

# **NORTH EAST YUCUTAN PENINSULA**

**2<sup>nd</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August 2016**

by Chris and Vicky Harper

With direct flights from Manchester Airport to Cancun now available, we decided that the Yucutan Peninsula in Mexico would be a great new place to visit for our honeymoon as it promises a great variety of birds, as well as a variety of other wildlife and the ancient Mayan culture. Return fares of £700 each and a 10 hour flight were very reasonable, with Thompsons new Dreamliner aircraft having plenty of comfort, with an opportunity to brush up on driving regulations, best birding routes, and bird identification on the way. The time difference also means a mid-afternoon arrival, giving time to pick up a hire car and make the hotel before evening sets in. Driving the area was easy, on very well kept roads in general, and the areas friendly reputation was well deserved, especially in the areas with a largely Mayan population.

Although August in the Yucatan is the rainy season and not the peak for birding, this did mean accommodation was cheaper, and places were generally less busy. After research on websites, blogs and trip companies, we decided to invest in 5 books for the trip. No single book covers all the birds of the peninsula, but using the 3 identification guides we put together a checklist of potential sightings for the area we were visiting and for the rainy season. We have a copy of this should anyone fancy using it (give us a shout). It isn't by any means a fully comprehensive list, but we found it extremely useful when unsure of species, or when targeting a specific area. The 3 identification guides we used were '100 Common Birds of the Yucatan Peninsula' by MacKinnon and de Montes, 'Birds of Costa Rica' by Garrigues and Dean, and 'A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America' by Howell and Webb. The latter especially is a weighty tome, but invaluable as a guide and for its distribution maps and timings. Two site guides taken were 'A Bird Finding Guide to Mexico' by Howell, and 'Where to Watch Birds in Central America and the Caribbean' by Wheatley and Brewer. The former we especially found very useful.

What follows is a day-by-day account of our route and the birds and other wildlife encountered, with a focus on the 'new' birds when seen. Some snaps included where we feel they are good enough.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> August: Cancun.**

On arrival at the airport, we noticed many Turkey vultures floating over the nearby mangroves. After a straightforward check in and bus to our car hire area, a 10-minute wait in the tropical heat gave us our first real taste of some urban birds. Great Tailed Grackle were feeding on the grass verges, and in the trees were Altamira and Hooded Oriole. A Great Kiskadee was also a lovely spot. It's always a really exciting time arriving in a new area, not really knowing which amazing looking birds from the guides you will actually see, and already we were more than happy that some of our 'must see' species were going to be relatively easy to observe. With the car picked up successfully, we drove via the coastal route to our hotel the 'Royal Lagoon', lying just on the North West side of the lagoon. En route, we spotted soaring Magnificent Frigate birds, a few flying White Ibis, and many large Grasshoppers flying, with us initially thinking the area was excellent for Cinnamon Hummingbirds! A few large Iguanas were by the Mayan ruins at El Rey, looking good for our trip there the next day.

After checking into the very pleasant hotel, avoiding the Gecko above the door, we had an hour to wander around the locality, which was basically the edge of a golf course and plantings along the main road across the North of the lagoon. Tropical Mockingbirds were very common on the golf course itself, with Collared Doves and Feral (Rock) Pigeons too. By the roadside vegetation we saw Yellow-backed Oriole, Melodious Blackbird, Lineated Woodpecker and Orange Oriole. After a Taco break, a sunset watch over the lagoon (conveniently from recliners at the rear of the hotel), saw many birds coming into roost in the Mangroves, including many Tricoloured Heron, Neotropic Cormorants, Great Egrets, and the odd Laughing Gull. Best of all a very obliging Green Heron on the hotel's jetty provided a good photo opportunity, and with the process of sneaking a little close, we luckily noticed the ripple of water indicating the presence of a Botteri's Crocodile very close in. Managed a couple of quick snaps before it snapped at us, and within minutes the rainy season lived up to its name, and in the 30 seconds it took to retreat to the hotel's lobby we were absolutely soaked. Jet lag was kicking in, so an early night was in order. I think we lasted until about 8pm (2am Manchester time).



