

WINGS OVER WILLCOX & BORDERLAND TOURS

San Blas, Jungle & Barranca: January 22-29, 2013



Golden-cheeked Woodpecker and Orange-fronted Parakeet by Ollie Oliver

Northern Potoo by Rick Taylor

Morning mist is rising over the tranquil river waters as the boat glides between living walls of red, white, and black mangroves. Fishing along the banks are Wood Stork, White Ibis, and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. Boat-billed Herons, with huge, scoop-shaped bills, roost quietly in buttonwood trees that arch over the boatway. Perched on top the mangroves are Common and Great Black-Hawks, Osprey, and—potentially—Crane Hawks with scarlet red legs. Emerald Green Kingfishers flash across the canals; skulking in the shadows are Rufous-necked Wood-Rails and Mangrove Cuckoos. Small birds include Tropical Parula and the red-headed “Mangrove” subspecies of Yellow Warbler. The most common bird of all, perhaps, is the Anhinga. Loafing on limbs overhanging the channel, five-foot-long Green Iguanas stare with beady eyes as the boat passes by. This outing is only one of many gifts awaiting you during our week-long stay at San Blas, Nayarit. The restaurant chef was trained in Europe and the grounds of the family-run hotel feature lush, tropical plantings. Best of all, there are no hotel changes the entire tour. Located approximately 1,000 miles down the west coast of Mexico, San Blas is surrounded by jungles, rivers, beaches, and mountains. It is here that the Sierra Madre Occidental plunges into the Pacific Ocean. A leisurely walk under 150-foot-tall Silk Cotton Kapok and Gumbo Limbo trees may yield Citreoline and Elegant Trogons, Mexican Woodnymph and Cinnamon Hummingbird, both of the large, flame-crested tropical woodpeckers—the Lineated and the Pale-billed, as well as the endemic Gray-crowned Woodpecker, parrots, parakeets, and parrotlets. The Barranca country between Puerto Vallarta and San Blas is famous for its flights of turquoise-winged, scarlet-tailed Military Macaws. In a single ravine on Cerro San Juan we may find Bumblebee Hummingbird, Russet-crowned Motmot, Green Jay, and Blue Mockingbird. There is no better place in the Mexican lowlands to see long-toed Northern Jaçanas walking on lily pads and Roseate Spoonbills in the lagoons, or wintering Black-capped Vireos and U.S. warblers in the highlands. There will also be time to visit the old church and ruins of Fort San Bacilio overlooking the harbor, and for swimming or just relaxing at our beautiful hotel.

Leaders: Homer Hansen & Rick Taylor

Cost of **San Blas, Jungle & Barranca** includes all accommodations, all meals, our chartered boat rides, and all air and land transportation beginning and ending in Phoenix, Arizona. *The cost also includes a donation to the Wings Over Willcox Birding & Nature Festival*.....**\$2,895.**

BORDERLAND TOURS 2550 W. Calle Padilla Tucson, AZ 85745

Trip Itinerary:

- Day 1: Meet at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix by 11:30 am for our 1:30 pm* departure for Puerto Vallarta. Bird en route to San Blas. All nights at Hotel Garza Canela in San Blas.
- Day 2: Explore the San Blas area & the beaches & lagoons surrounding San Blas proper
- Day 3: Bird the Singayta Jungle area; evening boat ride up Canal La Tovar
- Day 4: La Bajada area; Matanchen Beach area
- Day 5: Río San Cristóbal & Las Marismas boat ride; San Blas Ponds
- Day 6: All day trip to Cerro San Juan & Mirador del Aguila
- Day 7: Upper Singayta Jungle Road; Shrimp Pond Road
- Day 8: Return to Puerto Vallarta for our 2:30 pm departure for Phoenix. Arrive Phoenix at 4:30 pm.*

***Please note:** This itinerary is predicated on current airline schedules and is subject to change with their schedules. Please check with us regarding current flight schedules to/from Mexico before ticketing your flights to/from Phoenix. This itinerary is meant as a guide. Birds, weather, or road conditions may cause a change of schedule.

