Cuba
Caribbean Endemic Birding VIII
3rd to 12th March 2017 (10 days)
Trip Report

Trip Report compiled by Tour Leader, Forrest Rowland

Tour Participants: Alan Baratz, Ron and Cheryl Farmer, Cassia Gallagher, George Kenyon, Steve Nanz, Clive Prior, Heidi Steiner, Lucy Waskell, and Janet Zinn
Tour Top Ten List:

1. Bee Hummingbird
2. Cuban Tody
3. Cuban Trogon
4. Zapata Wren
5. Cuban Green Woodpecker
6. Blue-headed Quail-Dove
7. Great Lizard Cuckoo
8. Cuban Nightjar
9. Western Spindalis
10. Gundlach’s Hawk

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 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 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 arrived the day before, a couple participants took advantage of some fun touring around various parts of Havana, covering a few of the historic points of interest. 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 Killdeer were all in good numbers in the vicinity of the hotel itself.

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, West Indian Woodpeckers, Loggerhead Kingbird, LaSagra’s Flycatchers, Cuban Blackbirds, and Greater Antillean Grackle. With our local guide’s recommendation, we quickly got onto Cuban Grassquit, alongside Yellow-faced Grassquit. Dozens were seen coming to a local 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 morning! Migrants were beginning to arrive in droves. Myrtle, Tennessee and Black-throated Blue Warblers, American Redstart, and Northern Parula were noted, as was the first arrival of Black-whiskered Vireo on territory. Most tours miss the latter species because they winter farther south in the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America. We had the first through third of the season for our local guide today. A Merlin found by a participant was merely the second record for the community, Yellow-throated Vireo was present, and other fine species like Western Spindalis, White-winged and Zenaida Dove, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Oriole, and Cuban Bullfinch all showed nicely. In general, the birding was very good this fine, cool morning.

Moving from our first stop at Las Terrazas to a pine forest area, we enjoyed our first looks of the tour of one special species of warbler that only inhabits a few small islands in the Bahamas, and Cuba, and specialises in Caribbean pine habitats: Olive-capped Warbler. We had the best views of my life of this fabulous songster, when it finally came down out of the tops of the pine trees to almost land on us in a small nearby bush! This canopy denizen seldom comes lower than 30 feet above the ground. What a treat to get see this so well! Shortly thereafter, we moved on to lunch at the delicious Casa del Campesino.

A few stops en route to San Diego del los Banos for Snail Kite and other water-related species were made as we worked our way further west. This quaint, small town is known for the medical properties of its volcanic hot springs, which are just adjacent to our accommodations. 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 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 in front of us! The bird moved to a better perch for lengthy scope views shortly thereafter. To add to the quality of our sighting, a second individual came in, creating quite a fuss! The two Kingbirds were chasing each other from perch to perch, creating a ruckus and giving great views from all angles! The massive, hook-tipped bill of the Giant Kingbird (and its broad shoulders and heavy stature) were obvious. It was a huge treat to see this declining species as we did.

We had a slew of additions to the Trip List, including several neotropical migrants like Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Cape May Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Indigo Bunting. One of the better sightings of the afternoon was when Red-legged Honeycreepers turned up feeding, just above eye-level at times, in a near Gumbo Limbo tree. This species, which strongly favours the canopy of any flowering, fruiting, and emergent tree, 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 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. Summer Tanager was a nice addition, as were views of the lovely Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow-throated Warbler, and several other nice migrants. 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, as well as the highly localised and attractive Cuban Cliff Anole *Anolis bartschi* that is endemic to the caves of cliffs of these “mogotes”, or steeply rounded limestone mountains.

