



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Jamaica

Island Endemics II

12th – 17th March 2017 (6 Days)

Trip Report



Red-billed Streamertail by David Howe

Trip Report compiled by tour leader, Forrest Rowland

Tour Top 5:

1. Crested Quail Dove
2. Red-billed Streamertail
3. Jamaican Tody
4. Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo
5. Northern Potoo

Tour Summary

Jamaica is as about unique a destination as can be imagined. In the middle of the Caribbean, this small island developed a culture unlike any other, cuisine unlike any other, and vibrant, beautiful avifauna unlike any other. As a guide, it's pretty dreamy as well. Great accommodations, great food, and outstanding local bird guides that are extremely knowledgeable and helpful, making it a delight for everyone involved!



Jamaican Euphonia by David Howe

Our group met up in Montego Bay this year, rather than Kingston. With more international flights available to this extremely touristy destination, schedules were more suited to this port, though it did mean missing a chance in the Hellshire Hills for the Bahama Mockingbird. Luckily, we made it up for it with other amazing species and encounters later in the tour. After a brief lunch stop en route, we made our way straight through to the lovely Greencastle Estate for some evening birding, picking up Glossy Ibis, Neotropic Cormorant, Laughing Gull, and a few other commoner species before we had arrived.

Greencastle Estate is situated just inland from the seashore. Perched atop a hill with an incredible view of the Blue Mountains, Annotto Bay, and the Caribbean, this old plantation home was renovated and converted into a finely-appointed Lodge, complete with swimming pool, tennis court, and gardens. While the tennis court saw little action from our party, the fact that all this was constructed amidst 4,000 acres of primary and secondary native forest means the bird life here is spectacular! With plenty of time for relaxation allotted during this tour (*as most species fall in line nicely, without too much effort*), comfortable lodgings on this island paradise are distinctly beneficial. Great food, great service, and a homey feel were enjoyed for the 5 nights we spent at this little-known gem.

We spent a good deal of our time birding the lodge grounds and trails, as a wonderful diversity in habitats and species is found right on the estate



Mangrove Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen



grounds, just outside our doors. Our very first species after pulling onto the property was Mangrove Cuckoo, of which we ended up seeing three (!), *proving an auspicious start to the tour!* In the garden itself, Loggerhead Kingbirds, Yellow-faced and Black-faced Grassquits, Jamaican Oriole, Greater

Antillean Grackle, Vervain Hummingbird, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Cape May Warblers were all common sights. Less numerous, though seen from the area right around the Estate House, included Red-billed Streamertails, the gorgeous Jamaican Mango, Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, and Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo – all putting in wonderful appearances, and a pair of Northern Potoos set up camp on prominent perches and utility poles right there!



Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo by David Howe

The trails were amazingly productive, as well. *Impressive how much can be seen just from one property.* Sad, Stolid, and Rufous-tailed Flycatchers, Caribbean Dove, Worm-eating Warbler, Orangequit, Jamaican Elaenia, Jamaican Vireo, Ruddy Quail Dove, Jamaican Woodpecker, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, and the impressive, colorful, Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo were some of the many highlights from our strolls around. Perhaps one of the best birds anywhere in the Caribbean is the Tody. This family, endemic to the Caribbean Islands of the Greater Antilles, is a group of some of the cutest and charismatic birds on Earth. The emerald green gems were a daily sight for us, on occasion coming to within 15 feet of us!

One of the most productive trails on the property led through mixed pristine and secondary forest down to a small reservoir where we found a group of West Indian Whistling Ducks and loads of other waterfowl, waders, and good stuff! On top of the numerous avian highlights, we saw some nice herps, too. Jamaican Giant Anole is an attractive beast, *and surprisingly numerous!* Nocturnal efforts yielded up views of the tricky Jamaican Owl, which decided to put up a bit of a challenge for us. Sometimes they come right in to playback, or are simply sitting over the trail. Other times, they are flighty and elusive. Through persistence, we managed to get some looks nonetheless.

We had two day trips off the property and into primary forest habitats in the Blue Mountains. Our first excursion was to the high elevations around Silver Hill and Hardwar Gaps, in the John Crow Mountain National Park. The weather held out nicely for us, though the threat of rain was nearly continuous over the forest-laden hills



Jamaican Tody by Clayton Burne



and mountains in the eastern part of the island, where most of the rainfall in Jamaica occurs. Of course, these lush habitats are home to the most special endemics. Around John Crow National Park, we quickly had success with Blue Mountain Vireo, which was foraging at eye level, and a Rufous-throated Solitaire that responded beautifully to playback for us. Ring-tailed Pigeon, Jamaican Becard, Arrowhead Warbler, and more Jamaican Spindalis and Orangequits than one could count were seen on our excursion up the mountain. The two hardest endemics on the island are, arguably, Jamaican Blackbird and Crested Quail Dove.