Expanded Itinerary

Day 1: Meet at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix by 11:30 a.m. for our 1:30 p.m. departure for Puerto Vallarta. (Please note: airline flight schedules are subject to change. Please check with us prior to booking your flight into Phoenix. Travelers originating from the northern or eastern U.S. may find it advantageous to overnight in Phoenix.) The flight to Puerto Vallarta takes approximately 2-1/2 hours. Owing to a change in time zones, local time in Puerto Vallarta will be about 5:00 p.m. when we arrive. However, just a few miles north of the airport we cross the Rio Areca and enter the Mexican state of Nayarit, which is in the same time zone as Phoenix. This means it's hardly worth the effort to change your watch for the short amount of time it will take us to clear customs and claim our baggage. BORDERLAND has chartered a full-sized bus for the 2-1/2 hour transfer to San Blas. Every passenger will have a window seat. Some of the birds we may see as we pass through the vine-shrouded tropical deciduous forest along the west coast highway—immortalized in the motion picture *Night of the Iguana*—include Gray Hawks, Great Kiskadees, and Tropical Kingbirds, as well as endemic Black-throated Magpie-Jays and Sinaloa Crows. All nights at Hotel Garza Canela in San Blas.

Day 2: We'll be up in time for the first flush of bird song, almost thunderous in the San Blas area. Less than a mile from our hotel on a bluff overlooking this small seaport town is Fort San Bacilio. Celebrated in the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, we'll bird the 18th century churchyard where "The Bells of San Blas" once tolled. Some of the species that we may find here include Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Mexican Parrotlet, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Citreoline Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Greenish Elaenia, Gray-breasted Martin, Masked Tityra, Happy Wren, Rufous-backed Robin, and White-collared Seedeater. Migrants from the north may include Black-headed and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, as well as American Redstarts and Painted Buntings. In the afternoon we'll visit the nearby Crocodile Farm Road. Raptors are usually fairly common in the open pastures and marshlands along the first half-mile of the road, and we generally find a Common or Great Black-Hawk, a Harris's Hawk, a Laughing Falcon, or a Collared Forest-Falcon—or all of them! Other birds of interest include possible Muscovy Duck, Northern Jaçana, White-fronted Parrot, Golden-cheeked and Lineated Woodpeckers, White-throated Flycatcher, Blue-black Grassquit, Streak-backed Oriole, and Yellow-winged Cacique. Sunsets are almost invariably fabulous on the Crocodile Farm Road. Soon after the final wave of White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbills wings to roost, dozens and sometimes hundreds of Lesser Nighthawks perform an intricate ballet against the orange evening sky and Common Paurques may be perched on the road.

Day 3: Our morning is devoted to the Singayta Road. About a 15-minute drive from the hotel, this narrow track winds along the base of a forested ridge, threading through groves of large figs, palms, and gumbo limbo trees. Beginning with endemic Elegant Quail and Orange-fronted Parakeets near the little village of Singayta, among our many targets this morning are Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Squirrel Cuckoo, Elegant and Citreoline Trogons, Russet-crowned Motmot, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Rose-throated Becard, Sinaloa and Happy Wrens, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Tropical Parula, Fan-tailed Warbler, Scrub Euphonia, Grayish Saltator, Blue Bunting, and Striped-headed Sparrow. Crested Caracaras, Laughing Falcons, and Collared Forest-Falcons are often easiest to find on the Singayta Road, as are Short-tailed and Zone-tailed Hawks. After lunch at the hotel and our standard siesta break, we take the afternoon boat ride on the Río San Cristóbal and up the Canal La Tovar. Along the banks of the broad river we are apt to find 6-8 species of egrets and herons, including Reddish Egret and Tricolored Heron, as well as Common Black-Hawk and Green Kingfisher. On a sandbar island near the river mouth we can usually see Black Skimmers. The real prize on the Río San Cristóbal, however, is the Rufous-necked Wood-Rail. As large as a chicken with scarlet red legs, the Rufous-necked Wood-Rail looks as if a master of watercolors produced the indescribable hues of chestnut, cinnamon, green, dove gray, and black that limn its plumage. Along with an apple green bill and a ruby red eye, the sight of one of these elusive rails peering out of the mangrove shadows as we watch quietly from the boat is potentially one of the highlights of birding San Blas. Then we enter the narrow confines of Canal La Tovar. This tributary waterway tunnels up through Red Mangroves to the huge spring at the base of a hill that provides most of the town of San Blas's water supply. Among the assortment of birds are Anhingas at arm's reach and Boat-billed Herons nearly as close. As dusk settles in, a wild, guttural chortling reveals the presence of the resident pair of Mottled Owls, and Common Pauragues sortie out for insects over the crystal clear pool that is La Tovar. Then we begin the boat ride back down stream. Depending on the year, we have spotlighted as few as five Northern Potoos or as many as 28. Most years we find from 10-15 of these Barn Owl-sized birds whose big, fiery red eyes simply glow progressively more brilliant as they watch us approach to within 20 feet. Potoos almost never flush.

