

Cuba

Caribbean Endemic Birding I

14th January to 23rd January 2024 (10 days)



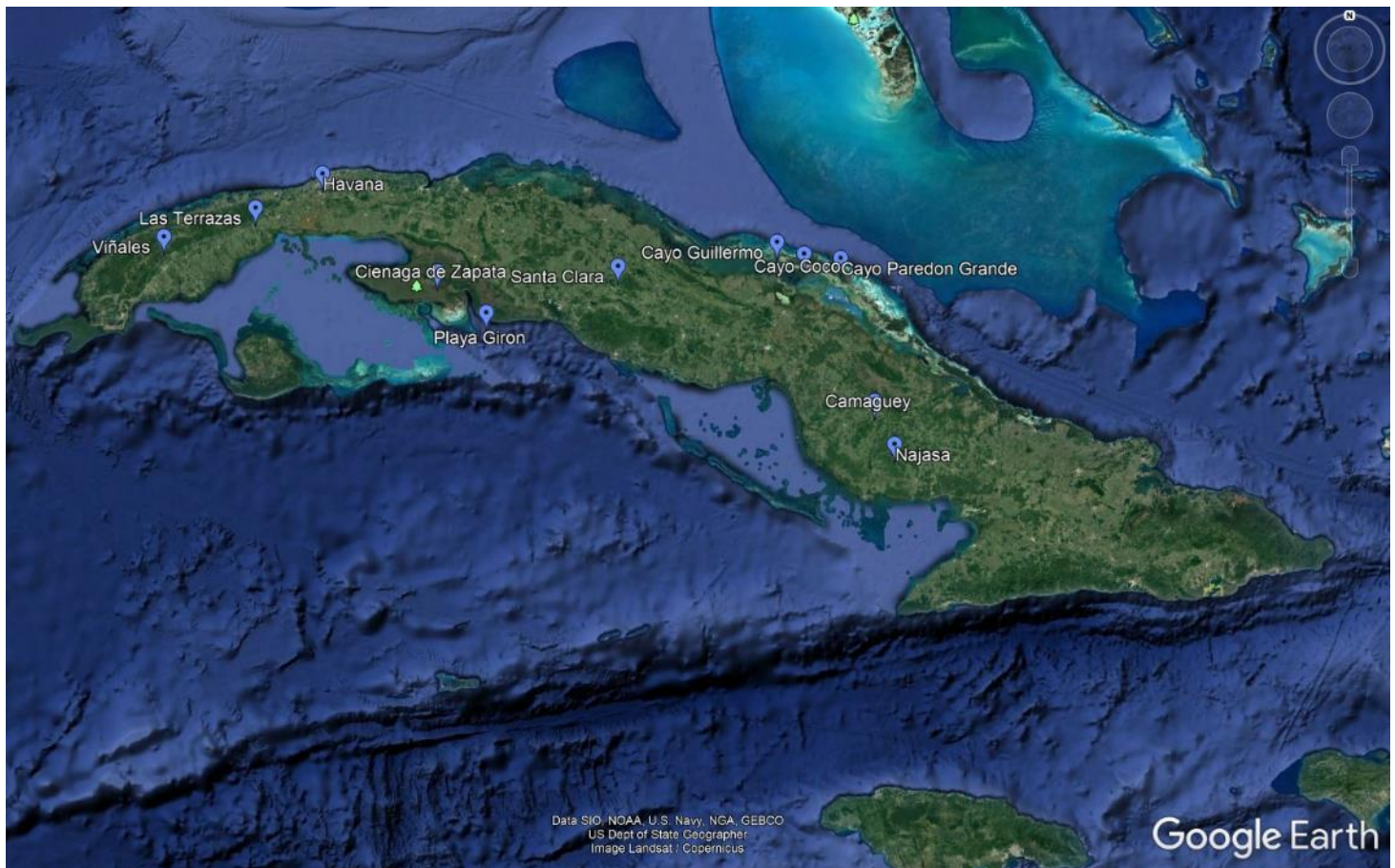
Bee Hummingbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Cuba, the Caribbean's largest island, lies just 120 km (75 miles) south of Florida, yet offers an impressive 28 endemic birds, numerous Caribbean specialities and a rich assemblage of overwintering North American warblers and waders. Our comprehensive Rockjumper tour targets almost every possible endemic and near-endemic species; and, using the services of local bird specialists at each site, we promise an impressive success rate in observing the island's amazing avian diversity. From the world's tiniest bird (Bee Hummingbird) to such sought-after species as Giant Kingbird, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Gundlach's Hawk, Oriente and Yellow-headed Warblers, Zapata Wren and no less than four species of stunning quail-doves, Cuba is an absolute pleasure to bird!

