



Sunrise Birding LLC
JAMAICA
December 1 - 7, 2013
TRIP REPORT



Photos: Jamaican Oriole, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Vervain Hummingbird, Jamaica 28 Club. Photos by Julian Hough.



JAMAICA "28 Club" TRIP REPORT

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Leaders: Julian Hough & Ricardo Miller

1st December, Day 1 – Arrival Kingston, Jamaica

The group arrived, seemingly, from all points of the continental USA on different flights at different times on different days and staying at different hotels! Thankfully the entire group convened as scheduled with me and local guide Ricardo Miller at The Gardens for a welcome dinner to kick off the Jamaica "28 Club" tour 2013.

The grounds at The Gardens, while not expansive, held a nice assortment of birds to keep the weary travelers' attention-when they were not taking a much-needed relaxing dip in the pool! The first Jamaican endemics to fall were **Jamaican Woodpecker**, **White-chinned Thrush**, **Jamaican Oriole** and **Vervain Hummingbird**. The surrounding trees held several wintering warblers that included **Prairie**, **Cape May**, **Black-throated Blue** and **Parula Warbler** as well as **American Redstart**. As dusk approached, **Antillean Palm Swifts** and **White-collared Swifts** rocketed overhead.

2nd December, Day 2 – Hellshire Hills

Our first full day's birding centered on the coastal dry scrub at Hellshire Hills - the only coastal spot on our itinerary to search for endemics such as Stolid Flycatcher and Jamaican Mango. An early start was in order to try and beat the heat. Walking the dry scrub produced many **Northern Mockingbirds** but not the sought after Bahama Mockingbird.

Jamaican Mangos were quite common here and gave great views, but a **Jamaican Vireo** was less than obliging. **Prairie Warblers** were common. A **Sad Flycatcher** (Photo: Julian Hough) gave some good initial views, but still no sign of its larger cousin, the Stolid Flycatcher or the mockingbird. As the heat increased, we



reached some coastal pools. Here we heard our first **Bahama Mockingbirds** and good views were had by all. I saw a duck, briefly, in silhouette that was most likely a **West Indian Whistling Duck**, but after returning to look for it after the distraction of the appearance of the first **Bahama Mockingbird**, it had disappeared, assumedly into the undergrowth and confirming views were not forthcoming. Two **Black-necked Stilts**, a **Greater Yellowlegs** and a **Black-bellied**

Plover were present as was **Green Heron**. The only other bird of note here was brief, fly-by views of three **Caribbean Doves**.

One of the highlights here was great views of a skulking **Mangrove Cuckoo** – a nemesis bird for Jack! Finally a **Stolid Flycatcher** (Photo: Julian Hough) gave itself up with great close views. A rather bland, dull Myiarchus-type compared to our home-grown **Great-crested Flycatcher**. We were off to an impressive start of the trip.



We returned to the bus for water and some welcome shelter from the increasing heat and headed back into Kingston for some lunch at Hope Gardens and some relaxed birding. Although lunch took longer to arrive than expected, the grounds allowed for some interim birding. A large tree outside the restaurant held the usual wintering warblers including a **Black-and-White** and a crippling **Yellow-throated Warbler**. **Loggerhead Kingbirds** sallied from nearby wires while another Jamaican endemic, **Jamaican Euphonia**, was added to the list. Further exploration revealed great looks at **Yellow-billed Parrot**, **Olive-throated Parakeet** and the Jamaican race of **American Kestrel**. The highlight of the afternoon was watching a stunning male **Red-billed Streamertail** at close range.

After lunch, we drove to our next stop at Forres Park Lodge, situated at 4000 feet in the Blue Mountains. This delightful lodge with quaint rooms had great food and we spent the last hour sitting drinking rum punch and watching birds from the verandah. Species included a sprinkling of warblers, euphonias as well as the common **Bananaquit**. A **Merlin** circling high over the chalets was a scarce bird. In the evening after a great dinner, we tried for **Jamaican Owl**. Despite a bird being heard distantly from the deck, it never came any closer to being added to our growing list of endemics.

