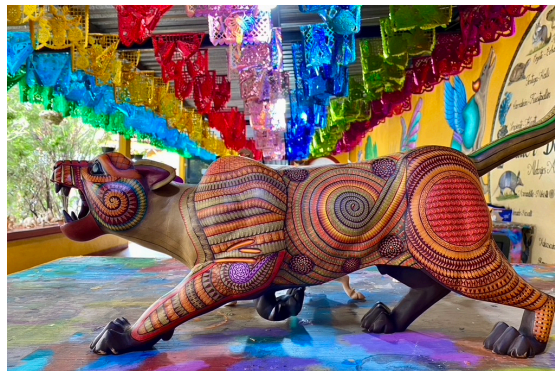
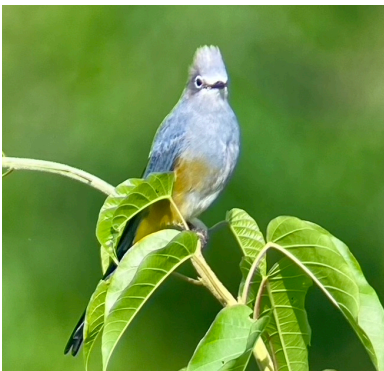


Oaxaca Valley: Birds, Culture & Crafts

July 22-30, 2024 | Trip Report | by Lena Moser



With guides Amy McAndrews, Jorge Montejo Díaz, and Lena Moser and Norita, Bill, Jon, Dru, Ken, Joelle, Lynne, Howard, and Audie



Our guides this year were Amy McAndrews and Jorge Montejo Díaz. They joined us from Xalapa, the capital city of the Mexican state of Veracruz. We are so grateful that these two amazing guides jumped in last minute and gave it their all! Their expertise on the culture, avifauna, ecology, and butterflies of Oaxaca was terrific, topped only by their thoughtfulness, attentiveness, and delightful sense of humor. Our local driver Ramón was unparalleled in his warmth, caring, and meticulously skilled driving on the winding country roads. Our group gelled wonderfully, and we all enjoyed the camaraderie, bird diversity, outstanding regional delicacies, talented local artisans, festivities, and stunning natural beauty of this truly unique tour.



Mon., July 22 Oaxaca City!

Participants from seven different U.S. states gathered for the first time at our hotel's welcome dinner. Some had arrived early to explore Oaxaca City and go birding on their own. We exchanged smiles, introductions, and a few stories before seeking a good night's slumber to get ready for our first full day of birding.

Tue., July 23 La Cumbre | Restaurante Colibrí

After an early breakfast, we headed north of Oaxaca City into the Sierra Norte, slowly climbing in elevation until we reached 9,000 feet at a birding hotspot known as La Cumbre. Leaving behind scrub and oak woodland, we wound our way up the mountains into humid pine oak forests. It had rained heavily the night before and bird activity was therefore quieter than usual. Nevertheless, we found plenty of birds: Yellow-eyed Junco, Steller's Jay, Red Warbler, Olive Warbler, Tufted Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo, and a vocal family of Gray-barred Wrens. We slowly explored the wet trails and quiet roads, locating small foraging flocks with Brown Creeper, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Red Crossbill, Mexican Chickadee, and Gray-breasted Wood-Wren. We only heard the two Nightingale-Thrushes, Russet and Ruddy-capped, but we lucked out with great looks at a few Red Warblers and a Golden-browed Warbler who came in close, showing off their striking, bright colors against a gray backdrop of dank leaves.

Lunch at the Restaurante Colibrí was unforgettable! We indulged in delicious hot chocolate for starters, followed by yummy huitlacoche (corn smut soup) and sopa azteca (savory tortilla soup). Believe it or not, the birds were even more delectable than the food. Accustomed to people, several wild winged wonders stunned us with up-close looks. A bossy Blue-throated Mountain-gem kept chasing away the Rivoli's Hummingbirds at the feeders. A Rufous-capped Brushfinch, normally a secretive forest bird of the understory, hopped around on the deck railings and under our feet among the chair legs akin to a House Sparrow (perhaps it was having an identity swap?). We had our best views of the trip at Stellar's Jays and a White-eared Hummingbird feeding on diminutive purple wildflowers. Fixing our spotting scope on a Collared Towhee singing from a nearby bush, we drank in every tiny feather detail and eye sparkle of this endemic's beauty. Suffice it to say that, even after two hours, we had a hard time leaving this fantastic, birdy restaurant nestled in the mountains.