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 when it led us to its nest! The haunting metallic song echoing through the cave really adds to the experience. Given the cloud cover, we were treated to warbler-laden *ficus* trees that must have attracted some sort of insect hatch: Norther Parula, American Redstart, and Palm, Yellow-throated, Tennessee and an extremely rare Hooded Warbler – *which has only been recorded 3 times previously at the site!* More Cuban Trogons, Cuban Pygmy Owl at a nest cavity(!!!), gorgeous Cuban Todies at eye level, and Red-legged Honeycreeper views were enjoyed, as were our first White-crowned 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, Louisiana Waterthrush, Anhinga, and a few other odds and ends. The main stop of the afternoon included getting a brief tour of the fish hatchery where the famous, ancient Cuban Paddlefish is rehabilitated into the main swamp system. It was great to see this bizarre creature up close. Some brief stops were made for photo ops as we traversed some fascinating landscape, as well as when we crossed paths with a plethora of beautifully maintained old cars Cuba is famous for.
The following two full days were spent at the famous Zapata Peninsula, so named for its geographical shape, which is that of a very large shoe. On the ground, it’s a mosaic of swamps, marshes, mangroves, estuaries, and semi-deciduous and humid woodlands. The Cienaga de Zapata National Park contains nearly all the bird species of Cuba within its extensive borders, save for a handful, and is simply a fabulous, relaxing place to bird.

We started our time in Zapata with the promise of an encounter with the endangered (and downright hard-to-see) Zapata Wren. Far from being a species that one can so confidently expect to see, we left out early, hoping to beat the windy conditions which had accompanied a recently arrived cold front from the north-east. With our local guide and handler, we cleared the way for our bus to make its winding way down the dykes into an area called La Turba. High anticipation, light wind, and dawn coming up over these vast RAMSAR-designated wetlands of international importance, the general sentiment was that we were enjoying a proper Cuban adventure. 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. Approximately 1-minute after arriving at the territory in the middle swamp, we heard a Zapata Wren singing nearby. About 2 minutes later, we had a male bullet directly at us, from across the canal, and choose a prominent perch within 25 feet of us to counter-sing in the lovely 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 disbelief as this iconic Cuban bird poured forth its complex clamouring song right before our eyes. To the sound of shutter snaps and cellphone videos, we enjoyed this confiding bird for nearly 10 minutes!

That was just the first stop of the day! We continued our exploits later in the morning by searching some of the more humid forest trails in the area for Yellow-headed Warblers, more Cuban Todies than one could know what to do with (other than take a lot of photos!), great looks at Cuban Vireo, Ovenbird, Cape May Warbler, and our third prize of the morning – Ruddy Quail-Dove. After lunch, we headed over to the Cueva de Peces, casually, to walk up on the feeding frenzy of Blue-headed Quail-Doves that the chefs at the restaurant there have been dutifully feeding rice to for the past couple of years. During our visit, there were a mere 7 individuals, but up to 17 have been seen at once!
We all took a break after lunch, to rest and absorb all the sightings of the day, to date. We then moved to the Soplillar area, to keep racking up some fine species from the well-developed secondary growth there. Highlights ranged from large mixed warbler flocks – hosting Prairie, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, Magnolia, and Yellow-throated Warblers – to seeing two Cuban endemics nesting in the same tree. Apparently, Cuban Green Woodpeckers and Bare-legged Owls have no problem being neighbours. The Cuban race of Northern Flicker was interesting, and we had more photo ops with the gorgeous Cuban Trogon. We ended the afternoon by walking up on a tree full of Cuban Parakeets, right next to a tree where two Fernandina’s Flickers were mating. But the day wasn’t over. We waited a bit longer for a chance at Cuban Nightjar, which we missed en route to the Zapata Wren site earlier that day. It took but a few minutes of waiting until near dark before one popped out into the track we were watching, and allowed us close approach for prolonged views and photos. An incredible end to our first day here!

The following morning was dedicated to any endemics missing from the area. So far we had very good luck with all of the hoped-for species, save Cuban Amazon (only seen in flight), Grey-fronted Quail-Dove, Red-shouldered Blackbird (we didn’t have any males displaying the shoulder patch yet), and last but not least, Bee Hummingbird (the smallest bird in the world; hadn’t even a whiff of this species yet). We headed directly over to the most fabulous Dove show out of 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 beautiful 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.

After great looks at the Quail-Doves, we drove over to a stake-out for Red-shouldered Blackbird. Due to a recent fire in the preferred habitat at the site, we initially had little aside from a flyby to show for our efforts, save great views of a singing Eastern Meadowlark of the local subspecies. So, we walked 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 making some loud squeaks and pishes, some 2 or 3, including a male 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 the famous museum in Playa Giron, known as the Museo Heroes de Giron. Perhaps the most iconic bird of Cuba, the Bee Hummingbird is just under 2 1/3” in length, but makes up for it in flash and a feisty character! We enjoyed spectacular views of the male and female of this staked-out pair, including many wonderful photos.

