



Rufous-breasted Spinetail

Villa Guadalupe, Tabasco Trip Report January 2016



Villa de Guadalupe

This trip reports covers a two-day visit to a rural community called “Villa de Guadalupe” located in the southwestern part of Tabasco, in Mexico. Three states converge on the area (Veracruz, Chiapas and Tabasco), so the birding here can be full of surprises.

The habitat consists of hilly tropical rainforest remnants and patches of second growth. Lots of streams crisscross the area and there are magnificent waterfalls. The local community (“ejido”) is trying to conserve its land, so they are promoting ecotourism.

They have two cabañas with electricity but no hot water (not really needed here). They also offer meals services and guided walks. There is a satellite phone available and a small rural store where the visitor can purchase water, refreshment drinks, canned goods and snacks. The area is secure and has many pleasant vistas. The road to the community is in an acceptable condition although in parts you have to navigate it carefully. Two days of exploration yielded 72 species, which is not a bad number considering we were birding tropical rainforest, which is a very challenging habitat (tall trees, low light ambiance and heat and humidity). We encountered three jungle gems, of the tropical tanager kind.

Day 1: As we approached the community we heard the call of a very vocal **Ruddy Crane**, which was a bit odd, because we were on a hilly habitat. We descended from the car and found out that a nearby brook had overflowed and formed a swampy little habitat, which explained the crane’s presence. Moving upwards we stopped to look in a patchy second-growth that seemed to have lots of bird activity. Here we found seven different warblers: **American Redstart, Black-and-white, Kentucky, Hooded, Wilson’s, Magnolia** and **Yellow Warbler**. There was also a skulking little bird, which turned out to be a **Rusty Sparrow**, a great find for the area.



Finally we arrive to the community where we encounter our local guide Don Romulo. He is part of the cooperative that owns and maintains the cabins.

Just above his house there is a **Keel-billed Toucan** (photo left) feeding on a cecropia. Nothing like a Toucan to get things going. We watch the colorful bird when four **Olive-throated Parakeets** also arrive to gorge on the fruits of this strange and very attractive (at least for birds) tree.

We quickly set up our gear and start hiking a jungle trail alongside a stream. We encounter a male **Collared Trogon**, two **White-breasted Wood-Wrens** that form a beautiful duet and a noisy group of **Red-throated Ant-Tanagers**. **Lesser Greenlets** seem to call from everywhere.



The stream we are following attracts **Louisiana Waterthrush** and an impressive number of **Green Kingfishers**.

A big fruiting tree hosts **Wood Thrushes** (photo left) and **Black-headed Saltators**, which appear common here.

Spot-breasted Wrens are ubiquitous and it seems a good year for **Black-throated Green Warblers**, as we see many of them. We reach a section of the trail that requires a bit of effort as it goes up on a steep incline but suddenly we are rewarded with a single **White-throated Thrush** (photo above). This was a target species for the trip. There were no recent records of this bird in Tabasco. We even manage a decent photo of this skittish thrush.





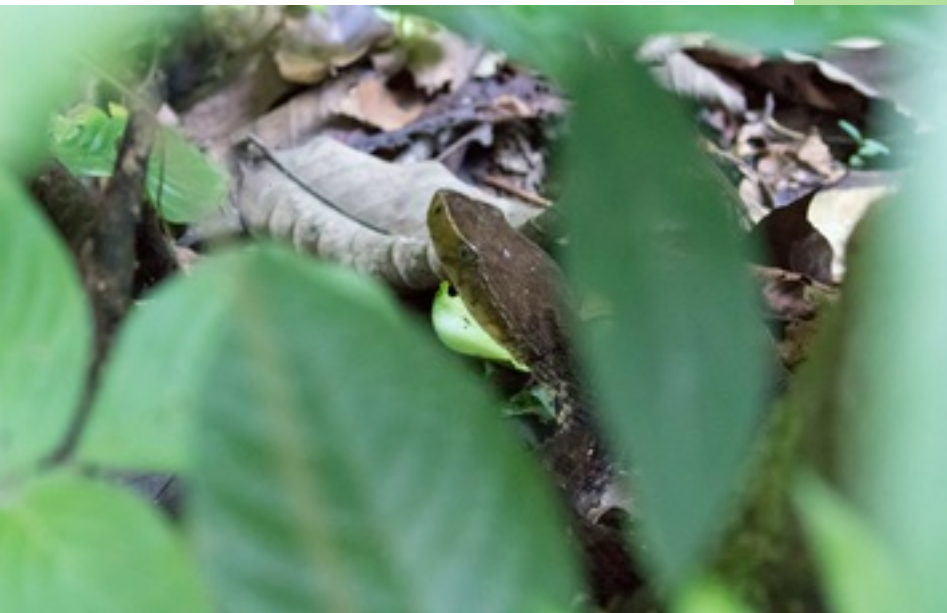
Villa de Guadalupe is located 2.5 hours away from the state capital, Villahermosa.