Wed., July 24 Teotitlán del Valle | Local Weaving | Tule Tree

After breakfast, we birded the front of the hotel and got good looks at Tropical Kingbird, Melodious Blackbird, Gray Silky-flycatcher, and the endemic Rufous-backed Robin, Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater, and White-throated Towhee. Not too bad for a hotel parking lot!



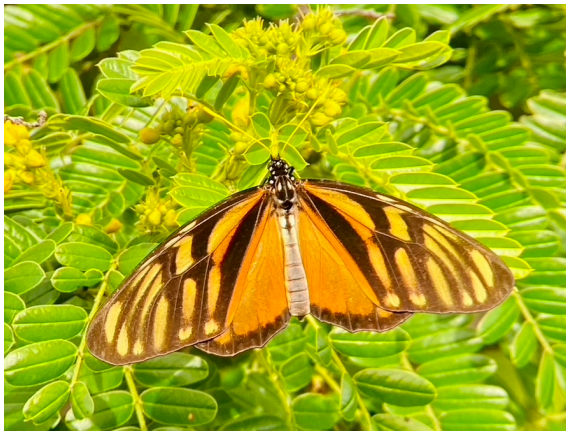
We loaded up for our next adventure to the neighboring community of Teotitlán del Valle, which is considered the birthplace of the 500-year-old Zapotec wool weaving tradition. On our way there, we made a few stops, picking up Groove-billed Ani, Crested Caracara, Blue Grosbeak, and Dusky Hummingbird in the pastures along the road. Another roadside stop in the arid scrub habitat yielded sought-out species endemic to southwest Mexico: Gray-breasted Woodpecker and a family of Boucard's Wrens. Nice finds! Other goodies in the dry thorns were Curve-billed Thrasher, Botteri's Sparrow, Bronzed Cowbird, White-throated Towhee, and surprise flyover Black-bellied Whistling Ducks.

The Piedra Azul Reservoir at the entrance to Teotitlán del Valle was quiet due to low water levels from longstanding drought in the region. We enjoyed looks at Least Grebe and Cassin's Kingbird, as well as our best scope views of Gray Silky-flycatchers and Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater. Stellar scope looks at cooperative birds sitting still are hard to beat.

At our next stop, a Blue Mockingbird and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush beckoned us with their haunting songs, their voices echoing from the thorn scrub arroyo, yet they remained elusively out of view. Other heard-only birds were Woodhouse's Scrub Jays, West Mexican Chachalacas, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bewick's Wren, and Chestnut-capped Brush Finch. Fortunately, other species showed themselves nicely, like the Bridled Sparrow, Greenish Elaenia, Squirrel Cuckoo, and three Red-tailed Hawks.

Lunch at El Descanso hit the spot with several types of delicious mole, which were easily over-indulged. Those of us who ordered the brick-red coloradito mole were blown away by its remarkable combination of spicy, smoky, tangy, and sweet flavors—a veritable flavor fiesta. Others enjoyed tlayudas—the famous, pizza-like Oaxacan street food which consists of a large, crunchy tortilla covered with refried beans, asiento (pork lard), lettuce, avocado, meat, quesillo (a Oaxacan cheese that's to die for), and salsa. Of course, no Oaxacan cuisine is complete without chapulines, the edible grasshoppers that are a delicacy in Mexico and Central America. The word "chapulines" comes from the Nahuatl word "chapolin" for grasshopper. These fried insects add a welcome crunch to many Oaxacan dishes. They're high in protein, low in fat, and rich in zinc and iron, as well as flavor, since they're often seasoned with garlic, lime, salt, and chiles. Yum!