Jamaican Spindalis by David Howe

The latter is actually quite numerous, large, colourful, and seen well on every tour, with some effort to overcome its secretive nature. We managed views of one perched individual today, which were improved upon at Ecclesdown, later in the tour. The Blackbird, however, can be missed on tour. Our local guide, Roger, had an

area he recalled seeing them fairly regularly over the past couple of weeks. We stalked the haunts, to no success, for the first couple hours of the day. It wasn't until the clouds set in that I noticed some sporadic, familiar calls from very close-by. We looked up to find a Jamaican Blackbird bathing in a bromeliad nearly overhead! It was accompanied by a silent, actively foraging, partner, behaving more like a nuthatch or woodcreeper than a Blackbird, as this particularly interesting species is wont to do. It was wonderful to view these at length, going about their day, oblivious to our presence and showing nicely. We wrapped up this day's excursion with a stop at the Dennis Coffee Farm store in Sect. This colourful, well-staffed (*humorous attendants*), little shop serves freshly roasted Blue Mountain coffee right off the farm (*the beans are roasted before your eyes, packaged warm*) and sells it in bulk. *We were interested in both!* Happy with our purchases that morning, the staff at the Dennis Coffee Farm gave us some coffee samples, and even offered up a sprig or two of ganja with a hearty "Rasta fari" as we walked out the door. We declined the herb, though, and left with smiles on our faces.

Our second outing was to the famed Ecclesdown Road. *If one finds oneself in Jamaica with only one day to bird, THIS is the place.* Ecclesdown Road hosts every single endemic on the whole island, with the exception of Red-billed Streamertail and Jamaican Owl, which are at Greencastle. This is possibly the best place on the island to get great views of the endemic Parrots of the island, as well as Crested Quail Dove. We had outstanding looks at both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Parrots, which came cruising by in flocks and perched wonderfully for scope views



Jamaican Blackbird by David Howe



and photographs on several occasions this morning. *It was quite a show!* Plain Pigeon, Jamaican Pewee, White-crowned Pigeon, Jamaican Vireo, and most of the wanted species on the island were all noted this morning, including Jamaican Crow. The Crow is tough outside of this part of the mountain



Northern Potoo by David Howe

range, though they are starting to slightly habituate in a few populated areas in the near region. Ecclesdown is certainly the best bet for this garrulous endemic, which is closely related to the Cuban and Hispaniolan Palm Crows, evidenced by the bizarre sounds and interesting shape of the birds.

The highlight of our morning might well have been a species we had already seen on the tour: Crested Quail Dove. *Seeing one through the bins, in the dark understorey is one thing.* Today, we coaxed one out onto a limb for image-filling scope views. *Now, that's a view to remember!* With early success under our belts, we wanted to put some hearty food in our bellies. Though the food at Greencastle is great, and the pack meals perfectly fine, near to Ecclesdown is the famed Boston Jerk Station. We couldn't pass up the opportunity to try this delicacy from the most famed site on the island. *We were not disappointed!* Though the lobster was tempting, we stuck with the Chicken, Pork, and Sausage Jerk, complete with bammy and festival sides. *It was awesome!*

The final afternoon of the tour was wrapped up with an eventful and entertaining novelty offered up by our local guide, Dwayne. We called it: "fishing for crakes". While playback can be productive, it is often intrusive and stressful on the birds. Extreme skulkers, like crakes, can be terribly difficult to get even a glimpse of, whether one uses playback for an hour to tease one out, or not. Dwayne's mentor had come up with an alternate method: employing fishing line tied to a small foil ball as "bait", and the line itself wrapped around a plastic bottle as "reel", our guide proceeded to methodically toss the foil ball into the swamp grass at an undisclosed location (*wished to be kept secret*) and reel it back in. Turns out, he was trolling. The light foil ball would stay on the tops of the grass and rush, and skip along the top of the vegetation as he reeled it back in before tossing again. Sure enough, after a few minutes, a Yellow-breasted Crake flushed right up into view! We saw where it landed. Tossed again. And up it came again! *It was one of the most amusing things I've seen in a while.* Far less intrusive than lining up and stopping through the marsh, or dragging a



Jamaican Vireo by David Howe



rope through a swamp, or marching in a line whilst banging empty milk cartons with ladles (*all methods I've seen employed to view rails and crakes in the past, even on refuge lands in the USA*), this method made no noise and offered little distress. It was wonderfully productive, and a fine way to end the tour.