Above: left, Tropical Mockingbird and right, Green Heron

### **3<sup>rd</sup> August: Cancun**

Awake early we decided to head to the mangrove viewing area at the Jardin des Art. Parking nearby we came across many Lesser Nighthawks, a few White-winged Doves, and an Osprey sitting on its nest by the main bridge leading from the lagoon to the sea. The Jardin itself was quiet at dawn, but soon gave excellent views of Social Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Warbler, Sulphur-breasted Flycatcher and a Bright-rumped Atilla. Across the lagoon to the mangroves we saw our only White-necked Puffbird of the trip, as well as many Golden-fronted Woodpecker, a few hawking Mangrove Swallow and passing Barn Swallow, and gracefully flying Brown Pelicans. A Bare-throated

Tiger Heron was fishing along the bank, and the sight of the fish themselves was amazing, looking like a suburban tropical fish tank. A return to the hotel gave a Black and White Warbler near the golf course, with a walk around the perimeter in searing heat adding Botteri's Sparrow, Ruddy and Common Ground Dove and Bronze Cowbird.



Above: left, Social Flycatcher and right, Mongrove Warbler



Above: left, Tiger Heron and right, Common Ground Dove

The afternoon saw a 20-minute car ride to the Mayan site of El Rey. Iguanas were loafing on the ruins themselves, but the highlight for us was our first two Hummingbird species in the form of a miniscule Green-breasted Mango, and a much larger Wedge-tailed Sabrewing . These species are always near the top of our target list, and to see them sitting still on the vegetation around the ruins was a special moment. On the journey back to the hotel, we stopped to dip our toes in the Caribbean and at the same time saw our first of many Royal Tern, a few Double Crested Cormorant and some Ruddy Turnstone.

An evening roost watch saw a much larger contingent of White Ibis and Frigate birds than the previous night, as well as a few Vaux Swift. We had heard on the news that the edge of Hurricane Earl might be coming our way. The birds seemed to know this rumour was true.





Above: top, Great Tailed Grackle and bottom, Royal Terns

#### **4<sup>th</sup> August: Puerto Morelos**

Our pick up with Go Mexico tours to Isla Contoy was at 9am, so still not quite adjusted to Mexican time we were up at six and decided to have a walk around the Jardin again. Upon parking, we saw a lovely male Collared Seedeater, together with many Lesser Nighthawk and loafing Frigatebirds. When we reached the boardwalk a Golden Crowned Warbler was flitting around the trees, but this was our only other 'new' bird here on our final visit. Still a great place and I would recommend it to anyone staying in Cancun needing a 'local' walk. Back at the hotel we waited for our pickup, and waited, and eventually rang to see where they were. Unfortunately, Earl had put a halt to the trip, and we were promised a full refund. (We eventually received this 3 months later after a great deal of faffing and for this reason I don't recommend this company).



Above: Frigatebirds

What to do? We decided to travel an hour down the coast to Puerto Morelos, firstly to go on their mangrove boardwalk, secondly to get a good view of Earl. En route we were lucky to see a flying Yellow-winged Cacique, and on arrival found the mangrove boardwalk was now redundant (up to date Rough Guide anyone?). Never mind, as a walk around the lush hotel gardens and roads to the North of the town provided some lovely birds, Many Tropical Kingbirds, a stunning Cinnamon Hummingbird and Bananaquit, and another Green-breasted Mango. Our first Yucatan Squirrel was also seen, with some sand lizard. The walk took us to the beach, and after a hearty meal with great views of Brown Pelicans and Frigatebirds, we braved the winds and at times torrential rain of Earl to wander up the beach back to the hotel zone. Many Least Sandpipers were on the sand, just a few meters from our feet, and Royal and Sandwich terns were resting their wings. Green Lizards scuttled around our feet on the flotsam.

