

Mexico: Yucatan Peninsula



Independent Budget Birding August 11-20, 2016

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www.budgetbirders.com

Summary:

Birding the Yucatan Peninsula is very straight forward. All of the birding spots are easily accessible, the roads are wide, paved, and in great condition, and people (away from the super touristy areas) are very friendly. Although it took us 10 days to cover this area, a dedicated birding trip covering all areas could be completed in a few less days. My itinerary was a bit complicated as I spent a few days birding before returning to the Cancun area for a wedding and then resumed birding for a few more days. This report covers the main birding areas we visited discussing directions/access, general birding advice/strategy for each location, and any additional logistics with regards to costs. August isn't an ideal time to visit this area of Mexico due to the lack of neotropical migrants and hot weather, but overall I was very pleased with the bird activity. The biggest inconvenience was the number of mosquitos, which were very prevalent at most locations. At the end of the report I've included a list of the "better" birds encountered on the Yucatan Peninsula and where to find them. I finished the 10 day trip with 181 species including almost all of the regional endemics. Overall, the total cost (including international airfare) for my wife and I was \$1,554.83

Resources:

Websites:

As usual, xeno-canto, cloudbirders, and eBird were extremely valuable resources in researching and preparing for the trip. A few trip reports that were referenced (to varying degrees of usefulness) are included below. The Howell guide to birding sights in Mexico is still very relevant, but I wouldn't consider it a necessity since there's enough trip reports covering the important areas. In addition to this trip report, my wife and I have written blog posts on our trip. Although the blog posts are informative, people looking to plan an independent trip to the Yucatan will find this report more helpful. eBird is rapidly becoming an extremely useful tool on seeing recent sightings before leaving on a trip, but sadly, most people remain extremely vague in their checklists. Most of my eBird checklists include GPS coordinates or detailed information for target birds and I encourage others visiting these areas to do the same. Even quick notes about where on a trail or km mark can be extremely helpful for those not familiar with the area.

www.eBird.org: all checklists from the trip including numerous pictures and audio recordings can be searched for on eBird

www.xeno-canto.org: Recordings for the trip were downloaded from here, I've also added [my recordings](#) from the trip

www.cloudbirder.com: Access to dozens of trip reports. Below are a few I took with me.

Books/Reports:

A Bird-Finding Guide to Mexico: Steve N.G. Howell, information is still very relevant, but if you don't want to spend the money for the book, it isn't necessary. There's enough information online about the Yucatan to get by without it.

[Yucatan 2015](#): David Alan Showler 2015

[Yucatan](#): Hakan Thorstensson

[Yucatan](#): Neil Gilbert 2016

www.budgetbirders.com: blog posts from this trip along with my prior travels can be found here

GPS:

For those who don't own a GPS, buy one. The Garmin Etrex 30 is extremely easy to use and I feel is essential to any independently traveling birder. Using a GPS and a set of coordinates helps to eliminate the guess work in directions and really makes it easier for others to find the same location. In this report I try to use GPS coordinates as much as possible and once again, encourage others to do the same. I'm always amazed to pick up a "bird site guide" and find detailed (though usually confusing or inaccurate directions) when all someone needs to do is write a few quick notes and provide a list of GPS way points. It is also very easy to download free open source maps online for use in both car GPSs and handhelds (such as the Garmin Etrex30). I've used these open source maps throughout the world and have found them extremely accurate in most circumstances and they are free!

OSM Map: http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/OSM_Map_On_Garmin/Download: Download maps from around the world for Garmin

I was able to download a map for both my Garmin as well as for my car gps from this link

Logistics:

Car Rental:

Although driving around the Yucatan Peninsula is fairly straightforward, renting a car can be a bit tricky. Most online travel websites quote prices that do not include additional mandatory insurance that will be added once you show up at the car rental office. From my research online, these additional insurance costs can easily make the quote double the original cost. Two local car companies provide low cost options and include all of the additional insurance in their original quoted prices. They are America Car Rental and Easyway RentaCar. The quotes I received were similar for both, but I decided to go with America Car Rental since they didn't charge extra for a pickup in Carmen de Playa and a drop off at Cancun Airport. Total rental car cost was \$363 for 8 days. If you go with these budget car companies, expect budget cars. My car was a manual and didn't have a radio. The car ran fine though and I didn't have any mechanical problems throughout the entire trip. Staff was very friendly and even gave me tips about avoiding gas station scams.

This brings me to my next point; gas station scams. Gas station employees in the Yucatan are notorious for scamming tourists. First make sure they zero out the counter before starting to fill your tank. Also, make sure you know exactly how many pesos you are giving them. The main "trick" is when you hand them 300 pesos in the form of a 100 bill and a 200 bill and they quickly switch it and show you a \$100 and a \$20 and say you made a mistake. This will also happen with \$500 in which they will quickly switch it to a \$50. When I got gas I always followed the same procedure. Get out of the car, go over to the guy, and tell him how much (\$500 for example). Show him the bills. Watch him enter 500 into the gas pump and watch it go to 0. Wait and then once it stops at \$500 give him the amount showing him exactly each bill as you hand it to him. Although I was very careful about this every time, the last time I got gas, I had an attendant and his friend try to pull the bill exchange trick on me as his friend tried to distract me with questions. I quickly let the guy know I wasn't an idiot, confronted him, and he quickly backed down. This was the only issue I had. Gas is the same price at every station since it is state controlled. Gas was 13.96 per liter.

Ferry:

UltraMar and Caribexpress are the two companies that run regular ferries between Playa de Carmen and Cozumel. There shouldn't be a need to buy a ticket early due to ferries leaving every 30 min. The exact schedules flex slightly so it's best to check each company's website to see exactly when departures are happening, but in general they run from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Costs also are slightly different between companies. My trip to Cozumel was on Caribexpress for \$135 and my trip back to Playa de Carmen was \$163. Ferry duration was about 45 minutes in each direction.

