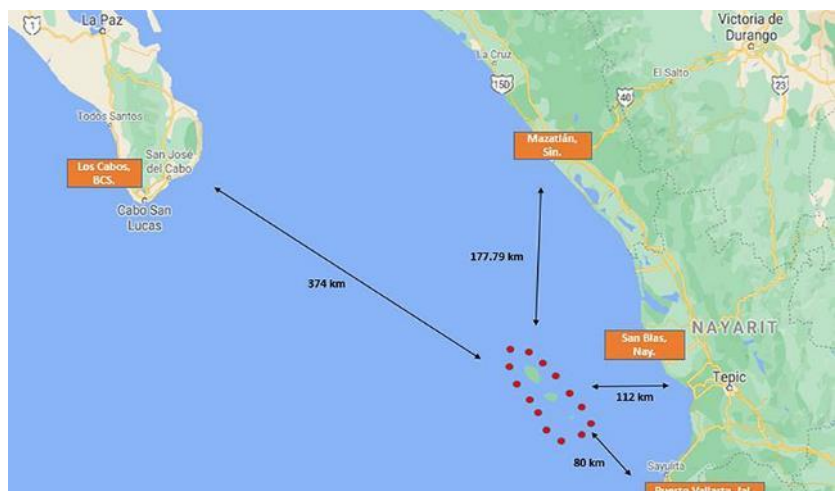




TRES MARIA COTTONTAIL
A Trip with Michael Carmody, Legacy Tours to
Isla Maria Madre, Nayarit, Mexico
August 12 - 18, 2023
John and Karen Shrader
Centerville, Ohio, USA
Date Revised: 01/07/2024

In addition to being birders and herp aficionados, we also enjoy seeing new mammals. For several decades we have been aware that there was an endemic, “new” cottontail and several other “interesting” mammals (RE: “new for us”) as well as several endemic birds on the Islas Marias, in the Mexican state of Nayarit, off the Pacific coast of Mexico. In 2010 the archipelago was designated the Isla Marias Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The island is about 100 km off San Blas and 370 km south of Cabo San Lucas, Baja Sur. The islands have been completely off limits to any tourists for over 100 years since the northernmost and largest (about 145 sq. km) island, Isla Maria Madre, has had a thriving prison business during that time (1905 to 2019). In fact, the Isla Marias Federal Penal Colony was known as the “Alcatraz of Mexico” and was actually the preferred place for incarceration for many Mexican prisoners, because of the relative freedom to move about the island. We will not go into the prison history further, since it is very well documented on the internet and some simple searches will reveal a lot of very fascinating stories about the island. The Islas Tres Marias archipelago (the three Mary’s - named after three important Marys in the Bible’s New Testament - Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the wife of Cleopas) are actually nine islands with four major islands (Maria Madre, Maria Magdalena, Maria Cleofas, and San Juanito) and none inhabited except for Maria Madre.



On February 18, 2019, the President of Mexico, Andros Manuel Lopez Obrador signed a declaration to close the prison system on the island, move all the prisoners to the mainland, and open up the island to tourists. His overall goal in Mexico was to open more schools and have less prisons. It took several years to create the infrastructure for tourism, but the island is now open for business. Downtown Puerto Balleto, the main center of population on the island, with a current census of about 200, has been rebuilt with a very nice visitor center, a restaurant serving buffet-style meals, and the former guard accommodations converted into very comfortable housing for tourists. Buses have been brought to the island to provide tourist access to the main sights of the island including a very nice beach and other famous prison facilities scattered about the island.

The Mexican government has tasked the Mexican Navy with the job of running a couple of large, very comfortable ferries from both Mazatlán and San Blas to Puerto Balleto. The government also built a large pier on the island that can handle several ships at once. From a birder's point of view, especially those interested in a big Mexican list, this mode of transport out to the islands is fabulous because it provides access to tremendous pelagic birding on a large, relatively stable platform. Of course, along with seabirds comes cetaceans as well! There is an airport on the island and talk of direct flights to the island as well, but we have not researched that way of getting to the island, since the chance of pelagic birds and cetaceans is excellent on the ferries.



Michael Carmody, guide and owner of Legacy Tours, Inc., and good friend has been talking about getting out to Isla Maria Madre for years. When it became apparent to Michael that there was a real possibility



of setting up a trip during August 2023, he let us know and we, along with a dozen others, dropped everything to go. For more information about Legacy Tours and Michael, see: <https://legacy-tours.com>.