3rd December, Day 3 – Forres Park, Blue Mountains

After a pre-dawn breakfast and some locally-grown Blue Mountain coffee, we transferred into two vehicles better equipped to handle the rough 'road' up to the Abbey Green area. Climbing up to 5000 feet, we reached some great cloud-forest-like habitat to look for some high-elevation birds. The haunting whistle and nasal calls of **Rufous-throated Solitaire** echoed across the valley. Exiting the vehicles, the group walked slowly along the road. One of the first birds was a pair of stunning **Rufous-throated Solitaires** and the tiny, but exquisite **Jamaican Tody** (Photo: Julian Hough). **Ringed Pigeons** glided high overhead, but the



sought after species here was **Crested Quail Dove**. Therefore, it was a great relief to have one bird flush abruptly from the slope below us. Unfortunately views were brief and not all the group were lucky enough to get onto it. Shortly afterwards, another bird flew across the road and was seen well, but briefly in the scope as it walked quickly up the slope and out of sight. Several warblers here included the usual suspects but the Jamaican endemic, **Arrowhead Warbler** was seen briefly by one member of the



group as it foraged in full view. Renee was sharp-eyed and picked out our first **White-eyed Thrush** as it hopped silently among the bare roots of the trees on the slope above us. Photo: **Birding Abbey Green** (Photo by Julian Hough)

Strangely enough, although **Orangequits** were frequently calling around us, none showed well enough and when they did they seemed to all be the drab female/young males. Other species seen include the Jamaican race of **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Black-throated Green**, **Greater Antillean Elaenia** and one bird that was seen well by all the group was a lone **Jamaican Elaenia**. Stopping at another spot on the way back yielded great looks at **Jamaican Spindalis** and **Greater Antillean Bullfinch** before the long drive back to the lodge.

Back at the lodge the group spent a few hours before dinner exploring the grounds or resting. Birding from the deck produced a **Yellow-throated Vireo**, a rather scarce migrant and another endemic, seen by a few of the group, was a rather skulking **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher**.

The afternoon excursion was a short drive to Old Mine Trail where we added further endemics including **Yellow-shouldered Grassquit**, **Jamaican Pewee** and finally, for the rest of the group, **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher**. A **Blue Mountain Vireo** was seen briefly among a feeding flock of warblers while **Jamaican Woodpecker**, **White-eyed** and **White-chinned Thrushes** provided great views.

4th December, Day 4 – Hardwar Gap

We left Forres Park and headed for Hardwar Gap and some more high-elevation birding in the Blue Mountains. Stopping for a bathroom break, the views over Kingston to the south were expansive. A confiding **Jamaican Tody** posed well for the photographers while other birds of note included **Sad Flycatcher**, calling **Rufous-throated Solitaires** and distant **White-collared Swifts** bombing around along the distant ridges. Our destination this evening was Starlight Chalet, so we took our time birding the road up to the top. Various stops along the road produced great looks (at last) of **Arrowhead Warbler**, **Jamaican Pewee** and another endemic, **Jamaican Becard**, with two-three birds showing well within the vicinity of a nest. Along this track, several **Jamaican**

Pewees performed well allowing all of the group to connect and another, typically fleeting (for many) **Crested Quail Dove**. One stop revealed a calling, but not visible **Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo** and a similarly non-showy **Jamaican Blackbird** that called back several times but failed to show.

Arriving at Starlight Chalet, we checked in and ate a great lunch. Everyone took a few hours to bird the grounds and feeders. Male **Orangequits**, notable for their lack of showmanship, showed well at the feeders, competing with the still mind blowing male **Red-billed Streamertails** (Photo: Julian Hough). **Black-throated Blue Warblers, Jamaican Orioles** and **Jamaican Spindalis** all were attending the feeders, but as the mist rolled in, it was Ricardo's shout of "**Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo!**" that got everyone motivated. The bird was distant, but good scope views were enjoyed. A quick walk down a road outside of the main gate was rather quiet, except for a brief look at a **Jamaican Blackbird** feeding on a bromeliad that slinked into the darkness of the forest before it could be seen by most of the group.



After another great meal and a few glasses of wine, a small hardy group suited up for a spot of owling. Jamaican Owl was the target, but the first bird, and quite a surprise, was a fabulous **Northern Potoo** (Photo: Julian Hough) perched up on the wires by the chalets. I ran back to the chalet to round up those that hadn't been interested in coming out and thankfully the bird was still present when we got back. Despite some time spent along the road, no owls were heard and it was quickly becoming apparent that Jamaican Owl was to be the one endemic that may prove more difficult than we hoped—it was reaching nemesis status.

5th December, Day 5 –

Starlight Chalet, Blue Mountains

Birding the upper reaches on foot and having the bus follow us down was the order of the day. We tried for **Crested Quail Dove** but the road was too well-travelled for any birds to be seen out in the open, preferring instead to



inhabit the leafy slopes below us. Another calling Lizard-Cuckoo was exceptionally close but again, frustratingly failed to show. However a singing **Blue Mountain Vireo** proved incredibly obliging giving great looks to all. Not much of a looker unfortunately, but another endemic in the bag that put us one species closer to the magical “28”.

Leaving the Blue Mountains, the plan was to head north to the north coast of Jamaica then travel east to Frenchman’s Cove, our final stop on the tour. We made a stop at Castleton gardens for one missing endemic – Jamaican Crow. As we pulled up, almost on cue, two **Jamaican Crows** flew over calling and showed well for a few minutes before disappearing into the main grounds. Tick and move on!