Many thanks go out to the fun-loving, relaxed, but avid birders who joined me on this tour. You were all a blast to bird and spend time with! I am looking forward to our next adventure.

Annotated List of Species Recorded

BIRDS: 118 species (28 Endemics, 6 Near Endemics)

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*
Great looks at several birds on the Greencastle Estate

American Wigeon *Anas americana*
A lone female on the Greencastle Estate

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*
Numerous on the Greencastle Estate

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
Large flock at a lake visited en route.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
Large flock in Annotto Bay

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis jamaicensis*
Few individuals mixed in with the Aythya.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*
Several seen

Ibises and Spoonbills Threskiornithidae



Glossy Ibis

Plegadis falcinellus

A few en route from Montego Bay

Hérons, Egrets, and Bitterns *Ardeidae*

Black-crowned Night Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli

Just a one seen en route.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti

Several at a few stops

Green Heron

Butorides virescens virescens

Many seen. Common and widespread.

Western Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Common and widespread.

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias occidentalis

But one recorded near Annotto Bay

Great Egret

Ardea alba egretta

Common and widespread.

Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

Common and widespread.

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula thula

Seen on most days in small numbers

Pelicans *Pelecanidae*

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis

Common along the coast.

Frigatebirds *Fregatidae*

Magnificent Frigatebird

Fregata magnificens

Species observed 3 days in total.

Cormorants and Shags *Phalacrocoracidae*

Neotropic Cormorant

Phalacrocorax brasilianus mexicanus

One seen on the drive from Montego Bay

New World Vultures *Cathartidae*

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura aura

Very common and widespread throughout the island.



Osprey Pandionidae

Western Osprey
Several seen

Pandion haliaetus

Hawks, Eagles, and Kites Accipitridae

Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

A few seen in the eastern portion of the island.

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots Rallidae

Sora

Porzana carolina

Nice scope views at Greencastle estate

Yellow-breasted Crake

Porzana flaviventer

Very entertaining experience at Greencastle Estate!

Common Gallinule

Gallinula galeata cerceris

Numerous at many sites.

American Coot

Fulica americana americana

Numerous at many sites.

Stilts and Avocets Recurvirostridae

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus mexicanus

Many at Greencastle

Plovers and Lapwings Charadriidae

Grey Plover

Pluvialis squatarola cynosurae

A few seen en route

Jacanas Jacanidae

Northern Jacana

Jacana spinosa

Seen well at small inland marshes.

Sandpipers and Allies Scolopacidae

Greater Yellowlegs

Tringa melanoleuca

One near Montego Bay

Spotted Sandpiper

Actitis macularius

Only two seen on the tour.

Ruddy Turnstone

Arenaria interpres morinella

A few near the beach



Sanderling *Calidris alba rubida*
A few at a beach stop

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers Laridae

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla atricilla*
Common at coastal sites.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
Two seen well

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus maximus*
Common on the coast

Pigeons and Doves Columbidae

Rock Dove (I) *Columba livia*
Common and widespread in human settlements.

White-crowned Pigeon (NT) *Patagioenas leucocephala*
Numerous and widespread.

Ring-tailed Pigeon (E) (V) *Patagioenas caribaea*
Numerous in habitat and seen well

Plain Pigeon (NT) *Patagioenas inornata*
A few on Ecclesdown road

Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina insularis*
Fairly common and in all habitats

Ruddy Quail-Dove *Geotrygon montana*
A very oblonging individual walking in the road

Crested Quail-Dove (E) (NT) *Geotrygon versicolor*
Stellar views on Ecclesdown!!!

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

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

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica asiatica*
Fairly common.



Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*
But one seen en route

Todies *Todidae*

Jamaican Tody (E) *Todus todus*
A stunning island endemic seen on numerous occasions.

Woodpeckers *Picidae*

Jamaican Woodpecker *Melanerpes radiolatus*
Common and widespread.

Falcons and Caracaras *Falconidae*

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius sparverioides*
Common and widespread.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*
One migrating bird at Ecclesdown.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
One seen at the end of the tour near Boston.

