



Sunrise Birding LLC
JAMAICA
December 1 - 7, 2012
TRIP REPORT





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www.sunrisebirding.com

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Leaders: Gina Nichol, Steve Bird, & local guides

Jamaican Tody
Photo by Gina Nichol



HIGHLIGHTS & GROUP FAVORITES:

- All 28 Jamaican Endemics
- Jamaican Owl
- Jamaican Tody
- Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo
- Crested Quail Dove
- Red-billed Streamertail
- Black-billed Streamertail
- Arrowhead Warbler
- Jamaican Blackbird
- Orangequit
- Northern Potoo
- Rufous-tailed Flycatcher
- Worm-eating Warbler
- Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo
- Caribbean Dove
- Jamaican Spindalis
- Rum punch!

Day 1: Arrival in Kingston, Jamaica

Everyone arrived either today or yesterday in Kingston, Jamaica on the southeastern coast of the island. We gathered in the evening to begin the tour with a nice dinner at the Devon House in Kingston. With rum punch all around, we toasted the beginning of our birding tour in Jamaica.

Day 2: Kingston to the Blue Mountains

This morning we were up early and out on the grounds of the university campus as the sun came up. Before first light we met our local guide Ricardo who pointed out the **Northern Mockingbirds** imitating Loggerhead Kingbirds in addition to real **Loggerhead Kingbirds** singing from the treetops. At first light we had **Cattle Egrets** flying over dispersing from their night roosts and **Greater Antillean Nighthawks** were flying past in numbers. The trees right in front of the lodge held **Prairie Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, more **Northern Mockingbirds**, and a **White-crowned Pigeon**. Our transport arrived and took us up to Widcombe Heights where we walked and birded the tree-lined road. Our first endemic **Orangequit** was a female feeding on a soursop fruit. Throughout the day, we had several more **Orangequits**



including some close nicely marked males. The roadside trees held **Cape May Warblers** which were enjoyed at close range and there were several **American Redstarts** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers** showing extremely well. A **Jamaican Euphonia** was being evasive when a pair of **Jamaican Woodpeckers** flew in and diverted our attention, the female showing very well. **White-chinned Thrush** was very prevalent along the road and **Zenaida Dove** showed well. A fruiting tree held four **Jamaican Euphonias** gorging themselves on its tiny fruits. A

Jamaican Mango came in and fed on a banana flower briefly and then quickly departed. Ricardo offered us some tasty sweet bananas as a snack and while we were enjoying them our first **Jamaican Tody** appeared and flitted from branch to branch offering varying views. Further up the road Ricardo was surprised to see the endemic



Ring-tailed Dove perched in the open on a Cecropia branch. A **Loggerhead Kingbird** glowed white in the morning light and Ricardo pointed out that this was the Cuban race (endemic subspecies) with the dark tail with white tips at the end. Continuing on, we had a pair of **Yellow-shouldered Grassquits** moving among the roadside shrubs. Some distant **Antillean Palm Swifts** were seen better later in the morning but noted as a before breakfast tick.



We returned back to the lodge for breakfast and then went to the Royal (Hope) Botanical Gardens, a 200-acre oasis near the university to look for a few more species before heading out of the city. Here we had great views of **Yellow-billed Parrot** and one tree held **Red-billed Streamertail**, **Jamaican Mango**, and **Vervain Hummingbird**. At the pond we had **Snowy Egret**, **Common Gallinule**, and **Little Blue Heron**. Also seen in the park were **White-winged Dove**, **Black-and-white Warbler**, **Yellow-throated Warbler**, and one warbler-filled tree yielded **Black-throated Green Warbler** as well as many more **Cape Mays**, **Black-throated Blues**, and **Northern Parulas**.



