



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Cuba

Caribbean Endemic Birding VII

22nd Feb - 3rd Mar 2017 (10 days)

Trip Report



Yellow-throated Warbler by Dusan Brinkhuizen

Trip Report compiled by tour leader, Forrest Rowland

Tour Summary

As any tour to Cuba does, we started by meeting up in fascinating Havana, where the drive from the airport to the luxurious (*relatively for Cuba*) 5th Avenue Four Points Sheraton Hotel offers up more interesting sights than just about any other airport drive I can think of. Passing oxcarts, Tractors hauling cane, and numerous old cars in various states of maintenance and care, participants made their way to



Red-legged Thrush by Dusan Brinkhuizen

one of the two Hotels in Cuba recently affiliated with larger world-chain operations. While this might seem to be a bit of an odd juxtaposition to the indigenous parochial surroundings, the locals seem very excited to have the recent influx of foreign interest and monies to update and improve the local infrastructure, including this fine hotel. With the Russian embassy building dominating the *skyline* (*a bizarre, monolithic, imposing structure indeed!*) from our balconies, and the Caribbean on the horizon, we enjoyed the best accommodations in the city.

As some folks had arrived the day before, many of the participants took advantage of some fun old-car touring around various parts of Havana, covering most of the historic points of interest in two afternoon excursions. With plenty of culture and sights to take in before our birding tour began, proper, not much notice was given to the species around town. Save for a few, that is. Antillean Palm Swift, Cuban Blackbird, Zenaida and Eurasian Collared Doves, Common Ground Dove, and Peregrine were all in good numbers in the vicinity of the hotel itself. Cuban Emerald was found on the grounds, as was Killdeer.

Our first full day of birding in Cuba was ridiculously successful. We set out Westward, after a somewhat leisurely breakfast at the Sheraton, with birds like Red-legged Thrush and Palm Warbler under our belts, which needed to be notched out a size after the ample, if not ostentatious, buffet spread we enjoyed on the terrace. Heading directly to the famous Las Terrazas Biosphere reserve, which is also a UNESCO project site and Cuba's largest reforestation effort, we stepped off the bus to our first of many Cuban Trogons, Cuban Green Woodpeckers, Loggerhead Kingbird, LaSagre's Flycatchers, Red-legged Honeycreepers, and Greater Antillean Grackles. With our local guide, Leonardo's recommendation, we quickly got onto Cuban Grassquit, alongside Yellow-faced Grassquit. Dozens were seen coming to a local



Cuban Green Woodpecker by Forrest Rowland



farmer's chicken feed! *Amazing views and photo ops of both species side by side were a treat.* West Indian Woodpeckers were located on nest, and later seen copulating (*different pair*) as nesting behaviour was in full swing. Bird activity was continuous, all day.



Cuban Pygmy Owl by Mike Austin

to get great views of Cuban Emeralds, even more Cuban Trogon, and were delighted when we were able to get great scope views of Cuban Pygmy-Owl! The very interesting Las Terrazas proved incredibly fruitful this morning, as we logged nearly 50 species at this site alone. Some 15 species were noted right around the area where we enjoyed a delicious criollo-style lunch, including Yellow-throated Vireo, which is an uncommon sight in Cuba.

A few stops en route for Snail Kite and other water-related species were made as we worked our way further West to San Diego de los Banos. This quaint, small town is known for the medical properties of its volcanic hot springs, which were just adjacent to our accommodation. Almost equally well-known to the local birders is the Merlin that has overwintered in the vicinity of the Hotel for a decade. The bird, scarce in Cuba, is still dutifully keeping his winter territory to this day!

In the afternoon, we headed over for a couple hours' birding at the old Hacienda Cortina. Previously a private residence of one of the very powerful politicians within the revolutionary movement, this well-manicured property is now a public recreation area dubbed "La Guira". The hacienda grounds are maintained for the tourists who come to visit, and host several very interesting species. Aside from species seen previously in the day, the most special bird we encountered was Giant Kingbird. This highly sought-after, critically endangered species is very rare now. Though

Moving from our first stop at Las Terrazas to the area behind the community and Hotel Moka, we enjoyed our first looks of the tour of several species of warbler, including Black-and-White, Tennessee, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and two sought-after endemic Warblers: Olive-capped and Yellow-headed. Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, and American Redstart were all seen in the same vicinity of Gray Catbird and the stunning Western Spindalis, feeding on fruiting Mulberry bushes. The parade of colour was nearly continuous, as we proceeded



Black-throated Blue Warbler by Dusan Brinkhuizen



logged on every Rockjumper Tour to date, it can be difficult to obtain anything better than a distant scope view of the species. We enjoyed one individual that responded to playback by perching right above us! The bird moved to a better perch for lengthy scope views shortly thereafter. To add to the quality of our sighting, two Loggerhead Kingbirds were moving in the general area for direct comparison. The massive, hook-tipped bill of the Giant Kingbird (*and its broad shoulders and heavy stature*) were obvious. *A huge*