We head back to town and midway we have an amazing encounter with a mysterious and deadly **Fer-de-lance**. Surely, it is a majestic creature. On the forest edge, we find a flurry of late day activity. A pair of **Rose-throated Becard** is engaged in an animated conversation. **Yellow-winged Tanagers** call up in the canopy.

We also encounter two resident species: **Rufous-capped** and **Golden-crowned Warblers**. **Indigo Buntings** and **Melodious Blackbirds** forage on a cultivated lot.

A male **Scrub Euphonia** sings on a nearby tree and a group of very large Amazonas (maybe Mealy Parrots?) makes a flyby to their nighttime roost.

Night comes too fast. We visit Don Romulo's home and take supper there. We are offered a simple and rustic but delicious dinner: recent hand-made corn tortillas and chicken soup with rice. We enjoy talking to our host. After the meal we settle on our spacious and clean cabin. The plan was to try a little owling but a sudden night wind quickly settles that. For night creatures we must wait till dawn.



A Fer-de-lance, truly a magnificent but very dangerous creature.

They are present in all the tropics, but are seldom seen.



Black-throated Shrike-Tanager

Day 2 (A Tanager show). Next day we start very early. We leave the cabin and it is still dark outside. We take a path that leads right to the foot of a mighty big waterfall. As we walk, we notice a ghostly presence ahead of us. It is a **Mottled Owl**, hunting in the same trail we are walking. Eventually dawn arises. Up in the mountain a cracid calls. We cannot locate it. Dawn chorus arrives and, as usual, the beauty of it dumbfounds us. We discern among the wrens and **Melodious Blackbirds** a **Stub-tailed Spadebill** and a **Long-billed Gnatwren**.

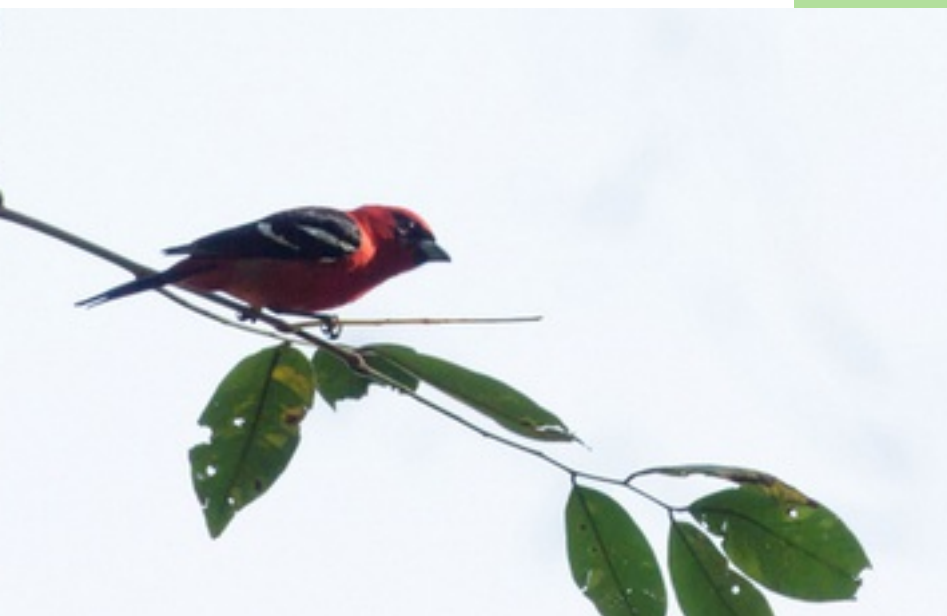
The wind starts to blow again, making things a bit difficult. We slowly ascend a slope, and as we look down we find ourselves somewhat within the canopy of lower level trees. Suddenly, the wind slackens, magic happens and a spectacular, adult male **Black-throated Shrike-Tanager** appears (photo above).