On the way out of the Port is a lovely flooded mangrove area, so we stopped the car in a reasonable place and spent an hour scoping the lagoons. This proved very fruitful, with great views of Northern Jacana and young, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Black-necked Stilt, Grey-breasted Martins, Anhinga, Snowy Egret, Limpkin, Belted Kingfisher, Red-winged Blackbirds, Moorhen, Grey Plover, Great Blue Heron, and a Carolina Wren. The route back gave our first Black Vulture, a Great Black Hawk, and on the outskirts of Cancun itself a few pairs of passing White-fronted Parrots. Our trip across the Caribbean may have been cancelled, but it was an unforgettable experience birding around the edge of a hurricane.





Above: top left, Least Sandpipers; top right, Limpkin; middle left, Northern Jacana; middle right, Black-Bellied Whistling Duck; bottom, Anhinga

## 5<sup>th</sup> August: Macario Gomez

Instead of staying in Tulum, we decided to take a risk and stay in a hotel in a small village just outside called Macario Gomez. The Casa de Orqidas proved a great place to stay for our 3 nights, with the proprietors loving wildlife, and serving us free Tequila on our final night! We set off from Cancun early, and reached the Botanical Gardens just outside Puerto Morelos on opening. This was recommended and was worth it for seeing the Spider Monkeys with young and a few skittish Agoutis along the jungle paths. Birdlife was also good, if needing a bit of patience to see at times. New species seen included Pale-vented Pigeon, Crested Guan, Groove-billed Ani, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Caribbean Dove, Purple Martin, and best of all a couple of vocal Yucatan Jay scolding us for ruining their ant meal. Lots of colourful butterflies around the trails too. Leaving the gardens we had a slow drive up the relatively new Route de Cenotes which was pretty quiet, but did give us a few Olive-throated Parakeets, a Common Black Hawk, a Boat-billed Flycatcher, Northern Cardinals, and a scuttling Mexican Tarantula on the road. The first of a few we would see, but exciting the first time, and nice to be surrounded by metal.

After settling into our hotel, we decided to explore the grounds and surrounds a little. Not far behind the hotel is a track leading to virgin forest, and the owners of the hotel recuperate injured birds from there. So they had a close up Oscillated Turkey and Yucatan Parrot for us to get amazing views of, as well as wilder birds in the grounds such as Clay-coloured Thrush, a family of Yucatan Jays, Caribbean Eleania, and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. Outside we spotted Scrub Euphonia, Greenish Eleania, Yellow-tailed Oriole, many hawking Northern- Rough-winged Swallows, and a couple of beautiful Green Jay (Image R). Dusk sets fast here, and a meal and a dip in the pool were in order after a busy day. The turkey kept his eye on us throughout.



Above: left, Yucatan Parrot and right, Oscillated Turkey





Above; Green Jay

### 6<sup>th</sup> August: Sian Kaan

To really see a good selection of jungle birds we thought it wise to hire a guide for our visit to Sian Kaan Biosphere Reserve. Mayans run Sian Kaan Tours and the profits from the tours go back into the local community. Our guide was called Rodrigo and we found his knowledge and expertise invaluable in what was our best birding day of the whole holiday in terms of number of new species observed. Based around the ancient jungle town of Muyil, we drove there ourselves and met our guide at 6.30am to the sound of distant Howler Monkeys.

Just on the outskirts of the village and within the first few minutes we had spotted Plain Chachalaca, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Common Ground Dove, White-tipped Dove, Rose-throated Becard, Yellow-Green Vireo, Lesser Greenlet, Tropical Peewee, and Brown Jay. As the light and temperature grew, a myriad of birds were calling and moving around the low shrub and gardens around the village, surrounded by the forest. Rodrigo charmed out a Spot-breasted Wren for us, and indeed his owl impressions worked well for a lot of the birds that followed. The birds kept coming. Canivet's Emerald and Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Masked Tityra, Green-backed Sparrow, Black Cowled Oriole, and Yellow-throated Euphonia, as well as a few of our 'must see' species like Red-legged Honeycreeper, Smoky Brown Woodpecker, and Scaled Pigeon. As we meandered towards the outskirts of the village, more typical forest dwellers started to be seen like Collared Aracari, Squirrel Cuckoo, Black-crowned Tityra, and best of all another three of our targets, Violaceous Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, and a showy if distant Keel-billed Toucan. Birding heaven was entered at this point really, and our tip for Rodrigo growing by the minute.