Later in the morning we left Kingston and headed up the winding road up to Forres Park, a coffee plantation situated on the slopes of Jamaica's picturesque Blue Mountains. Forres Park is the home of the dazzling endemic **Red-billed Streamertail**, Jamaica's national bird and here we saw several of these little beauties during our stay. We checked into our rooms and reconvened for lunch on the verandah enjoying the cooler mountain air. After lunch, some people stayed on the deck to watch the numerous **Orangequits** feeding on the flowering trees.

Later in the afternoon we walked up into the shade grown coffee plantation behind the lodge and found **Olive-throated Parakeet** (endemic subspecies), more and better views of **Antillean Palm Swift**, **Sad Flycatcher**, **Jamaican Woodpecker**, more **Ring-tailed Pigeons**, **Jamaican Oriole**, and **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo**.

Day 3: Blue Mountains - Old Mine Trail

Heavy rains overnight had impacted our plans to go to the highest peak in Jamaica. No problem though as we decided to bird the forested Old Mine Trail near the local coffee factory. We arrived after first light and began walking under

light drizzle that increased to intermittent, heavy showers with a few rainbows in between. We persevered however, and had a pretty good morning of birding. **Ring-tailed Pigeon** and **Jamaican Tody** greeted us as we set off on the trail and a quickly disappearing **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher** later offered excellent views. **Jamaican Spindalis** was also seen well several times along the trail. Bart called us back for a **Greater Antillean Elaenia** that was elusive at first and eventually showed along with a **Yellow-shouldered Grassquit**. **Orangequits** and **Ovenbirds** were present in numbers and **Common Ground Dove** was seen. Further along, we had one **White-eyed Thrush**, several **White-chinned Thrushes**, and a couple of **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**. Next up was a nice male **Greater Antillean Bullfinch** that showed well as it worked its way along the hillside above us. A **Black-faced Grassquit** came through along the ground below the Bullfinch and a **Common Yellowthroat** skulked in a bush up the hill. Another burst of heavy rain had us thinking about heading back toward the vehicles just as a female **Red-billed Streamertail** whizzed by. This kept us entertained long enough for the rain to subside and then Lyndon spotted a **Crested Quail Dove** that flew by and landed by a disused house. The bird then flew back into the forest only allowing only quick views by a few. We continued on to a tree full of **Ring-tailed**



Pigeons. The rains picked up again and we headed back getting better views of a pair of **Rufous-tailed Flycatchers** before heading back to the lodge.

It continued to rain through lunch time and the rest of the afternoon. A few stalwarts were up for going back out so we loaded up and drove up to the trail entrance and waited a few minutes for the torrential rains to subside. By this time the trail was flooded and we walked sometimes ankle deep through to the area for the Quail-dove. The **Jamaican Woodpeckers** were in the same spot as before and so were the **Crested Quail-Doves** and we improved our views of these birds despite their flightiness. Further on we had **Jamaican Pewee** and Bart had quick views of a **Jamaican Elaenia**. Frank spotted a **Blue Mountain Vireo** that got away quickly and a **Rufous-throated Solitaire** fled into a patch of bamboo before being seen by most. We walked back out the trail and the rain finally let up as we got near the road. Another **Antillean Bullfinch** flitted

through the trees and we headed back to the lodge for the evening. Starry skies gave us hope that the rains had ended but despite the deluge we had made the best of it and added some good birds to our list.

Day 4 – Forres Park / Hardwar Gap / Port Antonio



The break in the rains was short lived and in the morning we left Forres Park in the dark and in the rain. We made our way to Hardwar Gap in the hopes of finding more high-elevation bird species and endemics. Unfortunately, the rain continued producing flooded roads, landslides, and gushing waterfalls. In the rain there were several **White-chinned Thrushes** on the road. We got to our birding spot and got out in the pouring rain to find two close **Crested Quail-Doves** perched. The rain did not quit so we decided to move on and make stops when the rain subsided. Our last stop was most productive with good views of **Blue Mountain Vireo** and **Jamaican Vireo**, a nice **Arrowhead Warbler** spotted by David, **Prairie Warbler**,

Black-throated Green Warbler, Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, Jamaican Spindalis, and Jamaican Woodpecker.



