6
4	Rufous Hummingbird <i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	 1
8	Broad-tailed Hummingbird <i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>	 2
5	Dusky Hummingbird <i>Phaeoptila sordida</i>	 4

















41	White-eared Hummingbird	<i>Basilinna leucotis</i>	▶  7
1	Green-fronted Hummingbird	<i>Ramosomyia viridifrons</i>	▶  1
35	Berylline Hummingbird	<i>Saucerottia beryllina</i>	▶  6
50	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  1
1	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  1
1	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	▶  1
8	Least Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>	▶  1
3	Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	▶  1
7	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  2
2	Western Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	▶  1
9	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  1
71	Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶  4
56	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  11
3	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>	▶  2
3	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Astur cooperii</i>	▶  1
1	Zone-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>	▶  1
2	Short-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	▶  2
7	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  7
1	Northern Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium gnoma</i>	▶  1
1	Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium brasilianum</i>	▶  1
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl	<i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	▶  1
2	Russet-crowned Motmot	<i>Momotus mexicanus</i>	▶  1
1	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	▶  1
1	Green Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>	▶  1

- 1 **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus varius* ▶  1
- 11 **Gray-breasted Woodpecker** *Melanerpes hypopolius* ▶  3
- 2 **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** *Melanerpes aurifrons* ▶  1
- 2 **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** *Dryobates scalaris* ▶  2
- 3 **Hairy Woodpecker** *Dryobates villosus* ▶  2
- 11 **Crested Caracara** *Caracara plancus* ▶  3
- 5 **American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius* ▶  4
- 2 **Strong-billed Woodcreeper** *Xiphocolaptes promeropirhynchus*  ▶  1
- 4 **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper** *Lepidocolaptes affinis* ▶  3
- 2 **Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet** *Camptostoma imberbe* ▶  1
- 1 **Tufted Flycatcher** *Mitrephanes phaeocercus* ▶  1
- 3 **Greater Pewee** *Contopus pertinax* ▶  3
- 2 **Least Flycatcher** *Empidonax minimus* ▶  1
- 1 **Hammond's Flycatcher** *Empidonax hammondii* ▶  1
- 15 **Dusky Flycatcher** *Empidonax oberholseri* ▶  5
- 1 **Black Phoebe** *Sayornis nigricans* ▶  1
- 3 **Vermilion Flycatcher** *Pyrocephalus rubinus* ▶  2
- 9 **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** *Myiarchus tuberculifer* ▶  4
- 14 **Ash-throated Flycatcher** *Myiarchus cinerascens* ▶  4
- 1 **Nutting's Flycatcher** *Myiarchus nuttingi* ▶  1
- 2 **Great Kiskadee** *Pitangus sulphuratus* ▶  2
- 1 **Social Flycatcher** *Myiozetetes similis* ▶  1
- 16 **Cassin's Kingbird** *Tyrannus vociferans* ▶  4

3	Thick-billed Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus crassirostris</i>	▶  1
6	Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	▶  4
2	Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo	<i>Vireolanius melitophrys</i>	▶  2
3	Golden Vireo	<i>Vireo hypochryseus</i>	▶  3
1	Slaty Vireo	<i>Vireo brevipennis</i>	▶  1
4	Hutton's Vireo	<i>Vireo huttoni</i>	▶  2
6	Cassin's Vireo	<i>Vireo cassinii</i>	▶  4
2	Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>	▶  2
11	Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	▶  4
17	Dwarf Jay	<i>Cyanolyca nanus</i>	▶  2
8	White-throated Magpie-Jay	<i>Cyanocorax formosus</i>	▶  1
13	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	▶  3
6	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	<i>Aphelocoma woodhouseii</i>	▶  2
3	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  2
5	Mexican Chickadee	<i>Poecile sclateri</i>	▶  2
163	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	▶  8
81	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  3
2	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  1
13	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  8
6	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	▶  4
50	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	▶  6
8	White-lored Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila albiloris</i>	▶  1
1	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	▶  1