The trip, organized by Michael and Mexican birder and guide, David Salas, was primarily a birding trip and the primary goal was to see the Tres Marias Hummingbird, an endemic hummingbird to the archipelago and found nowhere else on earth. The islands have a very rich avifauna and there are several other bird species that have been split as well as quite a few special subspecies that scientists are suggesting might be valid species. Michael's goal was to find as many of these as possible. There is a corresponding number of unique plants as well. And of great interest to mammal watchers are some unique mammals, including a rabbit, a raccoon, and a mouse, among others, all endemic depending on who you ask. Although we are clearly world birders and definitely interested in the birds of the island, after seeing all the rabbits in America, the chance to see the Tres Marias Cottontail was very tempting! We discussed this with Michael and he checked with his naturalist contacts on the island who assured him the chance to see the rabbit was excellent including right around Puerto Balleto. Of course, that was welcome news to us!



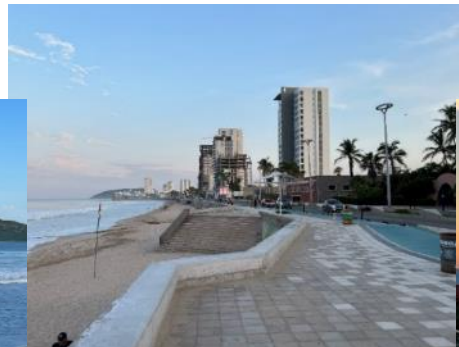


The trip started in Mazatlán, in the Mexican state of Sinaloa, sometimes known as the “Pearl of the Pacific.” All we had to do is to get to Mazatlán on relatively short notice! Michael had organized the rest of the trip including our hotels in Mazatlán. We chose to go down to Mexico two days before the trip started because we were very afraid of airline delays, and we didn’t want to miss the boat! So, on August 13, 2023, we flew to MZT via Phoenix on American Airlines. Of course, all went as scheduled despite our fears. We had been in touch with several others on the trip who were arriving on the same flight. As a little group, we hired a minibus to take our us to the hotel. There is a lot of good information on the internet detailing the process of getting from the airport, south of downtown, to the Golden Zone (Zona Dorada) area

where many of the hotels are located. Michael had chosen the Coral Island Beach View Hotel, which is just south of the Golden Zone across the road from the beach and boardwalk (called the Malecón.) Of particular interest to us is the large lagoon located just behind the hotel, offering plenty of good birding during our extra day in Mazatlán. As we understood it, it was the hotel Michael could find that would accommodate our group size. The week we were in Mexico was a “holiday” for families prior to school starting again. While crowded, that is quite important because the ferry needs to have enough passengers to make it worthwhile, so they apparently don’t always have the most regular service.



Most international travelers are familiar with the U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories, and of course, Mexico has been high on the caution list in the last few years. Sinaloa state has a “Do Not Travel” advisory, but for Mazatlán the recommendation is to travel there by air or sea only, and it is recommended that the traveler stick to the Zona Dorada and historic town center and should travel via direct routes between these destinations and the airport and sea terminal. All we experienced during our visit were friendly people happy to see some American tourists! Probably the most unexpected thing we encountered in Mazatlán was the very high humidity. Having been to Mazatlán in the winter, we can confirm that the difference is quite significant, and during mid-day adding the heat to the humidity can set one up for dehydration and even heat exhaustion / heat stroke if one isn’t aware of their limitations. Having said that, the city is truly beautiful and for us, a way to relax a bit from our busy schedule at home and acclimatize to the weather before heading out to the Islas Tres Marias.





On Sunday and Monday, the rest of the group arrived, and some chose to do a pre-trip to the nearby mountains to look for some special Mexican endemics including the spectacular Tufted Jay. Since we had been there several times in the past, we opted to spend the day just resting and doing a little birding on the Malecon and around the lagoon behind the hotel.

On Tuesday, we all assembled in the hotel lobby and a procession of four ECO Taxis (golf-cart-looking Pulmonias, unique to Mazatlán) quickly and efficiently delivered us to the ferry terminal south of downtown. It was obvious from the new terminal infrastructure that it is hoped the ferries, along with cruise ships, will become a real attraction in Mazatlán.