A trek up the far side of the village/jungle boundary yielded more species, including the Endemic Black Catbird and Yucatan Woodpecker, as well as Black-headed Saltator, Roadside Hawk, Black-headed Trogon, Golden Olive Woodpecker, and Black-crowned Tityra. Time up? Nowhere near. With the time at about 10am, we had a short and well-deserved break before crossing the main highway to bird the site around the ancient Muyil pyramid. New species here included Eye-ringed Flatbill, Black-crowned Tityra, many Grey-headed Tanager, Greyish Saltator, Black Cowled Oriole, and best of all our guides first Rose-throated Tanager for three years, and another Yucatan endemic. A walk to the lake viewing point was pleasant, with a few green Leaf Frogs, many butterflies including stunning Blue Morpho's, but less birds as the temperature was now becoming oppressive, and mosquitos



more annoying. A walk back to the meeting place bought us a very close Ruddy Woodcreeper, a singing Northern Waterthrush and a sprinting Grey Fox.

All in all an amazing mornings birdwatching, throw in some lovely scenery, Mayan ruins, a lunch included and some of the friendliest people you could wish to meet, and you have an absolute bargain. Why not book a trip tomorrow on the lagoons we thought, so we did.

The afternoon was spent chilling in the hotel and looking for the reported Yucatan Bobwhite on the football field without success, but lots of the more 'common' species were seen, and a relax in the hotels own cenote bought a fantastic day to a close.



Above: top left, Violaceous Trogon; top right, Turquoise-browed Motmot; bottom left, Keel-billed Toucan; bottom right, Endemic Black Catbird

## **7<sup>th</sup> August: Sian Kaan**

An early pick up from our hotel and a wind around other pick up points in Tulum on our way to the River float trip bought a Coati mundi scouring the beachside hotels for scraps. The boat trip across the lagoon bought few birds, but circling high above was our first Wood Stork, and a few Short-tailed Hawks. The river float itself was superb, with our life jackets on allowing the current in an old Mayan canal to take us from one lagoon to the next, whilst avoiding Mangrove roots and Barracuda's, but not

avoiding sunburn. Ouch. Across the next lagoon, we slowed to see at least one West Indian Manatee in the murky water, and our second crocodile of the trip.

Our final destination was the Caribbean coast of the reserve, and what a lovely tranquil place it was, with very tame Brown Pelicans, our first Little Blue Heron and Reddish Egret and passing Least Terns. A Spotted Sandpiper was opposite the mooring spot, and a couple of passing Ospreys.

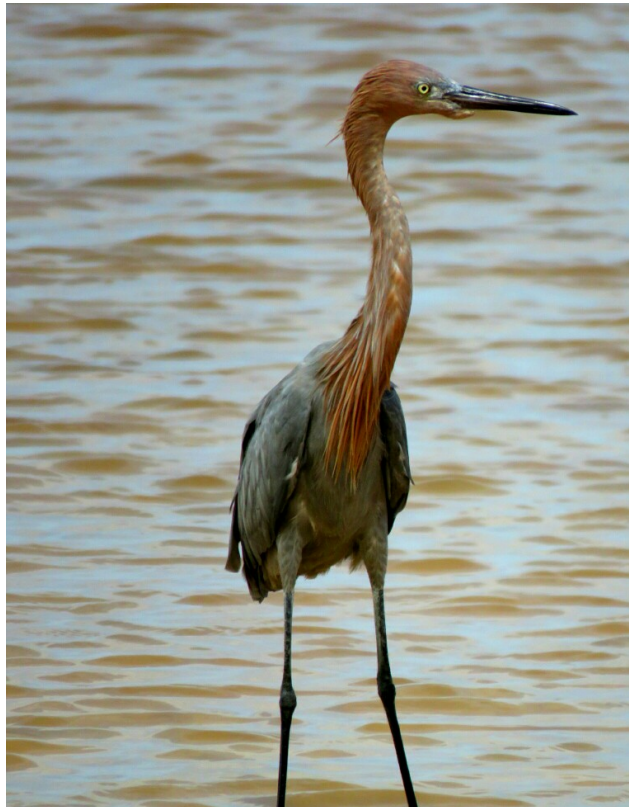
After our return and lunch (accompanied by a roosting Mexican Bat), we were dropped off at Tulum's superb Mayan ruins, and as well as viewing Green Turtle nesting sites and many Iguanas we also saw our first Red-billed Pigeon, a Stripe-throated Hermit, and a few Cave Swallows nesting in the ruins.

