



BIRDING IN MEXICO
ECOTOURISM FOR CONSERVATION

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SAN BLAS EXCURSION



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OPTION 2:
2-NIGHT COASTAL & MOUNTAIN SAN
BLAS EXCURSION:

A. DETAILED SCHEDULE FOR OPTION 2, DAY #1:

PRIVATE PICK-UP IN PV, SCENIC DRIVE TO SAN BLAS, TROPICAL BIRDING FOR ENDEMIC, INDIGENOUS & MIGRATORY BIRDS AT CAMINO AL COCODRILARIO / CROCODILE FARM ROAD, MATANCHÉN & SPOTLIGHTED WATERBORNE BIRDING SAFARI IN SEARCH OF NORTHERN POTOOS ON THE RIO LA TOVERA

1. Meet at 6:00 a.m. sharp for a full day of exciting birding at San Blas, Nayarit

— Our exciting adventure begins in Puerto Vallarta where Birding in Mexico will cheerfully pick you up at either your hotel or a prearranged meeting point — usually the parking lot for **Walmart / Sam's Club** off of Francisco Medina Ascencio — near the **Liverpool Galleria**—then whisk you away to high adventure as we begin a scenic 3-hour drive to San Blas.

Timings are approximate. Please be punctual. Casual birding en route as we watch for endemic Sinaloa Crows at roadside, a species that does not occur in Puerto Vallarta. We will have one comfort stop en route and another, with snacks, upon reaching our first great birding destination. Remember to **set your clocks back 1-hour as well, knowing that San Blas is in the State of Nayarit which is one hour behind Puerto Vallarta (except for Nuevo Vallarta, Bucerías, Cruz de Huanacastle & Punta Mita which remain on "PV time" year round, most of which is located in the State of Jalisco).*

2. 6:30 - 9:00 a.m

— We start our day with a welcome snack and participant introductions, followed by a lively description of your tour's logistics, replete with a display map, so you can get your bearings, as we take Highway #200 north 158 kms from Puerto Vallarta to San Blas, passing Bucerías, Sayulita, and Rincón de Guayabitos en route, then after leaving the main Pan American Highway at Las Vargas we will transit colloquial Zacualpan, Playa de los Cocos, and Matanchén where we will partake in a comfort stop that

includes sampling the region's famous, freshly baked banana bread, before visiting our first birding destination — **Camino al Cocodrilario / Crocodile Farm Road**, which offers easy birding where a rich assortment of 247 species of resident, migratory and endemic birds have been recorded.

3. 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

— Birding sites at **Camino al Cocodrilario / Crocodile Farm Road & the nearby sweet water wetlands of Laguna Matanchén** — are easily accessible via this gravel route leading from Matanchén Bay a few kilometers inland through an easily accessible array of microhabitats — **flooded freshwater marshes, coconut plantations and eventually Sinaloan Thorn and tropical forest** in some lightly rolling foothills —before reaching the crocodile farm, proper. We will not enter the crocodile farm on this occasion because it won't be open during our timeframe and is not very productive from a birding standpoint, though birding is usually quite good at the farm's unpaved parking area, which is located on a promontory overlooking it near the road's terminus.

This route offers excellent birding. Here we will have our first up close opportunities to glass aquatic specialties such as **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron; Black-bellied Whistling-Duck; Limpkin; Black-necked Stilt and Northern Jacana; Wood Stork; Anhinga; Roseate Spoonbill, White and White-faced ibis; Common Black Hawk, Snail Kite and Crane Hawk**, in addition to a mixture of common and specialty species of open woodlands, including **Cinnamon Hummingbird; Groove-billed Ani; Willow (winter) and Vermilion flycatchers; Lucy's Warbler and Northern Waterthrushes**



(both winter); **Stripe-headed Sparrow**; **Painted Bunting** (winter); **Blue-black Grassquit**; **Ruddy-breasted** and **Cinnamon-rumped Seedeaters**, etc. in the flooded ciénegas and scrubby woodlands we will explore during the initial two kilometers of this thoroughfare.