We were met by ferry personnel and quickly taken to the dock for the waiting tourist ferry, Isla Marias I. The first thing we noticed was a painting of a large bunny with a parrot on the side of the ship. That was a very good sign, we thought! It took 20 or 30 minutes for us to board, which was done in a very orderly manner. The ferry holds about 200 walk-on passengers and the day we sailed it was less than half-full. We were given assigned seating but because there were a lot of empty seats,



everyone ended up sitting where we wished. We birders were allowed outside on the main deck in the back of the ship. We were not allowed outside upstairs due to the risk of tripping over stanchions, etc. The inside was very comfortable and there was plenty of storage space for luggage so taking carry-on-type bags (roller wheels) is very easy. Of note, whatever you take you are expected to carry / drag from the ferry dock to the housing in town, which is probably a quarter to half a mile distance. The ferry provided entertainment during the passage (mostly in Spanish) and



showed multiple pictures of the wildlife including the cottontail and the raccoon, as well as some of the endemic birds such as the parrot, and endemic plants. The videos explained that the islands are a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and they are protected. As far as pelagic trips go, the ferry was a very comfortable platform. The temperature was 85 to 92F, and it was partly cloudy, with the wind south at 5 mph, seas 3-4 feet with a long period swell of 16 – 18 feet. The trip from Mazatlán to Puerto Balleto took about 4 ½ hours.





Birds seen included Black, Wedge-rumped, and Least Storm-Petrels, Sooty and Galapagos Shearwaters, Red-billed Tropicbirds, Brown Pelicans, Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds, Blue-footed, Masked, Nasca, Red-footed (Webster's) and Brown (Brewster's) Boobies, Heermann's and Laughing Gulls, and Black and Common Terns. We also saw a large pod (50 – 100) of Eastern Spinner Dolphins (*Stenella longirostris orientalis*), with some Common Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus* – coastal form) mixed in.



There is a modern dock at Puerto Balleto and after disembarking, the soles of our shoes were disinfected, and we all then carried our luggage to the visitor center at the beginning of the dock, where we got our room assignments.





Inside the visitor center is a very large mural featuring many of the special creatures of the Biosphere, including the Tres Marias Cottontail (*Sylvilagus graysoni*) and the Tres Marias Raccoon (*Procyon lotor insularis*.) The mural was even more encouraging!



The current population of Puerto Balleto is less than 200 people, down from 600 or so a couple of decades ago when the main business of the island was running a prison.

The town is pretty compact, and it is easy to walk around with the streets mostly laid out in a grid. There are a lot of ornamental plants and palm trees so there is a lot of habitat for the birds and the common mammals. It is fine to wander around at dawn and dusk as well as at night using a thermal scope. The buildings have been or are being remodeled so the housing (former prison staff housing) is now very comfortable with central air conditioning. Our unit was very clean inside. Some of the buildings in town were obviously part of the prison complex and are now a tourist attraction.



A nice gateway on the main street leads to a very pretty church. A stop at the visitor center is definitely warranted and there is a little market and souvenir shop as well. Several organized excursions by bus were arranged for our group. These included a visit west of the town and airport to a very nice beach (Playa Chapingo) with beautiful white sand. There is a two-story observation tower on the cliff above the beach making it easy to scan the crystal-clear, turquoise water for birds and cetaceans.



There is also a very good cafeteria named Brisa Marina Restaurante on the waterfront that serves food buffet style. You can visit the former Maximum Security prison, take a two-mile round trip hike to Cristo Rey, a 60-foot Christ the Redeemer Statue, and visit the El Faro Lighthouse, as well as



stargaze from the airport runway (with little light pollution) or travel to other parts of the island by bus. The Mirador Punta Halcones is absolutely spectacular. In town there is also a museum, a historical cemetery, and the Governor's House (Casa de Gobierno.).



During our first walk around town before heading to the cafeteria, Karen spotted our first Tres Marias Cottontail (*Sylvilagus graysoni*), quietly munching on grass only a couple hundred yards from our assigned cottage. It was very cooperative and allowed us to watch it and take photos as long as we wished. Naturally, we were worried about how easy it would be to find the rabbit, based on old reports suggesting it was rare to uncommon. However, at least on our trip, finding the cottontail was not a problem at all. During the 42 hours we were on the island, we ended up with eight sightings, including two more on our first evening around town (and two other individual rabbits seen by others), plus six more sightings during the rest of our stay. A very distinctive rabbit, as the photos show. Although generally nocturnal, we certainly saw them during the daytime, primarily the mornings and evenings. They often just stood still, which is ideal, of course, for taking photos. Per our research on the internet before we left, this is a protection-trait, which allows them to often remain undetected (but not by Karen, with both her sharp eyes and thermal scope!) We mostly saw them along the edges of town, but we did have one at dawn in the little garden across the road in front of the church. We also had two along the beginning of the trail to Cristo Rey while we were birding our first morning.