Day 4: La Bajada is a sheer-walled canyon—or *barranca*—that drains out of the Sierra Madre Occidental. Located about 45 minutes drive from San Blas, our route today follows the old cobblestone Camino Real, or “Royal Road,” that was the original highway into Northwest Mexico in the 16th and 17th centuries. Flowering Inga trees here provide our best chance of finding several endemic hummingbirds. Among these are Berylline, Sparkling-tailed, and Golden-crowned Emerald. La Bajada is also the best site for endemic Colima Pygmy-Owl, Gray-crowned Woodpecker, Gray-collared Becard, San Blas Jay, Golden Vireo, and Blue Mockingbird. In 2007 BORDERLAND found a pair of Black Hawk-Eagles in La Bajada, a range extension of 500 miles from the previous northernmost record. Returning to San Blas after a picnic lunch, we'll drive the sandy, five-mile-long arc of Matanchen Beach, hoping to intercept a resident American Oystercatcher or perhaps an overwintering Common Loon or even an Elegant Tern that never undertook the 8,000-mile-long journey to Chile in South America.

Day 5: The boat ride up the Río San Cristóbal to Las Marismas is one of the easiest, most productive, and esthetically pleasing outings in the San Blas area. Generally the water is liquid gold as we set out, and the boat slices the sky's reflection like a dagger. Our destination is one or more of the large shallow lagoons that feed the upper San Cristóbal. Endemic Purplish-backed Jays are most apt to be seen on this excursion, as are Bare-throated Tiger-Herons. In the winter of 2000 both Snail Kites and Limpkins leap-frogged north from southern Mexico and colonized the upper river. They are now fairly common. The Marismas generally host thousands of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and small numbers of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks. White-throated Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, and Gray-crowned Yellowthroat are all possible in riverside thickets. Crocodile hunting was outlawed in the San Blas area in the 1990s, and today crocs up to 15-foot-long are often seen on the return ride from the Marismas. Our afternoon outing is to the nearby San Blas Ponds. Least Grebes are probable here, and the range of other possibilities includes Great Black-Hawks and Ruddy Seed eaters. If time permits we may also scope the rock islet at the mouth of the Río San Cristóbal, where Blue-footed Boobies come to perch when tidal conditions are propitious.

Day 6: Looming 5,000 feet above San Blas lies the pine-oak woodland on Cerro San Juan. This is essentially a temperate zone plant association and the birds here are utterly different from those that occupy the tropical lowlands. Frost hardy flowers may harbor Mexican Woodnymph and tiny Bumblebee Hummingbirds, both endemic to Mexico, as well as a handful of other, more widespread species. Warblers join mixed flocks in these cool highlands and up to six to eight species may occupy a single tree. Among the common migrants are Orange-crowned, Nashville, Back-and-white, American Redstart, Townsend's, Hermit, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's Warblers. Rare but present are wintering Colima Warblers. Resident species include Olive, Crescent-chested, and Grace's Warblers, Painted and Slate-throated Redstarts, and Rufous-capped, Golden-crowned, and Fan-tailed Warblers. A host of other tropical specialties are possible on Cerro San Juan. Among them are White-striped Woodcreeper, Nutting's Flycatcher, Green Jay, Spotted Wren, Brown-backed Solitaire, Red-headed and Flame-colored Tanagers, Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, and Black-headed Siskin. On one tour we even recorded the rare Eared Quetzal. Returning to San Blas we detour by a major *barranca* that is justifiably famous for its afternoon flights of green, red, and turquoise Military Macaws.

Day 7: Today is "clean-up" day. Usually we return to the Singayta Road, which boasts more species than any other lowland site. If we've missed the Mexican Hermit (presently considered a race of Western Long-tailed Hermit, but a probable future split) or Black-capped Vireo or Rosy Thrush-Tanager, it makes sense to work the far end of the Singayta Road. Depending on any holes in our list, we'll decide the night before where we need to concentrate our efforts our last full day in San Blas. In the afternoon we usually visit Shrimp Pond Road, an excellent location for a good variety of raptors, including area rarities such as White-tailed Hawk, as well as for rails. On the Shrimp Pond Road outing, large flocks of Orchard Orioles are usually a treat.

Day 8: Depending on the time of our departing flight from Puerto Vallarta, we ordinarily leave San Blas between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. This gives us enough time to stop at a small coastal village en route back to Vallarta, where we frequently add several species of birds to our trip list. Almost certain is Brown Booby, a species seldom found at San Blas. Twice in recent years we've found a Surf Scoter in the small estuary on the edge of the village, by far the farthest south this species has ever been recorded. Other possibilities include Bat Falcon and Orange-breasted Bunting. Some winters there are Humpback Whales breaching just offshore. The trip ends with our flight from Puerto Vallarta Airport to Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport, arriving at approximately 4:30 p.m.