We headed out of the mountains later in the morning for lunch in Kingston and our transfer to Port Antonio on the northeast coast of Jamaica. During the drive we had several **Cattle Egrets** in a field with **Glossy Ibis**, **Great Egret**, **Snowy Egret**, **Great Blue Heron**, **American Kestrel**, and **Turkey Vulture**. As we neared the coast, **Magnificent Frigatebirds** appeared, soaring over the shoreline. A stop at the Spanish River bridge found us **Spotted Sandpiper**, a high soaring **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Little Blue Heron**, **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, and **Greater Antillean Grackle**. We arrived at our lovely accommodation in Port Antonio, checked into our rooms and were immediately out on the veranda watching **Black-billed Streamertail**,

Jamaican Oriole, many **Orangequits**, **Loggerhead Kingbird**, and **Jamaican Spindalis**. The Orioles and Orangequits were feeding on some close palm fruits making great photo opportunities. Later we enjoyed a gourmet dinner in the lodge restaurant.

Day 5 - Ecclesdown Road / John Crow Mountains

This morning we were out early heading for Ecclesdown Road, an endemic hotspot on the slopes of the John Crow Mountains. As we turned off the main road, **White-chinned Thrushes** were abundant along the road and a few **Ruddy Quail Doves** flew off in front of us as well. A small group of doves in the road turned out to be **Crested Quail Doves** and our slow approach yielded at least a half dozen birds and gave us our best views of the trip. We walked along the road noting the downed trees and damage from Hurricane Sandy but that did not seem to impact the birding as we picked up **Jamaican Euphonia**, **Northern Parula**, **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo**, **Worm-eating Warbler**, **Black-faced Grassquit**, **White-eyed Thrush**, **Sad Flycatcher**, and a nice **Arrowhead Warbler**. Steve spotted a roosting **Northern Potoo** fairly close to the road and we all enjoyed spectacular views of the bird. The next stop found us **Jamaican Oriole**, **Zenaida Dove**, more Thrushes, **Jamaican Tody**, **Jamaican Spindalis**, and **American Kestrel**. We picked up some distant calls of **Jamaican Crow** and David saw a bird fly across the forest but no one



else got on it. We scanned the forest but could not locate the bird and then waited on a corner for several minutes hoping the birds would call or fly again. No luck but we kept busy with a nice **Arrowhead Warbler**, Jamaican **Tody**, and others before moving further along the road to a spot where our local guide Roger said was good habitat for Jamaican Blackbird.

Almost immediately, Bart called out, "I have one!" and soon we were looking at four Jamaican **Blackbirds** feeding in tangles in the trees right next to the road. The views were amazing complemented by fantastic views of another **Arrowhead Warbler**.

Every once in a while the **Jamaican Crow** would call imploring us to scan the forested hillsides. A close **Jamaican Elaenia** caught our attention and showed well for us and we had both **Jamaican** and **Blue Mountain Vireo** and **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher** along the road.

Again the **Jamaican Crow** was calling and this time Steve spotted it perched on a distant Cecropia. It sat for several minutes while we scoped it and even got some record shots. Further up the road, the **Jamaican Crow** was seen again; this time a bird was eating a large fruit on a Cecropia little closer to us. A **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo** was seen just down the hill from the road near where a **Jamaican Lizard-cuckoo** was calling but remained hidden. We made our way back to the lodge for lunch and a short respite before birding the grounds of the lodge in the afternoon. Four **Greater Antillean Grackles** seemed to be surveying the pool from the roof of the lodge and another **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo** was seen. We walked out toward the gate and had a **White-crowned Pigeon** perched. Near that were a female **Jamaican Becard** which showed briefly and the ever present **Jamaican Spindalis**. A nice looking **Caribbean Dove** walked along the driveway below us. We continued down and Gina stopped to inspect a large tangle that was moving as if something was in it. Sure enough a **Jamaican Lizard-cuckoo** flew out and perched on an open branch for us! Fantastic! We made our way back to the lodge verandah and enjoyed the spectacular view until dusk and then wandered down to try and find a **Jamaican Owl**. A bird called once or twice but then went quiet leaving us wanting.