Lucky birders have even sighted **Laughing Falcons** on occasion in the nearby Coconut Plantations lining the main highway bordering Matanchén Bay.

The last kilometer of Camino al Cocodrilario / Crocodile Farm Road passes through the edges of a banana plantation to enter well developed Sinaloan Thorn Forest, Palm Forest and Tropical Forest, home to **Rufous-bellied Chachalaca**; **Gray and Short-tailed hawks**; **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**; **Citreoline Trogon**; **Russet-crowned Motmot**; **Golden-cheeked**, **Gila**, **Pale-billed** and **Lineated woodpeckers**;

Collared Forest-Falcon, **Crested Caracara** and **Bat Falcon**; **Mexican Parrotlet** and **Orange-fronted Parakeet**; **Ivory-billed Woodcreeper**; **Masked Tityra**, **Rose-throated Becard**, **Northern Beardless Tyrannulet**, **Greenish Elaenia**, **Pacific-slope**, **Dusky-capped**, **Nutting's**, **Brown-crested**, **Social**, **Boat-billed** and **Sulphurbellied** (spring&summer only) flycatchers, **Bright-rumped Attila**, **Great Kiskadee**, **Tropical and Thick-billed kingbirds**; **Golden**, **Black-capped**, **Bell's**, **Warbling** (the last three winter) and **Yellow-green** (spring & summer) vireos; **Sinaloa Crow**, **Black-throated Magpie-Jay**, **Green and San Blas jays**; **Happy and Sinaloa wrens**; **Rufous-backed Robin**; **Scrub** (Goldman's) **Euphonia**; **Rosy Thrush-Tanager**; **Yellow-winged Cacique**, **Black-vented**, **Hooded** and **Streak-backed orioles**; **MacGillivray's Warbler**; **Red-crowned Ant-Tanager**, **Red-breasted Chat**, **Blue and Varied buntings** and **Grayish Saltator**, etc.

4. 11:30a.m. - 12:00p.m.

— With the heat coming on we will travel the last 12 km to our air conditioned San Blas hotel of choice for checkin — the inviting **Hotel Garza Canela** — which literally means the “**Boat-billed Heron Hotel!**” Along the route, we may stop at an overview affording views of some **enormous American Crocodiles**, some in excess of 3.6 m / 12’ in length.

5. 12:45 - 2:00p.m.

— **Lunch at our Hotel Restaurant or in Town** — Following check-in we will give you a chance to freshen up in your room, followed by lunch at our hotel or a nearby restaurant in town, then an inviting 2-hour siesta.

Depending on our hunger level and the **Garza Canela’s Restaurante el Delphin’s opening hours, which usually opens its doors at 1:00p.m., we will either have lunch on site or in town.*

The Garza Canela’s fine, air-conditioned restaurant, serves up delicious regional and international dishes and you can have your choice, though their opening hours do not always sync with “birding hours,” which is why we will always have alternate meal options in town.

In the event we decide to enjoy lunch in San Blas, there are many wonderful choices to pick from, but one of our personal favorites is **Restaurante Wala Wala**, which serves up wonderfully fresh seafood dishes—including Lobster in season — and is popular with locals and foreigners, alike!

6. 4:00 - 7:30p.m.

— **Following our Siesta, We will partake in an enjoyable and exciting Spotlitged Waterborne Safari** to get up close and personal with San Blas’ phenomenally interesting **Northern Potoos of the Rio La Tovera when they are active — at night!**

To do this, we will meet our birder-boatman — **Chencho** — at the **Rio San Cristobal muelle (dock)** to take advantage of the cooler temperatures of the late afternoon and early evening hours, as we explore the rich birdlife inhabiting the **brackish mangroves and flooded freshwater savanna of the Rio La Tovera, with a sunset visit to La Tovera Springs, followed by nocturnal birding, then dinner in town.**