Fernandina's Flicker by Mike Austin

treat to see this declining species as we did. We had a slew of additions to the Trip List, including the likes of Cuban Oriole, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Pewee, Great Lizard Cuckoo, and several neotropical migrants like Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Louisiana Waterthrush, Cape May Warbler, and Indigo Bunting. One of the better sightings of the afternoon was a repeat from the morning – Olive-capped Warbler. This time I was able to coax a pair down, out of the canopy and onto perches just 25ft overhead. *The group was finally able to discern the olive crown!* This species, which strongly favours the canopy of pine and *Cassarina* trees, is another one of those species that, though recorded on every tour, doesn't necessarily give the most satisfactory views. Due to the nature of its behaviour, it almost always stays high in the trees. We ended the afternoon visit with a pair of Tree Swallows that came cruising overhead, a sight not always seen on our Cuban tours.

We started our morning today by returning, briefly, to Hacienda Cortina in search of Fernandina's Flicker at a nest site. *We were not disappointed!* A male appeared only a few minutes into the search. We also picked up our first great looks at both Cuban Tody and Great Lizard Cuckoo, both of which had been seen to varying degrees the day prior. Summer Tanager was a nice addition, as were views of the lovely White-crowned Pigeon. Without delay, we headed over to the main birding site for the morning – Cuevas de los Portales. This fabulous birding site was first known for its historic significance during the Cuban revolution. The amazing limestone caves and steep terrain afforded great vantage points and hideouts during the war for many important generals and commandants, including the famous Che Guevara. Che holed up on two occasions at the Cueva de los Portales, once for strategic planning, and once during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when locals believed it was possible that a war might begin with the United States. The remnants of the camp are still very much intact and maintained inside this glorious, high-ceilinged cave, complete with a few species of bats to add to the list.



Cuban Tody by Forrest Rowland



Aside from the historic significance, and a brief stop at the fantastic little community art house nearby for coffee, Portales is perhaps the best place in Cuba to see the Cuban Solitaire. No fewer than 4 made their presence known, one giving wonderfully good looks. The haunting metallic song echoing through



Old Car by Mike Austin

the cave really adds to the experience. Given the cloud cover, we were treated to warbler-laden *figus* trees that must have attracted some sort of insect hatch. Northern Parula, American Redstart, Palm, Yellow-throated, Tennessee, and Magnolia Warbler, and other species were noted. More Cuban Trogons, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, gorgeous Cuban Todies, and Red-legged Honeycreeper views were enjoyed, as were our first Scaly-naped Pigeons and Cuban Martins of the tour, among other nice encounters.

Travelling across tobacco and cane country, we made a few stops in the afternoon *en route* to Playa Larga, where we would be based the following 3 nights to explore the Zapata Swamp area. Concentrating on water features, we picked up several nice birds for the tour, including Crested Caracara, the localised endemic Red-shouldered Blackbird, Northern Waterthrush, Anhinga, and a few other odds and ends. Brief stops were made for photo ops, as we traversed some fascinating landscape, as well as crossed paths with a plethora of makes and models of the beautifully maintained old cars Cuba is famous for.

Our first full day on the Zapata Peninsula will perhaps go down as the most memorable day of the tour. After an early breakfast, we drove towards Santo Tomas, where we would take two boats down a canal, into the heart of the Cienaga de Zapata. We didn't make it that far before spotting a Cuban Nightjar in the roadway. After we all hustled out of the bus and got into formation, our local guide played a recording and in came this gorgeous, large nightjar! The bird landed but a few feet from us, about 10ft off the ground, for amazing views. After a few photos were managed despite it being still dark, we continued on towards Santo Tomas, and the promise of an encounter with the endangered (*and downright hard-to-see*) Zapata Wren. With our local boatmen poling the craft down the waterway, and dawn coming up over these vast RAMSAR-designated wetlands of international importance, the general sentiment was that we felt like we were getting to know the real Cuba the right way. While many species we had previously encountered were tallied for the day, Zapata Sparrow was seen well, in good numbers, to constitute our first new bird of the swamp proper.



Cuban Nightjar by Forrest Rowland



Approximately 1-minute after arriving at the observation platform built in the middle swamp, we heard a Zapata Wren singing nearby. About 5 minutes later, we had a male atop the most prominent perch within 25ft of us, singing, in perfect early morning light. *It was ridiculous and wonderful to have this skulking species, that many groups miss, perform like this!* We couldn't believe our luck, and stood in



Cuban Parrot by Forrest Rowland

disbelief as this iconic Cuban bird poured forth its complex clamouring song right before our eyes. To the sound shutter snaps and cellphone videos, we enjoyed this confiding bird for nearly 10 minutes!