Sated and happy, we were ready for the cultural highlight of the day: a visit to El Tono de la Cochinilla, the weaving studio of master weavers Rosario Martínez Vásquez and Ernesto Maldonado González. We watched an awe-inspiring demonstration of how tapetes (rugs) and tapices (tapestries) are traditionally spun and dyed. To



this day, most weavers use natural dyes in their rugs. Shades of deep scarlet and red come from grinding the little scale insects called chochinilla (cochineal) that live in nopal cactuses all over the valley. Blue comes from the painstaking process of fermenting, straining, then drying the pulp of the leaves of the indigo plant, which grows in the Istmo de Tehuantepec. Yellow is produced from pomegranate rinds or zacatlascal, a parasitic plant that grows like spaghetti on trees. Pecan shells and moss yield brown. The textiles' colors and the complex patterns of birds, trees, snakes, butterflies, mountains, rivers, and Zapotec geometries had us mesmerized. The experience of seeing and learning how these traditional works of art are made was nothing short of magical. Most of us ordered some woven treasures be shipped home.

As we were about to depart Teotitlán del Valle, we were surprised by the bird activity right outside the weaving studio. Large numbers of swifts and swallows darted overhead, heading west. We counted six species: Chestnut-collared Swift, Black Swift, Violet-green Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, and Barn Swallow. This was an unexpected avian treat.

Our last stop was in the town of Santa María del Tule, home to the legendary Tule tree. One of the oldest trees in the world, this colossal 2,000 year-old Montezuma cypress boasts the largest trunk of any tree in Mexico (the cypress is 145 feet in circumference, 130 feet tall, and weighs 636 tons). We were overwhelmed with wonder as we walked around the majestic giant. Exploring the gardens near the Tule tree, we “padded” our bird list with some common urban birds like Eurasian Collared Dove, House Finch, House Sparrow, and Rock Pigeon. To our pleasant surprise, we also added a colorful Red-lored Parrot that perched atop a pine.

In the evening, we had a superb dinner at Restaurante Colibrí. This was a different hummingbird restaurant than yesterdays, and it was just a short walk from our hotel. Decadent cocktails were passed around the table—margaritas, mezcalitas, and piña coladas. We enjoyed mouth-watering chili rellenos, savory soups, steaks, and a panoply of salads. For dessert, Jon ordered a beautiful crême brûlée, while Audie had plátanos (sweet plantains) with cream.

Goodness, what a fulfilling day!

Thur., July 25 San Miguel Arcangel | Yagul | Oaxaca City

After an early breakfast, we climbed to 7,000 feet in elevation to a birding hotspot called San Miguel Arcangel—Encino y Guaje. This was a new habitat for us—scrubby oak woodland and brushy cactus scrub of dry tropical



foothills and interior valleys. This thorny habitat was home to some of our endemic targets, but birds were more easily heard than seen on the steep slope thickets. We listened to White-tipped Dove, West Mexican Chachalaca, Boucard's Wren, and Ocellated Thrasher. We worked long and hard to see the latter, but the thrasher remained elusive to the eye.

Speaking of birding hard work, Jon was the only one to catch a glimpse of the difficult Slaty Vireo (lucky!), but thankfully everyone got fantastic looks at a cooperative Bridled Sparrow (which can be very skulking). This handsome sparrow is endemic to interior southern Mexico, so we celebrated the pretty sight. We also worked exceedingly hard for the Dwarf Vireo, and after prolonged, concerted effort, we all finally got glimpses of this tiny, shy vireo. Phew! A bit further up the road, we heard an Audubon's Oriole and saw a variety of other showy species like Bewick's Wren, Rose-throated Becard, Canyon Wren, Elegant Euphonia, Lesser Goldfinch, Western Wood-Pewee, Nutting's Flycatcher, and a striking Black-vented Oriole.