African & New World Parrots *Psittacidae*

Black-billed Amazon (E) (V) *Amazona agilis*
Multiple encounters with this noisy parrot at Ecclesdown!

Yellow-billed Amazon (E) (V) *Amazona collaria*
Lots of bright flocking birds at Ecclesdown

Olive-throated Parakeet (NT) *Eupsittula nana*
Fairly common throughout.

Tyrant Flycatchers *Tyrannidae*

Jamaican Elaenia (E) *Myiopagis cotta*
Only two seen well, as this bird can be scarce.

Greater Antillean Elaenia (NE) *Elaenia fallax*
Tricky bird! Only one seen by a couple participants.

Jamaican Pewee (NE) *Contopus pallidus*
Common and widespread.

.Great looks at a few territorial birds at Hacienda Cortina and again at Finca la Belen.

Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus*
A common resident.



Sad Flycatcher (E) *Myiarchus barbirostris*
A common resident.

Stolid Flycatcher (E) *Myiarchus stolidus*
A responsive pair at Greencastle Estate showed nicely!

Rufous-tailed Flycatcher (E) *Myiarchus validus*
Widespread, handsome endemic

Tityras, Becards Tityridae

Jamaican Becard (E) *Pachyrampus niger*
A few nice encounters with this fun endemic

Vireos Vireonidae

Jamaican Vireo (E) *Vireo modestus*
Fairly common and widespread.

Blue Mountain Vireo (E) (NT) *Vireo osburni*
A couple great looks in the highlands.

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus*
Common and vocal throughout

Crows, Jays, and Magpies Corvidae

Jamaican Crow (E) *Corvus jamaicensis*
A somewhat scarce island specialty but common at Ecclesdown.

Swallows Hirundinidae

Caribbean Martin (NE) *Progne cryptoleuca*
Seen at a few locations well. A graceful bird!

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*
One seen briefly on Greencastle Estate

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Several seen in migration.

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva cavicola*
Nice views on Greencastle Estate.

Mockingbirds and Thrashers Mimidae

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos orpheus*
Common throughout.



Mangrove Warbler In the sea grape near Greencastle Estate.	<i>Setophaga petechia gundlachi</i>
Black-throated Blue Warbler Common migrant.	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>
Palm Warbler Scarce migrant.	<i>Setophaga palmarum palmarum</i>
Yellow-throated Warbler Uncommon migrant.	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>
Prairie Warbler Gorgeous views of a couple of this common migrant.	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>
Black-throated Green Warbler Only one found on the tour in the Blue Mountains.	<i>Setophaga virens</i>

Troupials and Allies Icteridae

Jamaican Oriole (E) We ended up seeing several at a variety of locations; common.	<i>Icterus leucopteryx</i>
Jamaican Blackbird (E) (En) Rare, though we saw a pair very well!	<i>Nesopsar nigerrimus</i>
Shiny Cowbird A few seen on the tour, though never common given the habitats we focus on.	<i>Molothrus bonaerensis</i>
Greater Antillean Grackle Common and widespread.	<i>Quiscalus niger</i>

Bananaquit Coerebidae

Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>
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Tanagers and Allies Thraupidae

Yellow-faced Grassquit Fairly common and widespread.	<i>Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus</i>
Black-faced Grassquit Common in lowlands	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>
Yellow-shouldered Grassquit (E) Uncommon, seen on Greencastle Estate	<i>Loxipasser anoxanthus</i>



Greater Antillean Bullfinch (NE) *Loxigilla violácea*
Several of this beautiful near endemic seen in forested hábitats

Orangequit (E) *Eunoeornis campestris*
Very common, attractive endemic

Jamaican Spindalis (E) *Spindalis nigricephala*
Fairly common island stunner seen often!

Cardinals and Allies *Cardinalidae*

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*
A single individual at Greencastle Estate

Mammals

Small Asian Mongoose *Herpestes javanicus*
Caribbean Fruit-eating Bat *Artibeus jamaicensis*

Reptiles and Amphibians

Jamaican Giant Anole *Anolis garmani*
Graham's Anole *Anolis grahami*
Stripefoot Anole *Anolis lineatopus*
Jamaican Twig Anole *Anolis valencienni*
Jamaican Stipped Gecko *Sphaerodactylus argus*
Jamaican Forest Frog *Eleutherodactylus gossei*
Cane Toad *Rhinella marina*

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