The rest of the day, as they say, was gravy. Of course, having just arrived in the Zapata area, we had many targets still, but none as anxiety-ridden as the Zapata Wren, which can prove dastardly to get even a glimpse of. As we wandered through some nearby semi-deciduous scrub and woodlands, we managed to pick

up several fine species. Cuban Parrot and Cuban Parakeet both put in appearances, as did a wide variety of North American migrants, including the scarce Swainson's Warbler. Great Lizard Cuckoos posed for photos, while a Shiny Cowbird that turned up in a farmer's yard proved to be the first that the entire group managed to see. Satisfied and hungry, we headed towards lunch at Punta Perdiz, where a cocktail and lunch buffet awaited us.

We expected the afternoon to be pretty uneventful. *We were wrong.* Cuban Vireos, Worm-eating Warbler, and amazing views of Fernandina's Flicker were a few highlights of our visit to Soplillar. The number one bird of the afternoon was the Bare-legged Owl that roosted in the same snag as a Cuban Green Woodpecker was nesting. *What a sight!* Bare-legged Owl sticking its head out of the upper hole in the trunk, while the woodpecker was entering and exiting the bottom, not 25ft from us. Cuban Crows were unexpectedly entertaining, too. A raucous pair flew past, making all sorts of bubbling, gurgling, and bizarre noises. Our local guide called them back in with some playback, at which point the pair began some fascinating flight displays, complete with the continual soundtrack from the two birds who made an amazing amount of noise. We encountered a confiding pair of Cuban Trogons late in the day, near a nest, as well as a juvenile Grey-fronted Quail-Dove that showed very well for us. Search as we did, however, there was no sign of one our target birds for the area – Stygian Owl. Mario (*local guide*) and I were a bit concerned that we might finally have the first big miss on our hands.



Bare-legged Owl by Adam Riley



We returned fairly late to the Hotel. So, after dinner and the checklist, we were a bit reluctant, perhaps, to go owling off the hotel grounds. We settled for a brief search for Stygian Owl around the hotel grounds, where one shows up somewhat regularly. Despite a debacle involving what was thought to be one guide

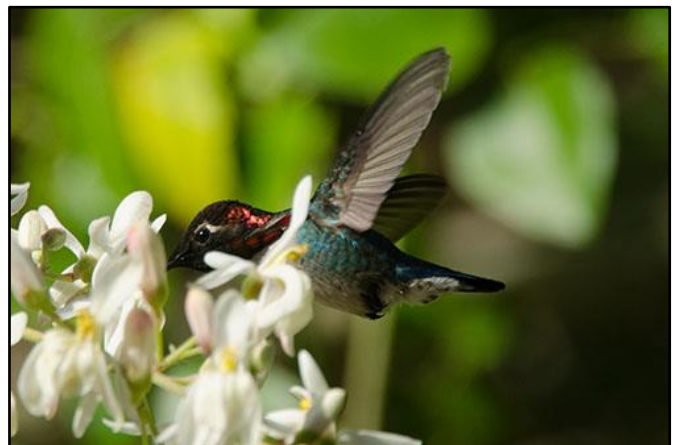


Blue-headed Quail-Dove by Forrest Rowland

deploying playback (*but was actually the bird itself!*) and a bit of running around to recollect people for a final effort, we had amazing views of this large, dark, intense-looking owl right on the hotel property. *Our luck held out!* As luck would have it, the reggaeton didn't start up tonight either, despite it being a Saturday. We got our owl, and a peaceful night's rest, too boot.

The following morning was dedicated to any endemics missing from the area. So far we had very good sightings of all hoped-for species, save Cuban Amazon (*only seen in flight*), adult Grey-fronted Quail-Dove (*we had only seen a juvenile*), Red-shouldered Blackbird (*we didn't have any males displaying the shoulder patch yet*), and last but not least, Bee Hummingbird (*smallest bird in the world; we hadn't even a whiff of this species yet*). We headed directly over to the most fabulous Dove show anywhere I've ever been, in Bermejas, after breakfast. Upon arrival, we were greeted to a flock of Cuban Parakeets overhead, Cuban Pygmy Owl making a ruckus, and both Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail-Doves mixed in among the numerous Zenaida Doves at this neat set-up. Complete with a blind, benches, and some of the most confiding Quail-Doves on Earth, we spent a little over an hour entertained by the antics of the doves, many of which were displaying to prospective mates. We waited around to see if Ruddy Quail-Dove would show, but it was not to be. So, we simply walked across the street to watch the Bee Hummingbird that has a territory in a flowering hedge. Just like that, we had another amazing Cuban endemic species in our sights, *including a very vocal male!* A local gentleman in a wheelchair pointed out a roosting Hutia, as well, which was a treat to see. This bizarre endemic mammal, which strongly resembles some of the more attractive tree rats from Central and South America, has only been recorded on a few Cuban tours previously.