**In the event Chencho is not available, fret not, for we have other skilled boatmen that can rise to the occasion, but Chencho is our favorite and has become an institution in his own right where waterborne birding tours exploring the Rio’s La Tovera and San Cristobal are concerned.*

During this excellent, water-borne birding excursion through one of the best preserved and intact Red Mangrove forests in Mexico, we will follow the Rio La Tovera to La Tovera Springs and back, where the star bird is the bizarre looking **Northern Potoo**. These very interesting nocturnal, neotropical birds, reach their northernmost outpost on the Pacific coast of Mexico in this vary ecosystem, where they are common... though you wouldn’t know it by birding the area during daylight hours! That’s why we board the pangas at dusk in order to explore the mangroves at night!

**Complimentary refreshments and snacks will come with us on the this waterborne journey.*

Northern Potoos aside, these crepuscular hours, are the best time to seek out a wide variety of exciting birds and other animals which are either actively feeding at the end of the day, returning to their roost sites, or emerging for their nighttime activities....

Commonly seen during the first several kilometers of our waterborne journey on the Rio La Tovera’s brackish mangrove channels are **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Green Heron, Rufous-**

bellied Chachalaca, Osprey, Common Black Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Red-billed Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Mangrove Swallow, Yellow-winged Cacique, Northern Waterthrush and the chestnut-headed form of the Yellow Warbler, known colloquially as the “Mangrove Warbler,” etc.

After several kilometers of **under-the-canopy-birding**, the mangrove forest opens up where **three recreations of indigenous Uto-Aztecans (Huichol and Cora) stilted fishing huts come into view** along with several large natural snags and adjacent coconut palms, all used as perching and roosting sites by various **Ardeids (herons and egrets), Rufous-bellied Chachalacas, vultures (Black & Turkey vultures) and raptors (such as Snail Kites, and occasionally Collared Forest-Falcon, etc.), Lesser Nighthawks and Red-billed Pigeons.**

From this point the Rio La Tovera continues to eventually grade into an enchanting **floating habitat of emergent freshwater grasses** — with **flurries of lively Social Flycatchers and Tropical Kingbirds fluttering all around at dusk** — before entering a dramatic riparian forest, on approach to **La Tovera Springs.**

We access the springs by passing through a culvert under a part of **Camino al Cocodrilario / Crocodile Farm Road** which we birded this morning. Seasonally, a pair of **Black Phoebes** can often be seen roosting or nesting under this culvert if we quietly pass through, and we will.

Frequently seen aquatic birds inhabiting these sweet water wetlands, include **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Purple and Common gallinules, Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Wood Stork, Anhinga, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, Roseate Spoonbill, White Ibis, Snail Kite** and others.

As the sun gently sets behind us, we have

the chance to see flurries of **Great, Snowy and Cattle egrets returning to their roosting or nesting sites (seasonally dependent)** backed by densely forested foothills, coming to a hidden lagoon near La Tovera Springs, where they adorn select overhanging trees, sometimes covering them completely, resembling snow on a holiday postcard... a sight that is especially memorable in the moonlight's soft luminescence.

Upon reaching La Tovera Springs we will have a brief comfort stop, utilizing the presence of its convenient though rustic restrooms (paper will be handed out) ahead of the return, **nocturnal part of our journey** as we retrace our route to search for San Blas' famed **Northern Potoos**, in addition to **Common Pauraque, Lesser Nighthawk, Mottled Owl**, and occasional **American Crocodiles**, large and small, all of which emerge at night to hunt in and above the channels of this enchanting watery wonderland.

Immediately after returning to the muelle at the Rio San Cristobal Bridge, we will head into San Blas for a late dinner at one of its inviting seafood restaurants (because the Garza Canela's Restaurante el Delfín closes about the time we finish our nocturnal outing), followed by a well earned rest.

It is our hope that you will drift into a satisfying slumber tonight with visions of today's Birding in Mexico's lovely natural sights and colorful avian discoveries dancing in your head, surrounded by the serenity of your comfortable Garza Canela quarters.

End of our first day's services.