Back at the hotel, we readied for our leaving the next day, which included applying much after sun cream and trying and failing to avoid the free tequila on offer from the proprietors. We did sleep well after that.



Above: top, Brown Pelicans and a Little Blue Heron; bottom left, Little Blue Heron; bottom right, Iguana





Above: Reddish Egret

### **8<sup>th</sup> August: Punta Laguna/Coba/Chichen Itza**

Our route to Chichen Itza was designed to take in two key sites on the peninsula. An early start meant we arrived at Coba Lake before the crowds, and we headed towards the 'far' side of the lake, away from the nice boardwalk and more 'touristy' part near the entrance to the Mayan ruins. A Least Bittern was reed climbing, and a Spotted Rail skulking in the lower vegetation. A few Chestnut Munia were flitting around the gardens, imports from Asia, but beautiful birds nonetheless. Limpkin were very showy. Blue Ground Doves fed on the paths. The lake itself had plenty of birds, our third Crocodile location, and great places for birdwatching. Around the more developed side, a pair of Blue-Grey Tanager were courting just above our heads. Despite scanning, we couldn't locate any Ruddy Crake, said to be common here.

We spent a few hours in the huge Mayan ruins, and found it excellent for birds. This is still heavily wooded, and the fact that some of the pyramids could be climbed meant you could be at canopy level in places. New birds seen included Yucatan Flycatcher, Streaked Flycatcher, Yucatan Vireo, and a skulking Red-headed Ant Tanager. Bird of the area was another of our targets in a brute of an Pileated Woodcreeper. If we had more time, this would be one area where we would have definitely spent more time.

The road to Punta Laguna was excellent for animals. We saw a Jaguarundi and Mexican Mouse Opossum on the road. Arriving at the site, we hired a guide to take us around, and whilst waiting in the car park were treated to six over flying Swallow-tailed Kite. The guide was excellent, but couldn't find us a Howler Monkey. However, we did see a very close Mexican Tarantula, trails of Leafcutter Ants, some very large Bats, and another Yucatan Squirrel. The Lake had a few obliging Least

Grebes, and the route back via the Cenotes had breeding Turquoise-browed Motmots. The day itself was probably the hottest of our trip, and by the time we arrived at the Hacienda Chichen Itza Hotel, we were ready for a spot of relaxation and a bit of quiet time. We were lucky in that we were given the cottage of S Morley, the US archaeologist who had excavated the site nearly one hundred years previously. The extra expense of the hotel was definitely going to be worth it for the next few days.



Above: Mexican Tarantula

### **9<sup>th</sup> August: Chichen Itza**

The day was spent relaxing and exploring the hotel gardens. They are set in excellent habitat near the ruins, and even have their own entrance to the site. There is edge habitat too, which allowed for excellent views of previously seen species, but just at a more leisurely pace. So excellent views were had of Green Jay, Turquoise-browed Motmot and Tityra's, Orioles, Tanagers, Flycatchers, Woodpeckers and Hummingbirds, all of which came close to our veranda. New species added included nesting Yellow-faced Grassquit, Yellow-winged Tanager, Northern Schiffornis, White-crowned Parrot, and our only owl of the trip in the shape of a small but aggressive Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (the call of which our guide at Sian Khan had mimicked to attract some skulking species). We also took advantage of the resident botanist who leads tours around the site.