Buses:

The only bus I took was from Cancun Airport to the Ado Bus Terminal in Playa de Carmen. There are bus stops located outside of each of Cancun's terminals and you can purchase your ticket on arrival. I arrived at Cancun at 10:00 and got on a bus at 10:55. The bus stopped at the other two terminals at Cancun Airport and then headed directly to Playa de Carmen. We arrived in Playa at 12:21 and I was able to quickly make it to the ferry terminal to catch the 12:30 ferry to Cozumel. Cost of the one way bus ticket was \$135.

Currency Exchange:

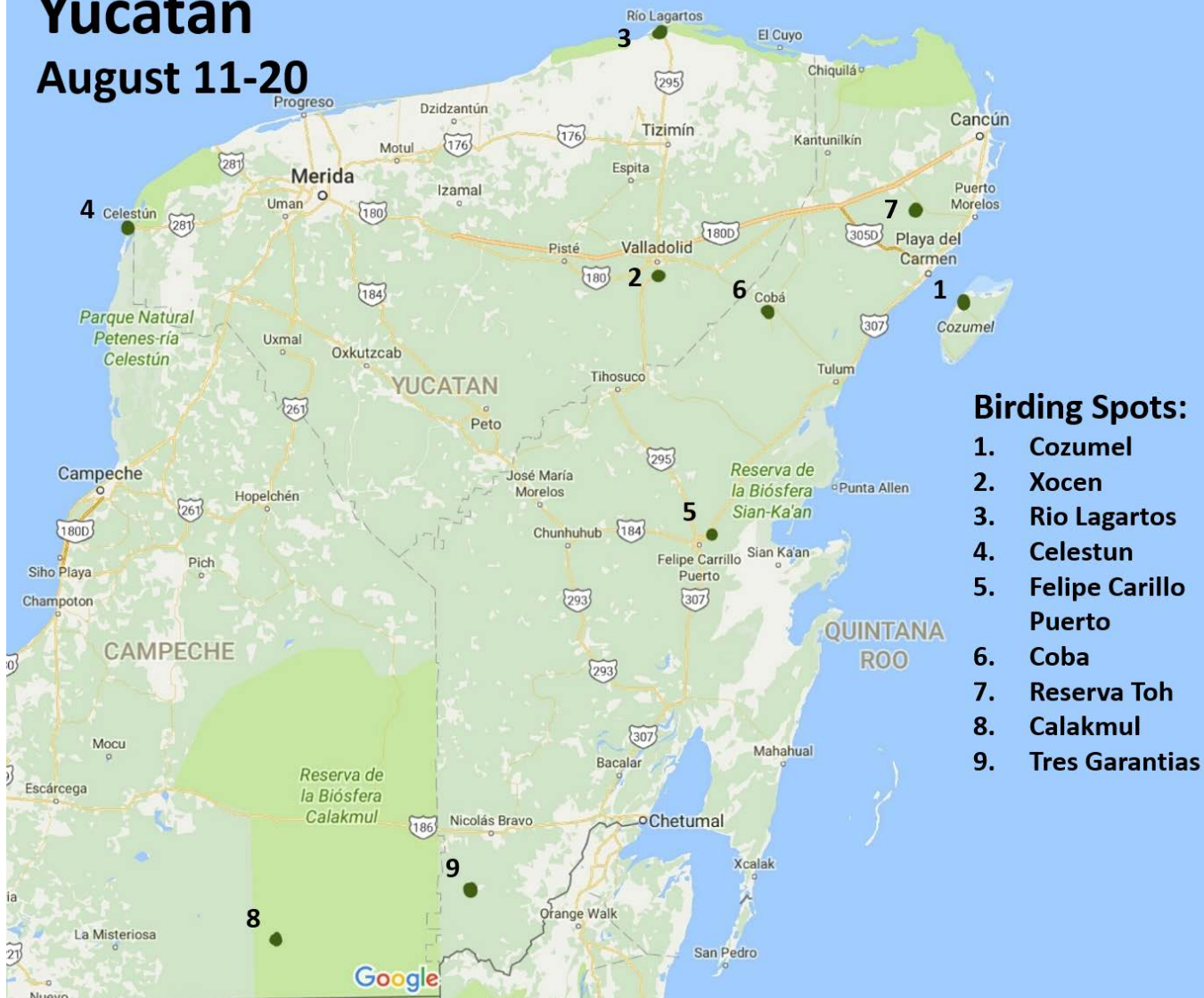
Surprisingly the best exchange rates were at the touristy areas in Playa de Carmen. The best rate I saw was 17.45 pesos for 1 USD. Most places away from the touristy areas were closer to 17.20. ATMs are available in all major towns. USD is accepted in the Cancun/Playa De Carmen area, but in more rural areas, you'll need pesos. All costs in this report are shown in Mexican Peso (\$). Actual exchange rate at the time was ~18.25 for reference.

Accommodation:

The only accommodation I used during the trip was Hostelito on Cozumel (\$180 per night) and for a wedding at the Secrets Silversands Resort (waaaay too expensive, but I didn't have a choice). The rest of the trip was spent car camping.

Yucatan

August 11-20



Birding Spots:

1. Cozumel
2. Xocen
3. Rio Lagartos
4. Celestun
5. Felipe Carrillo Puerto
6. Coba
7. Reserva Toh
8. Calakmul
9. Tres Garantias

Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive Cancun Airport (1000), Travel to Playa de Carmen (1055-1220), Travel to Cozumel (1230-1330), Dirt road north of San Miguel (1430-1830). Night: San Miguel, Cozumel, Hostelito (\$180, dorm bed, no AC)

Day 2: Abandon Housing Complex (0500-0830), Ferry to Playa de Carmen (1000-1100), Rental car pickup and stop at grocery store, Xocen (1500-2200), travel to Rio Lagartos. Night: Car camping along entrance to Rancho San Salvador

Day 3: Rio Lagartos (0400-1000), travel to Progreso, Progreso (1300-1330), Celestun (1500-1600, bad idea), travel to Felipe Carrillo Puerto. Night: Car camping Vigia Chico Road