B. DETAILED SCHEDULE FOR OPTION 2, DAY #2:

RUFIOUS-NECKED WOOD-RAILS OF MATANCHÉN BAY, A WATERBORNE BIRDING SAFARI ON THE RIO SAN CRISTOBAL & LARGE FOREST EAGLES & TROPICAL FOREST BIRDING EXPEDITON TO TERRACERÍA LA PALMA-TECUITATA, NEAR SAN BLAS:

1. 6:30 - 8:00a.m.

— Rufous-necked Wood-Rails of Matanchén Bay and Waterborne Birding Safari on the Rio San Cristobal

This morning is devoted to the pursuit of another of San Blas' star birding attractions—the **Rufous-necked Wood-Rail**.

This skulky but very attractive Rallid, is notoriously difficult to see and most birders never lay eyes on one in their lives. The San Blas region is by far the best area in Mexico to see this furtive will-o-the-wisp.

Never fear! Since the 1990s Greg R. Homel has discovered two very reliable places where they can, with patience, be ethically called into the open using playback during the early morning hours at **Matanchén Bay**. He has even managed to get them to come right into the open or even under the vehicle with the ethical use of this technique!

**With our spirits high, we'll try our luck this morning while bringing a boxed breakfast, coffee and juices on this outing, while consuming them in the comfort of our vehicle, which we will use as a mobile blind to see these shy and special birds.*

Frequently encountered birds here include the following species, in season: **Snowy and Great egrets, Green, Little Blue, Great Blue and Tricolored herons, Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned night-herons; Heermann's, California, Herring and Ring-billed gulls (mostly winter); Royal, Caspian and Least (summer) terns; Brown Pelican and Magnificent Frigatebird; Rufous-necked Wood-Rail; Osprey, Crane and Common Black hawks; Roseate Spoonbill and White**



Ibis; Willet and Whimbrel (both winter); Belted (winter) and Green kingfishers; Mangrove Swallow; Yellow-winged Cacique; Sinaloa Crow; Northern Waterthrush (winter) and the chestnut-headed "Mangrove Warbler" form of Yellow Warbler, etc.

We will devote one hour to this endeavor or then re-board our panga at the nearby muelle under the Rio San Cristobal bridge in order to explore the Rio La Tovar's much larger cousin, the Rio San Cristobal, in relaxing comfort, which can also be productive for **Rufous-necked Wood-Rails** (but not nearly as reliably as at Matanchén Bay), especially at low tide, in addition to a plethora of other exciting denizens of the Red Mangrove ecosystem.

Birds aside some **very large American Crocodiles** regularly sun themselves at a reliable location on the banks of this river, about an hour or so upstream, often providing us with excellent photographic opportunities.

2. 8:15a.m.-12:15p.m.

—Following our hopefully successful quest for the Rufous-necked Wood-Rail we will load up on some more **freshly baked banana bread**, partake in a **quick comfort stop** at the local **Ecotourism Consortium's headquarters at Matanchan**, before boarding our panga at the Rio San Cristobal bridge, for a 3-4-hour birding foray on the Rio San Cristobal.

**The pace is relaxing, but remember, there are no comfort stops on this boating excursion once you board the panga. In the event of an emergency we can get you to shore at a few widely spread portages created by local fishermen, but the substrate is likely to be muddy, so please make sure to utilize the available comfort stop at Matanchén ahead of our exploration of the Rio San Cristobal and to limit your intake of diuretics such as coffee.*

Commonly encountered birds of note inhabiting the first part of this route are similar to those found at Matanchén Bay, but we will now be open air and able to get quite close to observe many of them. As we continue into the mangrove ecosystem there will likely be other tantalizing species, including but not limited to **Muscovy duck; Limpkin; Black-necked Stilt, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer; Wood Stork; Anhinga and Snail Kite, etc.**

3. 12:30 - 1:30p.m.

—Upon our return to the dock, we will enjoy Lunch and a cheerful checklist party at San Blas, either at an open-air, palapa-style seafood restaurant or an enclosed restaurant with fans.