An evening light show in the Mayan site was a great spectacle, and free. It also gave us our only wild snake near the car park, a Bronze-backed Parrot Snake. Fireflies danced around the seating area, and Lesser Nighthawks flew around us as we awaited the show. On our return, we had to call management to remove two scorpions from the room, and hastily blocked the gap under the door for the rest of the stay. Great views though, even though it meant a nervy night's sleep.





Above: Yellow-faced Grassquit

### **10<sup>th</sup> August: Chichen Itza**

The whole day was spent exploring the Mayan ruins, but we did see Blue-crowned Motmot in the older part of the site, and Turquoise-browed nesting in some of the ruins and by the cenote. Short-tailed hawks were flyovers too. The land opposite the hotel was worth exploring at dusk, and we added Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, and Red-billed Pigeon to our list. We also had our best view of Rufus-browed Peppershrike, Clay-coloured Thrush, White-tipped Dove and Grey-throated Becard here.

### **11<sup>th</sup> August: Chichen Itza to Rio Lagartos**

The journey north to Rio Lagartos was a short drive of a couple of hours, but a long one due to the excellent habitat along the way prompting numerous stops to view birds and other wildlife. The transition from forest to scrubrier habitat, with farmland too made for the best journey of the trip in terms of new wildlife seen.

Not far from Chichen Itza, we passed a freshly run over Coral Snake (Image AB), and stopping to look at this we saw a wetter area of more open land, which gave us great views of a perched Crane Hawk, many Bronzed Red-eyed Cowbirds, a brief Dusky Antbird, and a White-bellied Emerald Hummingbird. Further along the road near very open farmland we were treated to the slightly hilarious displays of Blue-Black Grassquits jumping up and down on fence posts. Nearby were Buff-throated Saltator, Olive Sparrow and a female Vermillion Flycatcher on the overhead wires. A few Cattle Egret were in the fields, with many Groove-billed Ani and Grackles/Cowbirds.

Near Rio itself, a roadside pond held us for a good half hour as we spotted more Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, our first Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a perched White-tailed Hawk and another Buff-bellied Hummingbird. Yellow-headed and Black Vultures seemed to have replaced Turkey vultures as we moved north.

Arriving at our hotel, the Villa de Pescadores, we were amazed by the superb view out to the lagoon, with Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans coasting by the window, and distant views of Caribbean Flamingos, and terns including a few Bridled. We headed out to Riolagartosnaturetours to

book a couple of trips for our next day. Diego Nunez runs the company and although we tried to book online it wasn't possible, but luckily we managed to get both our required trips for the next day.

He suggested before our meal at his excellent restaurant that we have a look at the lagoon from the end of Calle 19. This proved an excellent suggestion, as here were many waders, including very close Caribbean Flamingos, Willet, many Short-billed Dowitcher, a single Wilson's Phalarope, a few Whimbrel and a skulking Western sandpiper, as well as many Snowy Egrets and Semipalmated Sandpiper.

An amazing sunset was viewed from Diego's restaurant with Pelicans gliding in to roost. Then home to our friendly Gecko chirping outside the room.



Above: Coral Snake

## **12<sup>th</sup> August: Rio Lagartos**

Both of our trips were led by the excellent William Canto. The first involved an early start for the inland jeep tour to look for the dryer forest specialties of Northern Yucatan. It was chilly at the start, but warmed up fast, and we applied plenty of mosquito spray as much of the time we were in areas where the window was down as William located the birds. The first scrubby area gave close views of Yucatan Wren, Common Parakeet, Mangrove Cuckoo, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, Black-headed Trogon at last a Yucatan Bobwhite and both a male and female Barred Antshrike. Just as we were leaving the area one of our target birds, Lesser Roadrunner appeared and we were afforded some stunning views (Image AE), together with a minute Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

