

VERACRUZ

RIVER OF RAPTORS

ECO
TOUR

Fri, Sep 29 - Sun, Oct 8

Led by: Sally O'Byrne



Travel that combines
a wealth of habitats,
history, and culture



See the largest
migration of hawks in the
Western Hemisphere.



IMMERSE YOURSELF IN NATURE AND CULTURE

GET INSPIRED



Veracruz is little-visited by Americans yet is a mecca for Mexicans looking for their roots. It is both a city and state of Mexico, following the Gulf of Mexico to the East and bounded on the West by the Sierra Madre Mountain.

For those who explore, it has a wealth of habitats, history, and culture, and importantly for us, the largest migration of hawks in the Western Hemisphere, if not the world.

The plains along the coast create vast thermals which transport migrating raptors on their southern journey. Travel inland and the hills have woodlands and tropical forests. Further west, a desert stretches to the state of Puebla and is the ancient route to Mexico City, home of the Aztec.



A WONDER OF NATURE RIVER OF RAPTORS

Just north of the Port of Veracruz is where we embark on our epic journey. We will stand in the exact spot the indigenous people stood when they first saw Hernán Cortéz's ship make landfall in 1519, explore the wealth of Mexican culture and peoples with local guides, and delight in the vast diversity of birds, butterflies, trees, and flora that make Veracruz such a uniquely vibrant gem of the natural world.

Experience the famed Veracruz River of Raptors and explore the various habitats of this state. Beyond the natural history, we will see remnants of the settlement built by Cortés after he landed in June 1519, and archaeological evidence of the civilizations that were there for thousands of years before his arrival.

Most migrating raptors traveling from North America to Central and South America siphon through a narrow corridor just north of Veracruz. This spectacle has been documented in ancient cultural artifacts, but was 'discovered' by ornithologists only about 30 years ago by four college student birders. Since then, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary worked with a local team to discern the two best count sites and to train counters, and through this joint effort they now have years of data to document nearly the totality of North American hawk migration. Pronatura, the Mexican equivalent of Nature Conservancy, stepped in to adopt this program and the River of Raptors project was begun.

MEET YOUR **GUIDE**

Sally O'Byrne
DelNature Teacher
Naturalist, Past
President of Delaware
Ornithological Society



AN ABUNDANCE OF FLOWERS,
BUTTERFLIES & BIRDS



This corridor also serves as a transit for many other migrants, and we will see an abundance of songbirds, shorebirds, and other spectacles like massive flocks of Pelicans and Woodstorks; some seen from the count sites and others seen as we travel through the surrounding habitats. These varied habitats are home to many butterflies and flowers never observed in Delaware, much less the US.

Our group will visit many of the habitats within the state of Veracruz, from river mouth to desert to coffee plantation. Our guides know the local area very well and will share their knowledge, not only of birds and butterflies, but also the cultural history of the State of Veracruz. Get a taste of the Mexico that is far removed from the border towns along Texas.

WILDLIFE, CULTURE, & HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES PLAN TO EXPLORE

DAY 1 - TRAVEL TO VERACRUZ, HOTEL MOCAMBO

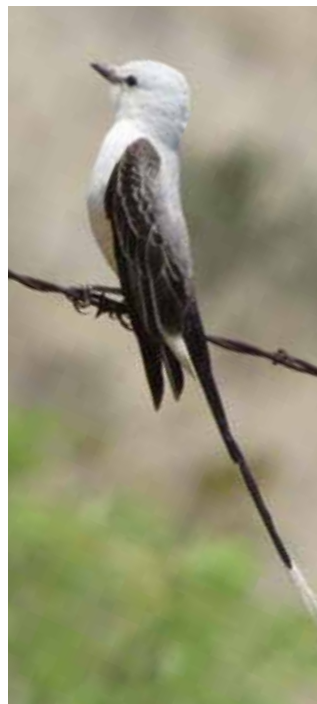
As we arrive in Veracruz, Mexico, the guides will meet everyone at the airport and transport us to the grand dame of Costa De Oro, the Hotel Mocambo, located approximately 4 miles south of Veracruz City's main square. Built in the 1920's this hotel hosted Mexican movie stars and is loaded with historic architectural features. The gardens are a great migrant trap, and the beach in front of the hotel hosts gulls, pelicans, and shorebirds.

DAY 2 - HOTEL BIENVENIDO, CARDEL

Beginning with a walk to the beach in front of Hotel Mocambo, we scan for shorebirds, songbirds, parrots, and the Ferruginous Pygmy owl. After a full breakfast, we drive to Hotel Bienvenido in Cardel - one of two count sites for the River of Raptors that fly over the state of Veracruz. This unique roof top count site is our destination as we follow the afternoon Broadwing Hawk flight. Late in the afternoon, we will travel to the second count site in the small town of Chichicaxtle, where there is a River of Raptors visitor center and gift shop. We will have plenty of viewing space and time beneath the thousands of birds traveling overhead and the counters who try to keep track.