Although the large Tres Marias Raccoon (*Procyon lotor insularis*) currently is classified as a subspecies of Common (or Northern) Raccoon, it has been considered a full species in the past. Given how species are often split, lumped, and re-split, naturally we were very interested in seeing one during our visit to the island if we could. Not to worry! As we were pulling up to the dock at the end of our ferry ride to the island, I was frantically summoned by my wife and all the other members of our group, while I was busy taking photos of the inside of the ferry. A raccoon was actually on the dock, apparently looking for lunch, and as the crew was getting ready to hook up the ship to the dock, it was running towards the island down the dock! We hadn't even landed and there was one of our target mammals! Can you believe it? Over the next couple of days, we saw two more raccoons around the town. One

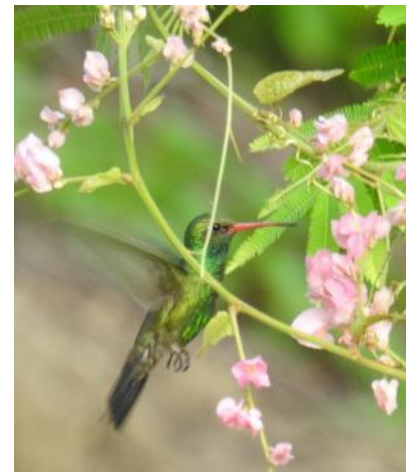
came out of a trash can while we were poking around before dawn, and the other one was exploring the area by the visitor center and nearby beaches.

Other mammals sighted included a rodent (mouse or rat) found with the thermal scope. It seemed very small, with a little nose and big ears and we wondered about a possible Tres Marias Island (or Deer) Mouse (*Peromyscus madrensis*). However, we now understand that the mouse hasn't been found on this island for about 50 years, so maybe it was a Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) – we tried to find more by walking around at night but had no further luck. From our research ahead of the trip, the status of this mouse is unclear, but it was apparently quite common in the past, and could be rebounding now that the island is protected? We also saw twenty feral goats and two domestic (feral?) cats. We also had a bat at night found with a bat detector, but the encounter was too brief to identify it. There are several possibilities on Isla Maria Madre.





Of course, since this was primarily a birding trip, there were a number of interesting birds on the island including the Tres Marias Hummingbird. Formerly, this hummingbird was considered a subspecies of Broad-billed Hummingbird, but starting about a decade ago, it has been elevated to a species endemic only to the Isla Marias island group. We found birds to be abundant around town and on our first full morning, we hiked about half of the way to the Cristo Rey, and found just about all the endemics and subspecies endemics except for the Grayson's Hummingbird (Cinnamon Hummingbird split.) There are at least two dozen bird taxa endemic or nearly endemic



to the Tres Marias islands. The species of major interest to birding lists (believed to be full species) include the Tres Marias Hummingbird (Broad-billed Hummingbird), the Grayson's Hummingbird (Cinnamon Hummingbird), Tres Marias Amazon (Yellow-headed Amazon), the Island Parrotlet (Mexican Parrotlet), Happy Wren, Red-breasted Chat, and Streak-backed Oriole. Other unique subspecies include Red-tailed Hawk, Red-billed Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Paraque, Elf Owl, Ladder-backed Woodpecker,



Golden Vireo, Yellow-green Vireo, Brown-backed Solitaire, Rufous-backed Thrush (Grayson's Thrush), Lesser Goldfinch, Streak-backed Oriole, Tropical Parula, Flame-colored Tanager, and Northern Cardinal. Please see Lists, and Useful Selected References and Websites sections below for very detailed information regarding the avifauna of the Isla Marias archipelago. The herpetofauna is also very abundant on the island, and we saw lots of Western (Mexican) Spiny-tailed Iguanas and Tropical House Geckos, and we also found a number of Tres Marias Islands or Colima Giant Whiptails. In other words, there are PLENTY of life forms on Isla Maria Madre to keep the enthusiastic naturalist happy!

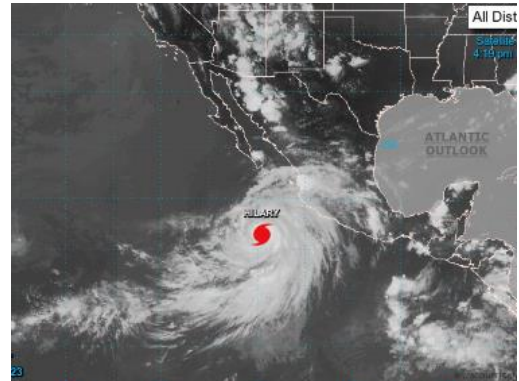




By evening on our second day on the island, clouds were moving in from the south and by late afternoon / early evening, we could see numerous rainshowers all around the island. These turned out to be the outer bands of Hurricane Hillary, which later inundated the southwest USA. The Mexican Navy was clearly



watching this storm and pushed up our departure for the next morning by several hours. We had just enough time to bird for about forty-five minutes around the buildings, looking for the Mexican Parrotlet that a couple people had missed, before we headed to the ferry for the trip back to the mainland.



