

RGV Birding Festival - Post-Festival Trip

El Cielo Biosphere Reserve, Mexico

Birding Heaven

with René Valdés, Steve N.G. Howell & Mary Gustafson

5 DAYS (13 Meals) \$1,005 PER PERSON

*Less than six hours south of the Lower Rio Grande Valley is a magical mountain range that is home to many tropical birds not found in the United States. The name, **El Cielo**, says it all – this is heaven to birders! The **El Cielo Biosphere Reserve**, a **UNESCO** site of international significance, offers cloud forest, dense tropical forest, cascading waterfalls, dramatic vistas, and enchanting birds. We are delighted to return to **El Cielo** and the diversity of tropical birds found there (255 resident species plus 175 migratory visitors), and the welcoming local communities. Reading a list of bird names is an adventure in taxonomy for a location so close to the US border: Blue-capped Motmot, Lineated Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Crescent-chested Warbler, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Spot-breasted Wren, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Blue Mockingbird, Golden-browed Warbler, Yellow-winged Tanager, Melodious Blackbird, to name a few. We will actively seek the specialty endemic birds of the area including Tamaulipas Pygmy-Owl, Tamaulipas Crow, Altamira Yellowthroat, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and the Golden-olive (Bronze-winged) Woodpecker. We visit this forested karst topography, 560 square miles of steep mountains and valleys, at the start of the dry season – to enjoy the water pools, lush scenery, and wondrous sounds surrounding them.*

"This is an active trip with walking over uneven ground. Once we reach Gomez Farias, some of our travels will be in open bedded pick ups over bumpy roads. You should be able to easily get in and out of the small boat used on the river tour. Although there may be times when the entire group will be together, the plan is to divide into smaller groups of preferably 7 and not more than 10 per U.S. birding guide. A local guide will assist."

ITINERARY: [Days are subject to change depending on the weather.]

Monday November 12 – Depart Harlingen 7 AM. We'll make our way in a modern motor coach across the border. After completing the required paperwork for a short-term visa (bring your passport), we'll continue south across the Tropic of Cancer to **Ciudad Victoria**, the capital of the state of Tamaulipas. A **picnic lunch** will be provided today. Afterwards, we'll stop at the **La Morito store**, famous amongst birders as the "**Mango Pie**" store, for their well-known dessert and a little birding. We could see Yellow-winged Tanager, Yellow-throated Euphonia, and Social Flycatcher for starters. Time allowing, we'll make a stop in an agricultural area to look for Aplomado Falcon and Double-striped Thick-Knee. After checking into the **Hotel Cumbres Inn & Suites**, if time and light are favorable, we'll explore the bountiful grounds of our hotel. We will remain in the same hotel for our entire visit. **Overnight** at the **Hotel Cumbres Inn & Suites, Gomez Farias. Meals: L, D**

Tuesday November 13 – Our morning will be spent in the **La Azteca** area looking for the specialty birds of open areas, such as Blue-black Grassquit, White-collared Seedeater, and Brown Jay. This grassy area often has wet patches favored by the Altamira Yellowthroat. This will be our first experience in the open-air vehicles that will take us to the birding sites unreachable by bus. We'll likely hear the ethereal voice of the Thicket Tinamou – more often heard than seen – for the first time. After returning to the hotel for lunch, we'll spend the afternoon birding around the **El Cielo Interpretive Center** and walking a nearby forest track. Depending on the weather and recent reports, we'll

explore the town of **Gomez Farias** one evening, searching for Stygian Owl (which sometimes hunts the town plaza) and nightjars. **Overnight** at the **Hotel Cumbres Inn & Suites, Gomez Farias. Meals: B, L, D**

Wednesday November 14 – We'll start early in our pick-up trucks and head up the cobble stone and dirt road towards **Alta Cima**, normally a 1-hour drive but taking all morning, to listen and watch for tropical forest flocks along the roadcut. A late lunch at the community-run restaurant (limited selection and no special meals possible) is provided. Our return trip down the same road to our hotel gives us a second chance at wandering flocks before dinner. The day will be long and tiring but the birds and scenery will be sensational. Possible species include Crested Guan, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Tamaulipas Pygmy-Owl, Crescent-chested Warbler, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Barred Antshrike, White-winged Tanager, and Hooded Grosbeak. **Overnight** at the **Hotel Cumbres Inn & Suites, Gomez Farias. Meals: B, L, D**

Thursday November 15 – It's a short ride by bus to the town park of **Boca Toma 2**, an area on the **Rio Frio** with a few trails we can walk near the beautiful, clear, clean river. We'll look for riverine and riparian birds, including Rose-throated Becard, Amazon (also Green and Ringed) Kingfishers, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Tropical Parula, and the recently split Blue-capped Motmot. A small outboard boat will take us in shifts to look for the rare Sungrebe with hopes of spotting a roosting Boat-billed Heron, and the chance for a wild Muscovy Duck. After lunch, we'll visit **La Florida**, a pretty river area that can be heavily used for recreation but includes a large diversity of birds. We'll look for the foothill forest species expected in this habitat. **Overnight** at the **Hotel Cumbres Inn & Suites, Gomez Farias. Meals: B, L, D**

Friday November 16 – With an early departure in our comfortable motor coach, we may head towards the coast or other points north, seeking some different birds on our return home. A mid-day lunch will be provided as we venture northward, passing through customs and immigration at the border. We anticipate a dinnertime arrival to Harlingen, but do not schedule a flight departure tonight. **Meals: B, L**

About our Border Logistics

*Anyone traveling from one country to another must have a valid passport. The passport card used by many local travelers cannot be used for traveling into the interior of Mexico. "Valid passport" means that the passport must be valid for at least six months after the return date from the country visited. Once our charter coach reaches the Mexican border, all passengers and luggage must off load. Luggage will be checked by customs. Passengers will need to complete a Visa form to be issued by Mexican Immigration to each passenger. Currently there is no charge for the Visa when the trip is seven days or less. The process is reversed on our return - the Visa is returned to Mexican Immigration, luggage and passengers off load on the Mexican side, US Immigration checks your passport, and US Customs may or may not inspect your luggage. The motor coach may also be inspected first by the US Customs and then by the Department of Transportation. **Go With Jo** staff will be present throughout to help us through the border crossing and paperwork. We will reverse the process on our return to the border*

PRICE PER PERSON

Single - \$1,115
Double - \$1,005
Triple - \$ 995

DEPARTURE DATE

November 12, 2018

VALID PASSPORT REQUIRED!!

Currently there is **NO CHARGE** for the Mexican Visa on land tours of **7 days or less!**

Departs from **Harlingen** at 7:00a.m.