Day 4: Vigia Chico Raod (0500-1130), Lago Cabo (1400-1500), travel to Secrets Silversands Resort. Night: Silversands Resort

Day 5: Reserva Toh (0400-0830), Resort rest of day. Night: Silversands Resort

Day 6: Vigia Chico Road (1400-2000), travel to Calakmul. Night: A few hours of sleep on side of highway enroute to Calakmul

Day 7: Entrance road to Calakmul (0400-0600), Checkpoint to Ruins (0600-0830), Calakmul ruins (0830-1500), road back to entrance (1500-1800). Night: Car camping outskirts of Tres Garantias

Day 8: Dirt road near Tres Garantias (0400-1000), travel to Xocen, Xocen (1500-2000), travel to Rio Lagartos. Night: Car camping near Rio Lagartos

Day 9: Rio Lagartos (0500-1300), Xocen (1500-1900), travel to Cancun. Night: Car camping outside American Car Rental office

Day 10: Return car (0400), flight home 0600

Birding Hotspots

Cozumel

Summary: Located 20 km east of Playa de Carmen, the small island of Cozumel is a popular tourist destination that is also home to a few island endemics. The three main targets for the island are Cozumel Emerald, Cozumel Vireo, and Cozumel Wren (currently lumped with House Wren), but there are also a few endemic subspecies including Rufous-browed Pepper Shrike, Roadside Hawk, Western Spindalis, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Mangrove Warbler, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, and Bananaquit.



A few other Yucatan specialties such as Black Catbird, Yucatan Woodpecker, Yucatan Vireo, Yucatan Parrot, Caribbean Dove, and Caribbean Elaenia are easier to find on Cozumel than they are on the peninsula. Renting a car on the island is very expensive so it is best to either use taxis or rent a scooter or bicycle. I elected to rent a bicycle as the main birding spots are very close to San Miguel. The furthest I needed to travel was 10 km in a single direction. The island is easily accessed from Playa de Carmen via a ferry (see ferry section for details). The main town of San Miguel has a wide variety of hostels and hotels catering to most budgets and cheap restaurants can be found if you wander away from the main tourist drag.

Dirt Road to Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP):

Directions/Access: Located a mere 10 km north of San Miguel, the dirt road leading to the island's waste water treatment plant, provides a relatively quiet access point to the dry forest located on the island. After heading north out of town, you'll pass a few hotels and eventually see the entrance for the island's golf course on your right. Shortly past this point (~6.75 km from the ferry dock) the paved road will turn to dirt/sand. Anywhere from this point to the WWTP (~2.7 km further) can be productive for the three endemics as well as the other target birds. It is another 1.8 km from the WWTP to the end of the road at the water although I never made it past the WWTP due to time.

Birding: I spent the afternoon of the 10th (1500-1830) birding from the start of the dirt road until the WWTP. Although it was still extremely hot when I started at 3:00 p.m., bird activity was still very high and it only took about 10 minutes for me to find Cozumel Wren and Cozumel Vireo. Birding along this section of road was very easy and birds were very responsive to pishing and playback. The most common species were Mangrove Warbler and Black Catbird, but other common birds included Cozumel Vireo, Yucatan Vireo, Yucatan Woodpecker, Tropical Mockingbird, Bananaquit, and Green-breasted Mango. This section of road was also the only place I saw Cozumel Emerald, although this species can also usually be found in the neighborhoods around San Miguel. Once you reach the WWTP, there's a large overgrown marshy area that commonly holds Ruddy Crake. The first spot I stopped at along the dirt road was at N 20.55145 W 086.91634. Another good area that produced the second Cozumel Wren was at N 20.54637 W 086.90511.

Abandon Housing Complex:

Directions/Access: The turnoff for the abandon housing complex is 5.3 km south of the ferry terminal at N 20.4650 W 086.97748. From here it's an additional 1.8 km until you reach the "housing grid". The access road as well as the network of abandon side roads offers great peaceful access to the island's forest.

Birding: I spent the morning of the 12th (0500-0830) birding along the access road as well as a few of the side roads through the grid. During my morning bike ride in to the location I flushed a single nightjar although I was unable to get an ID on it. As it became light, a few groups of Yucatan Parrots moved throughout the area and I was finally able to track down a few perched individuals. My main target of the morning was the local subspecies of Rufous-browed Peppershrike. I was able to find a single bird at N 20.45720 W 086.96142. The rest of the morning was spent slowly birding the access road back to the main highway. This section produced large numbers of Black Catbirds, Caribbean Elaenia (N 20.45971 W 086.96399), Cozumel and Yucatan Vireos, Western Spindalis, and multiple Caribbean Doves.

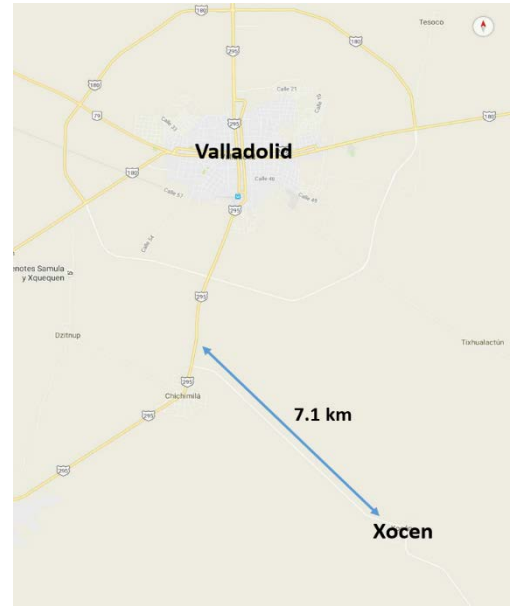
Xocen

Summary: Located 13 km south of Valladolid, the dirt road connecting the small towns of Xocen and Kanxoc provides great forest access with very little traffic. Although this spot doesn't seem to be on the "birder's map", it should be. According to eBird, there are a few local birders that regularly visit this site and for good reason. I spent three different afternoons at this location and was able to find a very nice list of birds. This spot seems to be extremely productive for night birds and supports a very healthy population of Thicket Tinamou. For those on a tight schedule, Xocen could easily be a good replacement for Vigia Chico Road in FCP.