Our lunch stop was at the charming Rancho Zapata—a roadside restaurant, mezcal distillery and tasting room, complete with a horse farm, gardens, and, of course, great food. Ken and Joelle ordered diablo shrimp, Jon loved his steak, and most others had tender lengua (beef tongue) in almond mole, which was exceptional. Flan topped things off for dessert. The pleasant outdoor seating allowed us to continue birding, and we had nice close-up looks at Gray-breasted Woodpecker on a cactus next to the patio. A nesting Inca Dove made for fun photographs, and we got our best looks at Boucard's Wren and Black-vented Oriole. We learned about the fascinating mezcal-making process and got to try samples in the tasting room afterwards (mezcal añejo, which had been aged in oak barrels for a few years, was our favorite).

In the late afternoon, we visited the prehistoric archeological site of Yagul. This fortress sits atop a hill, where we could take in the dramatic panoramic views of the ruins, valley, and mountains. One of the most studied archaeological sites of the Oaxaca Valley, Yagul boasts 30 tombs with hieroglyphic inscriptions and the second-largest ball court in the Americas (second to Chichén Itzá.). Also, the palace of six courtyards provides insight into pre-Columbian domestic life. Walking around the ruins, we marveled at the stunning prickly pear cacti in full bloom. Seeing an abundance of so many flowers was special, as these cacti flower only at very specific times of the year. We watched a pair of Rock Wrens bouncing about on the ruins and saw many Dusky Hummingbirds. As we left Yagul, we stopped on the side of the road to marvel at the 7,000-year-old rock art paintings on the cliffs by the entrance. This area is home to the Prehistoric Caves of Yagul, a UNESCO World Heritage site. These caves have provided extraordinarily well-preserved botanical evidence of maize cobs, beans, squash, and bottle



gourds—evidence of early plant domestication in North America dating back about 10,000 years, which documents the transition humans made from hunting-gathering to agriculture in the region.

We wanted to enjoy the festivities in Oaxaca City, so we headed to El Centro at 4:45 pm. Our tour happily coincided with La Guelaguetza—a yearly indigenous cultural festival in Oaxaca that celebrates the state's traditions of music, dance, art, and food. We admired huge sculptures, a parade of countless costumes, twirling, giant puppets, fireworks, live music, and colorful processions just outside the monumental San Domingo Church. We topped the evening off with a rooftop dinner at Las Quince Letras Restaurante, whose Chef Celia Florián enjoys global recognition for her Oaxacan cuisine. Our taste buds went to heaven! For an appetizer, Jon ordered a cold pepper stuffed with pork and couldn't stop raving about it. Lena and Howard loved their tender fish in a flavorful sauce. Amy enjoyed mole dulce, which is made with Mexican chocolate, dried ancho chiles, cinnamon, pumpkin seeds, and more. Everyone agreed that the decadent crème brûlée and chocolate mousse were out of this world.

Fri., July 26 Morning at Monte Albán | Drive to San José del Pacífico

Another early start again this morning brought us to the entrance of Monte Albán, the pre-Columbian archaeological site that was the capital of the Zapotec civilization for 1,300 years. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Monte Albán is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Mexico. This sprawling capital was inhabited by the Olmecs, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs. The site was built over the course of centuries and includes pyramids, terraces, dams, canals, artificial mounds, tombs, a ball court, and bas-reliefs. We were excited to explore these famous ruins, but before they opened up to the public, we first birded the entrance road and the surrounding grassland and wooded habitats.

A Black-vented Oriole tee'd up on a dead snag near the parking lot and must have heard our loud "oohs" and "aahs" as we marveled at its beauty in the early morning sunlight. The elusive Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush thwarted us no more, as we all got amazing scope views of one singing in the understory. We also celebrated great views of our nemesis Blue Mockingbird, which was preening in a pine tree, pausing long enough for us to get it in the scope! (Joelle's namesake of Black Mockingbird became a running joke, as the bird rarely showed itself well enough to appreciate its deep blue hues.)