Nearly as iconic as the Hummingbird (though probably more so for most Cubans) the most famous battle of the Cuban revolution led by Castro, Guevara, and many other lesser-known integral figures, was fought near here at Playa Giron. 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. 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 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 down the bumpy dirt road leading to 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, Northern Harrier, 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 Flamingoes for highlights of the afternoon, though the Clapper Rail was pretty fabulous, of course. We retired to the Hotel satisfied after another great day, and all of our wanted species in the bag.

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, and one gorgeous immature female Gundlach’s Hawk that zoomed across in front of the bus! We were all resting, lulling somewhat, when I noticed something shoot across in front of the bus. I know the shape well, and hollered to bring the bus to a stop. Thinking the bird would be lost, I hustled everybody off the bus, and we began searching for it while I played a territorial call. Shortly thereafter, we were treated to perched views, followed by a low, slow flyby that probably constituted the best looks at this rare endemic species that I’ve ever had. It was amazing! We arrived at 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. Mission objectives for the day were more than completed.

The following morning, our goal 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. Other nice finds included a pair of obliging Limpkin and the first arrival of Grey Kingbirds returning for breeding season from the southern Caribbean. Best photos yet of Cuban Tody and Trogon, and some gorgeous neotropical migrants in full breeding regalia were obtained during our leisurely two-hour visit to this lovely site.

Most of the day was devoted to traversing the country, for the near southern reaches of Cayo
Coco off the north coast. En route there was little to see in terms of birds, save for yet another Gundlach’s Hawk (*nobody sees TWO in a tour*!), this time a male that we had great views of, and stunning looks at Oriente Warblers. 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 Coca, we were met by a congress of more than 2,000 American Flamingos creating huge islands of pink on either side of the causeway. *Very impressive welcome!* Our local guide, Odey, had a pretty stellar plan for the afternoon. Before long, we had great looks at 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 are gorgeous, and the relative luxury of our accommodations, including fine food and all-inclusive drink options, make for a lively time!

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 target birds during our one full day in these lovely environs. We set our early on 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 30 feet from us, seemingly unaffected by our presence all the while. Our only miss for the morning was Mangrove Cuckoo, which we tried for at a few sites.

In the afternoon, we made a few stops for shorebirds and photos of several commoner species, which included finding some wonderful flocks of Sandpipers, Plovers, and more than a few Red Knots! The flamingo show was incredible, with a nice flock in a near lagoon in the perfect late-afternoon light. *An amazing spectacle, with the dark green mangrove as a backdrop and the varied*
intense rosy hues of the flamingoes practically glowing. We snuck in a couple of stops for shorebirds and gulls, adding Stilt, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plover, and Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. The population of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the New World is undoubtedly increasing, and more breeding grounds are being discovered.

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 Species Recorded

**BIRDS: 175 species**


**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 & Waterfowl - Anatidae**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Indian Whistling Duck</strong> (V)</td>
<td><em>Dendrocygna arborea</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very confiding family group perched at the edge of a lake in Cay Coco.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>American Wigeon</strong></td>
<td><em>Anas americana</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>A pair on Cayo Coco</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blue-winged Teal</strong></td>
<td><em>Anas discors</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>A few pair on Cayo Coco</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Shoveler</strong></td>
<td><em>Anas clypeata</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>A few individuals on Cayo Coco.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ring-necked Duck</strong></td>
<td><em>Aythya collaris</em></td>
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Large flock at a lake visited en route.

**Lesser Scaup**
Huge flock on the centre of the lake.

**Red-breasted Merganser**
Several groups seen around the keys

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

**Guineafowl - Numididae**

**Helmeted Guineafowl (I)**
Small flocks of this introduced species at Finca Belen.

**Grebes - Podicipedidae**

**Least Grebe**
A pair seen on Cayo Coco; one individual seen en route.

**Pied-billed Grebe**
Over a hundred seen at a lake visited en route!

**Flamingos - Phoenicopteridae**

**American Flamingo**
Good numbers present near Zapata, and literally thousands at the keys!

**Storks - Ciconiidae**

**Wood Stork**
Two seen in the Zapata Swamp area.

**Ibises and Spoonbills - Threskiornithidae**

**American White Ibis**
Common at coastal sites.

**Roseate Spoonbill**
Many seen well near Zapata and on the keys.

**Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns - Ardeidae**

**Black-crowned Night Heron**
Just a few seen en route.

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron**
Great views on Cayo Guillermo!