Directions/Access: Head south on 295 out of Valladolid. Just before Chichimila take a left at N 20.63902 W 88.21438 and continue 7.1 km until Xocen. At the far end of the plaza, take a right at N 20.59925 W 88.16294 and then take the next left at the other corner of the plaza. From here continue straight for 500 meters until the start of the dirt road at N 20.59870 W 88.15816. I'm not sure how long this dirt road is as I never made it further than roughly 6 km along it.

Birding: I spent three different afternoons along this road as well as two nights looking for owls and nightjars. The road passes through nice sections of forest as well as along a few clearings. The clearings held a number of interesting species including Black-throated Bobwhite, Black-cowled Oriole, Laughing Falcon, Black-crowned Tityra, Mangrove Vireo, and Rose-throated Becard. The forest sections held large numbers of Clay-colored Robins and Black Catbirds. Although I never encountered any ant swarms, I did find a few flocks of birds which included highlights such as Rose-throated Tanager, Northern Bentbill, Yucatan Vireo, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Eye-ringed Flatbill, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. In the late evening, Thicket Tinamou would start to call and on my last evening at this location I was finally able to track down a close individual and get nice looks at it. After dark, Xocen came alive with nightbirds with numerous Middle American Screech Owls and Mottled Owls heard calling. Yucatan Poorwill was easily found at N 20.57311 W 088.11624 and the only Yucatan Nightjar of the trip was seen at N 20.57688 W 088.12334. Common Pauraque was also seen sitting on the dirt road on a few occasions.

Additional Info: A few local birders have gotten the local community involved in conservation and bird watching in the area. The local men and women of Xocen have made some really cool crafts and carvings of the birds in the area that can be purchased on your visit. Contact Ismael Arellano Ciau (Facebook), if interested in finding out more about birding in Xocen.



Rio Lagartos

Summary: Rio Lagartos and the dry scrub habitat just south of town is a well-known spot for a few key Yucatan endemics. The town is located just over 100 km (1 ½ hours) north of Valladolid. The town itself is a popular tourist destination as it's one of two towns (Celestun being the other) that tourists regularly visit to go on flamingo tours. Although we elected not to go on a boat tour this can be a good way to see flamingos up close as well as have a good possibility for other birds such as

Boat-billed Heron, Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, and American Pygmy Kingfisher. Birding this area can be broken down into three main sections: town, the scrub along San Felipe Road, and the salt pans near Las Coloradas. Overall it should only take a day or so to explore the area, but of course, the more time the better. Birding in August is very hot and bird activity drastically slowed down by mid-morning. Also, the typical large number of waterbirds that are present in the winter time were mostly absent.



Rio Lagartos (town)/Restaurante Chilquila

Birding: Calle 9 is the street that runs along the water and provides a good access point to stop and scan for waterbirds if you aren't planning on going on a boat tour. Even in August I was able to find a few American Flamingos, but of course they were very distant. This street continues heading east out of town and dead ends at a large parking lot with a restaurant called Chilquila (N 21.59580 W 088.14625). Not only does this restaurant provide reasonable priced food (and wifi) it also has a few hummingbird feeders. There were multiple Mexican Sheartails and Cinnamon Hummingbirds visiting the feeders while we were there. Also, there's a small dilapidated boardwalk at the south eastern corner of the parking lot that provides some access into the mangroves. We did a brief walk along this trail during the heat of the day and luckily came across a single American Pygmy Kingfisher. If for some reason the hummingbirds aren't coming to the feeders at the restaurant, there's a blue house at the corner of Calle 12 and Calle 21 that also has two feeders. There were a few hummingbirds of each species also visiting these feeders.

Calle de San Felipe / Rancho San Salvador

Birding: Located ~2.5 km south of Rio Lagartos you'll find an intersection. West will take you to the town of San Felipe while east will take you to Los Coloradas. The road in both directions runs through a few good kilometers of scrub habitat, but the most visited area is the dirt road that veers right from the main road 7.5 km in the direction of Los Coloradas. This dirt road, sign posted as the entrance to Rancho San Salvador provides nice access to the scrub and allows you to get away from the fast moving traffic that is heading towards Los Coloradas. Along the first 1-2 km of this dirt road I was able to easily find Great-horned Owl (before light), Lesser Nighthawk (at dawn), Black-throated Bobwhite, Yucatan Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Mangrove Vireo, and Grey-crowned Yellowthroat. If you are unable to find any of your target birds along this dirt road, head back out to the main road and head west towards San Felipe where you'll pass through scrub habitat for at least 15 kilometers. It was driving back and forth through this section that I was finally able to find a single Lesser Roadrunner about 2 km west of the main intersection (Lesser Roadrunner was my only miss the first morning, luckily being found on my second trip to the area on Day 9). Make sure you keep your eye out for flocks of swallows in the area which can contain both Mangrove Swallow and Ridgway's Swallow. If you continue east along the main road towards Los Coloradas, you'll pass through some mangroves, cross over a bridge, and eventually make it to a section of large salt pans just before the town of Los Coloradas. Apparently this area can be fairly productive in the winter for shorebirds and flamingos, but during my visit it was void of birds.

Additional Logistics: Ismael Navarro is a local birder and guide who lives in Rio Lagartos. We met Ismael while we were eating lunch and watching the Mexican Sheartails come to the hummingbird feeders. If you do plan on taking a boat tour, I would highly recommend getting in touch with Ismael. Ismael has dedicated a lot of time to getting the local community interested in birds and has been teaching children in the area about bird watching. Ismael is also available to do other bird guiding throughout the Yucatan so if you'd like to have a local around for a few days, he's your man. He can be contacted at riolaga@hotmail.com or 9868665216 or can be found on Facebook.