We finally hit the coast and it was good to see the ocean after being in the mountains. Shortly, we arrived at the Frenchman’s Cove resort and after some shuttling, everyone was situated in their villas.

The evening dinner was spent at Anna Bananas restaurant before heading back for our first try at Jamaican Owl. With 24 of 28 endemics firmly under the belt, this was becoming nerve-wracking since we only had two nights left. I stayed on the bus with most of the group while Ricardo was dropped off with Bob and Carli who needed to access the Wi-Fi to conduct some personal business. As I shuttled everyone to their villas, I got a call from Ricardo to say that while he was gathering his gear, he had shone his flashlight into the tree next to our room and, by pure chance, had found a **Jamaican Owl** in the open 10ft off the ground. Rushing back, the bird had since disappeared, and despite searching, the bird was never seen again. Bob and Carli, who had been with Ricardo, were able to see it. So . . . Jamaican Owl. That’s how you were going to play it...game on!!

6th December, Day 6 – Ecclesdown Road

After an early breakfast, we traveled south-east to Hector’s River to look for White-tailed Tropicbirds at a breeding site. The rain began to pour heavily and it was obviously going to hamper birding. Arriving at the breeding cliffs I mentioned to the group that White-tailed Tropicbird was a “bogey” bird for me and that I had missed it on all my travels and on multiple pelagics. Ricardo told me he had seen 200 here on some occasions. Needless to say, despite scanning the breeding cliffs and surrounding ocean, except for the lone **Magnificent Frigatebird** and passing **Royal Tern**, nothing remotely tropicbird-like was seen. I couldn’t believe it...someone was playing a joke. Members of the group, who had seen them on their travels, gave me good advice on where I should go to see them...some lighthouse on the cliffs in Hawaii, the northern end of Bermuda is a great place to see them too. Ok...ok...how about this for a novel idea... go to a BREEDING SITE ON JAMAICA! I can only think that they were sitting on eggs as it was early in the breeding season, or perhaps we needed to be there even earlier in case they were heading out to sea.

We continued on to Ecclesdown Road and hoped the rain would ease off. It didn’t. So, we waited for a while and decided we would have to bird in the rain. It wasn’t bad and it did let up enough for us to continue walking the road. The remaining endemics consisted of Black-billed Parrot, Black-billed Streamertail, Jamaican Owl and Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo. We would need to see all of them on this last day, and there was no



guarantee on the owl or the cuckoo, both secretive and hard to pin down species. A few **Jamaican Crows** (Photo: Julian Hough) gave good views, but soon parrots were heard in the distance. Scanning the valley revealed two endemic **Black-billed Parrots** teed up in a large tree giving good scope views. **Black-billed Streamertail**, a relative shoe-in of an endemic quickly fell, with several birds seen briefly but not quite as

showy as their Red-billed cousins. The road was not that birdy, with just a few wintering warblers but the rain had kept things from being active. As we walked along the road, we stopped repeatedly to try and coax out a Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo, but to no avail...we didn't even hear one and things were looking dire! We got to an area of bromeliads and Ricardo thought he saw a movement in the under canopy. Renee, sharp-eyed again, picked up an oriole-sized bird in the shadows..."**Blackbird!**" Two **Jamaican Blackbirds** showed well allowing for great scope views for the entire group! A few more **Black-billed Parrots** were seen well, and it was while scanning the open valley that Tom suddenly said..."I've got a bird perched up...I think it's a lizard cuckoo!" Frantically trying to give directions, the bird was at least a mile away across the valley perched on a dead snag. Thankfully we got it in the scope and everyone had great views. Phew... **Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo** on the list!

It was a great find so far away. Amazingly, while I was watching through the scope, it dropped off the snag into the canopy but quickly returned to the same branch, except that when it did it looked different...the reason being that this time it was a **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo**...both cuckoos within seconds on the same snag...cool!

With that addition, and the fact that Bob and Carli had gripped off the whole group with Jamaican Owl meant that they had the privilege of being labelled "Mr. and Mrs. 28" - the only members, at that point, to see all 28 endemics.

Andrew, our driver (Photo: Julian Hough) arrived and ferried us back to our accommodations for a "free" afternoon of lunch and relaxing on the beach. The sun had come out and it was a beautiful afternoon, eating fresh fish and drinking rum punch on the beach and swimming in the blue Jamaican waters.