Travelling to a more open area we saw Grey Hawk, a very close White-tailed Hawk, feeding Crested Caracara, calling Couch's Kingbird, and best of all some very close stunning male Vermillion Flycatchers, possibly our number one target for the whole trip. Near this area was also a pair of Brown-crested Flycatcher, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, and many Northern Roughwing and Mangrove Swallows. The final stop at a pond gave little, but we did find a few Killdeer adjacent to it. A mid-morning cold juice at the Restaurant Chiquila was a superb place to finish. The drinks were welcome, but the highlight were the feeders for the hummingbirds, with the Mexican Sheartail being the star attraction. Both male and female of this diminutive endemic showed really well, allowing us to relax whilst surrounded by another star bird of the trip. Well worth the money, and we had time to recuperate before our afternoon trip out on the lagoon.



The trip itself was very leisurely in places, took us to the Gulf of Mexico at one point, and again was worth every penny. Many of the birds we had already seen, but the trip gave us very close views of Caribbean Flamingos, Wood Stork, white-morph Reddish Egret, Great Egret, sandpipers and terns, including Black and Gull-billed. Feeding on the exposed mud in the lagoon were hundreds of waders, including Short and Long-billed Dowitchers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover, and a few American Oystercatcher.

Travelling between mangroves to the more commercialised saltpans, we saw a rare Zone-tailed Hawk, Green Herons, flyover Zenaida Dove, Common Black Hawk and very close Bare-throated Tiger Heron. The best was waiting on our arrival though in the shape of a solitary but stunning Roseate Spoonbill and showy Snowy Plovers, recently split from the similar Kentish. A scour through the mangroves at dusk for Boat-billed Heron was unsuccessful, but nevertheless this was another fantastic trip and brought to the end another memorable day in the Yucatan.



Above: top left, Black-headed Trogon; top right, Yucatan Bobwhite; bottom left, White-tailed Hawk; bottom right, Caribbean Flamingos





Above: top left, Lesser Roadrunner; top right, Vermillion Flycatcher; middle left, Wood Stork; middle right, American Oystercatcher; bottom left, Common Black Hawk; bottom right, Roseate Spoonbill



### **13<sup>th</sup> August: Rio Lagartos to Holbox Island**

An early start to enable us to reach Holbox Island for the ferry gave us a chance to view the lagoon at the end of Calle 19. Very large flocks of Flamingos were flying over us, and a confiding Grey-necked Wood Rail soon skulked back into the undergrowth. We didn't stay long as William had tipped us off that a Bat Falcon could be viewed at the village of Kikil in the Mayan ruins. Sure enough after paying a small entrance fee, the Falcon was spotted on top of a pole eating a bat and gave excellent, extended views.

The journey to Holbox was convoluted but gave us some more good wildlife viewing, with a seemingly tame Lesser Nighthawk on a telephone wire, a flyover group of Yucatan Parrots, and Brown and Green Jays.

Other animals included another Grey Fox, Coatimundi, dead Green Tree Snake and a huge Bumblebee Millipede.

The ferry across to Holbox was quiet and a time to chill, with little wildlife, and on arrival, the walk to our Hotel Casa Blatha was exhausting, with no taxis available. After a meal, an evening stroll on the beach gave good views of a Stilt Sandpiper and many Lesser Nighthawk. Once we had cleared the Cockroach out of the room, a good night's sleep was had.



Above: Lesser Nighthawk

### **14<sup>th</sup> August: Holbox Island**

We knew from our meeting with our trip company the previous day that there was little chance of us going on our pre booked Whale Shark watching trip due to an approaching tropical storm, but next morning the whole of the port was closed, so our reserve trip of the 'three islands tour' was also a none starter. So with raincoats and mosquito spray we decided to have a mornings walk along the Northern shoreline from Passion Island east to Mosquito Point. A hearty breakfast was eaten whilst watching the nesting Hooded Orioles in the garden before we set off.