Felipe Carrillo Puerto

Summary: Camino Vigia Chico, the dirt road heading northeast from FCP is one of the most visited birding locations in the Yucatan. This road which is well described in the Howell book passes through large patches of intact forest and eventually leads to the Sian Ka'an Bioserve. The road has very little traffic (since it is a dead-end) which allows for nice easy birding along the roadside. Although many people rave about this location, I wasn't too impressed. Although my opinion is probably biased since every time I birded FCP, it was either raining, was about to rain, or was windy. Therefore my birding here was fairly lackluster. Personally, if you're pressed for time and planning to do Rio Lagartos as well, Xocen is a good replacement for FCP. Of course, if you do have extra time, I'd check out both locations.



Directions: Felipe Carrillo Puerto is located about 225 km south of Cancun along Route 307. As you enter town you'll come to a traffic circle (N 19.58029 W 088.04404). Take a left (head east) for 5 blocks (600 meters) and take a diagonal left on to Calle 63 (N 19.57865 W 08803866). This road heading in a northeast direction is the start of the Vigia Chico Road. Set odometer to zero here if you're following the km markings in the Howell book. The road heads along the outskirts of town for about 1.5 km before it heads into the forest. The entire road is good for birding and there are many side roads and trails that are available for exploring. Apparently at km 28 you'll come to a gate and won't be able to drive any further although I never made it this far along the road.

Birding: Although I visited this location twice, both times I encountered rain and wind and overall had a really tough time finding birds. The first morning I spent birding along this road involved heavy rain that would stop intermittently. In between the heavy bouts of rain I was still able to find Middle American Screech-Owl (before light), Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Collared Aracari, Stub-tailed Spadebill, and my only Grey-throated Chat of the trip. Due to the heavy rain, I headed in to town for lunch and when I returned 30 minutes later, a large tree had fallen across the road. This cut my first visit to this location short. The second time I visited was in the afternoon/evening. Although birding was slightly better, the weather was still an issue and overall I didn't find much. A few species that we were able to track down included Wedge-tailed Saberwing, Collared Aracari, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Northern Barred and Ivory-billed Woodcreepers, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, Northern Bentbill, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Northern Schiffornis, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Rose-throated Tanager. After dark, numerous Middle American Screech-Owls and Mottled Owls were calling. Luckily we were able to get great looks at a Mottled Owl.

Coba

Summary: Coba can easily be reached from either Cancun or Valladolid. This site is a popular tourist location due to the Mayan Ruins present at the location, but the surrounding forest and lake also provide for some decent birding. Most birders visit the location since it's a well-known spot for Spotted Rail, but I was unable to find any during my short visit. My main target for the location was Yellow-winged Tanager and I was easily able to find it along the south

shore of the lake. Overall, I wouldn't spend too much time in the area, but it's a worthwhile spot to visit for an afternoon on your way to or from Cancun. Apparently night birding can be decent in the area as well, but sadly I didn't have time to check it out myself. I also didn't visit the ruins which would provide better access to the surrounding forest and probably produce more birds.

Directions: Coba is located 2.5 km off of Route 109 and is well sign posted. As you approach the lake there's a road that will take you along the eastern edge of the lake and then along the southern portion. There's a small board walk along a section of the lake shore across from the entrance to the ruins. The Howell guide suggests that there's good access to the western reed beds from the south section of the lake, but that area appears to be off limits now since there's a small Spa located at the end of the road.

Birding: I only spent a little over an hour in the area on a single afternoon, but still managed to find my main target, Yellow-winged Tanager. This species seems to be a bit tricky at a lot of the other typical birding spots in the Yucatan, so if you're interested in seeing this species it might be worthwhile to make a short trip to Cabo. I spent the majority of my time along the southern edge of the lake where some fruiting trees were attracting a large variety of birds (N 20.48924 W 087.73744). At this location I had Yellow-winged Tanager, Blue-Grey Tanager, Scrub Euphonia, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. The lake itself produced Neotropical Cormorant, Limpkin, and Snail Kite, but the water level was high and there didn't seem to be any good areas for Spotted Rail.



Reserva Toh

Summary: This reserve is located about 20 kilometers from Puerto Morelos and provides a great opportunity for those on a family vacation to still find some interesting Yucatan specialties. Personally, I do not have much information on this site, since I only visited the area briefly for a single morning and actually spent my time on the access road before discovering the actual site right before I had to leave to head back to the resort. I'm not exactly sure of access requirements, but I think showing up unannounced would be fine. If you can't find the actual reserve, the road (which I birded) and side trails in the area will produce the same species.



Directions: From Puerto Morelos, head west on Route 307 for 19.2 km. Make a left (there's a large sign for Zapote Eco Park) and continue for a few kilometers until you see signs for Reserva Toh on your left.

Birding: I checked out this spot the morning on my friend's wedding. From 0300 until dawn I drove a few roads in the area looking for nightjars and poorwills, but came up empty. At dawn, I found the entrance road to Reserva Toh, but didn't realize the reserve even existed. I spent from 0600-0800 birding along the dirt entrance road with my wife and non-birding friend. We found a lot of the common Yucatan species including Black-headed Trogon, Lineated Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, Northern Bentbill, Spot-breasted Wren, Black-cowled Oriole, and Red-throated Ant-Tanager. This area is also good for a number of other interesting species including Rose-throated Tanager, Grey-throated Chat, and Orange Oriole. If you don't have much time to go birding during your family vacation to Cancun, this is the spot I'd recommend spending your free time at.

Calakmul

Summary: The ancient Mayan city of Calakmul offers the opportunity to bird amongst some of the most spectacular Mayan ruins that Mexico has to offer. Located in the Mexican state of Campeche, this site has become a well-known hotspot for birders and is probably the easiest spot in Mexico to see Ocellated Turkey. The 60 kilometer access road and trail system around the ruins provides fantastic access to the Calakmul Bio Reserve which encompasses hundreds of square kilometers of undisturbed tropical forest. Along with the turkeys, the area is known for routine sightings of Great Curassow and common encounters with ant swarms that are attended by a wide variety of interesting species.