2	Northern House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  1
4	Bewick's Wren <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	▶  2
15	Gray-barred Wren <i>Campylorhynchus megalopterus</i>	▶  3
3	Russet-naped Wren <i>Campylorhynchus humilis</i>	▶  1
4	Happy Wren <i>Pheugopedius felix</i>	▶  1
2	Blue Mockingbird <i>Melanotis caerulescens</i>	▶  2
3	Curve-billed Thrasher <i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶  1
28	Brown-backed Solitaire <i>Myadestes occidentalis</i>	▶  5
5	Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush <i>Catharus aurantiirostris</i>	▶  3
2	Russet Nightingale-Thrush <i>Catharus occidentalis</i>	▶  2
1	Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  1
1	Clay-colored Thrush <i>Turdus grayi</i>	▶  1
2	American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  1
1	Rufous-backed Robin <i>Turdus rufopalliatus</i>	▶  1
63	Gray Silky-flycatcher <i>Ptiliogonys cinereus</i>	▶  7
14	Olive Warbler <i>Peucedramus taeniatus</i>	▶  5
11	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  3
23	House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  4
4	Red Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	▶  2
31	Lesser Goldfinch <i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶  4
3	Bridled Sparrow <i>Peucaea mystacalis</i>	▶  2
1	Chestnut-capped Brushfinch <i>Arremon brunneinucha</i>	▶  1
5	Yellow-eyed Junco <i>Junco phaeonotus</i>	▶  1

2	Lincoln's Sparrow <i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	▶  1
30	White-throated Towhee <i>Melospiza albicollis</i>	▶  5
2	Oaxaca Sparrow <i>Aimophila notosticta</i>	▶  1
1	Spotted Towhee <i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	▶  1
6	Collared Towhee <i>Pipilo ocai</i>	▶  2
2	Rufous-capped Brushfinch <i>Atlapetes pileatus</i>	▶  1
10	Black-vented Oriole <i>Icterus wagleri</i>	▶  3
1	Hooded Oriole <i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	▶  1
6	Streak-backed Oriole <i>Icterus pustulatus</i>	▶  1
3	Bullock's Oriole <i>Icterus bullockii</i>	▶  2
12	Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  3
9	Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i>	▶  4
10	Crescent-chested Warbler <i>Oreothlypis superciliosa</i>	▶  5
8	Orange-crowned Warbler <i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	▶  3
18	Nashville Warbler <i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i>	▶  4
2	Virginia's Warbler <i>Leiothlypis virginiae</i>	▶  2
2	MacGillivray's Warbler <i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i>	▶  1
38	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  6
2	Black-throated Gray Warbler <i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>	▶  1
20	Townsend's Warbler <i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	▶  8
8	Hermit Warbler <i>Setophaga occidentalis</i>	▶  5
1	Black-throated Green Warbler <i>Setophaga virens</i>	▶  1
10	Rufous-capped Warbler <i>Basileuterus rufifrons</i>	▶  4

3	Golden-browed Warbler	<i>Basileuterus belli</i>	▶  2
16	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	▶  7
11	Red Warbler	<i>Cardellina rubra</i>	▶  6
1	Painted Redstart	<i>Myioborus pictus</i>	▶  1
4	Slate-throated Redstart	<i>Myioborus miniatus</i>	▶  3
8	Hepatic Tanager	<i>Piranga flava</i>	▶  3
2	Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>	▶  2
27	Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	▶  8
1	Yellow Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus chrysopheplus</i> ✓	▶  1
2	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>	▶  2
2	Black-headed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>	▶  2
2	Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>	▶  2
5	Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	▶  3
1	Orange-breasted Bunting	<i>Passerina leclancherii</i>	▶  1
1	Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>	▶  1
10	Blue-black Grassquit	<i>Volatinia jacarina</i>	▶  1