DAY 3 - HOTEL BIENVENIDO, CARDEL

Morning begins with birding in and around Villa Rica Road stopping by a small wetland before driving uphill to the pre-Aztec Quiahuiztlan Cemetery, one of the most beautiful overlooks of the Gulf of Mexico. Butterflies found here include Crinkled Banner, Rusty-tipped Page, and Cross-barred White. As the sun warms the afternoon, we will head back to the two count sites. Our guides are in touch with the counters at both sites to keep us abreast of the day's migration, and this week is the peak migration of Broadwing Hawks. You will witness the spectacle of numerous raptor kettles extending from near ground to high overhead as the birds soar from kettle to kettle. It is hard to keep track of different species flying at different levels; picking out rarities is a challenge as the mass of birds floods the sky. It takes three years for a counter to be trained to count this many birds, and you will appreciate the crazy difficulty of the task.



DAY 4 - HOTEL BIENVENIDO, CARDEL

Before dawn we travel to Juan Angel beach to catch the sun rising over the Gulf Coast. Here we will look for the endemic Mexican Shearwater and other desirables like Squirrel Cuckoo and Rufous-named Wren and migrants like the Yellow-breasted Chat. This is a favorite spot of the Aplomado Falcon, a bird native to this area, and variety of terns and shorebirds frequent the river's mouth, feeding on the numerous small fish. As an old coastal town, you'll also see locals with nets fishing in the river and cattle grazing in the local dunes as butterflies skip over the stunted growth. Our destination in the afternoon is the community where Cortés's settlement was founded and where the first Christian church of the Americas was built. La Antigua River flows past this community into the Gulf. We will take a boat to explore the shoreline as the sun sets.

DAY 5 - HOTEL PASO DE LA NIEBLA, PEROTE

We travel to Xalapa, inland from Veracruz and site of the Macuiltepetl Ecological Park, a preserved forest located on an extinct volcano in the center of Xalapa. This historic city park is well used by joggers and walkers, but is also a superb place to see both local and migrant songbirds and a variety of butterflies. Target birds are Blue Mockingbird, Blue-capped Motmot, Green Jays, and the Bearded Wood-partridge. We have lunch in downtown Xalapa and then travel to the high elevation forest of La Joya in search of the Red Warbler and Nightingale Thrush before settling into our hotel in Perote, an ancient stopping point for trade between Mexico City and the coast.

DAY 6 - HOTEL PASO DE LA NIEBLA

Traveling to La Joya, a high elevation pine forest and probably our coldest birding spot, we search for conifer loving species such as Silky Flycatcher, Red Warbler, Collared Towhee, Striped Sparrow, Strickland's Woodpecker, and Lucifer Hummingbird. Then we dip West into a desert on the slope of the Cofre de Perote Volcano. There are numerous butterfly species in both the high wet forest and the desert nearby, and the desert is where a new skipper species is currently being documented. This is our most Western locale, near the border with the State of Puebla.

DAY 7 - HOTEL PUENTE NACIONAL ON RIO LOS PESCADOS

After an early morning visit back to La Joya, we head back to Xalapa and the Museum of Anthropology which features the 9000 year old civilizations along the Gulf coast such as the Olmecs (the oldest known Mesoamerican civilization) and Totonacs, conquered by the warrior Aztec. These local groups, resentful of Aztec rule, joined forces with Cortés to defeat the Aztec. We then travel to the Rio Los Pescados. After settling into Hotel Puente Nacional, use the free time to swim in the outdoor pool or bird the grounds along the river.

DAY 8 - HOTEL PUENTE NACIONAL

Our destination this morning is El Mirador, an idyllic shade grown coffee plantation that set the standard for ecological diversity combined with commercial coffee production.

We will meet the 6th generation farmer and share a cup of coffee with him after looking for species such as Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Tropical Parula, and Gartered Trogon. Some spectacular butterflies such as the Malachite and the Anna's 88 are found here. After lunch, we travel back to Chichicaxtle to relax with binoculars on the raptor migration overhead. Swainson's Hawks will be starting to migrate through, so we will observe a mixture of raptor and vulture flight.

DAY 9 - HOTEL IN BOCA DEL RIO

Getting up early, we travel to the Alvarado Grasslands of Las Barrancas, along the coast south of Veracruz City.

In this savanna-type habitat, look for Common Tody Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Fork-tailed and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Double-striped Thick knee, and the Fuentes's Oriole endemic sub species of the Orchard Oriole. On our last afternoon, we'll drive into Veracruz City where there is a free time or perhaps a visit to the Historical Zocalo of Veracruz, then share a farewell dinner.

DAY 10 - TRAVEL DAY BACK HOME

Transfer to the airport. Breakfast served in the hotel. Guides will help our departure back to the airport.

PRICE

Double Occupancy \$2900/person
Single Occupancy \$3100/person

Registration closes June 29, 2023.
Adults only. Fee includes leadership, entrance fees, lodging, most meals and tips

REGISTER NOW

302.239.2334

DELNATURE.ORG/ECOTOURS

A group of people, including adults and children, are standing in a lush green forest. They are all looking through binoculars, suggesting they are birdwatching or observing wildlife. The forest is dense with tall trees and green foliage. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the people and the trees.

RIVER OF RAPTORS IS **FUNDED THROUGH**

Delaware Nature Society Donations

Pronatura Veracruz Trips Like Ours

The River of Raptors project funds local counters, local banding efforts, and local environmental education for community children; many local children have grown into today's counters. On this trip, you will get to see not only the actual river of raptor migration, but you will also meet some of the principals who made it happen and get to see conservation education in action.