**Green Heron**
Many seen. Common and widespread.

**Western Cattle Egret**
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 habitats.

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  
One seen en route.

Snail Kite  
Smashing looks at a few of this graceful species.

Cuban Black Hawk (E) (NT)  
Nice views of this recently split species at several localities.

Broad-winged Hawk  
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 cenceris  
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.

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 three dozen of these uncommon birds was mixed in with dowitchers and large plover on Cayo Guillermo.

Sanderling  
*Calidris alba rubida*
A few on the keys.

Semipalmented Sandpiper (NT)  
*Calidris pusilla*
A few seen on the keys.

Least Sandpiper  
*Calidris minutilia*
A few on the keys.

Dunlin  
*Calidris alpine*
Two seen at Salinas Brito.

Stilt Sandpiper  
*Calidris himantopus*
A small group on Cay Guillermo was seen amidst hundreds of Dunlin and some Red Knots.

**Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers - Laridae**

Black Skimmer  
*Rhyncops niger*
A nice flock at Zapata was seen well!

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

Ring-billed Gull  
*Larus delawarensis*
One inland, and a few on the keys.

American Herring Gull  
*Larus smithsonianus*
One on the keys.

Lesser Black-backed Gull  
*Larus fuscus*
One first year bird was seen well at Cayo Guillermo.

**Gull-billed Tern**  
*Gelochelidon nilotica aranea*  
Common at Zapata.

**Caspian Tern**  
*Hydroprogne caspia*  
Numerous in proper hábitat

**Royal Tern**  
*Thalasseus maximus maximus*  
Common at coastal sites.

**Cabot's (Sandwich) Tern**  
*Thalasseus acuflavidus*  
Numerous on the keys this time around!

**Forster's Tern**  
*Sterna fosteri*  

**Spotted Sandpiper**  
*Actitis macularius*  
Only two seen on the tour.

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**Pigeons and Doves - Columbidae**

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

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

**Scaly-naped Pigeon**  
*Patagioenas squamosa*  
Great scope views of multiple perched birds.

**Plain Pigeon (NT)**  
*Patagioenas inornata*  
Common at Finca la Belen.

**Eurasian Collared Dove (I)**  
*Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*  
Fairly common in human settlements.

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

**Blue-headed Quail-Dove (E) (En)**  
*Starnoenas cyanocephala*  
Several gorgeous birds seen in the Zapata area!

**Ruddy Quail-Dove**  
*Geotrygon montana*  
A pair turned up on a small trail in the Zapata Swamp!

**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.

**Barn Owls - Tytonidae**

Western Barn Owl  
*Tyto alba*
A nice surprise while searching for Cuban Nightjar!

**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.

**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 numerous 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*  
Gorgeous, common and widespread endemic.

**Northern Flicker**  
*Colaptes auratus chrysocaulos*  
Subspecies endemic to Cuba seen at Zapata and on Cayo Coco.

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

Falconidae

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

**American Kestrel**  
*Falco sparverius sparverioides*  
Common and widespread.

**Merlin**  
*Falco columbarius*  
One migrating bird at Las Terrazas and another marauding shorebirds at the keys.

**Peregrine Falcon**  
*Falco peregrinus*  
One seen at the end of the tour during the visit to Old Town 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.

Tyrannidae

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

**Grey Kingbird**  
*Tyrannus dominicensis*  
We found the FOY returning bird at Najasa.

**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.

**Black-whiskered Vireo**  \( Vireo \) *altiloquus*
FOY birds encountered at Las Terrazas

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**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!

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow**  \( Stelgidopteryx \) *serripennis*
A sizeable flock encountered en route one afternoon

**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.

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**Wrens - Troglodytidae**

**Zapata Wren (E) (En)**  \( Ferminia \) *cerverai*
One of the most spectacular encounters imaginable with this species!!! Photos will tell the story.