After great looks at the hummingbird, we drove over to a stake-out for Red-shouldered Blackbird. Other birders arrived shortly after we did, and aside from a flyby, we had little to show for our efforts, save great views of a singing Eastern Meadowlark of the local subspecies. So, we drove slowly down the road a bit, turned around, and as we passed back by, we noticed two Red-shouldered Blackbird sitting up in full view! After



Bee Hummingbird by Forrest Rowland



pulling over and making some loud squeaks and pishes, some 4 or 5 individuals, including two males more than willing to display their beautiful colours for us, were tallied as another success. We returned to the Bee Hummingbird site briefly, before heading to the famous museum in Playa Giron, known as the Museo Heroes de Giron. Perhaps the most famous battle of the Cuban revolution led by Castro, Guevara, and many other lesser-known integral figures, was fought here. It was the defining moment in which most of the “mercenaries” (*anti-revolutionary Cubans*) were captured, and victory against invading North American Imperialism was declared. The museum fascinated us all with its impressive collection of photographs, explanations of battle and general ideology of the time, as well as an extensive display of memorabilia from the battles in the area. We watched a short documentary made shortly after



Cuban Black Hawk by Dusan Brinkhuizen

the revolution was complete, and the establishment of the Castro regime was begun. I think everyone gained an interesting perspective on the events of the time, as well as what Cubans were experiencing both during and after the conflict was over, during our short hour here. Lunch was enjoyed at Caleta Buena. This lovely snorkelling hole offers all-you-can-eat and drink to its visitors. Cocktails and the many colourful fish in the pools here were a nice break from the heat, before we headed back to the Hotel for a short break.

The afternoon was spent at Las Salinas del Brito. The old salt evaporation installations have long since overgrown with native mangrove vegetation, and support a fabulous variety of birds. We saw some 48 species in a couple of hours here! Cuban Black Hawk and the stunning Cuban Amazon greeted us at the park entrance, both perched and showing nicely. The latter lingered for us to watch and photograph at leisure. *We had to walk away from the Parrot in search of more birds!* More birds were soon had, farther out on the bumpy dirt road leading towards the coast. Four species of Tern, nearly every Heron and Egret on the checklist, American White Pelican, Wood Stork, and the gorgeous American Flamingo were all seen in great numbers and stunning light. Mangrove Warbler popped out and cooperated, though perhaps not quite as well as a very bold Clapper Rail that walked across the road in front of us! Black Skimmers, several species of shorebirds, Osprey, and more Belted Kingfisher than I can ever recall seeing at one site, were noted in between. For some participants, the colourful Roseate Spoonbill vied with Flamingos for highlights of the afternoon, though the Rail was pretty fabulous, of course. A wayward American Avocet was the bird of the afternoon for our Cuban



American Flamingo by Adam Riley



hosts. It was a lifer for our driver, Rolando! We retired to the Hotel, satisfied after another great day, and all of our wanted species in the bag.



Giant Kingbird by Mike Austin

The drive from Playa Larga to Camaguey is a long one. We made few stops the next day, as we plied our way eastward towards Najasa. Little punctuated the drive, save for some fine conversation, great coffee, explanations of the culture and history by our local guide – Alejandro, one Northern Harrier, a flock of Stilt Sandpipers, and a lone Northern Jacana. We arrived in Camaguey in time for Alejandro to take the group through the winding city streets, absorbing the different architecture and cultural highlights of Camaguey, now recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The following morning, our main objective was to find the few remaining species possible for us on mainland Cuba, before making our way in the afternoon to the keys for a completely new set of exciting species! The historic Rancho (*Finca*) Belen was once a huge private hacienda that was nationalised during the revolution. Covering some 4,200 hectares, this ranch encompasses two small mountains covered in pristine forest. Home to most of the Cuban endemic bird species, the main attractions here for us were the virtual guarantee of seeing Plain Pigeon and Cuban Palm Crow, as well as another chance to see more Giant Kingbirds. *We were successful on all counts.* The other big draw here is the chance to see Gundlach's Hawk, which nests on the property. Only a few participants were able to get on the species as it zoomed by; though recent studies indicate that this is more likely a subspecies of Cooper's Hawk, than full species offered some consolation to those who missed its brief appearance. Other nice finds included a pair of obliging Limpkin and great views of Purple Gallinule and Northern Jacana as we were leaving.



