

El Cielo and NE Mexico Birding Trip June 24 – July 1, 2023

Come join us for a wondrous trip to see as many northeast Mexico bird species as possible while visiting some very different and breathtaking habitats. Rene Valdes, our expert guide who is based in Monterrey, MX, has planned this specialized trip just for GCBO. Joining us will be GCBO's Executive Director, Martin Hagne, for this fairly fast paced birding trip. We will travel down to El Cielo Biosphere Reserve in southern Tamaulipas, visiting the northern most cloud forest in North America. We will also be covering both the high mountainous elevations and the dryer grassland areas of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila states.



Day 1: Afternoon flight arrivals to Monterrey with an overnight stay in Monterrey.

Day 2: Early morning departure to Gomez Farias town at the base of El Cielo. Drive may take about 5 hrs. Lunch in Gomez Farias and check-in at Casa de Piedras BnB. In the afternoon, we will bird the lowlands (La Florida and Bocatoma) where we will take a boat trip along a river (main target Sungrebe and Amazon Kingfisher). At a close location we may also visit some agricultural areas to look for Aplomado Falcon, Tamaulipas Crow, Double-striped Thick-Knee, and Altamira Yellowthroat. We again overnight at Casa de Piedra in Gomez Farias. (*The nights in Gomez Farias will include searches for Tawny-collared Nightjar, Northern Potoo and Mottled Owl*).



Day 3: Birding El Cielo. Drive up the mountain (using a local 4x4 truck with benches in the bed) from Gomez Farias to the village of Altacima, birding with several stops along the road, and then walking around Altacima. Lunch at Altacima. We will continue driving up, again making birding stops, to later arrive to the San Jose village, where we will stay in cabins. This is a very birdy area.

Day 4: Birding El Cielo. We will be birding around the cabins and doing some walk in San Jose. By mid morning we will start driving down, with some stops around Altacima for more wonderful birding. We will plan to arrive back to Gomez Farias in the afternoon, with the possibility of birding at night to look for Tawny-collared Nightjar and wwls. Overnight at Casa de Piedra B&B in Gomez Farias.

Day 5: Birding El Cielo. We will bird the famous Gomez Farias-El Azteca road in the morning. This is the best place to see Thicket Tinamous and sometimes Great Curassaw. The road ends at a very good location to look for the endemic Altamira Yellowthroat. We will come back to Gomez Farias to have lunch and check out from our rooms. We will then start our drive back to Monterrey (5 hrs), and overnight at a hotel in Monterrey.



Day 6: We will be birding the desert and montane forest which will be a long day. We will have an early departure, breakfast on the way, to a Chihuahuan desert locality (1.5 hrs drive) to look for Worthen's Sparrow, but we will also explore the area for more desert specialties. We will move to the montane forest of the Sierra Madre Oriental and look for pine forest target species including Hooded Yellowthroat, Colima Warbler, Pine Flycatcher, Russet Nightingale-Thrush and others. We will continue our journey driving into the Cumbres de Monterrey National Park in the afternoon/evening until we arrive at our final destination, a complex of cabins at Mesa del Oso at 8000 ft, surrounded by excellent pine forest and passing by one of the nesting cliffs of Maroon-fronted Parrots. Overnight at cabins, with possibilities for night birding for owls and nightjars.



Day 7: We will bird the montane forest of the Cumbres de Monterrey National Park in the morning including the trails around the cabins and the nesting cliff, and make a few other stops on the way to Monterrey which we will reach by mid-morning/lunch. We will bird the beautiful and wild city, La Estanzuela, in the afternoon/evening, and stay in a Monterrey hotel.



Day 8: We will get an early start to drive up the mountains overlooking Monterrey and bird the Parque Ecologico Chipinque for a few specialties, and after lunch we will head for the Monterrey airport for PM flight departures.

8 people (max)

All Inclusive Cost:

\$ TBA per person - Double Occupancy

\$ TBA per person - Single Occupancy (Monterrey hotel only, cabins will be shared)

Includes:

- Lodging: 3 nights in Monterrey hotel, 2 nights at Gomez Farias BnB, 1 night in San Jose cabins, 1 night in Mesa del Oso cabins.
- Meals: all meals are included, beverages (alcohol with moderation, ie. one beer/meal), snacks, and box lunches if any.
- Entrances Fees: parks/preserves entrances fees.
- Local Transportation: 15 passenger Ford Transit, 4x4 vehicle in Gomez Farias, fuel, and toll roads fees.
- Boat Trip: river boat ride at Bocatoma - El Cielo.
- All Tips: bellboys, restaurants, boat driver, and any other tips during the trip.
- Guide Fees: including the local guide in El Cielo.

IMPORTANT TRIP INFORMATION:

This trip can be strenuous and is heavily focused on birdwatching. We do also soak in the culture as we travel, but no cultural stops/sites are planned. It will be long days with early wake ups, and a few nights with late owl watching. It is geared to get as many bird species as possible, and therefore not necessarily always a “leisurely” trip. It will also include quite a bit of driving to get to as many habitats as possible, including very narrow dirt mountain roads. The Monterrey to Gomez Farias drive is 5 hour or so. The drive up the mountain at El Cielo is by converted 4x4 pickup trucks with benches in the bed. It will be rather bumpy and close quarters. There will be quite a bit of walking, including on uneven dirt roads, some going uphill, and rocky.

Therefore, this trip is not recommended for anyone with major back or leg issues, or other serious medical conditions, as it can be rather strenuous. Lowlands will be warm/hot, and nights in mountains will be cool/cold.

The lodging in Monterrey is at nice modern hotels. The Bed and Breakfast in Gomez Farias is an old but beautiful hacienda built by rock. The cabins at El Cielo and Valle de Oso, are clean but somewhat rustic with small and rustic bathrooms, sometimes with cold water only, and no heat/AC. The high mountain elevations will have cool/cold nights and you will need warmer clothing. In at least one cabin some we will share open sleeping rooms divided by gender. WIFI will only be in Monterrey hotels, and electricity will be limited in the mountain cabins to certain hours/uses.

Our lunch and dinner meals will be delicious! They are a mix of new restaurants and small rural and sometimes rustic places.... but always with delicious wonderful local flavorful food! Breakfast is sometimes local cuisine at villages, or restaurants, but rarely maybe only be a stop at a gas station.

Rene Valdes is a field ornithologist specializing in endangered species conservation and research, and a Mexican birder for many years. He is based in Monterrey, and performs wildlife surveys, leads birding tours, and does wildlife photography. Rene guides custom birding trips in Monterrey and adjacent areas, west Mexico tours in Mazatlán-Durango and the San Blas area, one of the best birding sites in Mexico. When not birding (rarely happens), Rene reviews eBird records and hotspots for many states in Mexico, organizes the eBird-Mexico and Mexico Rare Bird Alert Facebook groups, compiles rare records from north Mexico for North American Birds, and coordinates the Breeding Bird Survey program for the northeastern states of Mexico. He is recently working as Citizen Science Project Manager for BirdsEye Birding apps (www.birdseyebirding.com), assisting with text and image editing, as well as collaborating with their many partners on new and improved citizen science projects.

