

Birds of Southern Jalisco, Mexico

At the Boca de Iguana-Tenacatita Bay

on the Pacific Coast:

Report on Field Ornithology in October 2005 with

comparative reference to March 2005

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the

Certificate in Field Ornithology

University of California Riverside Extension

By

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October 30, 2005

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Birds of Southern Jalisco

Introduction.

This report² documents our October, 2005 field trip from Lake Chapala to Boca de Iguanas on the Pacific Coast with occasional comparative reference to a visit the preceding March. "Lifebirds" are indicated by an exclamation point! The March trip, while not specifically ornithological, did give rise to our more formal October trip which was carried out in fulfillment of the final requirements for Certification in Field Ornithology from the University of California-Riverside.

The comparative list³ of bird sightings in March and November includes scientific names as well as common names in English and Spanish. We saw some 47 of the more than 500 species of birds in Jalisco.⁴

We used several field manuals including Peterson's Field Guide to Western Birds, Peterson's Field Guide to Mexican Birds, and Howell's Bird Finding Guide to Mexico. We consulted other sources on our return.⁵

Itinerary

Day 1 Oct 21, 2005 Axixic to Boca de Iguanas via Cuota Colima Route Mex 54.

9 AM - 1 pm en route windshield observations at Laguna Sayula, Ciudad Guzmán, Colima, Manzanillo, Cihuatlan, Barra de Navidad, Melaque, Boca de Iguanas.

1-2 p.m. Ocean front at Bahia Santiago at Manzanillo.

2 PM - 4PM windshield observations along coastal Route Mex 200 to Boca de Iguana

Day 2 Oct 22, 2005 Boca de Iguanas

8-10 a.m. stationary observation from rocky bluffs over ocean, beach, coconut groves, and brackish pond.

10-12 a.m. ambulatory survey along hillside roadway above Bahia Tenacatita.

2-4 p.m. La Manzanilla, crocodiles, river bottom, from rocky overlook of Bay.

Day 3 Oct 23, 2005 Boca de Iguanas

7-10 a.m. Ambulatory observations along beach front, adjacent coconut groves, papaya and milpa fields, and road along riverine habitat.

2-4 p.m. observation from rocky overlook

Day 4 Oct 24, 2005 Boca de Iguanas to Lake Chapala

8 a.m. - 3 p.m. Return to Lake Chapala via Route Mex 80. Barra de Navidad, La Huerta, Autlan de Navarro,

Jocotepec. Mountains, large scale farming valley, agave (tequila), hillside milpa, Lake Chapala.

Travelogue

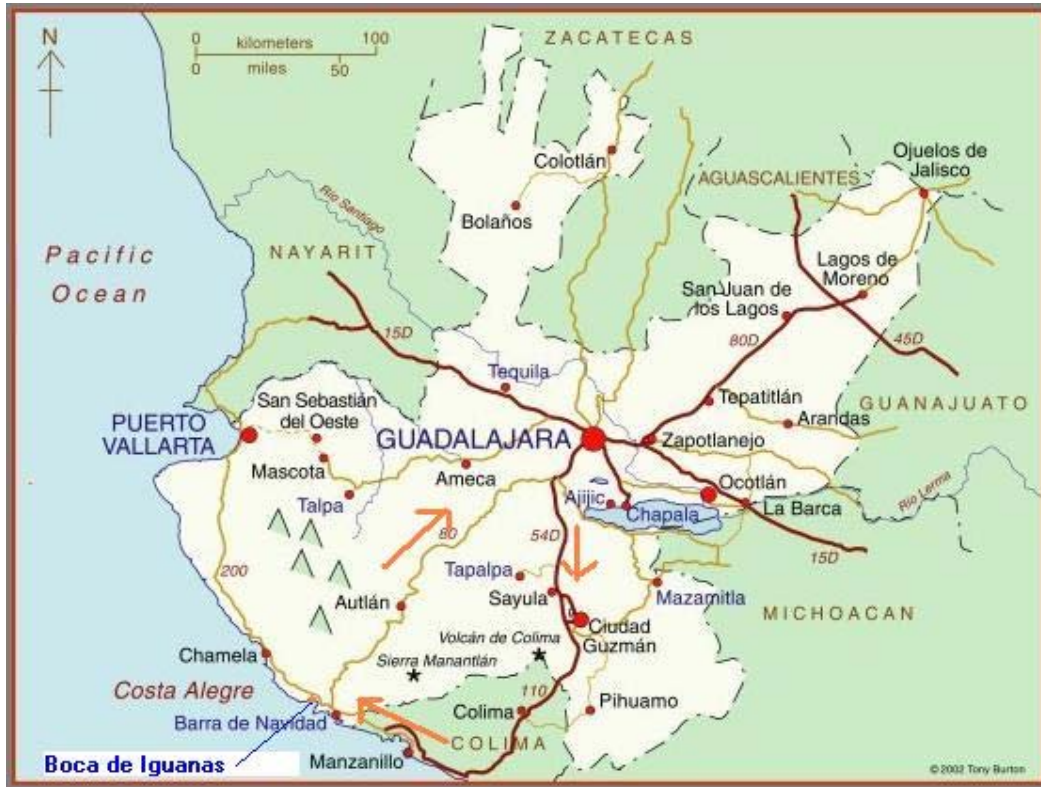
Our trip begins at Lake Chapala, Jalisco (at 5000 ft) at 20° 16' N 110 ° E. The southernmost point was 18 ° 30' N 103 ° 30' E, Tepalcates Estuary, Colima. From there we proceeded northwestward to Tenacatita Bay, Boca de Iguanas, Jalisco at 19 ° 16' N 104 ° 50' E (at sea level). Our return was along the mountain road north from Barra de Navidad on the Coast, through Autlan, then Jocotepec on Lake Chapala.