Oriente Warbler by Adam Riley

Most of the day was devoted to traversing the country for the near southern reaches to Cayo Coco off the north coast. En route there was little to see in terms of birds, though we passed through some delightful countryside and interesting habitats, including the Llanura de Camaguey (*Camaguey plains*) and Sierra de Cubitas, both of which we crossed as we neared the north coast. Upon arriving at Cayo Coco, we were met by our local guide who had a pretty stellar plan for the afternoon. Before long, we had great looks at Oriente Warbler, the endangered West Indian Whistling Duck, endearing little Cuban



Gnatcatcher, and several species of waterfowl and shorebirds new for the tour. The scenery and setting of the keys is gorgeous, and the relative luxury of our accommodations, including the fine food and all-inclusive drink options, make for a lively time!



Cuban Gnatcatcher by Dusan Brinkhuizen

Our time spent on Cayo Coco, Cayo Paredon Grande, and Cayo Guillermo was both effective and relaxing at the same time. With our early arrival the day before, we were able to locate those important species mentioned above, and alleviate some of the pressure for those targets birds during our one full day in these lovely environs. We set out early in the morning of our full day in the keys, for Paredon Grande. The site of one of the most historic lighthouses in Cuba (*constructed in 1859 by Chinese slaves brought over by the reigning powers of the time*) happens to be the best place in the area

for two special birds – Bahama Mockingbird and Thick-billed Vireo. Though each exhibits some characteristics of a true skulker, neither required much effort to get fantastic views of, including photos. Some Cuban Gnatcatchers popped up into view for us, and West Indian Woodpecker and Cuban Orioles took turns perching nicely on a century plant right above us. A young Cuban Black Hawk perched not 30ft from us, seemingly unaffected by our presence. Our only miss for the morning was Mangrove Cuckoo, which we tried for at a few sites. We made a few stops for shorebirds and photos on our return to the resort, which included finding some wonderful flocks of Sandpipers, Plovers, and a few Red Knots! In the afternoon, some of us headed over to Cayo Guillermo for American Flamingos and other species, while some participants chose to take the afternoon off, and relax. The flamingo show was incredible, with a nice flock in a near lagoon, in perfect late-afternoon light. An amazing spectacle, with the dark green mangrove as a backdrop and the varied intense rosy hues of the flamingos practically glowing. We snuck in a couple of stops for shorebirds and gulls, adding Solitary Sandpiper, Least Grebe, and Lesser Black-backed Gull. The latter of which is oddly increasing, despite it being an old world species. The population of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the New World is undoubtedly increasing, and more breeding grounds are being discovered.



Cuban Oriole by Clayton Burne

Our final full day of the tour was mostly in transit, save for a few stops for restroom breaks, coffee, and an amazing conglomeration of pelicans, cormorants, gulls, and terns numbering the hundreds alongside



the road as we left the keys for the mainland. We enjoyed a lengthy tour of the Centro Historico de Havana in the afternoon, visiting every single plaza of interest on foot, and stopping at a few of Hemingway's favourite watering holes for a refreshment ourselves. The colours, clothing, architecture, and smells of Havana are overwhelming in a wonderful way. Afterwards, we made our way to the famous Café del Oriente for a fabulous farewell dinner, and a reluctant official end to a great tour.

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS: 169 (168 seen, 1 heard)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill, F and D Donsker (Eds). 2016. IOC World Bird List (v 6.2) Birds of the World: Recommended English Names (2006) Princeton University Press.

Key to abbreviations:

E: an endemic species

NE: a near-endemic species

I: an introduced species

Conservation Status

C: critical **En:** endangered **V:** vulnerable **NT:** near-threatened

Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl Anatidae

West Indian Whistling Duck (V) *Dendrocygna arborea*

Very confiding family group perched at the edge of a lake in Cay Coco.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

A pair on Cayo Coco

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

A few pair on Cayo Coco

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

A few individuals on Cayo Coco.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

Large flock at a lake visited en route.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

Huge flock on the centre of the lake.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Several groups seen around the keys

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis jamaicensis*

Few individuals mixed in with the Aythya.

Guineafowl Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl (I) *Numida meleagris galeatus*



Small flocks of this introduced species at Finca Belen.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus*

A pair seen on Cayo Coco; one individual seen en route

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*

Over a hundred seen at a lake visited en route!

Flamingos Phoenicopteridae

American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Good numbers present near Zapata, and hundreds upon hundreds at the keys!

Storks Ciconiidae

Wood Stork *Mycteria americana*

Two seen in the Zapata Swamp area.

Ibises and Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

American White Ibis *Eudocimus albus albus*

Common at coastal sites.

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja*

Many seen well near Zapata and on the keys.

Hérons, Egrets, and Bitterns Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*

Just a few seen en route.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti*

Great views on Cayo Guillermo!

Green Heron *Butorides virescens virescens*

Many seen. Common and widespread.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Common and widespread.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias occidentalis*

Common and widespread

Great Egret *Ardea alba egretta*

Common and widespread.