On this tour, we will cover a wide variety of habitats, ranging from interior tropical forests and mangroves to extensive wetlands and white sand beaches along the northern coral cays. The awesome birdlife is further augmented by ease of travel, comfortable lodges, fascinating culture, a turbulent history, vintage cars that take one back to the 1950's, and super-friendly people, making this a thoroughly enjoyable adventure for both the hardcore and casual birder alike!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	Arrival in Havana
Day 2	Havana to Viñales via Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve
Day 3	Viñales to Zapata Peninsula
Days 4 & 5	Zapata Peninsula
Day 6	Zapata Peninsula to Camaguey
Day 7	Camaguey to Cayo Coco via Najasa
Day 8	Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Coco, Cayo Paredón Grande
Day 9	Cayo Coco to Havana
Day 10	Final departure



Birding sites in detail



Cuban Trogon by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Niña Bonita. This large lake provides an early bridging stop where we'll have a look for Snail Kite hovering or perched in the vicinity and numerous migrant waterfowl, commoner species including Ring-necked Duck and Blue-winged Teal, while Greater Scaup is occasionally recorded. Wading birds such as Limpkin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and Tricolored, Little Blue and Green Herons are also probable. We will soon be struck by the abundance of Turkey Vultures; these huge birds are almost a guaranteed sight each time we cast an eye skywards!

Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve. This community-run reserve was once clear cut for charcoal production, but millions of replanted trees have restored the area to its former grandeur. The reserve hosts one of our primary targets for the day, the delightfully coloured Cuban Grassquit. This beautiful little tanager is now endangered largely due to trapping for the cage-bird trade.

We can also expect to see many of Cuba's specialities including Cuba's national bird, the Cuban Trogon, and the very cute Cuban Tody. Belonging to a family of 5 species endemic to the Caribbean and most closely related to kingfishers, this brilliantly coloured jewel of the forest sometimes allows for an incredibly close approach and amazing photographic opportunities. There will also be time for the common buff-bellied Cuban sub-species of Red-

legged Thrush and Cuban Green Woodpecker. It won't take long to work out that we are in North American wood warbler heaven, as these brightly coloured gems flit around us and respond strongly to spishing. Particularly common are American Redstart, Northern Parula, Palm Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler.

Los Hoyos area. We'll make a few stops in this area to search for Giant Kingbird and Eastern Meadowlark, the local sub-species is expected to become an endemic species in the near future.

San Vicente. This site has a number of key species such as Scaly-naped Pigeon and Cuban Solitaire as well as Olive-capped Warbler - a relict of the past ice ages. The lovely warbler is a denizen of tall pine trees and shares its limited range in Cuba with a population in the Bahamas.

Whilst we're searching for these targets, we are likely to find some of the commoner endemics and resident species such as Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Blackbird, West Indian Woodpecker, Cuban Pygmy Owl and Great Lizard Cuckoo amongst others. With a considerable amount of luck, we may even chance upon Gundlach's Hawk.



Cuban Tody by Dušan Brinkhuizen



Blue-headed Quail-Dove by Clayton Burne

Maravillas de Viñales. We'll take a short walk to search for Cuban Solitaire, Western Spindalis, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Bullfinch, the introduced Red-legged Honeycreeper, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Pewee and La Sagra's Flycatcher.

Zapata Peninsula. En route towards the Zapata Peninsula, we will notice numerous signs commemorating the Cuban revolution, as well

as Cuba's national heroes, including of course Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara. We will see a large variety of transport modes on Cuba's roads, from oxen pulling wooden sleighs, fancy horse-drawn buggies and vintage 1950's US automobiles in every shape, size and colour! We'll settle into our lodge, nestled on the shores of Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs), close to the infamous 1961 invasion point of Playa Giron.

The Zapata Peninsula is the essence of Cuban birding. Large areas of this reserve now protect salt pans, mangroves, swamps and dry evergreen forests, home to most of Cuba's endemic birds. With the help of a superb local birding guide, we will visit numerous sites in search of these localised specialities. High on our agenda will be the world's smallest bird, the minuscule Bee Hummingbird. Measuring in at just 2.5" (tail to bill!), this tiny hummer really does resemble a bee as it flits around flowers. Its numbers have decreased dramatically, unfortunately, and it can prove a tough bird to find. We will also encounter the far more common Cuban Emerald, a sparkling green, fork-tailed nymph of the forest edge.

One of our mornings here will require an early start to reach a deciduous forest reserve where an incredible 4 species of secretive and beautiful quail-doves can be seen! A local conservationist has started putting out food along a forest trail, and both the stunning Blue-headed and iridescent Grey-fronted Quail-Doves often come in, allowing excellent viewing. We will also walk the trails to stand a reasonable chance of observing the more widespread Key West and rarer Ruddy Quail-Doves, while the attractive Zenaida Dove, as well as Common Ground and Mourning Doves, occur as well.