Directions: The turn off for Calakmul (N 18.53920 W 089.90022) is located ~520 kilometers from Cancun or 56 kilometers west from the nearest town of Xpujil. From here, the parking lot for the ruins is an additional 60 kilometers south. Just after you turn onto the access road, you'll see a guard shack on your left. You will need to purchase your access pass here before continuing further. It is possible to bird along the first 20 kilometers without purchasing a ticket, but at kilometer 20, there is another guard shack and gate which you'll need to present your pass at before continuing on to the parking lot.

Birding: We arrived at the access road around 0300 in the morning and spent about 2 ½ hours along the first 20 kilometers of the access road looking for night birds. Numerous Middle American Screech-Owls and Mottled Owls were heard calling and a single Northern Potoo was the only one for the trip. We also flushed a few Common Pauraque from the roadside and heard two Yucatan Poorwills. At 0600 we were back at the beginning of the entrance road where we were able to purchase our entrance permits. From here we raced back down the road so that we could get further into the park as it was getting light. We showed our permit to the guard at the Kilometer 20 gate and continued down the road towards the ruins. At roughly kilometer 35, we found our first Great Curassow along the road and soon afterwards our first group of Ocellated Turkeys. We ended up making a few more stops along the entrance road than expected and didn't make it to the ruins until nearly 8:30 am. The only map available of the ruins is a bit tricky to understand, but essentially there's a "short loop" and a "long loop." Although we started off down the long loop, I'd recommend doing the short loop first as that'll give you the quickest access to the tall ruins and allow for ample time to scan for interesting species from the top of the ruins. As we made our way along the "long loop" we encountered another Great Curassow. Other interesting species included numerous Keel-billed Toucans, Collared Aracaris, Yellow-olive and Eye-ringed Flatbills, Mexican Anthrush, Masked Tityra, and Bat Falcon. We finally made it to the top of the large ruins by around 10:30, but didn't see too much from the top. The only bird of interest was a Grey-headed Kite. Although the forest around the ruins is known for large ant swarms, we were unable to find any. After some midday showers, we decided to leave the ruins and spent the rest of the day birding back out along the access road. We encountered numerous flocks of Ocellated Turkeys and in the late afternoon a very large flock of White-fronted Parrots started to stage about 7 kilometers before the highway. Although it was tricky to scan through the large flock, we were able to get good looks at a few Red-lored Parrots as well.

Additional Logistics: The guard shack at the beginning of the access road doesn't open until 0600 although it's probably worthwhile to arrive a bit early as they were already there when we showed up exactly at 0600. Total cost for two people was \$354. You need to make sure you buy your permits at the beginning of the access road. You will not be able to buy them at the gate at Kilometer 20. There are bathrooms located at the small visitor center at the parking lot for the ruins, but there isn't any food to buy so make sure you pack a lunch if you plan on spending the entire day in the area. Although the 60 kilometer road is in good shape, it's narrow and windy and takes a bit longer than expected to reach the end. It's very easy to get distracted looking for birds along the entrance road, so if you really want to be at the ruins early, make sure you stay focused along the drive in!

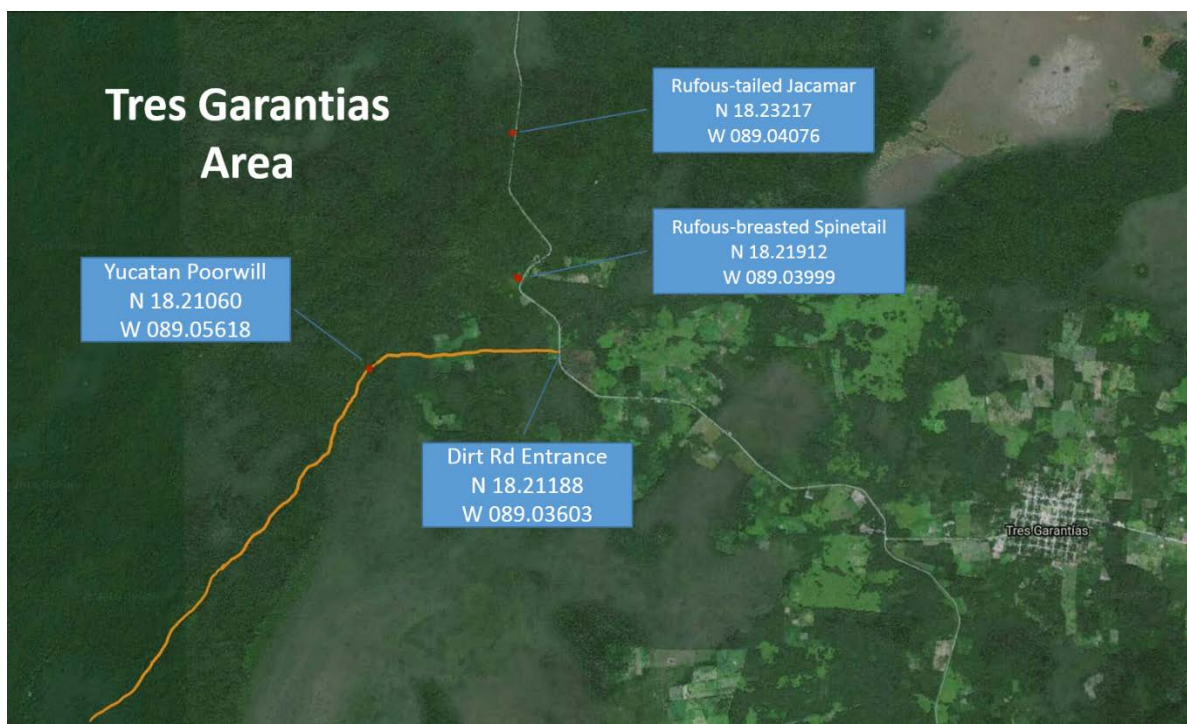
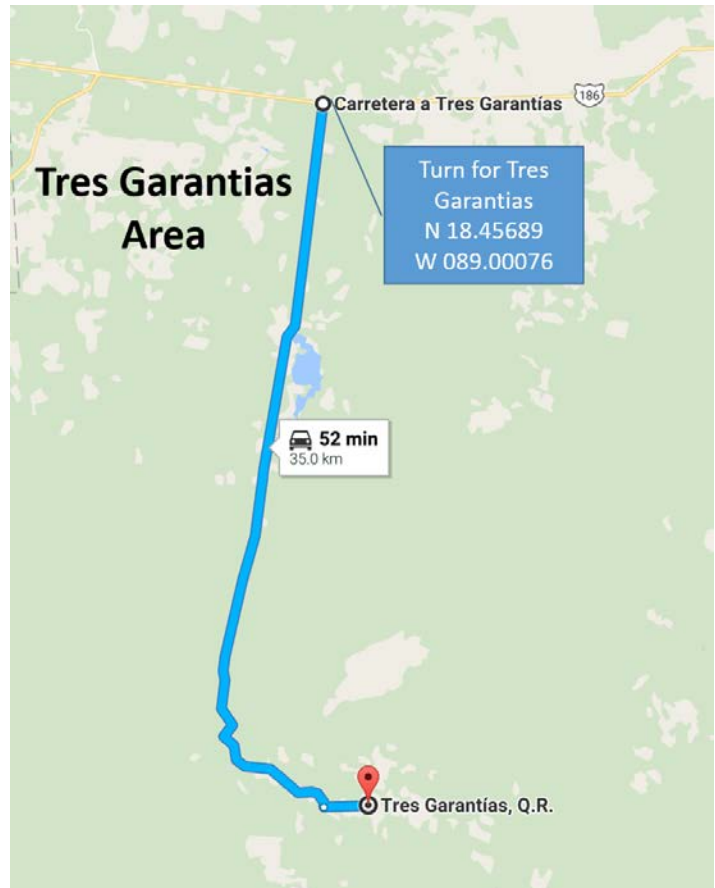