Reddish Egret (NT) *Egretta rufescens rufescens*

Both morphs were present. Some individuals foraging nicely at close range.



Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor ruficollis*
Numerous in saltwater hábitats

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*
Common and widespread.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula thula*
Seen on most days in small numbers

Pelicans *Pelecanidae*

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*
A flock of 20-30 individuals at Zapata, and a few more on the keys.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis*
Common along the coast.

Frigatebirds *Fregatidae*

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*
Species observed 5 days in total.

Cormorants and Shags *Phalacrocoracidae*

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus mexicanus*
A fairly common species both coastal and inland.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*
Relatively common, though not as widespread as previous species

New World Vultures *Cathartidae*

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura aura*
Very common and widespread throughout the island.

Osprey *Pandionidae*

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Locally common

Hawks, Eagles, and Kites *Accipitridae*

Gundlach's Hawk (E) (En) *Accipiter gundlachi*
Finca la Belén, Najasa
Brief views of an adult screaming by after prey.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*
One seen en route.

Cuban Black Hawk (E) (NT) *Buteogallus gundlachii*



Nice views of this recently split species at several localities.

Broad-winged Hawk

Buteo platypterus cubanensis

A few seen in the western portion of the island.

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots Rallidae

Clapper Rail

Rallus crepitans caribaeus

Superb views of an individual that walked right across the road, slowly, in front of us!

Purple Gallinule

Porphyrio martinicus

Great views of several at a pond near Finca la Belen.

Common Gallinule

Gallinula galeata cerceris

Numerous at many sites.

American Coot

Fulica americana americana

Numerous at many sites.

Limpkin Aramidae

Limpkin

Aramus guarauna pictus

Seen at two sites inland, though also possible on the keys.

Stilts and Avocets Recurvirostridae

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus mexicanus

Locally common.

American Avocet

Recurvirostra americana

One turned up at Zapata, and was new for our driver. A scarce species in Cuba!

Plovers and Lapwings Charadriidae

Grey Plover

Pluvialis squatarola cynosurae

Dozens seen on the keys, and one at Zapata.

Semipalmated Plover

Charadrius semipalmatus

Numerous on the keys.

Killdeer

Charadrius vociferus ternominatus

Numerous and widespread.

Piping Plover (NT)

Charadrius melodus

One individual hanging out near Cayo Paredon Grande constituted one of the few individuals detected during our multiple tours to Cuba. Always great to see this adorable, unfortunately declining, species.

Jacanas Jacanidae

Northern Jacana

Jacana spinosa



Sandpipers and Allies *Scolopacidae*

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Large flocks at Zapata and the key islands.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Casual in Cuba, we had a small flock on Cayo Coco!

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Numerous in habitat.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Great studies of this with the previous species on the keys.

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

One turned up at a small wetland on Cayo Coco!

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*

Common in the keys and a few at Zapata.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Only two seen on the tour.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres morinella*

A few around Zapata; numerous on the keys.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

A group of some two dozen of these uncommon birds was mixed in with dowitchers and large plover near Cayo Paredon Grande!

Calidris alba rubida

Sanderling

A few on the keys.

Semipalmated Sandpiper (NT) *Calidris pusilla*

A few seen on the keys.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

Flocks of hundreds on the keys!

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*

A flyby flocks over some inland rice fields was a surprise!

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers *Laridae*

Black Skimmer *Rhyncops niger*



A nice flock at Zapata was seen well!

Laughing Gull

Common at coastal sites.

Leucophaeus atricilla atricilla

Ring-billed Gull

One inland, and a few on the keys.

Larus delawarensis

American Herring Gull

One on the keys.

Larus smithsonianus

Larus fuscus

Lesser Black-backed Gull

One first year bird seen well at Cayo Guillermo.

Gelochelidon nilotica aranea

Gull-billed Tern

Common at Zapata.

Caspian Tern

Numerous in proper hábitat.

Hydroprogne caspia

Royal Tern

Common at coastal sites.

Thalasseus maximus maximus

Forster's Tern

Three seen well at Zapata.

Sterna fosteri

Pigeons and Doves *Columbidae*

Rock Dove (I)

Common and widespread in human settlements.

Columba livia

White-crowned Pigeon (NT)

Numerous and widespread.

Patagioenas leucocephala

Scaly-naped Pigeon

Great scope views of multiple perched birds.

Patagioenas squamosa

Plain Pigeon (NT)

Common at Finca la Belen.

Patagioenas inornata

Eurasian Collared Dove (I)

Fairly common in human settlements.

Streptopelia decaocto decaocto

Common Ground Dove

Fairly common and in all hábitats

Columbina passerina insularis

Blue-headed Quail-Dove (E) (En)

Starnoenas cyanocephala



Several gorgeous birds seen in the Zapata area!

