

# ¡Viva el Yucatán!

## The ABA Ventures South of the Border

**O**ur skiff glided around the estuary bend, and there they were: a study in pink. Pink legs, curvaceous pink necks bent in all possible directions, some with necks stretched down to filter water for invertebrates, some in flight, and others preening the incredible pinkness of their plumes. Greater Flamingos.

The ABA membership has been invited by Carolina Cardeñas Sosa (Minister of Tourism of the State of Yucatán) and by Barbara MacKinnon (Director of the Yucatán Bird Festival based in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico) to attend the third annual Yucatán Bird Festival, to be held during the third week of November 2004. Because of limited transportation and the limited availability of local guides, there will be a cap of

160 ABA members who can attend.

Although the event is an ABA conference, it is really quite different from any ABA conference of the past, as the ABA joins forces with local participants in the annual Yucatán Birding Festival.

Nearctic migrants to the neotropics disperse to the Yucatán after leaving their nesting territories in parts of Canada and the United States. Millions of migrant warblers join the 222 resident bird species—among them 11 endemic species and many endemic subspecies, including some that are candidates for future “splits”. You will have a chance to see lots of “our” warblers in a variety of plumages at the same time that you are searching for the endemics: Ocellated Turkey (rare), Yellow-lored Parrot, Yucatan Poorwill (crepuscular), Yucatan Nightjar (crepuscular), Red-vented [Yucatan] Woodpecker, Yucatan Flycatcher, Yucatan Jay (common), Yucatan Wren (coastal), Black Catbird (skulker), Rose-throated Tanager, and Orange Oriole (common). Lots of regional specialties await our discovery (see table, p. 244).

During the second annual Yucatán Birding

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Greater Flamingos will probably be seen on the Célestun field trip. *Célestun estuary, Yucatán, Mexico; 17 November 2003. © Bill Maynard.*



Festival, held in November of 2003, 90 bird species that have not been recorded in the ABA Area were seen by one or more of the nine birdathon groups. In total, 289 species were recorded during the 26-hour birdathon. (More about this birdathon in a moment.)

Mérida, the attractive capital of the state of Yucatán, will be our base city, where evening programs and workshops will be held. Field trips and the birdathon will be conducted away from Mérida, in other areas of Yucatán state. ABA members will join with Yucatecan guides and a few local birders—including local guides who have been, and are currently being, trained by Barbara MacKinnon and local conservation groups from the Yucatán. These guides, such as 21-year-old Ismael Caamal Angulo, who will be using binoculars donated by the ABA's Birders' Exchange Program, will lead ABA members in a competitive *xoc chi'ch'*—Mayan for birdathon. The birdathon will be the climax of the festival, and as many as 20 different groups will overnight near great birding sites with their local guides. During a day-and-a-half period, groups will record every species seen or heard. By the end of the event, new friendships will have been made, new birds will have been seen, and with some luck your group may have won the friendly competition.

But that is not all! The festival will feature workshops on local bird identification and a photographic display. There will also be several evening socials—Mérida-style—with a visit from the governor of Mérida. Spouses, companions, and significant others, who may not be interested



One of our field trip destinations will be Uxmal—the site of impressive Mayan ruins and lots of good birding. Uxmal, Yucatán, Mexico; 19 November 2003. © Bill Maynard.

in birding, will have an opportunity to visit the area's famous archeological sites or to visit other of the area's attractions in this distinctly Mayan part of the world.

And there is always the matter of Mayan cuisine, which is, in one word, exceptional. Because of the proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, seafood is fresh and prevalent. Squid in its own ink, spiny lobster, coconut prawns, paella, fresh fish *à la plancha*, *ceviche*, and other savory regional gastronomic delights featuring pork and beef defy description. Perfection of the reversed osmosis process renders water, including ice, safe for use in beverages. In the Yucatán, it is no longer necessary to say *sin hielo* ("without ice"). Leafy vegetables and tomatoes, usually at the top of the list of "Do not eat in Mexico", are painstakingly washed, making *turista* and other stomach ailments a thing of the past.