Tres Garantias

Summary: Although I was unable to find any birding reports detailing this area, some interesting checklists in eBird were enough to convince me to add this area to our itinerary. Although I was only able to spend a single morning in this area, there seems to be numerous access points into the forest around Tres Garantias and I feel the area has some very good potential. My main goals of visiting this site were to try and locate Rufous-breasted Spinetail and Black-headed Shrike-Tanager. Although I succeeded in finding the spinetail, I was unable to find the shrike-tanager. I think with more time, you could turn up some very interesting species in the area.

Directions: From Xpujil, head 42 km east before turning right (south) towards Tres Garantias. From here it's an additional 35 km south to the small town. The turnoff from Route 186 is at N 18.45689 W 089.00076.

Birding: I drove to Tres Garantias after our day at Calakmul. During the 35 kilometer drive south, I flushed over 30 Common Pauras from the roadside (no other nightjar species were seen). After car camping on the outskirts of town, I awoke at around 0400 and found a dirt road (N 18.21188 W 089.03603) a few kilometers north of town that looked promising. I headed west down this dirt road and after a few kilometers, the muddy logging road eventually got a little too rough for my small rental car to handle. I stopped here and spent about an hour before light with a pair of Yucatan Poorwills. Middle American Screech-Owl was also in the area. After light, we spent the morning walking along the dirt road through some nice sections of forests. New species encountered included Stripe-throated Hermit, White-breasted Wood-wren, Golden-crowned Warbler, and Olive-backed Euphonia. Although I had hoped to find Black-headed Shrike-Tanager we were unable to find any antswarms and therefore, no shrike-tanager. I think if we would have been able to get further down this road, we would have had a better opportunity (satellite shows this road runs through a very nice section of forest). Still wanting to find Rufous-breasted Spinetail, we headed back out to the main road and started heading north again, stopping along some scrubby sections to that looked good for spinetails. At our second stop at N 18.21912 W 089.03999 I was able to call in a very responsive Rufous-breasted Spinetail. Success. We continued birding along the road, stopping along a few sections of forest. The most interesting species we found along this section was Rufous-tailed Jacamar. By 10:30am we left the area as we had to make the long drive back to Xocen for the afternoon.



Budget Breakdown:

- Budget is based on 1 person for 3 days and 2 people for the next 7 days. The budget does not include the 2 nights at the all-inclusive resort, so food budget (and possibly lodging) would be slightly higher if we were buying food those two days
- Most food was purchased at local grocery stores or restaurants in non-tourist areas
- Only lodging was 1 night at Hostelito on Cozumel for 1 person
- Rental car was for 8 days through America Car Rental. Unlimited kilometers, manual, A/C, no radio. Pickup Playa de Carmen, Drop-off CUN. No extra charge for dropping off at different location
- Gas was 13.96 per liter
- Exchange rate was 17.2-17.4 in Mexico (~18.25 on exchange)

Yucatan (10 days) USD:

Rental Car: \$363.09

Gas: \$189.24

Food: \$108.87

Lodging: \$10.47

Park Fees: \$12.58

Other: \$12.58

Total: \$704.83

International Airfare: PIT to CUN: \$850.00 round trip for two people

Total Trip Cost for 2 people: \$1,554.83

Target Birds

This is not a comprehensive list of all species recorded. Instead it is a list of the more interesting species I recorded with Yucatan endemics, regional endemics, and good birds in bold. In total I recorded 181 species. Not a very impressive total, but I spent little time looking for water birds (most of which aren't even present at this time of year) and instead focused on target birds.