Westward view of Lake Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico

The five hour, five thousand foot descent from the mountain Lake Chapala to the Pacific Coast at Manzanillo passes a wide range of habitat: mountain lakeshore, dry

grazing land, irrigated agriculture, hillside deciduous forest, coastal plantations, beach, and the Ocean. Our destination being the Ocean, we did some windshield birding enroute.





Maps of Routes and Terrain

Over the Jocotepec pass we proceed southward and downward crossing the dry lakes of Sayula. Residual waters in Sayula's Laguna San Marcos gives hope to wading **Black Legged Stilts** and **American Avocets**. Roadside rushes and cattails are topped and filled by **Red-Winged** and **Yellow-Headed Blackbirds**. Distant **ducks** (spp?) paddle beyond our 10x Pentax range. **Cattle Egrets** outnumber cattle ten to one. **Applomado Falcons!** stake out territories from fence posts every kilometer or so as innumerable **Turkey Vultures** and **Black Vultures** scan the deserts for carrion. We are

told that **Roseate Spoonbills** occasion the lakebeds when and where the rains provide the proper depth for their swinging gait.

Continuing southward, we see the 12,000 foot conical Colima Volcano. Ranging from tequila fields to a fiery mouth above the snow fields the Volcano provides an abundant range of elevationally distributed lifezones and some 200 or more species of birds. Another destination -- another day.

Deep canyons, *barrancas*, cut the mountains and our descent provides views unparalleled of riverine habitat some 100 meters below. And yet another adventure calls.

The coastal zone is proved by plantations of coconuts, bananas, and avocados. At Tecoman, a **Loggerhead Shrike** dangles the tail-end of a fairly good sized lizard or perhaps it is a snake. **Great-tailed Grackles** glean the roadside fruit stands.

Our southernmost point is the Tepalcates Bridge over the estuary near Manzanillo. Our stop just over the bridge rewards us with a trio of **Brown Pelicans** perch on the electric wires spanning the water as **Neotropical Cormorants** wing their way to brushy stickups. Across the way, a **Wood Stork!** stands at ease beside a **Great Egret** as a **White**

Pelican drifts by. **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and **Gulls** - **Laughing Gulls** or **Sabine's**-- or perhaps both, wheel about.



Brown Pelicans on Wire

Our usual Manzanillo lunch stop is at the beach front Hotel Real on the Bay of Santiago, the more northerly of the twin bays where a sun-browned Bo Derek's cornrows and plunging swimwear first emerged. Now the "Perfect 10" goes to the **Brown Boobies**¹ plunging just beyond the breakers. We share our abundant buffet with table-hopping **House Sparrows**.



Manzanillo's Santiago Bay

Passing-up the well-reputed birding opportunities at the Manzanillo Airport swamps, we continue up the coast to our destination at the west end of the south-facing Bay of Tenacatita, at 19° 16'North latitude somewhere between the seaports of Manzanillo and Puerto Vallarta.