Another one of the ferries had come in the night before, possibly the one from San Blas. Fortunately, since the storm was coming from the south, although the waves were 3 – 6 feet, with a swell of 16 – 18 feet, since we were traveling with the swell on the trip back to Mazatlan, the trip was reasonably comfortable. There was a similar collection of pelagic



birds as on the trip to the island, however, the total number of individuals was a lot less. Of note, a Sabine's Gull did come by the boat and check us out.



The taxi ride to the Golden Zone went very smoothly, and we were soon checked into our hotel, called the Hotel AV Inn, just steps away from Camaron Beach. There are many shops, restaurants, and hotels in the Golden Zone to keep the tourists happy. We had our final meal together at a nearby restaurant, Panamá Restaurante y Pastelerías. After breakfast at the hotel, it was off to the airport to start our flights home. We had a great view of Mazatlán including the harbor, Malecon, and Golden Zone as we headed back to Phoenix.



LIST OF MAMMALS, BIRDS, AND REPTILES

MAMMALS SEEN ON ISLA MARIA MADRE OR FROM THE FERRY

1. Tres Marias Cottontail (*Sylvilagus graysoni*) - 8
2. Tres Marias Raccoon (*Procyon lotor insularis*) – 3
3. Rodent species – Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*)? - 1
4. Feral Goat (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) – 20
5. Domestic (feral?) cat (*Felis catus*) – 2
6. Eastern Spinner Dolphins (*Stenella longirostris orientalis*) – 50-100, with a few Common Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus* – coastal form) mixed in.

OUR ENDEMIC BIRD SPECIES / SUBSPECIES “SHOPPING LIST” FOR ISLA MARIA MADRE

1. Tres Marias Hummingbird (*Cyanthus latirostris* Lawrence) [AOU/IOC split from Broad-billed] – 5
2. Elegant Quail (*Callipepla douglasii*) – 8 (+6 H.O.)
3. Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)
4. Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis fumosus*) – 1 (JAS)
5. Red-billed Pigeon (*Patagioenas flavirostris medrensis*) – 6
6. White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi capitalis*) – 8
7. Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*) – 1
8. Parakee (*Nyctidromus albicollis insularis*)
9. Grayson's (Cinnamon) Hummingbird (*Amazilia rutila graysoni*)
10. Ladder-backed Woodpecker (*Dryobates scalaris graysoni*) – 2
11. Northern Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway pallidus*) – 12
12. Tres Marias (Yellow-headed) Amazon (*Amazona tresmariae*) – 3
13. Island Parrotlet [Mexican Parrotlet] (*Forpus cyanopygius insularis*) – 2
14. Greenish Elaenia (*Myiopagis vindcata minima*)
15. Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae insularis*)
16. Golden Vireo (*Vireo hypochryseus sordidus*)
17. Yellow-green Vireo (*Vireo flavoviridis forreri*) – 22
18. Happy Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii lawrencii*) – 11
19. Tres Marias Mockingbird [Blue] (*Melanotis caerulescens*)
20. Brown-backed Solitaire (*Myadestes occidentalis insularis*)
21. Grayson's [Rufous-backed] Thrush (*Turdus rufopalliatus graysoni*) – 12
22. Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria witti*)
23. Tres Marias [Streak-backed] Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus graysoni*) – 4
24. Tres Marias [Tropical] Parula (*Setophaga pitiayumi insularis*) – 56
25. Flame-colored Tanager (*Piranga bidentata flammea*) – 2
26. Tres Marias [Red-breasted] Chat (*Granatellus venustus francescae*) – 1
27. Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis mariae*) – 28

Birds in **BOLD** above were seen by us on this trip (18 out of 27 possible)

REPTILES SEEN ON ISLA MARIA MADRE

1. Western (Mexican) Spiny-tailed Iguana (*Ctenosaura pectinata*) – 24
2. Tropical House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) – 10
3. Tres Marias Islands or Colima Giant Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis communis mariarum*) – 4

OTHER BIRDS SEEN DURING OUR VISIT TO ISLA MARIA MADRE

1. Brown Pelican – 10
2. Great Frigatebird – 2
3. Turkey Vulture – 10
4. Black-necked Stilt – 10
5. Semipalmated Plover – 3
6. Wilson's Phalarope – 10
7. Red-necked Phalarope – 3
8. Spotted Sandpiper – 1
9. Wandering Tattler – 3
10. Sabine's Gull – 4
11. Rock Dove – 30
12. Eurasian Collared Dove – 4
13. Common Ground Dove – 10
14. Mourning Dove – 6
15. White-winged Dove – 10
16. Groove-billed Ani – 20
17. American Barn Owl – 1
18. Lesser Nighthawk – 2
19. American Kestrel – 4
20. Tropical Kingbird – 30
21. Dusky-capped (Olivaceous) Flycatcher – 1
22. Brown-crested Flycatcher – 10
23. Northern Rough-winged (Ridgway's) Swallow – 40
24. Northern Mockingbird – 10
25. House Sparrow – 11
26. Hooded Oriole – 10

