YUCATÁN:
COZUMEL ISLAND, RIO LAGARTOS, AND
THE ANCIENT MAYAN RUINS

With Gabriel Willow, Alex Dzib, and other local guides
Saturday, February 15 – Monday, February 24, 2014
(Pre-trip workshop: Wednesday, January 22, 2014, 6-8pm)

TOUR ITINERARY

**Meals:** Breakfast-B, Lunch-L, Dinner-D

Day 1, Saturday, February 15: Arrival

Arrival in Cancún. Transport from Cancún International Airport to Courtyard Marriott (free hotel shuttle). Dinner is on your own.

Day 2, Sunday, February 16: Isla Cozumel

We will get an early start for Cozumel Island, a small island just 30 miles north-south and 10 miles east-west. Yet it is home to some special birds that are only found on Cozumel: Cozumel vireo and wren, and the stunning and aptly named Cozumel emerald, a hummingbird species in which the males are a scintillating rich green, with long, blue, deeply forked tails. We will also see species which are endemic to the larger Yucatán region, and maybe even some local versions (subspecies) of more widely distributed birds: Yucatán flycatcher, woodpecker, parrot, bobwhite and nightjar, yellow-faced grassquit, bananaquit,
YUCATÁN:
COZUMEL ISLAND, RIO LAGARTOS, AND THE ANCIENT MAYAN RUINS

rufous-browed peppershrike, and mangrove cuckoo. If you look closely, you may even catch a glimpse of a tree frog or iguana resting in the lush vegetation.

Cozumel is home to the Mesoamerican Reef, which is the largest reef system in the Americas and is teeming with hundreds of tropical fish, turtles and other vibrant sea life. There are as many as 250 different species of tropical fish including the queen angelfish and the elusive toadfish. So in addition to the exciting songbird species we will see today, we could also get views of frigate birds, brown pelicans, olivaceous cormorants and other waterbirds, sitting in the trees that sway above the sparkling blue waters around the island. Overnight at Villa Blanca Beach Garden. Meals included: B/L/D

Day 3-4, Monday, February 17-Tuesday, February 18: Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Vigia Chico Road and Sian Ka’an

Today we depart for Felipe Carrillo Puerto and the Vigia Chico Road, where we might find droll Northern potoo and laughing falcon. We will look out for the more visible species this area is known for, like blue-crowned and turquoise-browed motmots, chestnut-colored woodpecker, king vulture, orange oriole, green-backed sparrow, keel-billed toucan, stub-

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tailed spadebill, rose-throated tanager and yellow-loomed parrot, as well as more elusive birds like thicket tinamou. Be ready for many, many beautiful hummingbirds! Overnight at El Faisan y el Venado. *Meals included: B/L/D.*

We will start early the next day and continue our exploration of the Vigia Chico Road, driving and birding until we reach the famous Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve. Sian Ka’an is one of the largest protected areas in the Yucatán peninsula. Here in the Reserve is our best chance to pick up ocellated turkey this far north in the Yucatán. We can see raptors such as white-tailed hawk, king and lesser yellow-headed vulture, and ferruginous pygmy owl; also limpkin, bare-throated tiger and boat-billed herons, black-bellied whistling duck, black-necked stilt, and a host of other waterbirds and shorebirds.

Sian Ka’an roughly translates into “Origin of the Sky” in the Mayan language of old. This beautiful site contains several types of habitat and more than 300 species of birds for us to explore! The presence of tropical forest, marsh, mangrove and even a barrier reef mean there will be a high concentration of diversity here to enjoy. Overnight at El Faisan y El Venado. *Meals included: B/L/D.*

**Day 5, Wednesday, February 19: Sian Ka’an and Valladolid**

Following breakfast we will continue birding the richly biodiverse Sian Ka’an for part of the morning. Then we will make our way to Valladolid, where lunch will be on your own.
Valladolid is a wonderful old colonial city, similar to the larger and more well-known Mérida. In its heyday, Valladolid was known as “The Sultana of the East,” and was the third most important city in the Yucatán. We will take the afternoon to enjoy the Spanish colonial style of architecture in the mansions and fortifications of the old city, actually built from the ruins of the Mayan city that preceded it, and learn about the history of this fascinating place. Overnight at Quinta Regia. Meals included: B/D.

Day 6-7, Thursday, February 20-Friday, February 21: Rio Lagartos

We will have an early breakfast, then drive to Rio Lagartos (about 3 hours away from Valladolid) for another day of fantastic birding. Rio Largartos is the destination for American flamingo, and we are sure to see scores of the brightly saturated pink and coral birds on their nesting grounds, the El Cuyo Basin. While here, we will also look for buff-bellied, white-bellied and cinnamon hummingbirds, as well as Mexican sheartail and Cavinet’s emerald. Other birds to see here include black-cowled and yellow-backed orioles, black-throated bobwhite, and lesser roadrunner. Overnight at Villa de Pescadores. Meals included: B/L/D.

The next day we will take a boat trip down the river to see clapper rail, rufous-necked wood-rail, American pygmy kingfisher, ruddy crake, and various other coots, gallinules.
YUCATÁN:
COZUMEL ISLAND, RIO LAGARTOS, AND
THE ANCIENT MAYAN RUINS

herons, cormorants, and storks. Raptors like great black, zone-tailed and crane hawks might be seen circling overhead. We may even spot a crocodile!

Rio Lagartos is home to more than 500 plant species, more than 300 bird species, almost 100 reptile and amphibian species, and over 50 mammal and fish species. There is no shortage of wonderful animals and birds to see! After our boat trip, we will return to town to lunch at a local restaurant, relax, and then bird even more near the hotel. Overnight at Villa de Pescadores. Meals included: B/L/D.

Day 8, Saturday, February 22:
Chichen Itza

After breakfast we head for Chichen Itza, a site known for its majestic Mayan ruins. We will tour the ancient ruins and learn about the rich history of this mighty civilization, and we will enjoy the bird-life that inhabits the surrounding forest, which includes parrots, tanagers, trogons and toucans. Groove-billed ani and black-headed saltator are possibilities here; we will probably also see some familiar neotropical migrants that have stopped here for the winter, and who may meet us in NYC again next spring, for example prairie warbler. Overnight at Villas Arqueologicas Chichen Itza. Meals included: B/L/D.

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YUCATÁN:
COZUMEL ISLAND, RIO LAGARTOS, AND
THE ANCIENT MAYAN RUINS

Day 9, Sunday, February 23: Return to Cancún

We can spend this morning birding in the hotel’s garden and trails. After we breakfast and get our last looks at the architecture and avifauna of this region, we will head back to Cancún in the afternoon. It is about a 3 hour drive, but we will stop for lunch (on your own) and squeeze in a little roadside birding along the way. When we arrive in Cancún we will check in in at the Courtyard Marriott; then you will have some free time to eat on your own or take in some of Cancún’s nightlife. Overnight at Courtyard Marriott. *Meals included: B.*

Day 10, Monday, February 24: Depart for U.S.

Travel day: Checkout from hotel and depart for your flight home at your discretion. Safe journey, see you again stateside! *Meals included: B.*

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