Other highlights were an up-close Berylline Hummingbird, Pileated Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, and a Thick-billed Kingbird that hawk-eye Amy spotted from miles away. Howard found a gorgeous Fig-eater Beetle,



and we admired its brilliant green and orange colors, never mind its heft. This large scarab beetle is commonly called a flower chafer since it feeds on pollen, nectar, or petals. On the grounds of the ruins, we loved watching a male Vermillion Flycatcher sallying for insects. Lesser Goldfinches also showed themselves well in their cheerful yellows. Lena yelled out “Zone-tailed Hawk!” and we got amazing looks at this Turkey Vulture mimic as it cruised low overhead. Of course, Monte Albán was fun to explore. It was easy to see why the Zapotecs named their city Dani Baá, which means “Sacred Mountain.” No matter which direction we looked, we reveled in the distant blue hills and sun-steeped Valles Centrales below. The Zapotecs took their advanced knowledge of the stars and built an empire atop the tallest hill they could find, then looked out over this great domain for two millennia. The sheer history of this place was enough to make the mind spin.

Hungry for lunch, we heartily enjoyed our stop at the Azucena Zapoteca restaurant, located in the town of San Martín Tilcajete, just 15 miles south of Oaxaca City. The outdoor seating area had colorful, lush vegetation in every corner. Each dish was a work of art to behold! Many of us enjoyed estofado with tender beef tongue—an exquisite mole distinctive for its tartness due to the addition of olives, capers, and sometimes citrus. Dru loved her chicken and rabbit grass caldo tileño—a hearty and flavorful soup that originated in Tlalpan, Mexico City. It's made with a chicken broth base, vegetables, and chipotle peppers, and is garnished with avocado, lime, and cilantro. Audie relished the Alcatraz Zapoteca—thinly shaved tasajo (beef) surrounded by zucchini flowers, cheese and vegetables, all floating on a bed of miltomate sauce and bean paste. Jorge, Lena, and Norita had beef tongue in chichilo mole, which is made of chilhuacle chili peppers, ancho chili peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, garlic, avocado leaves, cloves, cumin, beef stock, black peppercorns, corn flour for thickening, allspice, lemon juice, and lard. The complexity and many-layered flavors of the mole sauces are, of course, a distinctive highlight of Oaxaca, which is famed as “the land of seven moles.”

The exquisite food fueled us for our four-hour-long drive into the mountains of San José del Pacífico, where we would spend the next three nights. As we gradually climbed to 8,000 feet in elevation, we enjoyed the inspiring mountain scenery and even picked up new birds along the way: Peregrine Falcon and Purple Martins. Our dinner was at the Italian restaurant La Taberna de los Duendes, which served oversized portions of pasta. Whilst nestled in the chilly mountain pine forest, our rooms at the lodge all had fireplaces, and with a fire going, we had a cozy night's sleep.

Sat., July 27 Birding the Mountains of San José del Pacífico

We awoke to a cold and drizzly morning at Puesto del Sol, our lovely lodge. Layered up, we did some early, pre-breakfast birding on the beautiful grounds overlooking the vista of cloud-covered peaks of the Sierra Madres. We heard an Audubon's Oriole and Long-tailed Wood-Partridge in the distance, as well as the haunting, cascading song of the Brown-backed Solitaire. Red Crossbills, Spotted Towhees, and Yellow-eyed Juncos showed

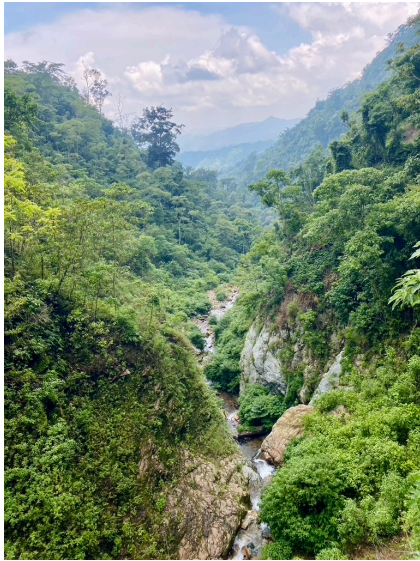


themselves nicely, but our desired Bumblebee Hummingbird briefly buzzed by without stopping. We marveled at a brown rhinoceros beetle in one of the potted plants on the front porch—it was huge! Amy identified it as *Golofa imperialis*, a species that can reach a length of two inches.