MAMMALS POSSIBLE ON ISLA MARIA MADRE

Mammals possible on the island include Gray Mouse Opossum, Tres Marias Cottontail, Black Rat, Tres Marias Island Mouse, White-tailed Deer, Gray Sac-winged Bat, Western Red Bat, Little Yellow Bat, Van Gelder's Bat, Findley's Myotis, Mexican Greater Funnel-eared Bat, Great Fruit-eating Bat, Pallas's Long-tongued Bat, Waterhouse's Leaf-nosed Bat, California Sea Lion, & Common (Tres Marias) Raccoon. While at sea possible mammals include Humpback Whale, Common Bottlenose Dolphin, Spinner Dolphin, Pantropical Spotted Dolphin, & Orca.

SEABIRDS POSSIBLE DURING MID-AUGUST IN SINALOA-NAYARIT WATERS (none of which are certain):

Masked Booby (<i>Sula dactylatra</i>)	Nazca Booby (<i>Sula granti</i>)
Brown Noddy (<i>Anous stolidus</i>)	Sooty Tern (<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>)
Bridled Tern (<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>)	Red-billed Tropicbird (<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>)
Leach's Storm-Petrel (<i>Hydrobates leucorhous</i>)	Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel (<i>Hydrobates tethys</i>)
Black Storm-Petrel (<i>Hydrobates melania</i>)	Least Storm-Petrel (<i>Hydrobates microsoma</i>)
Juan Fernandez Petrel (<i>Pterodroma externa</i>)	Tahiti Petrel (<i>Pterodroma rostrata</i>)
Pink-footed Shearwater (<i>Ardenna creatopus</i>)	Wedge-tailed Shearwater (<i>Ardenna pacifica</i>)
Sooty Shearwater (<i>Ardenna grisea</i>)	Galapagos Shearwater (<i>Puffinus subalaris</i>)
Townsend's Shearwater (<i>Puffinus auricularis</i>)	Black-vented Shearwater (<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>)

WEATHER ON THE ISLA MARIA MADRE (August 15 – 17, 2023)

Temperatures: 85 – 94F and very humid

Sky: Sunny becoming partly cloudy, then cloudy with widely scattered rain showers

Wind: South 5 – 15 mph

ADDENDUM: LEGACY TOURS TRIP – DECEMBER 8-10, 2023

Michael Carmody, Legacy Tours, decided to run a second trip out to Isla Maria Madre in December 2023. What follows is an e-mail to us from Michael describing his second trip out to the island:

"I will give you a report . . .

[1] I assume the water will have 25% different birds.

Water going OUT on Friday was flat and calm --- 1,000's of birds, mostly terns... BUT not the variety we had last August. Also, almost no birds the last 2 hours in Nayarit waters . . .

Also coming back on Sunday, the water was rough, and the ferry pitched back-and-forth quite a bit... a single Red-footed Booby was the only addition to the trip.

[2] There will be a few winter migrants on the islands - mostly western species.

This I guessed correctly – we had 40+ birds on the island in August . . . while in December the total was 60+ birds . . . difference was more time birding per Navy permission, and also more wintering species.

[3] I will count the mammals.

Easy to do this time . . .

We saw ONLY three total rabbits; two running away, and one on Saturday morning that allowed some to photograph it . . .

And raccoons even fewer sightings . . . one crossed the track at the beginning of the walk of the dirt roadway to the Christ-figure. And an adult and two small ones (juveniles) crossed near the same location on the way back down.. Only about half the group ever saw this species . . . brief encounters of moving animals.

Finally, the resident birds were encountered in surprisingly different densities as well . . . We saw only a handful of Brown-crested Flycatchers during our stay . . . we saw nearly twice as many Dusky-capped Flycatchers . . . I felt the BCFL was abundant last August . . . we didn't see our first one until mid-day on Saturday.

Both the Grayson's (Cinnamon) Hummingbird and the Long-billed (Blue) Mockingbird were repeatedly seen (more than 10 sightings of each species) while on the island. The Tres Marias Hummingbird was only slightly more common than the Grayson's.