| Species | Location | Notes |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thicket Tinamou | Xocen, FCP | commonly heard at Xocen, single bird seen well near dusk |
| Plain Chachalaca | Reserva Toh | |
| Great Curassow | Calakmul | around km35 and along "long loop" at ruins |
| Black-throated Bobwhite | Xocen, Rio Lagartos | Seen along road at Xocen, very common at Rio Lagartos in scrub areas, numerous males perching up on snags and singing |
| Singing Quail | Xocen | Heard only |
| Ocellated Turkey | Yucatan, Calakmul | Female and poults seen on drive from Celestun to FCP (rare), very easy along road to Calakmul |
| American Flamingo | Rio Lagartos | Distantly seen from Calle 9 along water |
| Gray-headed Kite | Calakmul | Seen from top of ruins |
| Snail Kite | Cabo | Flying over lake |
| Swallow-tailed Kite | FCP | large group migrating |
| Ruddy Crake | Cozumel | Near WWTP |
| Russet-naped Wood-Rail | Rio Lagartos | ponds before mangrove area |
| Limpkin | Cabo | |
| Short-billed Pigeon | Calakmul | A few seen from top of ruins |
| Caribbean Dove | Cozumel | A few seen in abandon housing complex |
| Zenaida Dove | Rio Lagartos | Flyovers |
| Lesser Roadrunner | Rio Lagartos | Single bird finally found along roadside roughly 2 km in direction of San Felipe. |
| Middle American Screech-Owl | | Common at most locations |
| Great Horned Owl | Rio Lagartos | Pair heard calling |
| Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl | | Common at most locations |
| Mottled Owl | Xocen, FCP, Calakmul | Often heard, single bird seen at FCP |
| Lesser Nighthawk | Rio Lagartos | Seen flying around at dawn in scrub area |
| Common Pauraque | Tres Garantias | ~30 birds flushed from roadside on 35 km drive to Tres Garantias |
| Yucatan Poorwill | Xocen, Calakmul, Tres Garantias | Xocen (N 20.57311 W 088.11624), Calakmul (N 18.43421 W 089.8888 & N 18.38752 W 089.894785), Tres Garantias (N 18.21060 W 089.05618) |
| Yucatan Nightjar | Xocen | Only one bird seen/heard the entire trip N 20.57688 W 088.12334 |
| Northern Potoo | Calakmul | Heard only along access road |
| Stripe-throated Hermit | Tres Garantias | |
| Green-breasted Mango | Cozumel | |
| Mexican Sheartail | Rio Largartos | Common at feeders at restaurant. Nest near intersection Calle 12/Calle 21 |
| Cozumel Emerald | Cozumel | Single bird seen along dirt road near WWTP |
| Cinnamon Hummingbird | Rio Largartos | Same places as sheartails |
| Gartered Trogon | Calakmul | Two birds heard, single bird seen |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lesson's Motmot | Calakmul | |
| Turquoise-browed Motmot | Rio Lagartos, Reserva Toh | Commonly sits on power lines |
| American Pygmy Kingfisher | Rio Lagartos | Along boardwalk at SE corner of parking lot at restaurant |
| Rufous-tailed Jacamar | Tres Garantias | Along main road at N 18.23217 W 089.04076 |
| Collared Aracari | FCP, Calakmul | |
| Keel-billed Toucan | Calakmul, Tres Garantias | |
| Yucatan Woodpecker | | Most easily seen on Cozumel where it's very common |
| Pale-billed Woodpecker | FCP, Calakmul | |
| Collared Forest-Falcon | Calakmul | Heard only |
| Laughing Falcon | Tres Garantias | Seen along road on drive out |
| Bat Falcon | Calakmul | Seen near ruins |
| Red-lored Parrot | Calakmul | Amongst large flock of WF Parrots near km7 in the late afternoon |
| White-fronted Parrot | Calakmul | Large flock staged at km7 in late afternoon |
| Yellow-lored Parrot | Cozumel | Abandon Housing Complex |
| Barred Antshrike | Rio Lagartos, Reserva Toh | |
| Black-faced (Mayan) Anthrush | Calakmul | |
| Rufous-breasted Spinetail | Tres Garantias | Scrubby area at N 18.21912 W 089.03999 |
| Caribbean Elaenia | Cozumel | Abandon housing complex N 20.45971 W 086.96399 |
| Northern Bentbill | | Fairly common in forest areas |
| Eye-ringed Flatbill | Xocen, Calakmul | |
| Stub-tailed Spadebill | FCP, Tres Garantias | |
| Yucatan Flycatcher | Progreso | Surprisingly, the only one I found was in the heat of the day at N 21.19499 W 089.69175 |
| Northern Schiffornis | FCP | |
| Rufous-browed Peppershrike | Cozumel | Abandoned housing complex N 20.45720 W 086.96142 |
| Mangrove Vireo | Xocen, Rio Lagartos | Single bird at Xocen, common in scrub at Rio |
| Cozumel Vireo | Cozumel | Common at both locations visited |
| Yucatan Vireo | Cozumel, Xocen | Common on Cozumel, single bird at Xocen |
| Yucatan Jay | Rio Lagartos, Xocen | Surprisingly few seen |
| Mangrove Swallow | Rio Lagartos | Near dump on way to San Felipe |
| House (Cozumel) Wren | Cozumel | Dirt road to WWTP, N 20.55145 W 086.91634 & N 20.54637 W 086.9051 |
| Yucatan Wren | Rio Lagartos | Common in scrub areas |
| White-lored Gnatcatcher | Rio Lagartos | A few seen in scrub areas |
| Black Catbird | Cozumel, Xocen | Very common on Cozumel, common at Xocen, surprisingly absent everywhere else |
| Yellow-winged Tanager | Cabo | south side of lake at fruiting trees |
| Western Spindalis | Cozumel | Abandon housing complex |
| Green-backed Sparrow | Xocen, Calakmul | |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Rose-throated Tanager | Xocen, FCP | A few birds at each location, listen for call |
| Grey-throated Chat | FCP | Single male seen |
| Black-cowled Oriole | Xocen, Reserva Toh | |
| Orange Oriole | Reserva Toh | Surprisingly uncommon |
| Scrub Euphonia | Cabo, Calakmul | |
| Yellow-throated Euphonia | Cabo, Calakmul | |
| Olive-backed Euphonia | Tres Garantias | |