**Timing may vary; restrooms are available at our restaurant of choice.*

4. 1:30 - 2:00 p.m.

—Enjoy a short siesta and recharge at the Garza Canela.

5. 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

—**Large forest eagles** in the vicinity of San Blas take advantage of thermals of warm air rising from the tropical lowlands to help carry them aloft over the forested peaks inland from San Blas.

In the vicinity of the colloquial mountain town of Ticuitata, elevation 248 m / 815', a small, isolated but regularly encountered population of two species of hawk-eagles has been discovered within an easy 45-minute drive from San Blas, and we will take advantage of this exciting chance to spot one of them this afternoon when warm thermals are most likely to keep them aloft, giving us improved chances of a sighting. Occasionally, they have been known to fly directly overhead at close range!

Sometimes they come in closely, at others they appear in the distance, and of course there are times they don't appear at all. This fact only adds to the excitement and intrigue of raptor watching, because you never quite know what you may get! We will be prepared for any contingency with our binoculars and an excellent spotting scope at the ready!

Our destination of choice is a recently discovered, well-forested montane birding hotspot with good vantage points to search for these exciting raptors and other highland species. It is located only 15 minutes beyond Tecuitata—a gravel road known as Terracería La Palma-Tecuitata, which will bring us to an elevation of 415 m / 1360'.

Again, **both Black-and-White and Black hawk-eagles** have been regularly sighted and photographed in this area. **As many as 19 species of interesting raptors** have been seen in the vicinity of the surrounding promontories, including: **Hook-billed Kite, Sharp-shinned, Coopers, Crain, Common Black, Great Black, Gray, Broad-winged, Short-tailed, Swainson's (migration), Zone-tailed and Red-tailed hawks**, in addition to **Collared Forest-Falcon, Crested**

Caracara, Laughing, Bat and Peregrine falcons, American Kestrel, etc.

Raptor watching and general birding for the following montane specialties, will keep us more than entertained for a 2-3 hour timeframe before sundown:

Thicket Tinamou; Rufous-bellied Chachalaca and Crested Guan; Elegant Quail; Red-billed Pigeon, Ruddy Quail-Dove and White-tipped Dove; Groove-billed Ani and Squirrel Cuckoo; up to a dozen hummingbird varieties—highlighted by Mexican Hermit, Plain-capped Starthroat, Golden-crowned Emerald, Mexican Woodnymph, Berylline and Violet-crowned varieties—Colima and Ferruginous pygmy-owls; Citreoline and Elegant trogons; Russet-crowned Motmot; Golden-cheeked, Gila, Ladder-backed, Pale-billed, Lineated and Gray-crowned woodpeckers; Mexican Parrotlet (winter), Orange-fronted Parakeet, Lilac-crowned and White-fronted Parrots; Ivory-billed Woodcreeper; Masked Tityra and Rose-throated Becard; Greenish Elaenia, Greater Pewee, Tufted, Pacific-slope, Cordilleran, Vermilion, Dusky-capped, Ash-throated (winter), Nutting's, Brown-crested, Flammulated, Social, Boat-billed, and Sulphur-bellied (summer) flycatchers; Bright-rumped Attila; Great Kiskadee, Tropical and Thick-billed kingbirds; Golden, Black-capped (winter), Bell's (winter), Cassin's (winter), Plumbeous, Warbling (winter) and Yellow-green (summer) vireos; Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Green and San Blas jays; Sinaloa Crow; Black-capped Gnatcatcher; Happy and Sinaloa wrens; Blue Mockingbird; Brown-backed Solitaire, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Swainson's (winter) and White-throated thrushes, American and Rufous-backed robins; Scrub (Goldman's) Euphonia; Rosy Thrush-Tanager; Stripe-headed Sparrow; Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow; Yellow-winged Cacique and six oriole species—punctuated by Black-vented, Orchard (winter), Hooded, Streak-backed



and Bullock's (winter) varieties—more than two dozen warblers—including wintering Louisiana Waterthrush, MacGillivray's, Black-throated Gray and resident Fan-tailed warblers, and Tropical Parula; Blue-black Grassquit, Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater and Grayish Saltator, etc.