The Parrotlet was again tough, not seen by the entire group until the final morning, though some had a brief encounter on Saturday afternoon. Just like the August trip the parrotlets were seen only in the village complex.

The Parrots were so easy to see . . . everyone had their fill of these birds . . . calling, playing, feeding in the trees very near to people throughout. During August, we saw them, but never did we walk away from perched birds in the tree 15 yards in front of us . . .

What made December so much more relaxed for birders was that the Navy assigned to us a bilingual mariner who stayed with us the entire time, and the commander assigned a bus to take us birding - though we mostly walked around the complex area. We never visited the saltwater lagoon that we visited during August, as they all had not yet seen the parrolet, and preferred to stay around Puerto Balleto to look for them.

The rough ferry ride surprised me and has discouraged me from wanting to organize yet another trip. I will decide about this early in the new year. I think the project will last through the change in government in Mexico next Summer {presidents there have only one six-year term with no re-election). If Obrador's party does not win, then the money for the Navy's Tres Marias project will dry up.

The weather was so much nicer during December, as the humidity was no longer an issue . . . but the rough ferry ride was a poor way to remember the trip. For a mammal watcher the summer was much better, as the days were longer, the nights warmer, and the mammals more easily seen.

One final bit on mammals... we saw a pod of SPINNER DOLPHINS during the passage to the island... completely out of the water, straight into the air, and full circles before falling back into the water... fun!"

USEFUL SELECTED REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

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Gómez de Silva, H., Pérez Villafaña, M. G., Cruz-Nieto, J. & Cruz-Nieto, M.A. 2020. Are some of the birds endemic to the Tres Marias Islands (Mexico) species? *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. 140(1):7-37.

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Excellent in-depth discussion of the various avian subspecies and the proposed splits. Required reading for any birder interested in the subspecies found on the Isla Maria Madre and which ones are likely full species. The authors propose adding six additional endemic/near-endemic species to the islands.

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A visit to Marias Madre on November 1, 2023.

Dinets, V. – An article entitled “Coon Air” at Vladimir Dinets website from his visit to Isla Maria Madre in November 2023.

<http://dinets.info/tmir.htm>

Very entertaining and highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the raccoons of the island!

Dinets, V. – An article on Mammalwatching.com by Vladimir Dinets describing trips to northern Mexico in 2003 - 2005

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Includes a section on Nayarit / Isla Marias on page 6.

Gómez de Silva, H., Pérez Villafaña, M. G., Cruz-Nieto, J., Cruzado Cortés, J., Hamilton, R. A., Vásquez Vásquez, S. & Cruz Neito, M. A. 2017. Review of the avifauna of the Tres Marías Islands, Mexico, including new and noteworthy records. *Western Birds* 48:2-25.

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Includes all recent casual or accidental sightings.

Stager, K. 1957. The avifauna of the Tres Marias Islands, Mexico. *The Auk* 74:413-432.

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Includes a very nice painting of the Tres Marias Tropical Parula Warbler.

Grant, P.R. & McT. Cowan, I. 1964. A review of the avifauna of the Tres Marias Islands, Nayarit, Mexico. *The Condor* 66: 221-228.

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<https://checklist.pensoft.net/article/76773/>

Much of what is written about the reptiles and amphibians on Isla Maria Cleofas seems to apply to Isla Maria Madre

Lenz, L.W. 1995. Plants of the Tres Marias Islands, Nayarit, Mexico. *Aliso: A Journal of Systematic and Floristic Botany* 14(1): Article 3.

<https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1320&context=aliso>

Excellent description of the early history of the islands, including the various naturalists who visited over the last 200 years.

Access the eBird Illustrated Checklist to the Reserva de la Biosfera Islas Marias – Isla María Madre by time of the year here (minus a few sensitive species such as the two *Psitticines*):

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L221381/media?yr=all&m=>

Pope, L. 2023. How to visit Islas Marias Mexico. Internet Website: Explorewithlora.com.

<https://www.explorewithlora.com/islas-marias-mexico>

There is an excellent overall description of Puerto Balleto and Isla Marias Madre here including things to do besides birding and mammal-watching. A brief history of the island is also included.

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<https://legacy-tours.com/>

MAZATLÁN AIRPORT TAXIS

Information about taxi transportation from the MZT airport to downtown Mazatlán. **Disclaimer:** This was put together in August 2023 from multiple sources on the internet to help us get to our hotel, and we don't vouch for its accuracy or guarantee that it is necessarily completely up to date, especially the fares quoted here. However, it really helped us, especially knowing about the taxi booth outside baggage claim, so we will pass it on, for what it is worth!



the taxi booth where you can get tickets for a private taxi or a shuttle bus. The Taxi is a good option, it can take up to 4 people and will charge only 30 or 35 dollars per trip and will go straight to your destination, the shuttle is less expensive and will make a few stops before arriving to your destination, which is a good option if there is only one or two persons in your party. These airport taxis and shuttles can only take you from the airport and cannot pick you up to take you back to the airport.

Re: Safe to grab a taxi from Mazatlan airport?

All taxis at MZT airport are from the ATAMSA company which has the federal concession, once you clear customs walk into the main terminal hall and the taxi payment booth will be on your right, there are no random taxis at the airport. To the RIU a taxi will be quicker than shuttle by almost an hour which will get you ahead of the lobby check in line and likely save you another hour. Last I check taxi cost to the RIU area was about \$600 MXN, or about \$30 USD's

You will first walk through what is called the "Shark Tank" there will be several people stating they are from the RUI offering you taxis, vans, shuttles ect ignore them, keep walking until you are in the main terminal of the airport where you can buy your ticket for a taxi to the RUI.

Our taxi to Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay which is very close to the RUI last month was 550 pesos which is about \$27 U.S.

Safety

The U.S. State Department warns that taxis not affiliated with a taxi stand -- "libres" -- put passengers at risk of robberies, beatings, shootings or sexual assault. Even embassy employees are forbidden from using cabs that are hailed on the street instead of called from a "sitio," or regulated taxi stand. When calling a taxi company, ask the dispatcher for the driver's name and the taxi's license plate number. When taking a cab from the airport, pre-pay

Mazatlán Airport Taxis

Getting to town from the Mazatlan Airport
OMA Mazatlan Airport Taxi Radio-dispatched airport taxis in Mazatlan
Telephone 669 990 3555



Taxi transport from the Mazatlan airport to the city is a monopoly of the Airport Taxi Group.

Airport Taxis in Mazatlan have yellow stripes with an airplane logo.

Traditionally, taxi fares from the airport to locations within Mazatlan were based upon a zone system.

Fares for various zones usually ranged from roughly \$25 USD (Golden Zone) to \$45 USD, which would cover the most distant destinations like the northern tip of Nuevo Mazatlan.

For a general overview of where the airport is in relation to the city download our map to the Mazatlan airport here.

Airport taxis are available 24-hours, payment in cash only.

From the internet (all comments below):
"Once you arrive to the airport and get your luggage, next to the exit you will find



the fare at one of the designated booths inside the airport and use it at one of the authorized airport taxis -- look for yellow stripes with an airplane logo on the door. Drivers in Mazatlan usually understand or speak basic English.

Fares

Mazatlan taxis have traditionally not been metered, but by the end of 2012 all cabs in the city were required to install meters. Fares start at 10 pesos with 5 pesos per kilometer and one peso per minute of waiting time. (The exchange rate fluctuates, but generally 10 pesos is about 80 cents in U.S. currency -- and cab drivers in Mexico willingly accept U.S. money.) Still, you might find a cab that hasn't caught up with the regulation, or a service offering a flat fee to and from popular destinations. Your hotel should have a list of standard fares to hot spots in the city. If you need to negotiate a price in an unmetered cab, begin armed with this knowledge of standard rates to avoid being cheated. If this prospect makes you uncomfortable, wait for a taxi in compliance with meter regulations.

The Mazatlan airport is located 20km south of Mazatlan on Highway 15. If you don't have a car, the only way to get to the airport is by taxi. The average price is around \$150 pesos, but some drivers may go as low as \$100. The trip will take around 30 minutes.

To get from the airport to Mazatlan, you have a few more options. Airport buses leave for \$38 pesos a person, but only after a flight has come in or if there are at least 5 people. The bus will drop you off wherever you are staying. Tickets for the bus can be purchased inside the airport near the baggage claim area. Tickets for the taxis should also be purchased here to avoid paying more than you should. The 'official' taxi rate can be anywhere from \$160 to \$180 pesos, but is a set \$160 if you purchase your ticket inside. Only yellow airport taxis are allowed to carry passengers from the airport; only the local green and red taxis may carry passengers to the airport. However, if you can convince a pulmonia driver to take you, it's possible to get a cheaper rate than the eco-taxis.

Taxis are a popular choice for airport transfers, especially for those who want to take a direct and comfortable ride to their destination. The taxi stand at the airport is conveniently located just to the right of the international arrivals gate, and the cabs are usually clean and air-conditioned. However, taxis can be expensive, and you may end up stuck in traffic. To use a taxi from the MZT airport and avoid overcharging, always use the taxi stand. It should cost between \$400 – \$500 MXN to get you to the Golden Zone or Centro.”