After breakfast, we took a short drive to go birding on the road from San Mateo toward Rio Hondo. Splitting into two groups based on interest and pace, we were each uniquely rewarded. Lena's group got looks at a Chestnut-sided Shrike-Video, flyby Band-tailed Pig eons, and an Amethyst-throated Hummingbird feeding on flowers adjacent to the road. What a little gem! A fruiting tree was a mecca for several Common Chlorospingus and the typically shy Brown-backed Solitaires. Finally, we got our best looks at a nearby Slate-throated Redstart. Soaking up the landscape, we also admired many fungi, lichen, butterflies, flowers, and trees along the way. A Zone-tailed Hawk zoomed past us as we worked our way through a busy mixed foraging flock, finding Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Mexican Chickadee, Olive Warbler, Hutton's Vireo, Tufted Flycatcher, and our most stellar views of Red Warbler. Amy and Jorge's group tracked down a Pine Flycatcher, Russet-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Mountain Trogon, Red Warbler, White-eared Hummingbird, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, and White-throated Jay. They also saw the very colorful and endangered Lila Downs Grasshopper, which was recently described to science.

Back at the lodge, some relaxed on the porch watching Garnet-throated Hummingbirds coming to the feeders, while others went into town for souvenirs. Lynne returned a happy hunter-gatherer, having found a lovely woven green hat and dress. Lena bought some colorful mushrooms crocheted by a couple of teenage girls who learned the art of crocheting from their grandmother. When we all got back together at 3:00 pm, it began to rain, so we called off our late afternoon birding, and a good thing, too—it soon began to downpour! Some of us were grateful for the extra rest while others stood for a long time under the roof of a woodshed, waiting patiently for a Beautiful Hummingbird to show up on the bush with the small white flowers. We played with an adorable puppy who made all the wet waiting much more fun. Our efforts paid off when a male Beautiful Hummingbird showed up, feeding stealthily and slowly inside and around the backside of the bush. But saw him we did! Hurrah!

Before evening fell, some of us went birding on the grounds and watched an American Robin, White-throated Thrush, and Brown-backed Solitaire feeding at fruiting tree behind Jorge and Amy's cabin. We also saw more Spotted Towhees, a Brown Creeper, and a juvenile Ruddy-capped Nightingale Thrush with very blotched plumage—he looked dapper in dapples.



More amazing food awaited us at the restaurant next door to our lodge. Dru and Jon split a giant burger, Audie and Howard had a supreme steak, Lynne loved yet another mole (Oaxaqueño), Joelle enjoyed a lighter fare of guacamole, Ken had salmon salad, and Lena ate the most delicious portobello veggie burger of her life (no joke). Another delicious end to a delightful day.

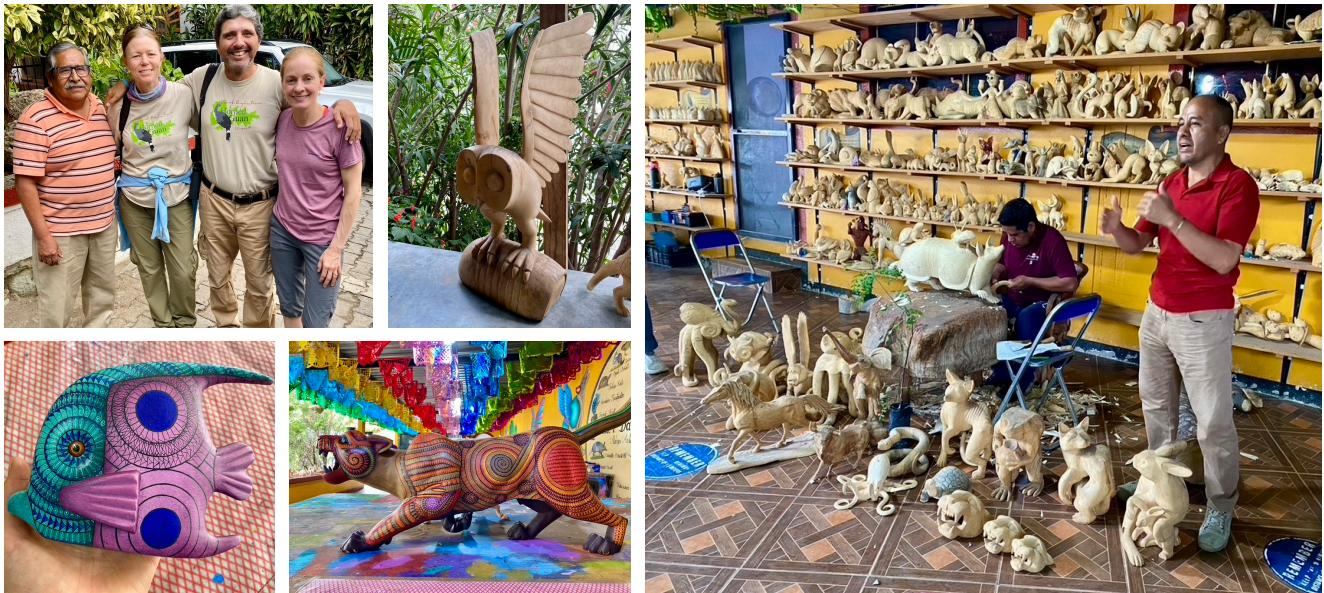
Sun., July 28 Pluma Hidalgo | Puesto del Sol