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**Gnatcatchers - Polioptilidae**

**Blue-grey Gnatcatcher**  \( Polioptila \) *caerulea caerulea*
Several in the Zapata area.

**Cuban Gnatcatcher (E)**  \( Polioptila \) *lembeyei*
Close encounters with a couple confiding pairs.

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**Mockingbirds and Thrashers - Mimidae**

**Grey Catbird**  \( Dumetella \) *carolinensis*
Common migrant.

**Northern Mockingbird**  
*Mimus polyglottos orpheus*  
Common throughout.

**Bahama Mockingbird (NE)**  
*Mimus gundlachii gundlachii*  
Great looks at close range of a single territorial adult!

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**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.

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**Old World Sparrows - Passeridae**

**House Sparrow (I)**  
*Passer domesticus*  
Very common.

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**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**  
*Parkesia motacilla*  
Fairly common migrant.

**Northern Waterthrush**  
*Parkesia noveboracensis*  
Common migrant.

**Black-and-white Warbler**  
*Mniotilta varia*  
Common migrant.

**Tennessee Warbler**  
*Leiothlypis peregrina*  
Scarcely migrant, though we managed to find 5 this year!

**Common Yellowthroat**  
*Geothlypis trichas trichas*  
Common migrant.

**Hooded Warbler**  
*Setophaga citrina*  
Quick view of a stunning male at PN Guira

**American Redstart**  
*Setophaga ruticilla*  
Common and widespread migrant.

**Cape May Warbler**  
*Setophaga tigrina*  
Fairly widespread migrant, though nowhere numerous.

**Northern Parula**  
*Setophaga americana*  
Common migrant.

**Magnolia Warbler**  
*Setophaga magnolia*
Uncommon migrant seen at Cueva Portales only.

**Mangrove Warbler**  
*Setophaga petechia gundlachi*  
In the mangroves at Zapata and the keys both.

**Black-throated Blue Warbler**  
*Setophaga caerulescens*  
Fairly Common migrant.

**Palm Warbler**  
*Setophaga palmarum palmarum*  
Common migrant.

**Olive-capped Warbler (NE)**  
*Setophaga pityophila*  
Great views of this near-endemic warbler!

**Myrtle Warbler**  
*Setophaga coronata*  
Seen near Finca la Belen.

**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 pairs 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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zapata Sparrow (E) (En)</strong></td>
<td><em>Torreornis inexpectata inexpectata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great views of both subspecies. This is the subspecies from Zapata. varonai:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This subspecies was coming to a feeder setup on Cayo Coco!</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Tanagers and Allies - *Thraupidae*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red-legged Honeycreeper (I)</strong></td>
<td><em>Cyanerpes cyaneus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few seen very well in the western parts of the island.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Bullfinch (NE)</strong></td>
<td><em>Melopyrrha nigra nigra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly common endemic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Grassquit (E)</strong></td>
<td><em>Tiaris canorus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superb views of a large flock at Las Terrazas!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow-faced Grassquit</strong></td>
<td><em>Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly common and widespread.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Spindalis (NE)</strong></td>
<td><em>Spindalis zena pretrei</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly common island stunner seen often!</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Cardinals and Allies - *Cardinalidae*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Tanager</strong></td>
<td><em>Piranga rubra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two at Hacienda Cortina!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rose-breasted Grosbeak</strong></td>
<td><em>Pheucticus ludovicianus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small group seen well at Hacienda Cortina.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indigo Bunting</strong></td>
<td><em>Passerina cyanea</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A single individual glimpsed in flight, while a few were Heard around the island.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mammals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brazilian Free-tailed Bat</strong></td>
<td><em>Tadarida brasiliensis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caribbean Fruit-eating Bat</strong></td>
<td><em>Artibeus jamaicensis</em></td>
</tr>
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### Reptiles and Amphibians

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Slider</strong></td>
<td><em>Trachemys decussate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cubitas Anole</strong></td>
<td><em>Anolis jubar</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Green Anole</strong></td>
<td><em>Anolis porcatus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Brown Anole</strong></td>
<td><em>Anolis sagrei</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Cliff Anole</strong></td>
<td><em>Anolis bartschi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Curly-tailed Lizard sp.</strong></td>
<td><em>Leiocephalus cubensis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Curly-tailed Lizard sp.</strong></td>
<td><em>Leiocephalus carinatus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuban Treefrog</strong></td>
<td><em>Osteopilus septentrionalis</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>