This is not an easy bird anywhere in Mexico. We are thrilled, to say the least. This may very well be the star of the tour.

Black-throated Shrike-Tanagers act as sentinels in mixed flocks.

A mixed flock appears with this magnificent bird, and we register **Northern-barred Woodpecker**, **Rufous Piha**, another group of **Red-throated Ant-Tanagers** and three **Golden-crowned Warblers**. We head back to the waterfall for a little raptor watch, and we are rewarded with two **Bat Falcons**, a **Gray** and a **Roadside Hawk**. White Hawk also frequents this area but we struck on it. Many migrants are also present on the nearby trees: **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** and **Ovenbird**.

Summer Tanager, **Gray Catbird** and **Wood Thrush** also delight ourselves. A **Squirrel Cuckoo** calls in the canopy. Directly in front of the waterfall, there is a ravine. In the distance, we spot a red-colored bird foraging on top of a exuberant tree. It is hidden well in the foliage but it is evident it has two white stripes on its black wings. We hold our breath when it finally comes out to an unobstructed branch and we delight ourselves with another good find: **White-winged Tanager**.



A male White-winged Tanager seen from a distance



It is time to walk back to the cabin and leave this beautiful and place. We say goodbye to the waterfall and almost reach the bridge that signals the starting point of the trail when loud calls and whistles attract our attention. Up in a fruiting tree there is a huge group of yet another rare find of the tanager kind: **Golden-hooded Tanager** (photo above). The color pattern on this species is spectacular. The tree also holds other jewels: **Gartered Trogon, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Masked Tityra, Rufous-breasted Spinetail** and **Yellow-olive Flycatcher**. It is a nice way to end our adventure.



List of birds seen:

Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture

Roadside Hawk
Gray Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk

Ruddy Crake

Squirrel Cuckoo
Groove-billed Ani

Mottled Owl

Long-billed Hermit
White-bellied Emerald

Gartered Trogon
Collared Trogon

Green Kingfisher

Keel-billed Toucan

Golden-fronted Woodpecker

Bat Falcon

Olive-throated Parakeet

Northern Barred-Woodcreeper
Rufous-breasted Spinetail



List of birds seen:

Yellow-olive Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Dusky-capped Flycatcher
Boat-billed Flycatcher
Social Flycatcher

Rufous Piha
Masked Tityra
Rose-throated Becard

Lesser Greenlet

Brown Jay

Band-backed Wren
Spot-breasted Wren
White-breasted Wood-Wren
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Wood Thrush
Clay-colored Thrush
White-throated Thrush

Gray Catbird

Ovenbird
Louisiana Waterthrush
Black-and-white Warbler
Kentucky Warbler
Hooded Warbler
American Redstart
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow Warbler



List of birds seen:

Black-throated Green Warbler
Rufous-capped Warbler
Golden-crowned Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
Yellow-breasted Chat

Black-throated Shrike-Tanager
Yellow-winged Tanager
Golden-hooded Tanager
Summer Tanager

Green-backed Sparrow
Rusty Sparrow
White-collared Seedeater
Variable Seedeater
Grayish Saltator
Black-headed Saltator

White-winged Tanager
Red-throated Ant-Tanager

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting

Hooded Oriole
Altamira Oriole
Melodious Blackbird
Montezuma Oropendola

Yellow-throated Euphonia
Scrub Euphonia