Grey-fronted Quail-Dove (E) (V) *Geotrygon caniceps*
Stellar views in the Zapata area of few individuals

Key West Quail-Dove *Geotrygon chrysia*
A few birds coming to a feeding station on Cayo Coco showed amazingly well!

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura macroura*
Common and widespread throughout the island.

Zenaida Dove *Zenaida aurita zenaida*
Fairly common in forested hábitats throughout.

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica asiatica*
A few on the keys and one at Finca La Belen.

Cuckoos Cuculidae

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani*
Common and widespread throughout the island.

Great Lizard Cuckoo (NE) *Coccyzus merlini merlini*
A fairly common island speciality.

Owls Strigidae

Bare-legged Owl (E) *Margarobyas lawrencii*
Stunning views of a bird at its day roost.

Cuban Pygmy Owl (E) *Glaucidium siju siju*
Multiple encounters with this neat island endemic.

Stygian Owl *Asio stygius siguapa*
Superb views in the spotlight at our Hotel in Playa Larga!

Nightjars and Allies Caprimulgidae

Cuban Nightjar (E) *Antrostomus cubanensis cubanensis*
Superb views of an amazingly confiding bird near Zapata!

Swifts Apodidae

Antillean Palm Swift *Tachornis phoenicobia iradii*
A fairly common species throughout the island.

Hummingbirds Trochilidae

Cuban Emerald (NE) *Chlorostilbon ricordii*
A common and widespread, lovely, species.



Bee Hummingbird (E) (NT) *Mellisuga helenae*
 Fantastic views of a singing male at close range, and a female.

Trogons Trogonidae

Cuban Trogon (E) *Priotelus temnurus temnurus*
 Superb views of this gorgeous, widespread endemic!

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*
 Widespread.

Todies Todidae

Cuban Tody (E) *Todus multicolor*
 A stunning island endemic seen on multiple occasions.

Woodpeckers Picidae

West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris superciliaris*
 Common and widespread.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*
 A few seen at various sites.

Cuban Green Woodpecker (E) *Xiphidiopicus percussus percussus*
 Common and widespread endemic.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus chrysocaulosus*
 Subspecies endemic to Cuba seen on Cayo Coco.

Fernandina's Flicker (E) (V) *Colaptes fernandinae*
 Prolonged views of this cracking endemic at both Hacienda Cortina and the Zapata area.

Falcons and Caracaras Falconidae

Northern Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway*
 Several seen at various sites.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius sparverioides*
 Common and widespread.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*
 One wintering bird at San Diego de Banos, and another marauding shorebirds on the keys.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
 One seen before the tour started across the way from the 5th Ave. Sheraton was the only one.

African & New World Parrots Psittacidae



Cuban Amazon (NE) (NT) *Amazona leucocephala leucocephala*
Multiple encounters with this spectacular parrot!

Cuban Parakeet (E) (V) *Psittacara euops*
Great views in the Zapata area.

Tyrant Flycatchers Tyrannidae

Cuban Pewee (NE) *Contopus caribaeus*
Common and widespread.

Giant Kingbird (E) (En) *Tyrannus cubensis*
Great looks at a few territorial birds at Hacienda Cortina and again at Finca la Belen.

Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus*
A common resident.

La Sagra's Flycatcher (NE) *Myiarchus sagrae sagrae*
A common resident.

Vireos Vireonidae

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus griseus*
Two obliging birds on Cayo Coco put on a show!

Thick-billed Vireo (NE) *Vireo crassirostris cubensis*
Fabulous looks of a few individuals in the coastal scrub!

Cuban Vireo (E) *Vireo gundlachii*
Fairly common and widespread in the western parts of the island, mostly.

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*
Several encounters with this handsome, uncommon, migrant.

Crows, Jays, and Magpies Corvidae

Cuban Palm Crow (E) (NT) *Corvus minutus*
Common locally, with few reliable sites including Finca la Belen.

Cuban Crow (NE) *Corvus nasicus*
A somewhat scarce island speciality but common at Finca Belén.

Swallows Hirundinidae

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*
Several in the Zapata area seen well

Cuban Martin (E) *Progne cryptoleuca*
Seen at several locations well. A graceful bird!



Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Little attention paid while viewing a Bee Hummingbird and the other en route.

Cave Swallow

Petrochelidon fulva cavicola

Nice views at the cave system of Cueva Portales, and around Zapata.

Wrens Troglodytidae

Zapata Wren (E) (En)

Ferminia cerverai

One of the most spectacular encounters imaginable with this species!!! Photos will tell the story.

Gnatcatchers Polioptilidae

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher

Polioptila caerulea caerulea

Several in the Zapata area.

Cuban Gnatcatcher (E)

Polioptila lembeyi

Close encounters with a couple confiding pairs.

Mockingbirds and Thrashers Mimidae

Grey Catbird

Dumetella carolinensis

Common migrant.