After an early breakfast, we wound our way down twisting roads to a new habitat at lower elevation (4,500 feet). We spent the morning birding various logging roads near the small mountain village of Pluma Hidalgo, where Oaxaca's highest quality Arabica coffee is grown. The tropical moist montane forest that surrounded us was teeming with novel birds, and we could barely keep up with the flurry of activity!

At our first stop, a Red-billed Pigeon sang in the distance as we searched for a skulking Happy Wren. The common Blue-capped Hummingbirds were welcome little jewels who zipped by now and again. A Squirrel Cuckoo sailed overhead while a flock of five Northern Emerald Toucanets secluded themselves in the canopy (most of us eventually got a peek at one toucanet). Our second stop was a big win when we got to watch a Mexican Hermit feeding along the forest edge. Although drab brown in plumage, this large endemic hummingbird has a strikingly striped face, very long, decurved bill, and long white tail streamers. Two White-tipped Doves flew past while a Banded Wren and Black-headed Saltator sang nearby. We also got great looks at a Dusky-capped Flycatcher and Rusty Sparrow. Amy stunned us all again when her sharp eyes spotted a Long-billed Starthroat—a very uncommon hummingbird. A soaring Short-tailed Hawk bid us adieu as we made our way to towards our third hotspot of the morning: a bridge over a gorgeous waterfall. Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers greeted us there, but the biggest treat was the tiny-but-majestic Bat Falcon we saw perched above the ridgeline.

Butterflies abounded today, too. We admired the Turquoise-spotted Navy Eighty-eight butterfly, which landed on Norita's shirt and posed nicely for us. This butterfly of the Neotropical ecozone has faint markings on its wings that resemble the number 88. We also saw and photographed an Orange Mapwing, Anna's Eighty-eight (which landed on Lynn), Crimson Patch, and a Blue Morpho.

After making a sudden stop to admire an Orange-fronted Parakeet perched in a cecropia tree on the side of the road, we arrived at the base of the village of Pluma Hidalgo. Cars could not go up the small, steep roads leading there, so we all got into tiny Tuk Tuks to make our way up... how fun! We were warmly greeted by Don Alberto



Pérez Ramos and his family, who treated us to one of the most outstanding meals of our trip. We felt like welcome guests in their family’s outdoor kitchen, where we watched Doña Ramos and her daughters cook up fresh tortillas, a satisfying chicken-and-potato stew, along with rice, abundant fresh coffee, and dessert. We were downright spoiled. The laughter, friendly atmosphere, and beautiful, birdy surroundings meshed together to imprint upon us a most treasured memory.