In the scrub near the hotel a Raccoon was seen scampering, and a few fireflies still about too, together with a small mouse. Many of the previously seen species were again on show, with good

views of Great Blue and Yellow-crowned Night Herons amongst Egrets, Flamingos and Ibis. A few Ospreys patrolled the coast, and many Lesser Nighthawks. Nearer the point, we almost trod on a Northern Waterthrush, as well as getting close to the more common Sandpipers and many Willet. A few waders were still in summer plumage, including Grey Plover and Short-billed Dowitcher. Royal, Gull-billed and Least Terns were offshore, and the bird of the day was in the form of a ringed Piping Plover, which we have been informed was possibly from Canada. The scrub around the hotel later in the day had some good birds, with close views of another Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Bright-rumped Atilla, and both Mexican Sheartail and Green-breasted Mango. A House Wren was pleasing to see, and we had our best views by far of a few Zenaida Dove.

Back near Passion Island (Isla Passion) when the rain had lessened near evening were many Barn, Northern Roughwing and Mangrove Swallows, together with Grey-greasted Martin. Yellow-faced Grassquits were seen again, and Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Vireo, Grey-throated Yellowthroat and best of the smaller birds a returning Nashville Warbler gave a glimpse of what the area might be like in a few week's time when migration from the North gets into full swing.

So this was our only true wet day of the trip, and bought some great birds, and the bonus of fewer mosquitos than we were braced for.

### **15<sup>th</sup> August: Holbox to Puerto Morelos**

The following day was calm and clear, and before packing and catching the ferry back to the mainland, we headed around the scrubby area for a final time. Similar birds were seen, with very close views of Zenaida Dove, but the best bird was one we had given up hope of seeing. A juvenile Brown Booby sitting quietly on the beach, having obviously blown in by yesterday's storm (Image AP). Every cloud.... It proved approachable, and we sent some pictures to William, who replied to us later that the bird had been taken into care later in the day.

The northern half of the route towards Puerto Morelos bought two new additions to our list in the forms of Lesser Goldfinch (at last) and good views of a Barred Forest Falcon. The Route de Cenotes that we had travelled on previously once again had Tarantula's crossing it. William had given us another tip off that on this route in the small village of Vallarta it was possible to see Royal Flycatcher. Despite a good hours search, however, we couldn't locate any, even asking the locals armed with our field guide. However, we did see a couple of new birds. Eastern Wood Peewee and Yellow Billed Elaenia, as well as great views of more Red Legged Honeycreeper.

We had a quick scan across the lagoon leading into the port again, with better views of the Jacana and Anhinga this time. Our hotel was basic, but on the beach, with excellent views of Pelicans and Frigate birds at sunset before one hell of an electrical storm meant an early night with the electric tripped.



Above: Brown Booby

### **16<sup>th</sup> August: Puerto Morelos to Manchester**

With the airport less than an hour away, and our car drop off not until midday, we packed up and had a couple more hours in the Botanical Gardens. No Spider Monkeys this time, but very close Agoutis, as well as some cracking birds again. Brown and Yucatan Jays were seen well from the canopy lookout, as were more 'Aztec' Olive-throated Parakeets, Plain Chacalaca's and another House Wren.

After car drop off and check in at the airport, we spent an hour looking across the airfield at a patiently waiting Roadside Hawk, soaring Turkey Vultures and Grey-breasted Martins nesting under the aircraft walkways.



Above: 'Aztec' Olive-throated Parakeets



The overnight flight back was uneventful and gave plenty of time for rest, arriving early morning in Manchester, with opportunity to re adjust to UK time.

So, our Yucatan adventure had come to a close, and we really cannot recommend the area enough. Great roads, friendly people, a myriad of Mayan sites, unique geology and superb wildlife at an affordable price. With a total bird count of 208 species seen, plenty of the areas other species remain to be discovered at a later date, at a different time of year or in a slightly more southern or western area. We'll be back.



Chris and Vicky Harper

[www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com)