Mimus polyglottos orpheus

Northern Mockingbird

Common throughout.

Mimus gundlachii gundlachii

Bahama Mockingbird (NE)

Great looks at close range of a single territorial adult!

Thrushes and Allies Turdidae

Cuban Solitaire (E) (NT)

Myadestes elisabeth elisabeth

Superb scope views. What a song!

Red-legged Thrush

Turdus plumbeus rubripes

A common and attractive species.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

House Sparrow (I)

Passer domesticus

Very common.

New World Warblers Parulidae

Ovenbird

Seiurus aurocapilla furvior

Fairly common migrant.

Worm-eating Warbler

Helmitheros vermivorum

One bird in a mixed-flock at Zapata.



Louisiana Waterthrush Fairly common migrant.	<i>Parkesia motacilla</i>
Northern Waterthrush Common migrant.	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>
Black-and-white Warbler Common migrant.	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
Swainson's Warbler Great looks in the Zapata area of this rare bird!	<i>Limnothlypis swainsonii</i>
Tennessee Warbler Scarce migrant, though we managed to find 5 this year!	<i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>
Common Yellowthroat Common migrant.	<i>Geothlypis trichas trichas</i>
American Redstart Common and widespread migrant.	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Cape May Warbler Fairly widespread migrant, though nowhere numerous.	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>
Northern Parula Common migrant.	<i>Setophaga americana</i>
Magnolia Warbler Uncommon migrant seen at Cueva Portales only.	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>
Mangrove Warbler In the mangroves at Zapata and the keys both.	<i>Setophaga petechia gundlachi</i>
Black-throated Blue Warbler Fairly Common migrant.	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>
Palm Warbler Common migrant.	<i>Setophaga palmarum palmarum</i>
Olive-capped Warbler (NE) Great views of this near-endemic warbler!	<i>Setophaga pityophila</i>
*Myrtle Warbler Heard near Finca la Belen.	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>



Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*
Fairly common migrant.

Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor*
Gorgeous views of a couple of this fairly common migrant.

Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*
Common migrant, though only two encountered this tour.

Family uncertain *Incertae Sedis 2*

Yellow-headed Warbler (E) *Teretistris fernandinae*
Stellar views and photos of this fairly common endemic.

Oriente Warbler (E) *Teretistris fornsi fornsi*
Fairly common endemic but more localised than the previous species.

Troupials and Allies *Icteridae*

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna hippocrepis*
At a roadside marsh in Zapata and fields elsewhere.

Cuban Oriole (E) *Icterus melanopsis*
We ended up seeing several at a variety of locations, though nowhere common.

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird (NE) *Agelaius humeralis*
Common and widespread.

Red-shouldered Blackbird (E) *Agelaius assimilis assimilis*
Superb views of two pair at a roadside marsh past Bermejas.

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonaerensis*
A few seen on the tour, though never common given the habitats we focus on.

Cuban Blackbird (E) *Ptiloxena atroviolacea*
Common and widespread endemic.

Greater Antillean Grackle *Quiscalus niger*
Common and widespread.

Buntings, Sparrows and Allies *Emberizidae*

Zapata Sparrow (E) (En) *Torreornis inexpectata inexpectata*
Great views of both subspecies. This is the subspecies from Zapata.

varonai:

This subspecies was coming to a feeder setup on Cayo Coco!



Tanagers and Allies *Thraupidae***Red-legged Honeycreeper (I)** *Cyanerpes cyaneus*

A few seen very well in the western parts of the island.

Cuban Bullfinch (NE) *Melopyrrha nigra nigra*

Fairly common endemic.

Cuban Grassquit (E) *Tiaris canorus*

Superb views of a large flock at Las Terrazas!

Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*

Fairly common and widespread.

Western Spindalis (NE) *Spindalis zena pretrei*

Fairly common island stunner seen often!

Cardinals and Allies *Cardinalidae***Summer Tanager** *Piranga rubra*

Two at Hacienda Cortina!

Indigo Bunting *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

A single individual glimpsed in flight, while a few were Heard around the island.

Mammals**Brazilian Free-tailed Bat** *Tadarida brasiliensis***Caribbean Fruit-eating Bat** *Artibeus jamaicensis***Hutia** *Hutia cubanensis claviana (sp?)***Reptiles and Amphibians****Cuban Slider** *Trachemys decussate***Cubitas Anole** *Anolis jubar***Cuban Green Anole** *Anolis porcatus***Cuban Brown Anole** *Anolis sagrei***Anole, sp. (no common name assigned)** *Anolis homolechis***Anole, sp. (no common name assigned)** *Anolis vermiculatus***Cuban Curly-tailed Lizard** *Leiocephalis cubensis***Cuban Treefrog** *Osteopilus septentrionalis*

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