Along these trails, we will also seek out the Cuban Pygmy Owl and Bare-legged (or Cuban Screech) Owl, which are usually found at known roosts. We will take the time to seek out Cuban Crow; this large, all black corvid is rather rare, and we will listen out for its loud and distinctive parrot-like vocalisations in order



Cuban Solitaire by Dušan Brinkhuizen



Olive-capped Warbler by Bobby Wilcox

to track it down. Another tough and rare endemic best found on the peninsula is the huge Fernandina's Flicker, a surprisingly attractive woodpecker. Other species in this group that occur here are West Indian Woodpecker, Northern Flicker (an endemic resident race) and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Raptors are not particularly numerous, but we will keep a look out for Red-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks, Northern Crested Caracara, Merlin and of course the endemic and extremely tough Gundlach's Hawk.

Another morning will be spent along the edges of the great sawgrass Zapata Swamp in the Cienega de Zapata National Park. Our chief target here is the very secretive Zapata Wren, a rather aberrant troglodyte

that is the sole member of its genus. It might take some patience and sharp spotting to obtain views of this speciality, though sightings are by no means guaranteed. Here we will also seek the surprisingly attractive and accommodating Zapata Sparrow. This is also the prime locality for the localised Red-shouldered Blackbird; the males are almost identical to the North American Red-winged Blackbird but the females differ in sporting all-black plumage. We will also look out for the near-endemic Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and endemic Cuban Oriole (recently split from Greater Antillean Oriole, and now considered a good species).

Further excursions will take us onto the tidal flats and mangrove islets at Salinas de Brito, which are situated along the southern shore of the Zapata Peninsula. The saltwater marshes are justly famous for their waders and waterfowl, and we will seek out the recently split Cuban Black Hawk, now an endemic (previously considered a subspecies of Common Black Hawk). Stunningly pink American Flamingos occur in healthy numbers, and we will add numerous waterbirds to our burgeoning list, including Brown Pelican, Anhinga, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, American White Ibis, Wood Stork, Clapper Rail, Caspian and Royal Terns, Black Skimmer, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher and Least Sandpiper, among many others. Cuban Martins are possible from February to mid-October.

An evening excursion may be taken to search for Cuban Nightjar and the impressive Stygian Owl. The latter is a dark and imposing-looking predator so-named after the black river Styx (in Greek mythology 'Styx' symbolised the boundary between Earth and the underworld).

Santa Clara. Time permitting, we'll make a short stop at Santa Clara, synonymous with Ernesto 'Che'



Zapata Wren by Dušan Brinkhuizen



Giant Kingbird by Adam Riley

Guevara. Site of his most famous battle during the Cuban Revolution, it now plays host to Che's mausoleum – where his remains were finally interred in 1997 after their discovery in a secret grave in Bolivia.

Camaguey area. We'll visit a nearby nature reserve that protects unspoilt lowland forest and palm groves, harbouring a great diversity of flora and fauna. Our two main target species are the Cuban Palm Crow and the endangered, massive-billed Giant Kingbird (with an estimated population of fewer than 1000 birds). The region is also host to several other endemics and near-endemics, and we will keep a careful look out for the lovely Cuban Amazon (also known as Rose-throated or Cuban Parrot)

and flocks of Cuban Parakeet screeching overhead. The early morning is also our best chance of finding Plain Pigeon, as they sit on exposed perches before heading off to their feeding grounds. We have another chance to find the elusive Gundlach's Hawk should we still require it, while being treated to a regular supply of North American warblers that may include Worm-eating and Swainson's if we are very lucky.

Cayo Coco. As our Cuban birding adventure begins to wind down, we head northwards to explore some of the thousands of small coral islets fringing Cuba. Upon reaching the coast, we will drive over a scenic 17km (10 ½ mi) causeway that separates the island of Cayo Coco from the mainland (somewhat reminiscent of Key West), and during our journey, we should spot large numbers of waterbirds. Highly probable species include Magnificent Frigatebird, Neotropic Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Pied-billed Grebe, American Wigeon, American Coot, Western Osprey, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Willet, Black-necked Stilt and numerous smaller migrant waders.

Cayo Guillermo & Cayo Paredón Grande. These low-lying coral islands support a wide variety of birding habitats, ranging from stunning beaches and mangrove-lined mudflats to swamps, low growing thorn-scrub and dwarf semi-deciduous forest in the island interior. A new suite of species will be sought here including the delightful Oriente Warbler, Cuban Gnatcatcher, endemic Cuban and highly localised Thick-billed Vireos, and the scarce Bahama Mockingbird. A short search of the nearby beach may yield the rare Piping Plover, Sanderling and even small flocks of Cave Swallow.