Stay tuned for additional general information about the ABA Yucatán Conference and for specific details about the ABA's participation in the third Annual Yucatán Birding Festival. I plan on being on the winning birdathon team this year. How about you?

**The American Birding Association has just learned from the local organizing committee for the 2004 Yucatán Birding Festival of a funding problem with this year's festival. How this news might affect ABA's plans to join forces with Yucatecans in putting on an international ABA conference for this year was unresolved at the time that this article went to press.**

**The ABA is committed to continued exploration of all birding opportunities in Mexico, including the Yucatán Peninsula. Updates on the Yucatán Regional Conference and on other future conference possibilities will be forthcoming in the August 2004 issue of *Birding*, as well as on the ABA website.**

— Bill Maynard

## Yucatán Birdathon Bird List

This is a list of some of the species that ABA staff saw during a scouting trip in November of 2003. In addition to the species listed below, you should expect to see many others that have occurred in the ABA Area—some of them as common breeders that migrate to Mexico (e.g., Least Flycatcher), others that are regular along the southern fringes of the U.S. (e.g., White-tailed Hawk), and quite a number that fall into the *how-lucky-can-you-get?* category for ABA Area birders (e.g., Jabiru, Crane Hawk, Masked Tityra).

Thicket Tinamou  
Ocellated Turkey  
Black-throated Bobwhite  
Singing Quail  
Pinnated Bittern  
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron  
Boat-billed Heron  
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture  
King Vulture  
Laughing Falcon  
Bat Falcon  
Ruddy Crake  
Rufous-necked Wood-Rail  
Gray-necked Wood-Rail  
Caribbean Dove  
Olive-throated Parakeet  
White-fronted Parrot  
Yellow-lored Parrot  
Squirrel Cuckoo  
Lesser Roadrunner  
Vermiculated Screech-Owl  
Yucatan Nightjar  
Wedge-tailed Sabrewing  
Green-breasted Mango  
Canivet's Emerald  
Rufous-tailed Hummingbird



We'll have good chances at finding the spectacular, snake-eating Laughing Falcon. Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico; 7 March 2003. © Christopher L. Wood.

Cinnamon Hummingbird  
Mexican Sheartail  
Black-headed Trogon  
Blue-crowned Motmot  
Turquoise-browed Motmot  
American Pygmy Kingfisher  
Red-vented [Yucatan] Woodpecker  
Golden-olive Woodpecker  
Lineated Woodpecker  
Tawny-winged Woodcreeper  
Olivaceous Woodcreeper  
Ivory-billed Woodcreeper  
Barred Antshrike  
Yellow-bellied Elaenia  
Northern Bentbill  
Common Tody-Flycatcher  
Yellow-olive Flycatcher  
Stub-tailed Spadebill  
Tropical Pewee  
Bright-rumped Attila  
Yucatan Flycatcher  
Boat-billed Flycatcher  
Social Flycatcher  
Gray-collared Becard  
Mangrove Vireo  
Yucatan Vireo  
Lesser Greenlet  
Yucatan Jay



We hope to see the Lesser Roadrunner during our *xoc chi'ch'*—the Mayan word for birdathon. Rio Lagartos, Yucatán, Mexico; 22 November 2003. © Bill Maynard.

Mangrove Swallow  
Yucatan Wren  
Spot-breasted Wren  
White-bellied Wren  
Long-billed Gnatwren  
White-lored Gnatcatcher  
Black Catbird  
Tropical Mockingbird  
Gray-throated Chat  
Gray-headed Tanager  
Red-throated Ant-Tanager  
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager  
Blue-gray Tanager  
Yellow-winged Tanager  
Blue-black Grassquit  
Green-backed Sparrow  
Grayish Saltator  
Black-headed Saltator  
Melodious Blackbird  
Black-cowled Oriole  
Yellow-backed Oriole  
Yellow-tailed Oriole  
Orange Oriole  
Yellow-billed Cacique  
Scrub Euphonia  
Yellow-throated Euphonia



The Scrub Euphonia, a fairly common denizen of edges and second-growth habitats, should be one of the species on our list. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico; 4 March 2003. © Christopher L. Wood.