Day 6: Happy Grove / Ecclesdown Road

With just two endemics left to see, we headed out early this morning to Happy Grove for a field breakfast overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Scanning out over the water, we hoped to see the **White-tailed Tropicbirds** that frequent the waters just off the coast. There were at least two but very far out over the water. **Magnificent Frigatebirds** were also far out but easier to see given their size. Closer to shore we had **Great Egret** and a white morph **Little Blue Heron**, **Royal Tern**, and several **Cave Swallows** flying over a spit of land that had a football pitch. The usual **Loggerhead Kingbirds** were around as was **American Kestrel** and **Cattle Egret**.



After breakfast, we moved on to the other end of Ecclesdown Road birding through the "parrot" village where we had

Common Yellowthroat, **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **Prairie Warbler**, **Northern Mockingbird**, and **Jamaican Orioles**. A flock of **Yellow-billed Parrots** flew toward us and passed offering nice flight views. Further on, we stopped for parrots perched on a bare tree and the top one was indeed a **Black-billed Parrot** that moved quickly to another leafy tree and was seen well before it departed. A couple of **Sad Flycatchers** showed well flitting around a tree in someone's garden and a **Yellow-faced Grassquit** was seen. A male **Jamaican Spindalis** posed for photos in nice light while another female **Jamaican Becard** vied for attention. A **Jamaican Woodpecker** came in close and worked the top of a dead palm.

We drove slowly along the road adding **Smooth-billed Ani** to our trip list and **Ruddy Quail Dove** was seen again. Moving on again, Paul spotted a **Jamaican Lizard-cuckoo** in a tree near the road that was easy to see. The usual **White-chinned Thrushes** were everywhere and a few **White-eyed Thrushes** were seen. Further along the road we had close **Crested Quail Doves** and one flew into an area where **Worm-eating** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers** were foraging. Two **Red-tailed Hawks** flew over and then we headed back to Port Antonio for lunch. A quick stop at the Errol Flynn Marina produced the only **Osprey** of the trip and then we made our way to our lunch stop at Woody's Burgers just outside Port Antonio. Woody was keen to serve us and show us some of the trees in his garden including a



large breadfruit which we imagined looked slightly like the elusive Jamaican Owl.

After lunch we took a boat ride around Port Antonio harbor and Navy Island where Errol Flynn once lived. This short junket got us **Belted Kingfisher, Little Blue Heron, Great Blue Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, and close views of three **Royal Terns** perched on posts in the channel. One the other side of the island, we had nearly three dozen **Magnificent Frigatebirds** perched on power lines that stretched across to the island. A few males showed their red gular pouches and one was inflated. We returned back to the lodge and reconvened for another search for the **Jamaican Owl** at dusk. Again one called and again it remained out of site. Later on we enjoyed a nice dinner with wine provided compliments of Paul.

Day 7: Breakfast / Departures

Hardcore is the only word to describe those that were us at 3:30 am to listen for the still not seen **Jamaican Owl**. It had been heard calling around 3:45 am the two previous mornings and this was the last chance for this now mythical bird. The bird called once within a few minutes but went quiet until just after 5 am when at least 4 birds began calling around the garden. Eventually we tracked one down and got great views of it on an open branch - a victory! The **Jamaican Owl** was the 28th endemic seen on the trip. Later we enjoyed our last breakfast together and then parted ways with memories of Jamaica's warm temperatures, warm people and special birds.



Thanks to all of the tour participants who endured early starts and flooding rains earning just rewards of seeing Jamaica's special birds.

Jamaican Owl photo by Paul Cozza. All other photos by Gina Nichol & Steve Bird.



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