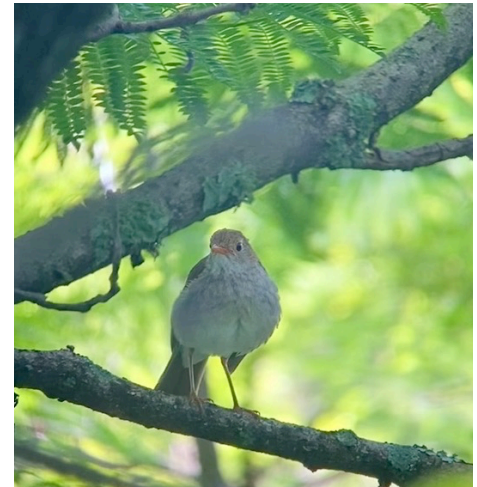
Birding at 4,800 feet in the drizzly, cloudy foothill s was a challenge due to the thick fog, but we made the most of it, getting good looks at Audubon’s Oriole, Black-headed Saltator, Happy Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Blue Mockingbird. When it started raining hard, Don Ramos, the fourth-generation owner of this coffee plantation, showed us how the family produces their coffee, from plucking the coffee berries off the coffee shrubs, to roasting, grinding, and packaging the beans. We’ll never forget the Rusty Sparrow that landed in the same coffee shrub where Don Ramos was giving his harvesting demonstration!

After another delicious dinner in the restaurant next to our lodge, we happily snuggled into our fireplace-warmed rooms for a most satisfying sleep.

Mon., July 29 Local Birding | Alebrijes Workshop | Return to Oaxaca City

Today we decided to give a local logging road another go and were so glad we did. Bumping into various mixed flocks, we enjoyed more looks at Slate-throated Redstarts, family groups of Red Warblers (with juveniles of funky plumages), Mexican Chickadees, Brown Creepers, Bushtits, Hutton’s Vireos, and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers. Pine and Tufted Flycatchers called in the distance and a Violet-green Swallow passed overhead. We examined the many mushrooms that sprung up after the rains, included a large puffball and a stunning *Amanita muscaria* (Fly Agaric).

Alas, the time came to leave our charming mountain lodge. After packing up, we headed back to Oaxaca City for one more night at the hotel Misión de los Angeles. But first, we had a special treat awaiting us. Just south of the city, in the town of San Martín Tilcajete, we stopped for an art demonstration at a spectacular alebrijes workshop: Taller David Hernández. This family business has been dedicated to the craft of making alebrijes of tonas and nahuales for 50 years, and it is now run by the third generation of artisans in the family. Alebrijes are fanciful representations, in bold color and intricate detail, of tonas and nahuales—animal spirit guides and protectors from the Zapotec culture. Zapotec artisans have carved tonas and nahuales out of copal wood for thousands of years. We were in awe as we watched the carving and fine precision painting. To say that this



elaborate work is jaw-dropping would be an understatement. Of course, we couldn't leave without buying a few special alebrijes to take home.

Upon arrival in Oaxaca Centro, Bill pronounced, "This is so not Sarasota." Lol! Laughter is the best medicine. We returned early enough to clean up for the evening and head over to our favorite Restaurante Colibrí, where we went around the table and shared the highlights of our adventure. We were grateful for how we all connected as a group and had such a good time together. Other highlights mentioned were Amy's hearing and spotting of ridiculously distant birds, Jorge's appetite and jovial sense of humor, Lena's boundless enthusiasm and energy, the people and their hospitality, the many beautiful locations, lunch at Pluma Hidalgo, Red Warbler, the 88 butterfly sitting on Lynn, big slabs of meat, alebrijes, and much more.

What a sweet way to end our time together.

Tue., July 30 Departures

Several of us had early departures this morning, so we bid farewell to our tireless driver Ramón and unforgettable guides Jorge and Amy. We shared a remarkable time in Oaxaca and made vivid memories that we will treasure for many years to come.

Photos by Lena Moser: Group, Gray Silky-flycatcher, Carved Alebrijes, Collared Towhee, Oaxaca Streets, Orchid, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Scenic, Weaving Demonstration, Tule Tree, Butterfly, Scenic, Exploring Yagul, Oaxaca City, Monte Alban, Agave, Scenic, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Mural, White-throated Towhee, Long-billed Starthroat, Carved Alebrijes, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush