

## Rarities in the state of Aguascalientes, Mexico

by

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2009-08-28

With no official list and no thorough species assessment in general of course it is difficult to decide whether a species should be considered rare or not.

A lot of work needs to be done to be able to create a more correct picture of the status of the avifauna in Ags.

I have received the result of a field study (2008?) (Riva) conducted by Professor de la Riva of the University of Aguascalientes which purpose was to map the avian diversity in different habitats throughout the state. An estimation of the level of abundance has been made for each species and can give a hint about whether a species is rare or not in the state, but since the data material is based on very few, one or two, visits at every site, the list is most likely only showing an underestimated picture of the true situation.

I have also received a draft list (Ags-list) from another local ornithologist. It is primarily based on the distribution maps in Howell and Webb 1995 (Howell) and his own observations. But it is a raw list without status judgment or comments and I'm not able to distinguish his records from the 'map includes'.

Therefore I have decided, while still having the two lists in mind, to follow the distribution maps in Howell, edition 2005 (despite my comments in Howell vs. Reality) when to decide if an observation should be regarded as rare or not.

Obviously some species will later have to be removed from the 'rarity-list' as I/we start to get a better picture of the avifauna here in the state.

The list will be updated continuously (2009-11-11, 2009-11-12, 2009-11-18, 2010-05-24, 2010-06-16, 2010-07-05), and the species listed in taxonomical order.

### Species in the list:

[Least Grebe \(\*Tachybaptus dominicus\*\)](#)

[Gray Hawk \(\*Buteo nitidus\*\)](#)

[Short-tailed Hawk \(\*Buteo brachyurus\*\)](#)

[Prairie Falcon \(\*Falco mexicanus\*\)](#)

[Wild Turkey \(\*Peleagris gallopavo\*\)](#)

[Northern Bobwhite \(\*Colinus virginianus\*\)](#)

[Snowy Plover \(\*Charadrius alexandrinus\*\)](#)

[Semipalmated Plover \(\*Charadrius semipalmatus\*\)](#)

[Willet \(\*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus\*\)](#)

[Marbled Godwit \(\*Limosa fedoa\*\)](#)

[Semipalmated Sandpiper \(\*Calidris pusilla\*\)](#)

[Royal Tern \(\*Thalasseus maximus\*\)](#)

[Red-billed Pigeon \(\*Columba flavirostris\*\)](#)

[Tropical Kingbird \(\*Tyrannus melancholicus\*\)](#)

[Rose-throated Becard \(\*Pachyramphus aglaiae\*\)](#)

[Rufous-backed Robin \(\*Turdus rufopalliatus\*\)](#)

[American Robin \(\*Turdus migratorius\*\)](#)  
[Blue Mockingbird \(\*Melanotus caerulescens\*\)](#)  
[Gray Silky-flycatcher \(\*Ptilogonys cinereus\*\)](#)  
[Blue-black Grassquit \(\*Volatinia jacarina\*\)](#)  
[Lark Sparrow \(\*Chondestes grammacus\*\)](#)  
[Indigo Bunting \(\*Passerina cyanea\*\)](#)  
[Streak-backed Oriole \(\*Icterus pustulatus\*\)](#)

**Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*)**

Several dates: Most surprisingly this species has not officially been registered for the state until now. I observed this species the first time on February 5 2006, during my first visit to the state. It was in a small waterhole close to San José de Gracia in the northwest part of the state. Subsequently I have seen it on several occasions in presa México and presa El Cedazo in the city of Aguascalientes. And also in the south at the bridge crossing the river San Pedro before the road enters the village next to the reserve of Los Sabinales. Maximum count of 6 in presa México. Most observation I have made during the winter months but in presa El Cedazo I still saw 3 individuals on June 19 2009.

I have no reason to suspect breeding attempts from any of these observations. The birds in the presas in the parks were obviously wintering/summering birds. The bridge crossing spot could be a potential place for breeding since the river holds a good water level and has plenty of vegetation in some parts. Will have to check it out.



**Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*)**

2007-05-06: One adult seen perched along the highway (stopped to check it out) en route from Aguascalientes to San José de Gracia. Since it is my only record until date it is probably a regular rarity, in accordance with the distribution map in Howell.

**Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*)**

2006-02-09: One adult light morph seen passing above 'Los Sabinales' a natural protected area to the southwest of Aguascalientes. I actually thought I had seen more birds, but my database only shows this individual. Distribution map in Howell depicts resident status close to the western border of the state of Aguascalientes, so probably a regular visitor or perhaps even breeder.

### **Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)**

One adult seen 2009-05-26 in Sierra Guajolote northwest of the city of Aguascalientes, one adult seen at presa La Colorada near Palo Alto in the southeastern part of the state on 2009-08-23 and one individual seen at the close by Cerro Juan Grande on 2009-11-01. The species is registered as a local breeder with several pairs by the local ornithologist, in contra of Howell who states it as being only a winter visitor at this latitude. Also a flyby 2010-04-15 in Cañada Pabellon Hidalgo and one seen 2010-0508 at Cerro Altamira, Asientos harassing Golden Eagle.

### **Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)**

2009-05-26: One adult male seen at Sierra Guajolote northwest of Aguascalientes. Howell states it as being extirpated from the area which probably is correct. Talked to a ranch owner in Sierra Fría and he told me that many years ago he and some friend started to introduce birds which were caught further north in Mexico. So my bird is probably introduced as well (though seen well away from where they released their birds), but since a slight possibility always exists that some original birds have survived I list it here, for the record.

### **Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)**

Seen regularly throughout the year and at localities ranging from west of Aguascalientes to near the eastern and northeastern border of the state. But listed here because Howell draws a distribution line exactly at the southern border of the state. Should probably be listed as an uncommon breeder profiting well by the widespread farmland localities in the southern and eastern part of the state. Birds seen have belonged to the *pectoralis* group, probably the *graysoni* race.



### **Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)**

2009-08-14, 2009-08-23, 2009-11-13: One individual each day at presa La Colorada in the county El Llano. Winter plumage or juvenile.

The central part of the Mexican high plain is a well-known breeding area for this species therefore it was expected to see it at a suited habitat. I choose to list it here as a rare species anyway because it probably always only will be registered in few numbers in this part of the country. I'm not able to say anything about these birds being local or migrants.



**Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)**

2009-08-23: At least two individuals at presa La Colorada in the county of El Llano. Like the Willet this species is seen rarely in the interior down to the volcanic belt according to Howell, but is still not registered in the Ags-list. So it is probably a first record in Ags.

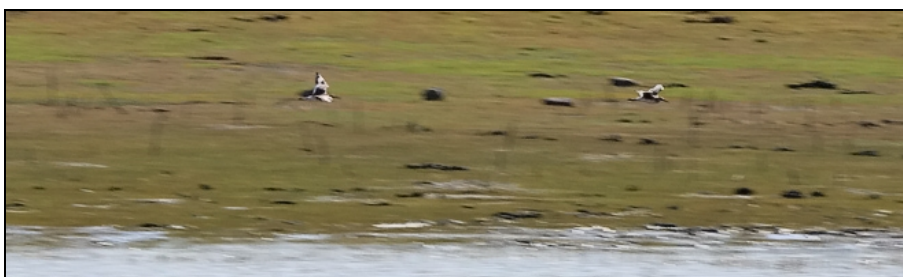
The two birds together are an adult and a juvenile (with broken breast band). A while before one had taken off and then a bit later I saw these two together, so it is likely that there were three in all, though the one flying off could have returned.



2009-11-13: 7 birds seen at presa la Colorada indicating that the true status of this species probably should be scarce rather than rare.

**Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*)**

2009-08-23: Two adult individuals at presa La Colorada in the county of El Llano. Howell states that it is seen rarely in winter in the interior down to the volcanic belt. So it is not unexpected, but still isn't on the Ags-list and therefore probably a first record for Ags.





**Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)**

2009-07-29 and 2009-08-04: Seen on the mentioned days at presa El Salvador near the town Palo Alto in the eastern county El Llano. It is normally only seen near the coast in Mexico, despite that it is an inland breeder further north. Is not on the Ags-list and this will probably be the first proved record. Though I wonder if it is not somewhat overlooked in this part of the country and probably pass by in small numbers.

At my following visit after August 4, the presa had almost completely been drained by the peasants and all the shorebirds had left.



**Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*)**

2009-08-23: One juvenile seen at presa la Colorada, Palo Alto. Many shorebirds that day including a good number of Western Sandpipers. Most likely first record for the state and probably regular but rare/scarce. See larger picture on this website.



2009-08-23

### **Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*)**

2009-04-09: One individual seen at presa Rodriguez west of the city of Aguascalientes. As picture shows it was an individual in winter plumage most likely second calendar year.

It had been rather windy the days before, if the appearance could have anything to do with that. First record for Ags.



### **Red-billed Pigeon (*Columba flavirostris*)**

2006-06-18: Single record of this species at el Picacho at the Cerro del muerto west of the city of Aguascalientes. I know it is a controversial record, but I keep feeling sure that it is correctly identified.

I had been two months in Veracruz previously and saw the species daily.

When back in Ags and seeing this bird passing by, the jizz with shape, flight and colors instantly made me say Red-billed Pigeon and I noted it in my book, and didn't think much more about it. At that time I was not aware of its normal range.

The other pigeons and doves normally seen in Ags in this area are all very different and the only realistic confusion species would be Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) and Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*).

The former, though general colours could be similar, shows a rather distinct profile when flying with rather pointed wings not like the Red-billed Pigeon. The latter is seen in Ags but probably only at much higher altitudes where the habitat consists of pine or mixed pine-oaks.

Pines do not exist on Cerro del muerto and during my frequent visits I have never seen a Band-tailed Pigeon there. And furthermore the very dark impression 'my' pigeon showed would not fit the Bt Pigeon which in general is a pale gray species.

First record for Ags.

**Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)**

Several dates: First observation was October 27 2007 at presa El Cedazo in the city of Aguascalientes. I left Mexico a few days later, and didn't return until October 2008. At that moment it was more like a suspicion I had. It looked somewhat different from the Cassin's Kingbirds (*Tyrannus vociferus*) that was/is common in the state. I got a picture of it, but didn't make more of it at that time.

Not until I visited the park again on December 5 2008 and saw this odd Kingbird again. Got some more photos, and felt pretty sure that it was not a Cassin's and that it only could be a Tropical. But with my lack of experience and the notorious difficulty identifying many of the Tyrant Flycatchers I still didn't feel sure.

On February 20 2009 I saw it again, but it was not until May 29 2009 that I finally could put a bullet-proof label on it. I saw it better this time and it spoke up! With the voice I was no longer in doubt. And to my surprise it turned out that there were two of them together. A potential breeding pair. On June 19 2009 I saw the two again, but on July 5 2009 only one, which is my last record (have not visited the place after that).

Therefore no breeding proved but the presence of the species is a fact. Is not on the Ags list, so probably a first record for Ags.



2009-06-19

2009-08-29: Kiddie Care Kindergarten in the northwestern part of the city of Aguascalientes. I come there almost daily, and have only seen it once. Perhaps a young bird from a nearby breeding pair?



2009-08-29 Same bird from the front and behind

2009-09-13: Two birds seen / heard in Parque Héroes in the city of Aguascalientes. This was the first time I had this species in this park. Earlier this year I visited once in March and again in May. If breeding, in May they would probably have been more silent and secret in their behavior hence overlooked more easily.

With 3 observations at different localities the status of the this species in the state certainly can't be rare, but if it is a breeding species is still to be proved.

2010: Has been seen in parque el Cedazo and with max. 6 in parque Héroes as well as in wetlands in the north of the state near the village of San Antonio. Therefore since its presence should be well proved (also with photos from this year) I will no longer list observations of the species in this article, but they will be found in the database under the Observations page of this website.



2009-09-13

### Rose-throated Becard (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*)

2010-05-25, 2010-05-29: El Sabinal southwest of the city of Aguascalientes. 2-3 pairs seen, two nests found. Is known to be present by the locals but still not included in Howell though drawing the line very close to the west of the state. Probably present in most river beds with large trees.



2010-05-25

### Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatu*s)

2009-05-20 and 2009-06-26: Seen in el Arroyo de la Gloria at the eastern end of presa Rodriguez west of the city of Aguascalientes. The species is a known breeder in the area in contra of Howell which depicts its closest distribution well southwest of the state of Aguascalientes. I have only visited the place on these two dates and saw 6 birds the last time. Could be present in other stream beds with tall trees around the state. Riva lists it from Río Gil in the southwest of the state.

2010-05-25, 2010-05-29: Common in El Sabinal southwest of the city of Aguascalientes. And just to mention that a report by other hands are being created about the recent expansion of this species. Due November 2010.





2009-06-26

### **American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)**

2008-12-12 and 2009-09-05/06: Seen in Sierra Fría on both my visits up there, probably meaning that it is a well-established breeding species, though Howell managed to draw the lines of presence exactly outside of the state. Riva also lists it from Sierra Fría.

### **Blue Mockingbird (*Melanotus caerulescens*)**

2010-05-20: Cañada Pabellon Hidalgo. Two birds present. Probably a pair.

Is known by the locals especially from the south and western part, but not seen very often. So since it is a resident species its skulking nature probably makes it more difficult to detect outside the 'singing' season. Howell has it well south and west of Ags.



2010-05-20

### **Gray Silky-flycatcher (*Ptilogonys cinereus*)**

2007-05-06: Two birds seen along the ascending road towards Sierra Fría entering via San José de Gracia in the north. Howell draws the distribution limit just to the west of the state. Riva lists it as common in Sierra Laurél in the southwest of the state.

### **Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*)**

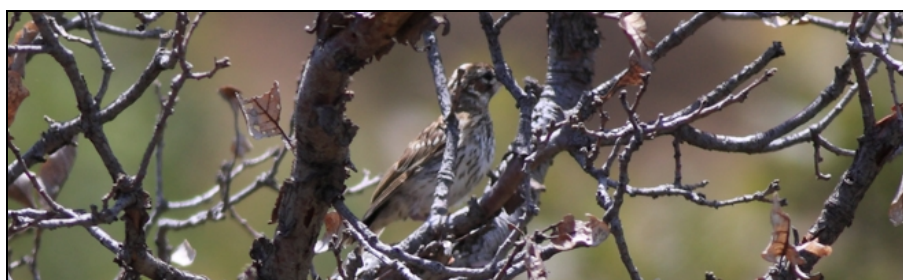
2010-05-25, 2010-05-29: About 10 in all including 3 females were seen at the narrow bridge before the village El Salto de los Salado and the reserve El Sabinal southwest of the city of Aguascalientes. Habitat were corn field and scrub vegetation alongside the river San Pedro. Local resources do not mention this species at all, therefore probably first record for the state. No doubt they are breeding there. Howell suspects that it could be present in the interior like Ags, but draws the line west of the state (less than 100 km). Also mentions that it probably redraws from the interior in winter, moving towards the costal areas. To be proved, but sounds correct to me.



2010-05-29 Male Blue-black Grassquit

### **Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)**

2009-07-06: North of presa Rodriguez west of the city of Aguascalientes. Two juvenile birds seen together in thorny scrub almost being proof of breeding in the state. Howell only lists the species as a winter visitor, with breeding range a little north of the state border.



2009-07-06 One of two juveniles

### **Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)**

2009-02-02: A female seen along the road close to the 'reserva de sabinales' southwest of the city of Aguascalientes.

2009-05-15: A male seen at 'Campos el Molino' fields at the northwest edge of the city of Aguascalientes.

Howell draws an arched line south of Ags as the species' most northern wintering range. This should probably be move northward, at least including Ags.

### **Streak-backed Oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*)**

2008-10-13: Two males and a female seen at 'Campos el Molino' fields at northwestern edge of the city of Aguascalientes. No subspecies details recorded.

The distribution range in Howell lies at the closest a bit southwest of the state of Aguascalientes and the species is probably a regular visitor to the state. Listed as rare in some parts of Sierra Fría by Riva.