Arriving at about 4 p.m. we are cheerily greeted by our hosts at the house with the yellow roof.⁶



Coconuts-by-the-Sea

From our rocky aerie above Boca de Iguanas on Tenacatita Bay, our vista includes the three mile coastline to the fishing village of La Manzanilla and beyond. Wind-drifting **Turkey Vultures** tilt along the ledges below. And once in a while an **Osprey** or a **Grey Hawk!** cruises by.

Rising air currents carry a **Magnificent Frigatebird** who wakens briefly to adjust his angle.



East view of Bay of Tenacatita with La Manzanilla in the distance about three miles down the beach at Boca de Iguanas; coconut palms and riverine trees in foreground.

Magnificent Frigatebird filtered through palm fronds.



As a local family harvests sardines on the wet sand shore, squadrons of **Brown Pelicans** patrol the breaking surf, and Pacific Dolphins leap in perfect pairs. **Shearwaters** (sp?) tip their wings into the brine while **Seagulls**, again **Laughing Gulls** or **Sabine's**, comb the beachfront for hermit crabs and leftovers from the sea. **Whimbrel**, **Black Legged Stilt**, **American Avocet**, and a **Semi-Palmated Plover** poke about in the evening and morning cool,

rapidly chasing the outgoing surf and not retreating quite quickly enough from the incoming ripples. And clams exhale the intruding wet sand.



Harvesting sardines



Crab hole



Pacific Dolphins

Just 40 meters from the water's edge are the towering coconut groves with occasional glimpses of long tailed

Black-Throated Magpie Jay!. Rush hour crowds of **Yellow-Winged Caciques!** jockey for command of tree space on the way to their daily toils in the grove. Sundown brings their raucous evening return to the deciduous forested hills above the mangrove swamp.

Trips to the village of La Manzanilla for lunch at "Martin's" (Spanish for Kingfisher) or to Melaque for groceries suggest later, more focused, birding trips. We anticipate returning for a kayaking trip up the river.

Among the trees along the roads are **Bronzed Cowbirds** and **Brown Headed Cowbirds** and still more **Grackles**.



La Manzanilla estuary and Pacific (from Martin's Restaurant)

In early March, before the summer rains bring green, the dry forest reveals **Squirrel Cuckoo**, a **Streak-Backed Oriole!**, and a hair-on-fire **Pale-Billed Woodpecker**. We did not hear the distinctive "TOC TOC" that we heard in Belize so we are tempted to call it an Ivory-Billed but are reluctant given their rarity. It may be a Lineated Woodpecker. **Orange-Breasted Buntings!** cobble-stone the winding roadway.

Mid-October's greenery conceals much. But a bright **Hooded Oriole** emerges into plain view as the distant calls of **White Winged Doves** ask their peculiar culinary question. Abundant and varied butterflies, better named *las mariposas*, zig about their last rites. And wildly red zinnias border the road. Now, a solitary **Blue Bunting!** perches nearby. A **Happy Wren!** flitters about the brush just below our lookout. And just there was a **Black-Capped Gnatcatcher!**.



Wild Zinnia

Crocodiles, endangered but not uncommon, basking in sunny spaces wink at the **Heron** (**Yellow-crowned Night Heron** and a **Tricolor Heron**) stalking the mangrove-lined riverbank.



Crocodiles bask as herons watch.

Close encounter with crocodile at La Manzanilla. He is about 12 inches between eyes.

Stepping out of the pond, a **Snowy Egret** reveals his yellow, muddy feet and joins a **Great Egret** to swap stories about the one-that-got-away. A pair of **Ringed Kingfishers** supervise from a low hanging branch, their **Belted**

Kingfisher cousins, there in March, are not evident this time.



Kingfishers

A morning walk up the dusty track along the river passes by a papaya garden and a **Blue Black Grassquit!**. **Social Flycatchers**, **Tropical Kingbird**, **Cassin's Kingbird**, and numerous **Barn Swallows** participate in clearing our way through the mosquitoes, but shortly we make hasty retreat to our lofty adobe.

Four days later, on Sunday, we return home by the old road, ascending the foothills' oak and cottonwood canyons (**Elegant Trogon** habitat).



A cattle-drive flows around us.

We pass the tequila and maize farmlands of Autlan, and then to the complex Colima-Morelia-Guadalajara intersection with no roadsign to either Jocotepec or Axixic.

We manage the mazeway and head up the mountain road toward Lake Chapala. Crawling through Jocotepec's Sunday market crowd we manage to share "our" lane with bicycles, burros, babies, and truckloads of passengers. We pass the marisco restaurants with their flagmen's red banners



Mariscos and Mariachis

beckoning us to join the mariachis. We pass by but take silent note of the **Egrets** resting in the trees and floating islands of lirio.