Gundlach's Hawk by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Undemanding. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels and mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Undemanding. Most key species offer good visuals in open conditions. Birding is from roadside, forest edge & open habitats.
Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good to comfortable, variable.
Walking / Trails	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Moderate walking, mostly on flat ground, roads, wide trails and around lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comfortable bus on flat sealed roads with little traffic.
Photography	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good to excellent. No feeders, one site with a makeshift blind.
Annoyances	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at some sites. Hot, with harsh sun at times.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 10;
- Bottled drinking water;
- Soft drink/water/coffee/tea at meals;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels) not noted above;
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tiping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- The 2017 hurricane season incurred significant damage in and around the Caribbean, central and northern America. Hurricane Irma destroyed large swathes of the northern Cuban Cayos (keys), specifically affecting most habitat types on Cayo Paredon Grande. Consequently, both Thick-billed Vireo and Bahama Mockingbird have become increasingly difficult to find. While neither species was seen on our early 2018 tours, we did find alternate sites in late 2018 and early 2019.
- Havana City Tour: Our visit to the old town of Havana is typically very short. Guests that are interested in spending more time in this unique city for sightseeing are advised to organize a dedicated historical tour before, or after our tour.
- It can be hot with harsh sun in some areas of Cuba, especially along the coast, so please come prepared with hats and sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are also high throughout most of Cuba.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times and it's advisable to pack a good supply of DEET or another effective insect repellent. There is no malaria in Cuba.
- There are some long days in the field taking advantage of available habitat, but overall, the tour pace is relaxed, and the walking is easy.
- There are some long drives on this tour, but the comfort of the transport and flat, straight nature of the roads means these days are not uncomfortable.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is fairly comfortable. Historically, most tours to Cuba stayed in government owned and operated hotels. These suffered from poor maintenance and dispirited staff. Many of these facilities have broken or dysfunctional facilities and service is typically very slow. On this tour, we stay mostly in houses and lodges owned by private Cubans where possible and privately operated hotels. The standards of comfort and service are of a decidedly higher standard and allow for a proper, authentic Cuban experience.
- Food on this tour is also of a much higher standard as we eat at privately owned restaurants, hotels and lodges. Cuba certainly doesn't lack for a variety or quantity of food, but you need to know where to find it! Government operated hotels and restaurants typically have very limited options and volumes.

USA RESIDENTS PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

Travel to Cuba is regulated by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Anyone located in the United States, regardless of citizenship or nationality, must comply with these regulations. Individuals seeking to travel to Cuba are not required to obtain licenses from OFAC if their travel is covered by a general license.

Rockjumper's Tours to Cuba are not sanctioned by OFAC, nor can we state equivocally as to whether you will be covered to travel under one of the general license categories. Therefore, any resident of the United States of America wishing to book this tour must consider the potential risk of defying a federal statute.

Should you wish to travel to Cuba, it will not be possible to arrange direct, return flights (unless you are attempting to travel under a general license category). Common gateway routings to reach Cuba include flying via Mexico, Panama, Canada and the Dominican Republic.

Health Insurance - You will need a health insurance policy that covers your time in Cuba. This insurance is often covered by your flight ticket to Cuba. Alternatively, you can buy a specific policy in advance. Purchase of Health insurance is possible at the Asistur counter on arrival at Jose Marti International Airport, Havana, but can be problematic if the counter is closed.

Visa: You can purchase your visa, better known as a Tarjeta del Turista (Tourist Card) before you travel to Cuba from dedicated travel services. Most airlines will also help in obtaining your card. The processing and costs range from US\$50 to US\$85 per Tourist Card. Alternatively, you can purchase the card at another airport en route to Cuba such as Panama International Airport / Santo Domingo International Airport / Cancun International Airport. Typically, the card is available at the airline counter. If you are not able to see it, or find the appropriate desk, do ask any of the helpful Immigration Officials to direct you. The card costs approximately US\$25.00 (CUC20.00).

After arriving at Havana International Airport, it is prudent to request the Immigration officials not to stamp your passport.

Be sure to make a copy of your passport (and any other important documents) in case yours is lost or stolen. You will need your passport, Tarjeta del Turista and Visa (if required) for check in purposes at hotels.

It is impossible to predict what changes may be made to the existing regulations by the current US Administration, so it is considered prudent not to mention traveling to/from Cuba. US issued credit card and debit cards will not work in Cuba.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts with a welcome dinner on the evening of day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 10.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Jose Marti International Airport, Havana (IATA: HAV) is the main port of entry for international flights into Cuba and is serviced by several international carriers.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: [Visa HQ for Travel](#)

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.