6. 5:30 - 6:30p.m.

—On our sunset drive back to San Blas, we will keep an eye out for emerging nocturnal species such as **Common Pauraque, Buff-collared Nightjar and Mottled Owl**, etc.

7. 6:30-7:30p.m.

—Dinner and checklist party at either Restaurante Delfín or a restaurant in town, followed by our second night at the cozy Garza Canela in San Blas.

End of second day's services.

D. DETAILED SCHEDULE FOR OPTION 2, DAY #3:

PACIFIC BOATING EXCURSION TO SEE THE RED-BILLED TROPICBIRDS, BOOBIES & TROPICAL TERNS OF SAN BLAS' GUANO-ENCRUSTED OFFSHORE ISLANDS, FOLLOWED BY LUNCH, A SHORT SIESTA AND RETURN TO PUERTO VALLARTA

1. 6:00 - 10:00 a.m.

—An early departure will be essential to success on today's outing, and to ensure calm seas and mild temps, as sea conditions are always better in the morning hours—before the barometric pressure rises, creating swell-generating winds!

**Boxed lunches are included and will be dutifully prepared by the Hotel Garza Canela's Restaurante Delfín ahead of our departure, and we will pick them up in the lobby on departure, along with available coffee, tea, fresh juices and continental breakfast items.*

Though most local birding excursions omit San Blas' offshore birding opportunities, probably out of time considerations, this excursion offers the wonderful opportunity to view and photograph **select neotropical and pan-tropical seabirds** of the eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean, at San Blas' nearby, **guano-stained islets**, highlighted by a visit to two rocky islets just offshore from **Faro del Isla del Rey**, and **Roca Elefante**—a towering rocky sea stack in the shape of an elephant's head—located just 1.5 and 14 nautical miles, respectively, outside San Blas' small fishing harbor.

Seasonally, the closest of these islets are usually adorned by **Heermann's Gull, Brown Noddy (summer), Bridled Tern (summer), Royal and Elegant (migration) terns, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Blue-footed and Brown boobies, etc., and even** nesting **Gray-breasted Martins**, and towering Roca Elefante, which is located farther offshore, houses these and a small population of **Red-billed Tropicbirds**.

An amazing **63 species of birds** — many migratory, and not all of them marine—have been recorded here, so the possibili-

ties fuel the imagination!

There is always the chance to spot **Least and Black storm-petrels** in the waters near **Roca Elefante**, in addition to the seasonal possibilities of breaching **Humpbacked Whales (winter) and Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphins, giant Manta Rays, and possibly even Olive Ridley Sea Turtles** during this morning's outing.

2. 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

—Take this time to Freshen up and Pack in your Room before ahead of enjoying our Seafood Lunch and final (for this trip anyway) Checklist Party at San Blas.

3. 12:00 - 1:30p.m

— **Celebratory Seafood Lunch and Checklist Party in San Blas**

4. 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

— **Checkout of the Garza Canela Hotel, followed by a Scenic Return to San Blas before Sunset, with Possible Impromptu Birding Stops en route.**

End of Birding in Mexico's Services.

**Complimentary refreshments and snacks will come with us on the this waterborne journey.*

**Motion sickness tablets are recommended and will be provided as a courtesy if you want one*

**Sea conditions dependent; if conditions are unfavorable we will bird for shorebirds at Shrimp Pond Road / Granja de Camarón and the "Singayta Jungle"*

Thanks for adventure traveling with Birding in Mexico. We sincerely hope you enjoyed your chosen excursion and hope to see you again on another exciting adventure to visit one of Mexico's most biodiverse destinations! Have a happy and safe trip home!

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Have a happy and safe trip home!

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Cel: 322 130 3028
birdinginmexico@gmail.com
WWW.BIRDINGINMEXICO.COM