We coast through Axixic and the welcome shade of La Floresta. We find our humble adobe in Tlayacapan, weary but grateful to be home again on the shores of Mexico's largest natural lake and its abundant, yet, inadequately documented bird life.

Our dogs are glad we're back. The cats did not know we were gone.

Birders? Yes! Avid? Perhaps, but not like our vigorously enthusiastic 100 species-per-day mentors, Chet and Gene⁷, in Southern California. But we did log 47 remarkable species including 12 "lifebirds" in our March and October vacations-from-retirement at 19° 16' North by the Sea.

And we identified many potentially productive day-trip options along the way.

Frequency of Observations.

While we did not count the number of sightings of a particular species, nor its numbers, **Turkey Vultures** are ubiquitous, being found at every elevation and over every precinct. In sheer numerosity, however, the **Orange-Breasted Bunting** reigned supreme despite its limited season (March) and place (ocean hillside). **Pelicans**, both **White and Brown**, are found both at Lake Chapala and on the Pacific, and presumably overhead between, as are **Stilts** and **Avocets** and Wood Storks, Great and Snowy Egrets other wading birds (see below).

Supplemental observations at Chapala Riviera.

Aside and beyond our ocean ventures, are the numerous birds of our backyard and lakeside on Lake Chapala where, after a rainfall, we may see four or five species of Oriole within an hour. We also have seen and checked-off **Northern Jacana, Common Moorhen, White Pelican, Brown Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Little Blue Heron, White-Faced Iris, Wood Stork, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Boat-Billed Heron, Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, Crested**

Caracara, Inca Dove, White Winged Dove, Common Ground Dove, Smooth Billed Ani, various Hummingbirds, Red-Breasted Sapsucker, Golden Cheeked Woodpecker, Golden Fronted Woodpecker, several tyrant flycatchers including Western Kingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Black Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, as well as Vermillion Flycatcher. Bronzed and Brown-headed Cowbirds and Brown Jays abound at the hot springs and a Canyon Wren grazes the walls of our house. Curve-billed Thrasher, Blue Mockingbird, Grey-Silky Flycatcher, Rufous-Backed Robin, Yellow Rumped Warbler, Golden Warbler, Yellow Warbler (likely the "Chapala" variety and an occasional couple of high flying parrots (spp?), and of course the Rock Dove and House Sparrow comprise our local Lake Chapala birding.

Allen C. Turner

Judy M. Boyd

Appendix A: Comparative Chart of Bird Sitings: March and
October 2005

Appendix B: Jalisco, Mexico Checklist

Endnotes:

¹ Allen and Judy are a husband and wife team. Both of us have jointly participated in all our field trips credited by the University of California-Riverside Extension.

² The narrative was written by Allen C. Turner and edited by Judy M. Boyd.

³ The comparative listing was prepared by Judy M. Boyd and edited by Allen C. Turner. See Appendix A.

⁴ Checklist of Jalisco Birds. See Appendix B.

⁵ Resources:

Alden. Finding the Birds in Western Mexico. University of Arizona Press.

Boddy, The Birds from Paradise: The Guide and Checklist of the Birds of Puerto Vallarta. One of the best checklists with habitat descriptions, its illustrations are brief and must be supplemented by pictorial guides. To many too many, "Paradise" is Puerto Vallarta. For the birds, unfortunately, "economic" development is rapidly displacing habitat in those tourist-centered zones. Reluctantly, lest a pathway be beaten to this endangered spot, we report our sightings of the birds from "Just South of Paradise" just north of the 19th parallel on the Coast.

Edwards. A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas. University of Texas Press.

Howell. A Bird-Finding Guide to Mexico. Cornell University Press.

Kaufman. Guía de campo a las aves de Norteamérica. Houghton Mifflin. Spanish edition of Kaufman's Guide to the Birds of North America.

Paulson. Shorebirds of North America. Princeton University Press.

Peterson. Field Guide to Western Birds. Houghton Mifflin.

Peterson and Chalif. Field Guide to Mexican Birds. Houghton Mifflin.

Wauer. Birder's Mexico. Texas A&M University Press.

Wheatley and Brewer. Where to Watch Birds in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Princeton University Press.

⁶ www.Coconutsbythesea.com

⁷ Our inaugural field trip to Southeastern Arizona, directed by Chet McGaugh, opened our eyes to the importance of "birding" as a new way of appreciating our environment. Eugene Cardiff showed us the meaning of dedication.