Russet-crowned Motmot by Mike West



Boat-billed Heron by Rick Taylor

General Information

Trip Difficulty: The pace of the trip will generally be moderate with frequent stops to observe birds, wildlife, and scenery. Birding trips will be scheduled every morning. Most days after lunch there is time for walking into town, lounging by the hotel swimming pool, or just taking a siesta before an afternoon outing. Temperatures can vary from 50-90 degrees, but usually fall into the 65-85 degree range. Elevations will be from sea level to 5,000 feet on Cerro San Juan. It will not be the rainy season and insect numbers should be lower than spring, but insect repellent is always a good precaution.

Recommended Equipment and Luggage: Bring your binoculars and your camera. Other useful items include a small day pack to stow a one quart water bottle, camera, sun screen, insect repellent, and perhaps a paperback book or a field guide. Luggage should be limited to one soft-sided suitcase or duffel. Clothing should be informal and suitable for field wear. Some articles to include are bathing suit, shorts, trousers, slacks or dress, short and long-sleeved shirts, and a lightweight outer garment. It will definitely be cool on our evening boat ride up Canal La Tovar to see Northern Potoos and on our day trip up Cerro San Juan. A hat to ward off the tropical sun is a good idea. Be sure to bring a toilet kit and any necessary medications.

Proof of Citizenship: A current passport is required.

Inclusions: The cost of **Jungle & Barranca: San Blas** includes all air and land travel from the trip origin and ending point in Phoenix, Arizona, our boat rides, all entrance fees, all meals beginning with dinner the first day and ending with lunch our final day, accommodations, and guide service. Cost does not include bottled beverages, phone calls, laundry, or private purchases. Mexico offers some excellent gift values, and it is recommended each participant bring funds for that purpose (any amount over \$200 should be in traveler's checks).

Accommodations: Our accommodations are in a modern hotel with beautiful plantings, a lovely swimming pool, and private baths. Our accommodations have been selected for comfort and cleanliness. Electricity is 120 volts, the same as in the United States. Purified drinking water is always available at our hotel restaurant and cafes of purified water are placed in the guest rooms daily.

Single Supplement: Single rooms may be available at a supplemental charge equivalent to the difference between double and single rooms. **The single supplement for this trip is \$235.** You will be charged a single supplement if we are unable to place you with a roommate.

Meals: All meals are included beginning with dinner the first day through lunch on the final day. Dinner desserts and non-bottled beverages are included. Purified drinking water is always available at our restaurant and salads are safe to eat. Alcoholic beverages and bottled soft drinks are at the participant's expense, except soft drinks are provided on the two days we have picnic lunches. Ordinarily the restaurant at the Hotel Garza Canela can accommodate vegetarian and other special diets, as long as the participant is willing to be flexible about kinds of foods and variety.

References:

- *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America* by Steve Howell and Sophie Webb, 1995, is the preferred reference and covers all the tropical birds.
- Many U.S. birds winter at San Blas, so a standard North American field guide such as the National Geographic, Kaufman, or Sibley guide is also recommended to supplement Howell & Webb's Mexican field guide. *Birds of Southeastern Arizona*, a regional photo field guide by Richard Cachor Taylor, 2010, will cover the majority of the birds of the region, including many Mexican specialties.
- *Birds of Mexico and Central America, Princeton Illustrated Checklists* by Ber Van Perlo, 2006, is more compact and covers all the birds of the region. However, the pages facing each plate do not list all the species on the opposite page, making it difficult to use. The information given for each species is very limited.
- R. T. Peterson and E. Chalif's *A Field Guide to Mexican Birds*, 1973, also illustrates the tropical specialties.

Leaders: Homer Hansen has been chairman of the annual Wings Over Willcox bird festival for the past decade, and created the popular G.I.S.S. Series of guides for raptors, flycatchers, and sparrows. Homer instructs advanced birding workshops for Tucson Audubon and leads field trips for a wide variety of organizations and institutions. Rick Taylor is the author of the new photo field guide *Birds of Southeastern Arizona*, as well as the ABA's bird finding guide *A Birder's Guide to Southeastern Arizona* and *Trogons of the Arizona Borderlands*. In 1988 Rick set a "Big Year" record for the most birds seen in Mexico with 717 species. While birding in the San Blas area in 2001, Clive Green, Kenn Kaufman, and Rick Taylor surpassed Clive & Rick's previous Mexican "Big Day" record by 10, observing 201 species.

Further Information: Please contact:

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Sunset at San Blas by Rick Taylor

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