After dinner, we decided we needed to make a concerted effort for the owl. Other birders had heard three (!) calling around the parking lot of Goblin Hill Resort. Despite our best effort, no birds were heard. We decided to

reconvene at our villa to try the area Ricardo had found one the previous night. We walked around the reception area and it was looking bleak. Playing the call resulted in no call backs from any owl. Then, out of the corner of my eye, in the dark, I glimpsed what I thought was an owl buzz us. I wasn't sure I had imagined it...it was so brief and dark. Suddenly, Ricardo's flashlight beam fell upon a **Jamaican Owl** sat out in the open on a dead branch. Awesome views were had by all that quickly gathered around. Number 28!!!!

This was a fitting end to my first fabulous trip with a delightful group of people and some outstanding birding, great weather and more importantly, great birding with everyone managing to see all 28 endemics. Thanks to our excellent driver Andrew and exceptional local guide Ricardo for a memorable trip!



Photo: Julian Hough & Ricardo Miller

Report by Julian Hough
Sunrise Birding LLC



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JAMAICA SPECIES LIST

(Endemics in bold)

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SPECIES	Scientific Name
1. Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
2. Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
3. Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias occidentalis</i>
4. Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta Tricolor</i>
5. Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba egretta</i>
6. Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula brewsteri</i>
7. Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
8. Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis ibis</i>
9. Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens virescens</i>
10. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti</i>
11. Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura aura</i>
12. Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
13. Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis</i>
14. American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
15. Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
16. Common Gallinule/Moorhen	<i>Gallinula galeata cerceris</i>
17. Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
18. Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
19. Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
20. Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>
21. Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>
22. Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis acuflavida</i>
23. Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
24. Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
25. White-crowned Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>
26. Ring-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas caribaea</i>
27. White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>
28. Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita zenaida</i>
29. Common Ground-Dove	<i>Columbina passerina jamaicensis</i>
30. Caribbean Dove	<i>Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis</i>
31. Crested Quail-Dove	<i>Geotrygon versicolor</i>
32. Olive-throated Parakeet	<i>Aratinga nana nana</i>
33. Yellow-billed Parrot	<i>Amazona collaria</i>
34. Black-billed Parrot	<i>Amazona agilis</i>
35. Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus pluvialis</i>
36. Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus vetula</i>
37. Smooth-billed Ani	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
38. Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>

39.	Jamaican Owl	<i>Pseudoscops grammicus</i>
40.	Northern Potoo	<i>Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis</i>
41.	White-collared Swift	<i>Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons</i>
42.	Antillean Palm-Swift	<i>Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia</i>
43.	Jamaican Mango	<i>Anthracothorax mang</i>
44.	Vervain Hummingbird	<i>Mellisuga minima minima</i>
45.	Red-billed Streamertail	<i>Trochilus polytmus</i>
46.	Black-billed Streamertail	<i>Trochilus scitulus</i>
47.	Jamaican Tody	<i>Todus todus</i>
48.	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>
49.	Jamaican Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes radiolatus</i>
50.	Jamaican Elaenia	<i>Myiopagis cotta</i>
51.	Greater Antillean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia fallax fallax</i>
52.	Jamaican Pewee	<i>Contopus pallidus</i>
53.	Sad Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus barbirostris</i>
54.	Rufous-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus validus</i>
55.	Loggerhead Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis</i>
56.	Jamaican Becard	<i>Pachyramphus niger</i>
57.	Jamaican Vireo	<i>Vireo modestus</i>
58.	Blue Mountain Vireo	<i>Vireo osburni</i>
59.	Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>
60.	Jamaican Crow	<i>Corvus jamaicensis</i>
61.	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis solitarus</i>
62.	White-eyed Thrush	<i>Turdus jamaicensis</i>
63.	White-chinned Thrush	<i>Turdus aurantius</i>
64.	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos orpheus</i>
65.	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
66.	Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>
67.	Worm-eating Warbler	<i>Helmitheros vermivorum</i>
68.	Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
69.	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
70.	Arrowhead Warbler	<i>Setophaga pharetra</i>
71.	American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
72.	Cape May Warbler	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>
73.	Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>
74.	Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>
75.	Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>
76.	Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>
77.	Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>
78.	Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Setophaga virens</i>
79.	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola flaveola</i>
80.	Jamaican Spindalis	<i>Spindalis nigricephala</i>
81.	Yellow-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus</i>
82.	Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor marchii</i>
83.	Yellow-shouldered Grassquit	<i>Loxipasser anoxanthus</i>
84.	Greater Antillean Bullfinch	<i>Loxigilla violacea</i>
85.	Orangequit	<i>Euneornis campestris</i>

86.	Jamaican Blackbird	<i>Nesopsar nigerrimus</i>
87.	Greater Antillean Grackle	<i>Quiscalus niger crassirostris</i>
88.	Jamaican Oriole	<i>Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx</i>
89.	Jamaican Euphonia	<i>Euphonia jamaica</i>
90.	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
91.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>